INTERVIEW WITH VIC SATZEWICH

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How did the multicultural character of Canada evolve between 1967 and 2007 (in qualitative and quantitative terms) and what would be the outlook for 2017 (the 150th anniversary of the confederation)?

We all know that the regional sources of immigrants have changed over the past forty years. Put simply, Europe supplies far fewer immigrants than it once did, and Asia, Africa, Latin American and the Caribbean now supply far more immigrants than they once did. The late 1960s were watershed years in Canadian immigration. As a result, we have seen a growth in what Canadians like to call 'visible minorities'. This is part of our understanding of how we have evolved as a country over the past forty years. Yet, I think we need to be careful about how we frame and understand the widening of the sources of recent immigrants. In Canada, we seem to assume that, because the skin colours and faces of immigrants have changed over the past forty years, we are now more multicultural than we ever were before. There is, I think, a terminological and conceptual sleight of hand involved in the equation of more 'visible minority' immigrants with more 'multicultural diversity'. This common sense equation assumes that new immigrants, because they look physically different from the ideal typical European immigrant of the earlier period, naturally carry with them a different set of cultural values, attitudes and perspectives on life. There are admittedly cultural differences between recent immigrants (both visible and 'non-visible') and Canadians who are born and raised here. After all, some new immigrants bring to Canada different food preferences, different ways of dressing, and varied ways of praying to gods, prophets and deities. But, as some sociologists argue, these are expressions of symbolic ethnicity. These differences in symbolic ethnicity tend to be overemphasized at the expense of the values and cultural characteristics that many new immigrants and the Canadian born arguably share. I think it is problematic to simply conflate the changing faces of immigrants within the notion that we are becoming increasingly 'multicultural'. Having a particular skin tone does not necessarily mean that a person or a group is, in a cultural sense, completely different from 'white' Canadians. In many ways, immigrants, regardless of where they come from, want the same things as other Canadians, including good schools for their children, decent heath care, safe neighbourhoods, a clean environment, good jobs and a chance to participate in the dream of upward mobility. These common values, and perhaps even common cultural characteristics, are sometimes lost sight of when we talk about the growing number of visible minorities in Canada and the increasing diversity they supposedly bring.

What factors contribute to better labour market outcomes for Canadian-born visible minorities and visible minority immigrants?

Clearly, as a number of academics, immigrant aid agencies, and immigrants themselves have suggested, one of the key challenges immigrants in Canada face is securing work for which they have the experience, skills and education. The way that Canadian society evaluates the credentials that immigrants bring to the labour market needs to be rethought. Professional licensing bodies do have a right, indeed an obligation, to be concerned with 'quality control'. After all, nobody wants a bridge built by an engineer, or to be treated by a doctor, who does not have the same professional knowledge and capabilities of Canadian trained engineers or doctors. But, professional licensing bodies operate as guilds that regulate entry to the profession and the roadblocks that they place in the way of newcomers gaining entry to their respective professions seem to be more than just matters of quality control. Professional licensing bodies in other countries around the world that also receive and/or recruit skilled professionals seem to have cracked this problem. Yet, Canada seems to have particular difficulty in coming up with systems and procedures that fairly evaluate the credentials, experiences and skills that immigrants bring to our society. This is a solvable problem that would benefit immigrants and Canadian society more generally.

There does not appear to be much public support for employment equity type policies any more. It is not clear whether employment equity ever really did have much public support, but today there seems to be little discussion of using employment equity as a way of addressing some of the inequality issues that exist in this country. Perhaps there are good reasons for this, after all, employment equity has never had a really effective enforcement mechanism, and as some have argued, it creates the appearance of change without actually changing anything.

