BEYOND THE MOSAIC: MULTICULTURALISM 2.0

ABSTRACT

This conceptual article explores the notion that the idea of an ethnocultural mosaic is obsolete. It proposes that the experience of contemporary urban Canada, "Multiculturalism 2.0," has outgrown the mosaic. It describes "cultural navigators," a generation of Canadians who are able to move through a complex network of cultural spaces, and examines their struggle with conventional notions of ethnic and national identity. It also looks at the new features of "Multiculturalism 2.0," including an updated conceptual device, called a "schema," for visualizing cultural identity.

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For far too long, the "mosaic" has monopolized multiculturalism. As a conceptual device for visualizing cultural diversity in Canada, the mosaic – although deeply embedded in the hearts of Canadians – has become an outdated idea. It fails to encompass the contemporary complexity of the multi-ethnic and multi-racial identities that are ubiquitous to urban life in Canada. It also fails to acknowledge that this new diverse reality does not belong exclusively to those who identify themselves as belonging to a visibly diverse (visible minority or non-white) group. In the same way that Internet usage and technological developments have spawned the current and ongoing evolution of online experiences, commonly known as "Web 2.0," many factors in Canada, including technological developments and attitudinal shifts towards ethnicity, have driven Canada's cities towards Multiculturalism 2.0. Despite this, when describing cultural identity in Canada, the media, academia as well as political and cultural institutions remain locked in the rhetoric of the ethnic mosaic. This article introduces some ideas about Multiculturalism 2.0, a work in progress.

A system update is long overdue. New models are needed to account for the dynamic and composite identities of an emergent generation of genuinely multi-cultural youth, the children of immigrants who were born or have always lived in a "multicultural Canada," the children of multiculturalism. We have tried to describe their experience as ethnocultural hybridity, sometimes calling them bi-racial; at our most succinct, we describe their reality as a fusion. At worst, members of this generation are distastefully called "bananas," "coconuts" or "apples," implying that individuals are psychologically or culturally "whitewashed" while trapped in a non-white shell. We continue to consider the space they occupy as being "in between cultures," a reference to Homi K. Bhabha's "third space." None of these sufficiently describes the complexity, cultural mobility or cultural competence of this generation and their contribution to what Erin Anderssen and Michael Valpy have referred to as a "New Canada" (Anderssen and Valpy 2005) and what author and editor Claude Grunitzky refers to as "transculturalism" (Grunitzky 2004), a term first used by Cuban anthropologist, Ferdnando Ortiz (Ortiz 1947).

These individuals are, in fact, the cultural engineers of today's Canada. Their very being defies the standard definitions of ethnocultural identity, and their persistent deinstitutionalization of identity challenges the rigidity and valuation of ethnic distinction. They are "cultural navigators," broadly defined as individuals who are able to manoeuvre through and around complex networks of cultural spaces and "see themselves as the product of these [cultural] networks, available to them through immigration, family roots and residency in diverse cities all over the world" (Habacon 2004). Cultural navigators are not defined so much by their demographic traits but by their capacity for cultural mobility and distinct attitude towards ethnicity and cultural identity. In more conventional demographic terms, this group is composed primarily of (but not exclusive to) the generations that followed the baby boomers; they are today's second[1] and third generation Canadians, urban Aboriginal youth and generations of mixed-race Canadians.

As cultural navigators, many second and third generation children of immigrants do not necessarily consider themselves as part of a marginalized immigrant community, although they may have roots there. They are likely to be well travelled and culturally and economically mobile. They are statistically the most educated group of young adult Canadians (Anderssen and Valpy 2005). They are rapidly professionalizing and finding their Canadian education and work experience, combined with their cultural competencies, to be tremendous assets. Corporations around the world are recruiting them, while Canadian companies are just beginning to realize their importance in the management

of an increasingly diverse workforce composed of new immigrants. Cultural navigators are not only influential in their role as part of the collective mainstream but are also often the drivers of cultural innovation in Canada.

But where are you *really* from?

