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**DECONSTRUCTING CANADA'S DISCOURSE OF
IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION**

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DECONSTRUCTING CANADA'S DISCOURSE OF IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION

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The term “integration” is commonly used in Canada's immigration discourse to refer to the desirable way by which newcomers should become members of the receiving society. Policy makers, immigration critics and academics adopt different languages and conceptual tools to articulate integration, but the subtext of their discourse is similar. This paper deconstructs the integration discourse in policy statements, immigration debates and academic writings. The analysis shows that the discourse endorses a conformity model in assessing immigrants and a monolithic cultural framework that preaches tolerance in the abstract but remains intolerant towards cultural specificities deemed outside the mainstream. The subtext is unequivocal: Becoming similar to Canadians is integration and maintaining cultural difference is opposite to integration. The paper advocates a more inclusive approach towards integration.

In Canada's immigration discourse, the term “integration” is often adopted to study immigrants and their settlement process. It is used liberally by policy makers, immigration critics and academics without a vigorous theoretical explication. The term implies a desirable outcome as newcomers become members of the receiving society, by which the success and failure of immigrants can be gauged and by which the efficacy of the immigration policy can be determined. In reality, the assessment is often based on a narrow understanding and a rigid expectation that treat integration solely in terms of the degree to which immigrants converge to the average performance of native-born Canadians and their normative and behavioural standards. Thus, to the extent that immigrants earn as much as native-born Canadians, they are deemed to be economically well integrated. Similarly, successful social integration implies immigrants' adopting the English or French language, moving away from ethnically concentrated immigrant enclaves, and participating in social and political activities of mainstream society, in short, discarding differences deemed to fall outside mainstream society. What constitutes desirable integration of immigrants is taken for granted in the immigration discourse. Accordingly, there is a strong expectation that immigrants should accept Canada's prevailing practice and standard and become similar to the resident population. The discourse nominally endorses cultural diversity, but specific cultural differences, especially those deemed to be far removed from the Canadian standard, are viewed as obstacles to integration.

Keywords: insert text

This paper deconstructs policy statements, immigration debates and academic writings to show that the discourse of integration clearly upholds the normative expectation of conformity as the desirable outcome of immigrant integration. It also projects immigrants' deviations from the majority standard - whether pertaining to economic performance, normative values, or other behavioural benchmarks - as signs of incomplete or poor integration. The discourse recognizes the value of diversity, but at the same time questions it on the premise that growing racial diversity and cultural difference weaken Canada's normative consensus and social cohesion. The paper argues that integration can be framed in a more inclusive way such that differences can be treated as assets in the building of a global and diverse society and not as liabilities that undermine the aesthetic past of traditional Canada.

Theoretical Debate of Integration

Much of the theoretical debate on integration approaches the concept from the vantage point of assessing the merits of diversity and cultural difference under liberal democracy. It is a theoretical problem about integrating differences in light of the universal or cohesive values of democracy. The basic question has to do with whether diversity and multiculturalism challenge the foundations of liberal democratic societies that are premised upon universal individual rights (Bibby, 1990; Bissoondath, 1994; Kymlicka, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Parekh, 2000; Taylor, 1994). In essence, it is a debate about whether granting special rights to minority groups and extending privileges to marginalized populations promote a hierarchy of rights based in part on group rights, and thereby institutionalize differences that would undermine the foundation and cohesion of a civil society. As Abu-Laban (2002: 462) eloquently put it, it is a debate over "limits of liberalism given ethnic diversity, and/or the limits of ethnic diversity given liberalism".

Several "solutions" to the debate have been proposed. First, many liberal thinkers have suggested that there is no fundamental contradiction between maintaining liberalism and the implied universalism on the one hand and supporting multiculturalism and the implied particularism on the other (Parekh, 2000; Patterson, 1997; Taylor, 1994; Kymlicka 1995a). In fact, recognition of differences and cultural diversity is essential to protecting equality in civil society. Second, academics critical of multiculturalism have pointed out that the liberal version of multiculturalism is mainly symbolic as it merely encourages individual multiculturalism in private life while leaving institutional homogeneity and ideological uniformity intact, thus implying that liberalism has comfortably incorporated multiculturalism by relegating the latter to the margin (Breton, 1987; Gans, 1979; Kallen, 1982; Li, 1999; McLellan & Richmond, 1994; Robert & Clifton, 1982; Steinberg, 1981). In short, the official multiculturalism policy has lent support to a symbolic version of cultural difference that poses no possible threat to universalism and cohesion of liberal democratic society. Third, some critics of diversity and multiculturalism have clearly characterized differences as divisive and weakening national unity, and their version of liberalism advocates strong shared values and liberal traditions and weak multiculturalism (Bibby, 1990; Bissoondath, 1994).

