The Intergenerational Transfer of Ethnic Identity in Canada at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century

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ABSTRACT

This paper concerns itself with what the census reveals about the nature of Canadian society in terms of immigrant composition and with the integration of the immigrant populations within the Canadian cultural landscape. More specifically, the author analyses census data, such as the decline in the use of ethnic languages spoken at home and lower levels of ethnic-connectedness, in order to understand how immigrant identities evolve from one generation to the other, and the patterns through which ethnic identity is transferred intergenerationally.

The post-war years in Canada have seen the emergence of the ideals of multiculturalism blossom into policies that have had a major effect on the composition of Canada's immigrant stream and this along with time has had a major effect on the identity of Canada's immigrants. Changes in the wording of the census ethnic ancestry question since 1971, the legitimization of multiple origin responses, the acceptance of "Canadian" as an answer to the ethnic origin ancestry question, and the addition of the birthplace of parents question for the first time since 1971 present an opportunity to look at the intergenerational transfer of ethnic identity in Canada at the time of Canada's 2001 Census.

While Canada's census does not ask an identity question per se, it is still possible to examine the data to achieve some understanding of how Canadians identify themselves in terms of ethnicity. Questions such as those dealing with birthplace of parents, mother tongue, language spoken at home, ethnic ancestry, birthplace and marriage type can tell us about identity and its changes from one generation to another. Ethnic ancestry and ethnic identity, for example, can be the same or different depending on the individual and his/her migration and generational status, language use, marital type if married or the marital type of his/her parents or ancestors. Levels of ethnic-connectedness can also be examined with Canadian census data. A case in point is the use of an ethnic language spoken at home or mother tongue. Previous research has shown a decline in the use of ethnic languages from the first to the third-plus generation (Kalbach and Richard, 1991, Pigott, 2003).

The major waves of immigration of Canada's older immigrant populations such as the Germans, Ukrainians, Dutch, Scandinavian and Polish took place in the early decades of the twentieth century. Canada's visible minorities did not come in large numbers until the country's immigration policy became non-discriminatory in the 1960s. The older immigrant groups had large proportions of third-plus generations by the turn of the century, while the more recent immigrants such as the Chinese and South Asians did not. The only exception is the Japanese who have been in Canada for many years and the Blacks to some degree, because "Canadian Blacks", i.e., those who came to Canada from the United States to escape slavery, are included in this group. Low proportions of third-plus generations make it more difficult to examine intergenerational transfers of ethnic identity because the numbers are small and therefore less reliable than if the numbers were larger. Regina, Saskatoon and Winnipeg tend to have the highest proportions of the more Canadianized third-plus generations compared to Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto and Montreal and were consistently above the average for Canada as a whole at the time of the 2001 Census.

Canadian Responses

Statistics Canada has always accepted "Canadian" as an ethnic ancestry. It has been suggested in an earlier paper that Canadian is not an ethnic ancestry per se, but rather an ethnic identity (Kalbach and Kalbach 1999). The percent

distribution of Canadian responses in the 1991, 1996 and 2001 censuses reveals an increase from 4 percent in 1991 to 31 and 39 percent in 1996 and 2001 respectively. Very clearly, the increase in the response rate reveals that over time greater percentages of individuals perceive themselves as Canadian. According to the 2001 Census, the highest proportion of individuals reporting Canadian tends to have native-born parents followed by individuals with at least one-native born parent. The proportion of individuals reporting Canadian is significantly lower if both of their parents are foreign born. Conversely, the percentage of people reporting origins other than Canadian is significantly higher for people with parents who are both foreign born. Thus, the more Canadianized generations are the ones that tend to identify as Canadian rather than with their ethnic or cultural ancestry group.

Multiple Origins

Multiple responses are also indicative of the relative importance of an individual's ethnic ancestry in terms of identity. The ethnic-connectedness research argues that higher levels of ethnic-connectedness tend to be associated with single ethnic origin responses. Multiple origin responses tend to be associated with lower levels of ethnic-connectedness for Canada, the five Prairie census metropolitan areas, Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver. Census data show that the most ethnic mixing in Canada at the turn of the century had occurred within the older immigrants groups, i.e., the British, French, German and Ukrainian followed by the Latin, Central, and South Americans, Middle Easterners, Italians, Canadians, and Greeks and Portuguese. The least ethnic mixing is reported for the Chinese and South Asians. This is consistent with recent intermarriage research (Kalbach, 2000, 2002). Similar patterns for the eight census metropolitan areas are evident. However, the Portuguese and Italians residing in Regina and Saskatoon are exceptions to the overall patterns in that they tend to have relatively high proportions of multiple responses rates. Aboriginals residing in Canada's CMAs also have high rates of multiple responses. The lowest response rates for Aboriginals are found in the Prairie CMAs of Regina and Saskatoon.

Ethnic Intermarriage

The percentage of husbands and wives of English, French, Polish Ukrainian Greek, Portuguese, East Indian and Chinese who were married to spouses of different origins at the time of the 2001 Census tell the stories of interethnic marriage for these ethnic origin groups. The data indicate an increase in the rates of ethnic intermarriage across generations for Ukrainian, East Indian and Chinese husbands. An increase in ethnic exogamy across generations is also revealed for Ukrainian, Greek, Portuguese and Chinese wives. The exceptions are husbands and wives who are English, French and Polish, Greek and Portuguese husbands and East Indian wives. In general, however, the pattern for these groups reflects a significant increase in ethnic intermarriage from the 1st generation to the 2nd and 2.5 generations.

