BRIDGING THE COMMON DIVIDE: THE IMPORTANCE OF BOTH "COHESION" AND "INCLUSION"

ABSTRACT

This article suggests that in a pluralistic society a focus on identity is as important as socioeconomic inclusion, particularly as it relates to second and other generation Canadians. It argues that civic cohesion, especially in a post-9/11 world, does not simply arise out of pluralism and inclusion.

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As a country, Canada is marked by its diversity, its concern for the well-being of its citizens and its openness towards the evolution of its identity. These three features, to which we will refer as *pluralism*, *social inclusion* and *civic cohesion*, are key elements that have made Canada a successfully plural and inclusive society. Aboriginal Canadians, linguistic duality and a quarter of a million new immigrants coming from a range of countries to Canada each year make this country one of the most pluralistic in the world. Support from all levels of government for the social and economic well-being of Canadians underscores the country's commitment to social inclusion, which includes policies and programs aimed at issues such as poverty reduction, anti-discrimination, healthcare, and meeting the needs of an ageing population. But when it comes to the third feature, that of civic cohesion, this paper suggests that this question has received somewhat less attention than have pluralism and social inclusion.

While the recognition of our pluralistic make-up and the focus on inclusion are essential to Canada, we ask whether there also needs to exist a dialogue on building a common and distinctive Canadian identity. After all, the pluralism of a society can only act as a source of enrichment as long as all of the members of that society, including immigrants and second and other generation Canadians, participate in and identify with that society. Such participation and identification arguably requires more than the unencumbered pursuit of socioeconomic well-being. It is a point also raised by Banting, Courchene and Seidle in *Belonging? – Diversity, Recognition and Shared Citizenship in Canada*, a volume published by the Institute for Research on Public Policy (IRPP) (2007):

> Based on certain measures of civic participation, recent arrivals and their children are engaging reasonably well with Canadian society. However, on other measures, such as a sense of belonging to Canada and trust in others, there is a gap between immigrants and the rest of the population, and this gap seems to remain for the second generation despite their progress over time on other measures (such as income).

This article suggests that in a pluralistic society a focus on identity is as important as socio-economic inclusion, particularly as it relates to second and other generation Canadians. It argues that civic cohesion, especially in a post-9/11 world, does not simply arise out of pluralism and inclusion. And it raises the question of what is required to ensure that citizens in a society that is as diverse as Canada's are able to devise a narrative that is reflective of their self-understanding and capable of furthering their aspirations as a community of citizens.

Finding their place

To understand "cohesion" and "inclusion" as they relate to immigrants and their descendents (i.e., second and other generation Canadians), it is helpful to consider the process of immigrant adaptation to society. This process is part of a much broader society-wide dynamic. J. W. Berry, in his work on intercultural relations, discusses this process of adaptation (1999). He refers to "acculturation" as:

> The process of cultural change that results when two (or more) cultural groups come into contact as well as the psychological changes that individuals experience as a result of being members of cultural groups that are undergoing acculturation at the group or collective level.

Berry's research has given rise to "two-dimensional" models of acculturation, which "recognize that the two dominant aspects of acculturation, namely, preservation of one's heritage culture and adaptation to the host society, are conceptually distinct and can vary independently." (Phinney et al. 2001)

In turn, two questions can be constructed that reflect the "strategies used by immigrants in dealing with acculturation," "Is it considered to be of value to maintain one's cultural heritage?" and "Is it considered to be of value to develop relationships with the larger society?" (*Ibid.*). These questions extend to second and other generation Canadians as evidenced by other research (Eid 2003, Gaudet, Clément and Deuzeman 2005, Plaza 2006).

Two questions in a larger context

The process of answering the acculturation questions (i.e., how they are negotiated in reality) is a dynamic one, as part of a larger "give-and-take" between individuals and groups in society, including immigrants as well as second and other generation Canadians. The optimal balance, arguably, is what Berry (1999) refers to as "integration." But he cautions:

> Integration can only be "freely" chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity….Thus a mutual accommodation is required for integration to be attained, involving the acceptance by both dominant and non-dominant groups of the fight of all groups to live as culturally different peoples. This strategy requires non-dominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions (e.g., education, health, labour) to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society.

From this, we suggest that at least two phenomena are at work in this dynamic. The first is "inclusion," which is mainly about the removal of barriers to full participation for certain groups and individuals within a society. Primarily focused on social and economic issues, inclusion often includes measures such as immigrant settlement services, employment equity programs to end discriminatory hiring practices, anti-racism activities and anti-poverty initiatives.