In this paper, I examine how the potential tensions surrounding the concept of integration are resolved in the immigration discourse. I argue that despite a difference in language and approach, policy makers, immigration critics and academics in Canada converge in their discourse of integration regarding the primacy of uniformity and conformity. However, they differ in how they approach diversity. In official policy statements, the tension between diversity and unity is reconciled by adopting a discourse that upholds the ideals of multiculturalism but dismisses the specifics of cultural particularism as undesirable for integration. In contrast, immigration critics tend to use a language that dwells on cultural essentialism, that is the belief that cultural differences are fundamental and unbridgeable, and its incompatibility with the normative consensus of a civil society under liberal democracy. Finally, academics engaged in empirical research of immigrant integration typically adopt conformity to national standards as the objective and obvious benchmark of desirable integration, even though they also endorse the ideals of multiculturalism. Thus, rather than interrogating the relationship between diversity and integration, they tend to accept and internalize the norms and expectations of those already well entrenched in Canada as though they constitute natural and scientific standards of integration. The discourse of integration illustrates (1) how in the immigration debate, the subtext of what constitutes proper integration converges despite a difference in articulation; and (2) how the potential tension between the concepts “diversity” and “integration” is resolved in the immigration discourse by adopting a language that either dismisses or marginalizes diversity. The application of critical discourse analysis to the integration debate illustrates how the immigration discourse successfully constructs a monolithic version of integration by accentuating cultural essentialism and by placing arduous restrictions on diversity and multiculturalism.¹

Policy Discussion of Integration

In the policy discourse, the concept “integration” as applied to immigrants refers to the process by which immigrants become productive members and develop close relations with mainstream society. For example, in a 2002 report of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration (CIC), it explains the objective and strategy of integration as follows:

CIC’s integration strategy aims to enable newcomers to settle, adapt and integrate as quickly and comfortably as possible so that they may become contributing members of Canadian society. It is a two-way process that encourages adjustments on the part of both newcomers and the receiving society. Canada responds to the needs of newcomers through a variety of settlement programs, services and integration promotion activities throughout the integration process. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002a: 28).

Several elements in the foregoing statement on integration can be ascertained. First, it can be inferred that successful integration involves immigrants becoming contributing members quickly and smoothly. The notion of “contributing members” is vague, but it is sometimes explained as equivalent to full engagement in Canadian society, which is equally illusive. As the Deputy Minister of Citizenship

and Immigration explained, “Ultimately, the goal of integration is to encourage newcomers to be fully engaged in the economic, social, political and cultural life of Canada” (Dorais, 2002: 4).

Second, the policy objective of integration, as stated, is a two-way process, requiring changes on the part of newcomers and Canadian society. The policy stresses that integration is not assimilation, as immigrants can maintain cultural differences in Canada under the multiculturalism policy. This point was made clear by the Deputy Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

In Canada, integration is a two-way process of accommodation between newcomers and Canadians: It encourages immigrants to adapt to Canadian society without requiring them to abandon their cultures. It encourages people and institutions to respond in kind by respecting and reflecting the cultural differences newcomers bring to the country. (Dorais, 2002: 4).

Third, Canada’s official response to the challenge of integrating immigrants is to support settlement programs to help immigrants to acquire the necessary social and language skills needed to do well in Canada. The federal government’s spending on settlement programs amounts to \$205 million for the fiscal year 2000-2001, not counting the \$157 million grants to provinces; much of the spending on settlement has to do with supporting instructions of official languages for new immigrants (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2001). Notwithstanding the value of settlement programs, they are limited in scope and designed to help immigrants to acquire skills to facilitate their entry to the labour market.

Despite the language of the integration discourse which appears fair to both newcomers and native-born Canadians, it also upholds the notions of conformity and compliance as yardsticks in evaluating immigrants, and expects immigrants to accept prevailing values and beliefs and to acquire living standards and behavioural patterns similar to majority Canadians. The following description of integration from a 1993 government document illustrates the contradictory approaches which speak of integration as accepting immigrants’ differences on one hand, but insist upon immigrants complying with the normative values and national standard of Canada on the other.

Canada has been officially committed for some time to a model of integration that allows immigrant groups to maintain their ethnic identities...(T)he federal government has stipulated that it views integration as a two-way process involving accommodation and adjustment on the part of both immigrants and Canadian society...(I)n discussing the issues of successful integration of immigrants to Canada, we can begin with the assumption that those who have chosen to come here respect the basic values that underlie Canadian society...Immigrants who are successfully integrated into all aspects of Canadian life should compare favourably with other Canadians in measurable aspects of social and economic life. (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 5-7).