Generational patterns of ethnic intermarriage for husbands residing in the census metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg and Toronto at the time of the 2001 Census show similar results re ethnic exogamy to the patterns for husbands in Canada as a whole. Rates of ethnic intermarriage are generally significantly higher for third-plus generation husbands, but in most cases the rates tend to be slightly lower than the rates for husbands of the second and 2.5 generations. However, it is important to note that the increase in marital assimilation from the first generation to the third-plus generation is significant.

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Language: Mother Tongue and Language Most Often at Home

The use of an ethnic language has been shown to decline across generations (Kalbach and Richard, 1980). Lower levels of ethnic-connectedness are associated with a decline in the use of the ethnic language (Ibid.). An examination of the percentage distribution of non-official mother tongues by generation of the population fifteen years of age and over for Canada and the census metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal at the time of the 2001 Census reveal the classic pattern of continuous ethnic language loss from the first to the third-plus generation is clearly evident for Canada and each of the CMAs. The declines are most precipitous for Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver.

A slightly different pattern is evident for ethnic languages spoken most often in the home. There was a significant decline in the use of ethnic languages spoken most often at home from the first generation to the third-plus generation at the time of the 2001 Census, but the proportion of the third-plus generation using an ethnic language in the home was not always lower than the proportion for the 2nd or 2.5 generation. Again, the most precipitous decline in the loss of the ethnic languages spoken most often at home between first and third-plus generations was evident for Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver, and least in the Prairie CMAs.

If the data were available to do a similar analysis for specific ethnic groups, the same results regarding a generational decline of ethnic mother tongues and ethnic languages spoken most often at home would be expected. Differences in levels of declines between groups would also be expected, as well as generational differences within the various ethnic or cultural groups.

Aboriginals

Many Aboriginals declared multiple origins in the 2001 Census as previously mentioned. The rate of multiple responses as a percentage of the total responses was 57.9

for Canada and over 50 percent for every CMA except Regina. The rate of multiple responses was just over fifty percent for Saskatoon.

Aboriginal ancestry and identity can be examined directly because a question was asked about both in the census. It is clear from the 2001 Census data that a significant number of Canada's Aboriginals don't identify with their aboriginal heritage.

Discussion and Conclusions

Canada's 2001 Census reveals that there is an intergenerational transfer of ethnic identity across generations for Canada and the census metropolitan areas of Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton, Regina, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Toronto and Montreal. The evidence is found in ethnic language loss across generations, in increases in ethnic exogamy across generations, in relatively high rates of multiple responses and in the continued increases in the percentage of the population who have responded Canadian in Canada's censuses since 1991. According to previous research lower levels of ethnic-connectedness are associated with each of these findings, and this in turn suggests that there is a significant level of intergenerational transfer of ethnic identity in Canada, especially from the first to the third-plus generation. Any aberrations in the data can probably be explained by small numbers in the 2.5 and third-plus generations for the most recent immigrant groups such as the Italians, Greeks, Portuguese, East Indians and Chinese. It is also a fact that some of the older ethnic ancestry groups such as the Poles that have not been refueled by high levels of recent immigration also have small numbers of first generation or foreign born. In spite of these facts the analysis reveals a intergenerational transfer in ethnic identity away from an ethnic ancestry to another identity such as Canadian or a combination of ethnic ancestry and Canadian. At any rate the analysis suggest that there are many individuals who think of themselves as Canadian, but who also seem to be aware of their ethnic or cultural ancestry with which they may still identify under some circumstances (Kalbach and Kalbach, 1999; `Isajiw, 1990; Isajiw et.al., 1993).

Lower levels of ethnic-connectedness are associated with a decline in the use of the ethnic language.

The 2001 Census of Canada provides a picture of Canada's multicultural population at the turn of the twenty-first century. The ethnic character of Canada's immigration stream has changed from what it was during most of the twentieth century. Canada's immigrants are now mainly non-European in ancestry and most live in census metropolitan areas. The analyses in this paper suggest that the new immigrant groups will continue to experience an intergenerational transfer of ethnic identity as their second and third-plus generations numbers increase.

One of the goals of Canada's Censuses is to provide a snapshot of the Canadian population at the same point in time every ten years. This is especially important in a multicultural society such as Canada if policy making is to be adequately informed. Thus, the results of this analysis provide an argument for continuing to ask about ethnic ancestry and argue for additional questions to be retained on a regular basis or added. It would be prudent to remove Canadian as a response to the ethnic ancestry question because it is really an answer to the question of identity. In time it may become a legitimate ethnic ancestry but as long as Canada is a country of immigration it would appear to be more of a reflection of ethnic identity. The addition of a question on ethnic identity would allow individuals to identify as Canadian if they wished. It would ensure legitimacy and validity to this response category as well as to the ethnic ancestry question. In addition, questions on birthplace and birthplace of parents should be included in all decennial censuses to facilitate the provision of an accurate picture of Canada's immigrants and the extent of their integration into Canadian society over time.

Statistics Canada and Canadian Heritage conducted a post-censal survey regarding ethnic diversity in Canada after the 2001 Census. This should be continued if Canada's policymakers and ethnic groups themselves are to make informed decisions about their welfare.

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