WHAT DOES INTEGRATION EVEN MEAN IN MULTICULTURAL CANADA?

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This paper examines evolving frameworks for immigrant integration, emphasizing the Canadian context. Traditional models like spatial and segmented assimilation theories, which view integration as adopting mainstream characteristics, are increasingly inadequate in super-diverse societies. The study highlights Crul's Integration into Diversity (ID) theory, which suggests integration as acceptance within multiple "mainstreams" with varied attitudes toward diversity. Using Canadian data and insights from the Becoming a Minority (BaM) project, it identifies nine identity positions reflecting integration levels and tolerance. Incorporating such models into Canadian frameworks like the Canadian Index for Measuring Integration and Inclusion (CIMI) could better capture the complexities of integration in multicultural settings, offering new strategies to foster social cohesion.

BACKGROUND

Approximately forty years ago, Doug Massey and proponents of the 'spatial assimilation theory' argued that segregated minority groups segregated into specific neighbourhoods could gain tangible benefits-such as improved health, education, employment opportunities, reduced crime rates, and enhanced social prestige - by integrating into the residential "mainstream".[1,2] Massey et al. termed this process "spatial assimilation," describing it as a model of status attainment that connects the spatial and social positions of minority group members.[3]

When applied to immigrants, Massey's work – rooted in the ecological tradition of the Chicago School, which he continued – suggests that new immigrants often initially concentrate into reception areas or "ethnic enclaves," as a survival strategy. Reasons for clustering may include external factors, such as discrimination or limited employment opportunities or internal characteristics, such as a shared

1 Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. 1985. "Spatial Assimilation as a Socioeconomic Outcome." *American Sociological Review* 50, no. 1: 94–106.

2 Massey, Douglas S., and Brendan P. Mullan. 1984. "Processes of Hispanic and Black Spatial Assimilation." *American Journal of Sociology* 89: 836–74.

3 Massey, Douglas S., and Nancy A. Denton. 1985. "Spatial Assimilation as a Socioeconomic Outcome." *American Sociological Review* 50, no. 1: 94–106.

language, kinship ties, common financial constraints, or the need to pool resources. Regardless of these reasons, ethnic concentration is viewed as temporary phase. As an immigrant family's socioeconomic status improves and barring other structural impediments, the family should eventually move to a less segregated neighbourhood and integrate into the residential mainstream. At this point, the newcomers are considered assimilated – or, as we would say today, integrated-and largely indistinguishable from the general population.

In this way, Massey's work was, and has been, incredibly influential for understanding how immigrants cluster and disperse in their communities. Although his research focused on the United States, scholars around the world – including those in Canada[4,5] – used his framework to understand the immigrant experience. One could argue that few theories of integration have had a greater impact.

Like many theories, spatial assimilation sought to impose order on a seemingly random process. Throughout much of the 1900s, hundreds of thousands of immigrants entered North America each year. Spatial assimilation theory provided researchers with a framework to understand and predict the mobility paths of these newcomers. However, this frameword did not apply neatly to all groups. For example, Dutch immigrants often opted for the Canadian countryside over urban areas, limiting their exposure to neighbourhoods where assimilation might typically occur. Despite these exceptions, spatial assimilation theory remained a dominant model for understanding integration for decades.

In many Canadian cities, particularly Toronto, unifying theories like spatial assimilation have lost their relevance. Maintaining this idea of Toronto as our baseline, consider the following[6]:

- Only 49.3% of residents in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area were born in Canada.
- Roughly 4% of the CMA's population consists of non-permanent residents; in the City of Toronto, it is 5.3%.
- No single group represents more than 15% of the entire CMA population. The largest groups are from Chine (10.4%) and India (13.8%).

While Toronto is leading the pack in terms of diversity in Canada, the rest of the country is not far behind. By 2041, Statistics Canada predicts that half of the country's population will be immigrants and their Canadian-born children, with two in five people identifying as non-white and one in four born in Asia or Africa.[7] Although most of this diversity will continue to be concentrated in urban centres, change is also afoot in rural Canada. Programs such as the Atlantic Immigrant Program and the Rural, Northern, and Remote Immigration Pilot Program are expected to accelerate these demographic shifts across Canada.