But there might be other reasons why employment equity, as we know it, might not be an appropriate or effective policy tool to deal with labour market issues. 'Visible minorities', as we know, are one of the four designated groups covered

by the policy. The concept of 'visible minority', a euphemism created in the early 1980s when Canadians were searching for a way to talk about 'race' without actually using the term 'race', may no longer be an appropriate analytical or public policy category. The concept of 'visible minority' lumps together a wide variety of people with different migration histories, backgrounds, and identities. It has trouble dealing with multiple identities and origins, and it also blurs the significance of social class differences within ethnic and immigrant populations. While many 'visible minority' immigrants, and Canadian born visible minorities, are struggling economically in Canada, it is wrong to assume that visible minorities, as a socially manufactured collectivity, are an underclass in Canadian society – whose members are all in need of a policy which promotes their access to certain kinds of jobs. The fact is, and we sometimes forget this, that some members of groups defined as 'visible minorities' (both immigrant and Canadian born) have privileged class and educational backgrounds and do extraordinarily well in our society. I think it is time for academics and public policies to start making somewhat more rigorous definitions of what constitutes privilege and a lack of privilege, finer distinctions between those who are, and those who are not privileged, and more focused policies on the truly disadvantaged.

What approaches could be used to promote diversity in rural communities in Canada? What indicators could be used to measure this progress?

I sometimes wonder whether promoting diversity in rural communities is desirable from a public policy or immigrant integration perspective. While some academics and policy makers are worried about ethnic and immigrant enclaves being formed in some of Canada's major cities, it is not clear that these enclaves are, in the long run, bad for Canadian society as a whole, or for immigrants themselves. I am reminded of the moral panic about bloc settlements on the prairies in the early 20th century. Bloc settlements were formed by eastern European immigrants who found comfort, support and community by living and farming close to family members and co-ethnics. However, for some political and economic elites in Canada at the time, the bloc settlements were seen as a recipe for disaster. They were alleged to discourage assimilation, discourage the settlement of better types of farmers in the same vicinity, and were seen as ethnic islands where backward, old-world cultures, values and prejudices were being reproduced. I do not necessarily think that history repeats itself in a simplistic sort of way, but with the benefit of hindsight, the concerns about ethnic enclave formation on the prairies were largely unwarranted. The eastern Europeans living in their 'enclaves' who were seen as so threatening to the future stability of the country turned out fine, and Canadian society is arguably better off for their having come and settled in this country. My guess is that we will say the same thing about the enclaves that seem to be forming in today's major cities. By the time the second generation is having children of their own, they will be thoroughly Canadian.

At the same time, if cities, towns and regions outside of the traditional 'tier one' cities of Toronto, Montreal and Vancouver want to attract more immigrants to help solve labour market and demographic problems, they clearly need to do a better job in marketing themselves to potential immigrants. While Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto are world-class cities, immigrants who consider coming to Canada have less knowledge and awareness of what other cities and locations in Canada have to offer. As a result, second tier cities, rural areas, and other places that are off of immigrants' social map of Canada – need to do a better job in marketing themselves and making known what they have to offer.

There is, it should be noted, considerable secondary migration occurring within Canada. That is, even though most immigrants initially settle in places like Toronto, Vancouver or Montreal, there is evidence that after a few years, some immigrants move on to live in other, second tier cities like Hamilton, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa. As patterns of chain migration become established from these cities, it is not unreasonable to expect that more immigrants will see these as desirable places to settle. This is an argument in favour of doing nothing and simply letting the dynamics of chain migration take their course.

I am not a fan of measures that would restrict mobility of immigrants to help spread them around. Canada tried a version of this in the early 1950s, when it imposed restrictions on immigrants from eastern and southern Europe who were recruited to fill jobs in industries that were short of labour. Even though they were accepted as immigrants, the Canadian government made them subject to deportation if they did not remain in the job they were initially recruited for a year or two. This policy generated resentments within immigrant communities and there is little reason to think that such a policy would not generate resentment today.

Some have suggested that we need to make more use of migrant labour models to solve labour shortages in more remote locations of Canada, and in industries that are perennially short of workers. The Caribbean and Mexican Seasonal Agricultural Workers program is seen as a model that can be emulated in other industries. While it might be a success story, at least from the perspective of solving employer recruitment and retention problems, the use of these kinds of schemes come at considerable cost to migrants and their families. Many people around the world are in desperate circumstances and so there is an economic benefit to participate in migrant worker schemes in Canada. They can earn more in Canada than they can in their country of origin, but evidence suggests that women and families back home bear the psychological and emotional burdens of these kinds of schemes. They are also at odds with the values of freedom that other Canadians take for granted.