This is a loaded question in Canada. Being asked "Where are you from?" can cause much anxiety. For some, it ignites anger because of the inherent assumption that the respondent is not from Canada, and, consequently, *not* Canadian.[2] "Where are you from?" – as asked by Canadian immigration officials – was (and may still be) associated with a great prejudice towards non-European immigrants, a prejudice evident in the histories of Chinese, Indian and Black immigrants to Canada. For second generation Canadians, it conjures a singular sense of exclusion from Canadianness because if you identify (or are identified) as a person of colour, this question is inevitable. It is common knowledge among second generation Canadians of non-European ancestry that the question "Where are you from," will be followed with a second, more aggressive question, "No, no, where are you *really* from?"

This is also the experience of many visibly diverse Canadians while traveling outside of Canada. The experience of a stranger's scepticism that a non-European-looking person could be from Canada is commonly described as extremely annoying and sometimes hurtful. However, when asked to describe the moment where one has felt the most Canadian, many cultural navigators respond with stories that take place abroad. Cultural navigators speak of experiencing an epiphany while being overseas, commonly characterized as the self-realization that, despite looking like the crowds around them (becoming invisible), their point of view and identity was distinctly Canadian (Mahtani 2002).

Transnationalism is hardwired into the personal history of many cultural navigators, making it impossible to respond to questions of origin with simple answers. Hannah Simone, a prominent Canadian media personality, emblematic of the New Canada is a case in point. Her public response to the question is no longer one of defensiveness:

> I was born in London, England. Then I moved to Calgary and then I moved to Saudi Arabia. When the war broke out, my family moved to Cyprus. After five years, I moved to India. I came back to Canada for grade 12. We moved to British Columbia and then I stayed in the province for university. I did my degree in International Relations/Political Science and then moved back to London. I moved to Toronto a couple of years ago. So I don't really have a hometown, per se. My family is my home." (www.muchmusic.com 2007)

For those with access to, and mobility and competency in, a range of cultural spaces, including mainstream Canada, a simplistic definition of identity is constraining and false. Arguably, all definitions of identity are inherently inaccurate, but for cultural navigators like Simone, blanket terms like "Asian" or "Indo-Canadian" are no longer sufficient to describe the complexity of their identity.

The fundamental struggle of cultural navigators within the rubric of the Canadian mosaic and Canadian multiculturalism policy is that "multicultural policy focuses on ethnicity as a primary identification" (Mahtani 2002). The ethnocultural mosaic, or "Multiculturalism 1.0," relies on clear and simple responses to the question "Where are you from?" or "Where are you *really* from?" Cultural navigators resist the mosaic's stringent essentializing of identity to "the product of one's ethnic parts" (Mahtani 2002). This is especially pronounced for mixed-race individuals, for whom "the emphasis upon ethnicity effectively reduces identity to one's ethnic constituency" (Mahtani 2002). This is an unsustainable and obsolete paradigm because the cultural identity of Canadians living in urban centres is often influenced more by the Internet, education, occupation, participation in sports and overall consumption of media than by ethnic allegiance or nationalism.

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Trends: Beyond demographics

Multiculturalism 2.0 is the product of numerous intersecting trends in Canada and around the world. Many Canadians presume immigration and related shifts in demographics to be the most influential trends. However, the impact of technology, especially the impact of the Internet on media consumption and lifestyle, and the attitudinal shifts that are prominent in Anderssen and Valpy's New Canada likely surpass the impact of demographics.

There are a number of reasons why technology exerts a greater influence than demographics. Changes in technology are moving at a rate much faster than changes in demographics because advances in technology are being driven by industry and commerce. The proliferation of the Internet, manufacturing efficiencies and the ongoing miniaturization of digital storage capacity has made computer and telecommunications technology more accessible, more affordable and more prevalent. Most importantly, this technology has become an intimate part of how we view ourselves and has dramatically affected our sense of connectedness to each other. These factors have increased Canadians' real and virtual mobility and connectedness to communities, both locally and globally (sometimes referred to as "glocal"). Compared with immigrants from previous waves, new immigrants, who are not only proportionately greater in number than ever before but also more technologically savvy, are staying more

connected, in real time, with family and loved ones overseas (Habacon 2007). This heightened degree of virtual connectedness results in a psychological and emotional connection, also in real time, with locations once thought to be distant. The debate over conventional forms of transnationalism, such as dual citizenship, are moot in the current social environment where Canadian families are living transnationalism without having to be bogged down by airfare, passports and official declarations of loyalty to nation states. When the consciousness of Canadians transcends geographic and political borders, it is impossible for government bodies to impose their sense of geo-political boundaries.