INTEGRATION AND DIVERSITY

Canada has long had an uneasy relationship with terms like assimilation and integration. The idea of individuals changing who they are to fit into a new society has always been anathema to the country's policy of multiculturalism. Yet, prior to Canada's rise to a state of "superdiversity", the process of integration appeared more prevalent. Try to find, for example, a "Little Italy" or a "Little Portugal" where the majority – or even a sizeable minority c of residents still hail from those countries. Even in the City of Kitchener (formerly New Berlin), less than one percent of the population was born in Germany. What this suggests is that, in Canada, and perhaps in most immigrant-receiving countries, the concepts of 'integration' and 'assimilation' are becoming outdated, both as predictors of a process and reflections of present realities.

Like the reality it seeks to describe and explain, academic research has also been moving away from the notion of integration as a process through which individuals meld into the mainstream, with some even calling the theories of assimilation and integration "dead".[8] In the remainder of this article, I will describe some of the new(ish) theories around immigrant incorporation, followed by some closing thoughts on what might come next.

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4 Fong, Eric, and Rima Wilkes. 1999. "The Spatial Assimilation Model Reexamined: An Assessment by Canadian Data." *International Migration Review* 33, no. 3: 594–620.

5 Myles, John, and Feng Hou. 2004. "Changing Colours: Neighbourhood Attainment and Residential Segregation Among Toronto's Visible Minorities." *Canadian Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 1.

6 Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. 2023. "Profile Table, Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population Toronto, City (C) [Census Subdivision], Ontario;Toronto [Census Metropolitan Area], Ontario." November 15, 2023. www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=toronto&DGUIDlist=2021A00053520005,2021S0503535&GENDERlist=1&STATISTIClist=1&HEADERlist=0

7 Government of Canada, Statistics Canada. 2022. "The Daily – Canada in 2041: A Larger, More Diverse Population With Greater Differences Between Regions." September 8, 2022. www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220908/dq220908a-eng.htm

8 Greenman, Emily, and Yu Xie. 2008. "Is Assimilation Theory Dead? The Effect of Assimilation on Adolescent Well-Being." *Social Science Research* 37, no. 1: 109–37.

NEW ASSIMILATION THEORY

Once it became obvious that people were no longer 'disappearing' into the mainstream, new theories were required. To this end, post-spatial assimilation research largely went in two distinct directions. The first was segmented assimilation theory, developed by Alejandro Portes and colleagues. Unlike standard assimilation theory, which assumes a single path into a unified mainstream, segmented assimilation posits that there may be multiple mainstreams, each with distinct social, economic, and cultural features, and that individuals might get pushed into different ones based on a variety of factors. Perhaps the best example of this provided by Portes was the experience of black immigrants in the United States.[9,10] Rather than entering white majority society, Black immigrants often find themselves pushed into the African American underclass, experiencing many of the same disadvantages as native-born African Americans. This bifurcation occurred for no reason other than the skin immigrants' skin colour, which plays a significant role in determining their social and economic outcomes.

As effective as segmented assimilation theory is in explaining certain types of this disadvantage (particularly in the United States), it did little to explain groups that appeared to not only voluntarily cluster, but also fare well in the process. More recent, though still somewhat dated, research a 'new assimilation' perspective[11] suggests that many, but not all, immigrants want to blend in as quickly as possible.[12,13] Regarding residential clustering, for example, some immigrant groups maintain their enclaves for far longer than what spatial assimilation theory would predict, even though they ostensibly have the resources to leave. Some groups may, in fact, be choosing to go against spatial assimilation and forming more durable "ethnic communities" with same-group members by staking a claim in their enclaves with the purchase of a home.[14]

These communities often choose to remain active within their ethnic economies, particularly in instances "where their group is well-resourced. This may be giving rise to a positive and growing "enclave effect" on various measures of success, including homeownership,[15] and participation in the labour market,[16] signaling that, for certain groups, residential and economic clustering may actually enhance rather than inhibit integration outcomes.