"Cohesion," by contrast, can be understood as the quality of relationships between the various individuals and groups constituting a given society, where the overlap and convergence of values, experiences, and interests is what one may refer to as a distinct identity that is "national," "shared" or "common" in character. It includes the openness of a host society to welcoming and accommodating a diversity of cultures (constituted by characteristics such as ethnicity, race or religion). For immigrants, and their descendants, cohesion is about the *capacity* for reciprocal attachment to and identification with the host society.

The importance of these concepts for Canada arises from the plural nature of the country. We are a nation of many cultures and peoples; this involves numerous, complex relationships. The challenge for Canada is to derive benefit from its pluralism by working towards inclusion, while not neglecting civic cohesion.

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Inclusion vs. cohesion

Inclusion, however, does not automatically foster cohesion and can develop independently. A recent study on the acculturation of Canadian immigrants argues that "employment status, occupation and prior earnings do not have an impact on whether immigrants assume the identity of their host society" (Phythian, Walters and Anisef 2007). Inclusion, economic in this case, did not affect the relationship of immigrants with the host society.

Furthermore, a generally welcoming attitude towards immigrants in Canadian society may not necessarily be indicative of the extent to which specific groups are made to feel that they are a part of the whole society. One case study of Iranian immigrants found that their acceptance into Canada was hampered by their religious affiliation and popular associations with their country of origin, as Sadeghi (2007) points out:

> Iranian immigrants often have had to face multiple layers of systematic discrimination, exclusion and social isolation because of their religious affiliation as Muslims, and also as the result of their association to a country whose name is commonly linked to negative images of fundamentalism and terrorism.

In a recent poll, when asked questions about the positive aspects of immigration, Canadians said that they "identified [immigration] as giving a boost to the workforce by bringing in more labourers and highly skilled people" (Aubry 2007). Interestingly, although "increasing cultural diversity" was also deemed positive,

the same group of respondents reported concerns with immigrants "imposing their culture[s]" and their desire "to have Canada accommodate them" (Aubry 2007) – attitudes that are not welcoming of diversity and not likely to further a sense of civic cohesion.

In order to delve deeper into the distinction between inclusion and cohesion, one could also consider the "Toronto Bomb Plot," which saw 18 suspects arrested in 2006 for allegedly planning to blow up targets in Southern Ontario. The alleged plot was "home-grown," in that all of the suspects were either born in Canada or long-time residents (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2008). At the same time, all the suspects were from ethnocultural minority groups. One line of argument has been that they were "included" in but did not identify with society to such an extent that they were considering terrorist activities. As mentioned earlier, inclusion and cohesion can develop quite independently, and an increase in one does not necessarily mean an increase in the other.

Over time, Canada has moved away from seeing itself as solely based on its "foundational" cultures (i.e., Aboriginal, French, and English). It has evolved into a pluralistic society wherein identity does not ignore Canada's cultural and linguistic roots and realities but builds on them to open up a narrative that includes other markers of identity. The challenge is to give expression to this new narrative, between our foundations and our evolving diversity, in a way that encourages civic cohesion.

Without a sense of civic cohesion and common purpose, groups and individuals, even if they are not socio-economically disadvantaged, may see themselves as "outsiders".

The risks of neglecting cohesion

Inclusion without cohesion, to borrow a term from Berry's work, could lead to a situation where communities live parallel lives within a society without developing a sense of connectedness to the larger whole. The extent to which second generation Canadians see themselves as an integral part of the overall narrative of their society is something of a litmus test for the civic groundedness of pluralism in Canada. Without a sense of civic cohesion and common purpose, groups and individuals, even if they are not socioeconomically disadvantaged, may see themselves as "outsiders":

> The consequences of not belonging creates a deep sense of alienation, resulting in projections and introjections of the self through imagined and fantasized notions of culture, religion and identity [which can give] rise to culturalism essentialism, religious fundamentalism and the institution of terror through violence, such as the subway and bus "terrorist" attacks in London on 7 July and 21 July 2005. (Moodley 2007)