For many years, this author has been celebrating Lunar New Year with the Chung family. Like millions of people who make the annual journey "home," the oldest Chung sibling, Ron – a genuine transnational, makes a regular trip to his hometown Vancouver from Hong Kong where he currently lives and works. Unlike in previous years, this year he spent Lunar New Year in Hong Kong but joined the family's celebratory meal (in real time) using online video communication. Certainly, it was not the same as being physically with his family; nonetheless, Ron's presence was felt. Similarly, the Telectroscope (Figure 1), an installation in both London and New York, which gives the illusion of a tunnel linking these two cities (in real time), illustrates the impact of technology on the collective imagination and transnational consciousness (St. George 2008). This connectedness is far more common among Canadian families than is acknowledged or studied.

The next most influential trend in Multiculturalism 2.0 is sociocultural. In the same way that media consumers now demand absolute control over what digital content they consume and when and where they consume it, control of one's cultural identity is now in the hands of the individual. Urban Canadians are able to customize their cultural identity as one might create an iTunes playlist. Cultural identity is now self-determined beyond the terms of ethnic allegiance. Certainly aspects like ancestry are fixed; however, Canadians are now able to determine the relative significance of ancestry in their cultural identity. Cultural navigators would say that they are informed by ethnicity but *not* defined by it.

This trend is part of the emerging sensibility of the New Canada as seen in the research conducted in 2003 by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC) and the *Globe and Mail*. The findings of this research demonstrated a major shift in attitudes towards ethnicity. When asked how important ethnic background was when choosing a spouse, respondents identified ethnic background as the least important factor while "attitudes towards family and children" were considered the most important factor.

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The data about ethnicity does not suggest, however, that cultural similarities are unimportant. In fact, they indicate that cultural values like "attitudes towards family" and "sense of humour" (which are often very culturally specific) are more important than ancestry, race or skin colour to Canadians today. The data also indicates that the most universal cultural values, like family and humour, remain relevant over time (Habacon 2007).

What's new in Multiculturalism 2.0: The "schema model" for cultural identity

There are more than just a few "significant performance improvements" in Multiculturalism 2.0. It comes with a paradigm shift about cultural identity. In addition to increased global connectedness, transnationalism and the attitudinal shift towards ethnicity, cultural diversity in Canada has moved from the assumed margins of contemporary Canada to the core of the collective mainstream experience. The fourth "new feature" is a new model for cultural diversity. In light of the mosaic's failure to make sense of a dynamic cultural identity in today's Canada, a new conceptual model for envisioning cultural identity – referred to as one's schema – is proposed. This model replaces (or, in some cases, supplements) the ethnocultural mosaic.

There are three fundamental assumptions that distinguish the schema from the mosaic. The first assumption is that ethnicity informs one's cultural identity but does not define it. In the mosaic, by contrast, you are defined by your ancestry, regardless of how much your ancestry is actually part of your everyday life (Mahtani 2005,

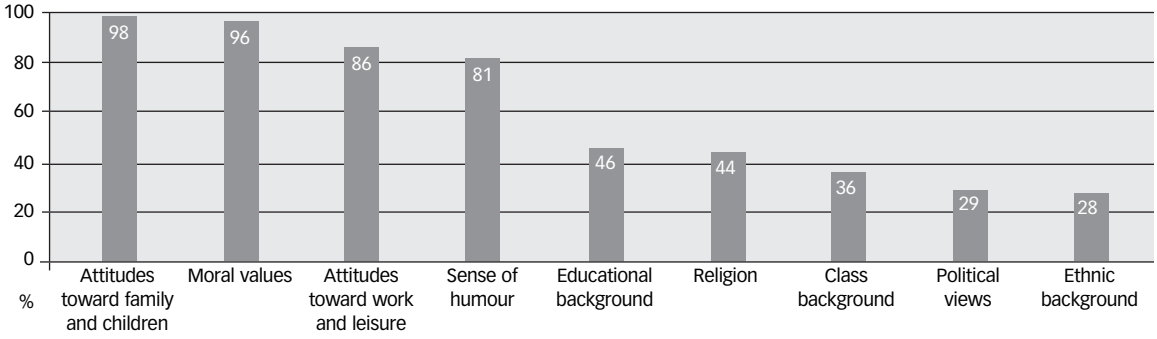
Figure 1
The Telectroscope



Photo : Charlotte Gilhooly.