INTEGRATION INTO DIVERSITY

Although there is evidence to support both segmented and new assimilation theories, it is also becoming increasingly evident that researchers must account for the demographic realities in immigrant-receiving countries such as Canada. As mainstream populations continue to shrink in proportion to the whole, it becomes increasingly difficult to pinpoint where exactly the process of integration might occur. Richard Alba[17] recommends expanding the mainstream to include more groups. While this is obviously an important step, it maintains an underlying assumption of the existence of a core population group. What happens then when a city increasingly does not have a clear majority group?

To address this, Crul[18] recommends that we move beyond thinking about integration as a minority group merging into a majority population. His Integration into Diversity theory (ID) argues that the notion of a mainstream is becoming less useful, and that we should replace it with a population marked by diversity. Crul offers a practical matrix to describe the ultimate outcome of integrated individuals (Figure 1).

Drawing on results from the Becoming a Minority project (BaM), which collected data from Amsterdam, Antwerp, Hamburg, Malmö, Rotterdam, and Vienna, the matrix above describes nine identity positions, with each position focused on identifying different attitudes towards integration. The

9 Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut. 2001. Legacies: The Story of the Immigrant Second Generation. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

10 Portes, Alejandro, and Min Zhou. 1993. "The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants." *Annals* 530: 74–96.

11 Crul, Maurice. 2024. "Integration into Diversity: Renewing – Once Again – Assimilation Theory." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 50, no. 1: 257–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2023.2258688

12 Alba, Richard D., and Victor Nee. Remaking the American Mainstream. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

13 Logan, John R., Richard D. Alba, and Wenquan Zhang. 2002. "Immigrant Enclaves and Ethnic Communities in New York and Los Angeles." *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 2: 299–322.

14 Alba, Richard D., and Victor Nee. Remaking the American Mainstream. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.

15 Borjas, George. 2002. "Homeownership in the Immigrant Population." *Journal of Urban Economics* 52, no. 3: 448–76.

16 Tu, Jiong. 2010. "The Effect of Enclave Residence on the Labour Force Activities of Immigrants in Canada." IZA Discussion Papers 4744, Institute of Labor Economics (IZA).

17 Alba, Richard. The Great Demographic Illusion: Majority, Minority, and the Expanding American Mainstream. Princeton University Press, 2020.

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FIGURE 1.

	Migration-related diversity is threatening	Neutral	Migration-related diversity is enriching
At least half of my friends or acquaintances have a migration background	ID position 1	ID position 2	ID position 3
Some of my friends or acquaintances have a migration background	ID position 4	ID position 5	ID position 6
None of my friends or acquaintances have a migration background	ID position 7	ID position 8	ID position 9

Sources: BaM survey

most integrated individuals will hold ID position 3, characterized by diverse social networks and a belief in the enriching effects of migration-related diversity. At the opposite end is ID position 7, where individuals feel threatened by migration, favouring instead a homogenous social circle.

The strength of this approach lies in its disregard for personal characteristics such as skin colour or first language. For this theory, these factors do not really matter because there is no expectation of comparing individual characteristics with that of a mainstream population; neither the characteristics of the community or the person matter. Instead, what matters are individual actions and attitudes toward diversity. The more open and tolerant a person is, the more integrated they are considered to be.

This approach is still relatively new and does not yet fully explain which identity position a person will take. It is only beginning to be used to predict characteristics like feelings of belonging and perceptions of neighbourhood security. Crul[19] is clear in that he does not want ID to replace new or segmented assimilation theory as an explanation of the integration process (he instead refers to it as an update), but it does shift the focus away from melding into a mainstream. By suggesting nine subgroups, ID allows for multiple "mainstreams" with varied attitudes toward integration.

CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, as Crul[20] notes, the true value of any theoretical framework is best assessed empirically. Existing Canadian data can be used to identify a respondent's *Identity Position*. For example, the Social Identity wave of the General Social Survey asks individuals how many of their friends are from the same ethnic group. While it does not inquire about attitudes toward diversity, this is something that could – and should – be added, especially as public sentiment toward immigration appears to be shifting.

The Association for Canadian Studies has worked for years on the Canadian Index for Measuring Integration and Inclusion (CIMI). Exploring the potential to integrate CIMI with Crul's Integration into Diversity (ID) framework could enrich both approaches.

19 Ibid.

20 Ibid.

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