The post-9/11 reaction in the U.S., and the narrative defining individuals and groups as either "with us or against us" could be viewed as an example of a lack of civic cohesion created in a situation where Arab- and Muslim-Americans, including second and other generation Americans, were seen primarily as "Muslims" or "Arabs" and not as "Americans." Interestingly, this occurred despite having formal legal guarantees of equality, as in the U.S. Constitution *Bill of Rights*. The American government, in responding to potential threats, did not rely "on individualized suspicion or intelligence-driven criteria [but instead used] national origin as a proxy for evidence of dangerousness" (Chishti et al. 2003). The effect of these actions has been argued to have "diminished the openness of U.S. society and eroded national unity." (*Ibid.*)

This reaction was not just confined to official activities but extended to the broader American society. Workplace discrimination jumped significantly immediately after 9/11, to the effect that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) had to create "a new category to track acts of discrimination against Middle Eastern, Muslim and South Asian workers" (*Ibid.*). Additionally, hate crimes against Muslims have soared after September 11, which rose more than 1,500% (though violent crimes have since tapered off). Despite being a liberal-democratic society with constitutional guarantees of legal equality, we would suggest that these developments indicated not merely a lack of social inclusion but of civic cohesion in the U.S. One might argue that many of these situations could have been avoided had a better relationship between the larger society and ethnocultural minority groups existed.

The Canadian context

Some would argue that the post-9/11 U.S. experience has limited bearing on the Canadian context – but the distinction may be less pronounced than one might think. There are signs of weakening cohesion in Canada, too. For example, a 2006 poll found that 48% of Canadian respondents supported sending government agents to infiltrate the Muslim community, whereas 62% supported giving the U.S. any information they requested about Canadian citizens whom they suspect of being terrorists (Strategic Counsel 2006). More broadly, a 2008 poll indicated that 30% of respondents believed accommodating the ethnic and religious diversity of immigrants weakened our sense of national identity (Strategic Counsel 2008). The same poll also noted that 45% thought immigrants hold on to their customs and traditions too long when they come to Canada, and 61% agreed that Canada makes too many accommodations to visible minorities. Yet, at the same time, about 88% of respondents believed that Canada was welcoming of visible minorities.

Looking forward

Measures to address issues of inclusion continue to be extremely important and valued by Canadians.

Removing barriers so that all individuals and groups can fully participate both socially and economically in Canadian society is important. It is also quintessentially Canadian.

In addition, we have put forward the idea that in order to support a pluralistic Canadian society in a post-9/11 world, we also need to pay heed to questions of civic cohesion. A sense of belonging or attachment is essential for all groups in society, and this is especially true for second and other generation Canadians. If the ever-evolving narrative of Canada does not speak to all Canadians, including some of Canada's newest citizens, we risk creating groups which see themselves as marginal to society, even though they are fully participating in it economically. If we ignore questions of identity and civic cohesion we may become unable to articulate the ties that bind us as citizens, and the narrative that is common to the Canadian experience.

In the above-mentioned IRPP publication, Banting, Courchene and Seidle (2007) conclude:

> In a bilingual, multinational federal state, there are definite limits to our capacity to engage in nation-building enterprises. Hence our stress on the three equalities [1. human rights and the justice system; 2. socioeconomic equality; 3. political and civic participation] as the bedrock of our shared citizenship. We build respect by respecting difference; we build tolerance by resisting discrimination; we build trust by being trustworthy; we build belonging by drawing people into the mainstream of civic and political life; we build solidarity by supporting all Canadians in need.

A goal of this paper has been to stimulate discussion on the third equality, which we have called "civic cohesion" here – especially as it relates to second and other generation Canadians. The value of diversity in Canada is undeniable – culturally, socially, linguistically and economically. It adds to the richness of our pluralistic nation. Canada is a welcoming and caring country, so much so that one of its most acclaimed writers, Yann Martel, once called it the "greatest hotel on Earth" (Bethune 2006). A hotel can house and feed you exceptionally well, but for it to become a true community, those inside must discover a common bond and see themselves as more than guests but as neighbours and citizens.

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Notes

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[2] The specificity and high degree of pluralism in the Canadian context arises from the fact that Canada combines Aboriginal peoples, two major linguistic communities and ethnocultural communities within the same polity. This particular constellation of pluralist elements in Canada is highly unusual when compared with other countries.

[3] We use the expression "second and other generation Canadian," as opposed to "second generation immigrant," as it more accurately describes this group of Canadians (i.e., given that they are Canadian born, or former immigrants who are now Canadian citizens).

[4] Capacity has a twofold understanding here. First, it is the desire of immigrants to form a relationship with the host society, by, for example, adopting its identity and values. Second, it is the existence, or lack thereof, of barriers (e.g., discrimination) affecting the formation of a relationship with the host society.