Figure 2
Important factors when choosing a spouse

Percentage of respondants who answered "very important" or "important" to the question:
"When choosing a spouse, it is very important, important, not very important or not at all important that both people share similar…"



Source: *A New Canada: An Identity Shaped by Diversity* (Centre for Research and Information on Canada, October 2003).

Habacon 2007). For reasons described earlier, this traditional model – based on essentializing identity – is problematic for Canadians who occupy, manoeuvre or reside in multiple cultural spaces.

Assumption number two is that cultural identity is fluid. Our cultural identity is affected by and adjusts to the cultural influences that become part of our daily lives: learning a language, moving to the "other coast" or changing jobs to work for a company with a unique corporate culture. Once internalized, these influences ultimately affect your Cultural Intelligence (CQ), which is defined as "a person's accumulation or use of relevant *insider* information so as to be intuitively familiar with a variety of cultural contexts" (Habacon 2007). Our potential CQ is an almost direct reflection of our cultural identity.

The final assumption is that an individual's schema includes all forms of culture: work cultures, music subcultures, academic cultures, virtual online cultures, media consumption cultures and the most commonly shared Canadian cultural space, amateur sports. The mosaic, based on ethnic allegiance, assumes that the "stuff" that actually makes up one's cultural identity, such as television, does not exist or have a significant impact; the gap between how cultural navigators experience their cultural identity and how it is conceptualized using the mosaic is thus created.

One's schema is similar to one's Web identity. When occupying a Web space, your actual in-the-moment identity may be different from Website to Website (from community to community). Mapping the collection of the Web spaces one occupies would produce a schematic diagram that represents the sum of one's Web identities. It is time sensitive because our interests change over time. In this exact way, Canadians – as multi-racial, multi-ethnic and multi-cultural individuals – occupy and use a complex network or web of cultural spaces. A variety of experiences such as travel, language, education, friendship and marriage can provide access to an infinite number of cultural spaces. One's cultural identity (or cultural identities) is an organic collection of the cultural spaces through which one navigates – spaces that are constantly changing and wildly diverse (Habacon 2007).

Figure 3



Describing the "schema" model of cultural identity at the Couchiching Institute of Public Affairs Summer Conference 2007

What's your schema?

Knowing one's schema is powerful. It describes individuals as they truly live much more accurately than the labels of ethnic background or nationality. It can also be a measure of one's CQ or cultural competence. Most importantly, however, in allowing for a complex and fluid identity that would otherwise be considered static and fixed, self-awareness of one's cultural identity through one's schema shifts the perspective of others. One's schema reveals the forces that influence decisions, tastes and mannerisms. Rather than trying to understand someone through the lens of ethnicity or ancestry, a schema frames individuals as the product of their cultural mobility; it, therefore, enables a real sense of cultural understanding on an individual level. Everyone has a schema, regardless of ethnicity or ancestry. The schema, which is not based on ethnic identifiers, acknowledges the diversity of those who appear to be the least diverse. This system update replaces the ethnocultural mosaic with a schema thus freeing Canadians from the dreaded question, "Where are you (really) from?" This question is replaced with one that acknowledges the complexity of Multiculturalism 2.0, "What's your schema?"

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Notes

[1] "Second generation Canadians" refers to those people who were born in Canada or immigrated to Canada as young children.

[2] There is a simple historical explanation to this reaction. During the first half of the 20th century, it was not uncommon to hear the Prime Minister and Members of Parliament of the time passionately express the public sentiment that an idealized White (British Anglo-Saxon) Canada must be preserved. This was the era of the *Exclusion Act* and the *Continuous Journey Act*, and perhaps one of the most racist periods in Canada's history.

Special Issue of the Canadian Journal of Urban Research

Our Diverse Cities:
Challenges and Opportunities



This issue of the Canadian Journal of Urban Research (Vol. 15, No. 2, 2006) was guest edited by Tom Carter and Marc Vachon of the University of Winnipeg; John Biles and Erin Tolley of the Metropolis Project Team; and Jim Zamprelli of the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. It contains selected articles on politics, religion, housing, youth gang activity, sports and recreational services. These articles explore the challenges posed by the increasing concentration of religious, linguistic, ethnic and racial groups in Canadian cities, and suggest ways of facilitating the integration process.

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