Thus, the discourse stresses the importance of shared values and compliance to the Canadian standard of life as essential to successful integration. The rationale is justified on the grounds

that immigrants choose to join an existing society with shared values and established behavioural standards, and that such choice implies an a priori acceptance of pre-existing values and standards. This obligation is explained as an unspoken “social contract”, which, according to the same document, involves “agreed-upon values that allow the society to function and evolve as a complete unit” (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 6). It is not clear what those agreed-upon values pertain to, but the new citizenship bill tabled in the House of Commons in October, 2002 includes a revised citizenship oath that requires new citizens to respect Canada’s rights and freedoms to uphold the democratic values (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002b). It would seem that the “agreed-upon values” are not clearly defined but at best vaguely implied in the immigration discourse.

The idea that immigrants must respect the core values of Canada is often applied as a narrow understanding of racial and cultural differences. As a result, the approach in the integration discourse towards the specifics of diversity is guarded. The following illustrates how ethnic enclaves, as a form of diversity, are viewed in light of notions of “social contract” and “compliance”:

Ethnic enclaves can play a positive role in easing the shock of adjustment to a new culture...To the degree that ethnic enclaves restrict their members and shield them from alternative norms, values and behaviours, they can discourage immigrants from full participation in society and perpetuate segregation...Ideally, in an integrated society, immigrants move through the ethnic enclave, using its resources in order to enter the mainstream society. In this view, ethnic enclaves consist of individuals linked by common interests in removing barriers against their participation in the broader community. Ethnic groups may continue to exist, but individuals might fall away as they adjust to the host society. (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 4-5)

It is clear that ethnic enclaves are considered as social features in opposition to “mainstream society” and “broader community”, and therefore at odds with the core values of Canada. In fact, ethnic enclaves are viewed as undesirable and marginal developments outside mainstream society. At best, they are seen as providing a temporary relief to immigrants when they first arrive and as a means by which they mobilize resources to overcome barriers, but in the long run, they are considered obstacles of integration because they encourage “alternative norms, values and behaviours”. Ethnic enclaves may endure in Canadian society but individual immigrants, according to the discourse, should only rely on them as stepping stones to join mainstream society and not as a permanent anchor for cultural security. Indeed, adherence to distinct cultural and normative values is suspected of leading to undesirable consequences such as segregation and ghettoization (Employment and Immigration Canada, 1993: 7). The immigration discourse has a tendency to reify specific cultural and racial differences and to represent them as threats to Canada’s core values. At the same time, it promotes conformity as a desirable outcome for immigrants and for Canada, despite the rhetorical commitment to diversity and multiculturalism.

Immigration Critics' Version of Integration

Canada's immigration critics typically criticize Canada's immigration policy as out of control on the grounds that Canada's immigration level is high relative to the immigrant intake of other advanced industrialized countries and that the justification of maintaining a high level of immigration based on economic and demographic benefits is untenable (Collacott, 2002; Francis, 2002; Stoffman, 2002). Among the criticisms of the immigration policy is the suggestion that the culturally diverse backgrounds of recent immigrants are at odds with the Canadian way of life, and such "fundamental" cultural differences would undermine Canada's core values, normative standards, and democratic traditions. In short, in addition to the notion that immigration brings limited benefits to Canada, the opposition to maintaining a high level of immigration is also premised on immigrants' cultural differences and on the difficulties of integrating immigrants deemed fundamentally different.

Immigration critics are careful to point out that they are in favour of, and not opposed to, diversity, provided that it is a form of diversity that is not perceived as a challenge to Canada's cohesion, its values and tradition. The following is an example from an influential book written by an immigration critic:

Canada is diverse but not multicultural. The crucial difference is that multiculturalism is divisive and diversity is not ... because different cultures have irreconcilable values ... (and) because Canada is built not around an ethnicity or a religion but rather around a shared belief in the values of democracy and individual freedom. But if a belief in democracy unites us, and freedom of speech is essential to democracy, what happens when a powerful minority group refuses to accept the basic value? Doesn't that refusal threaten the cohesion of Canadian society? (Stoffman, 2002: 16).

The foregoing makes several explicit and implicit points. People from different cultures are described as having "irreconcilable values" that threaten Canada's cohesion by undermining the values of democracy and freedom at the encouragement of the multiculturalism policy. In short, cultural differences are seen as essential and unbridgeable, and as eventually leading to a clash with the basic values of civil society. Accordingly, it would be difficult to integrate immigrants coming from very different cultures because of their irreconcilable differences.

Immigration critics often compare the difficulty of integrating recent immigrants to the ease in doing so for earlier European immigrants to Canada. The following passage makes this point clear:

The waves of immigrants that arrived on the prairies early in the 20th century were quickly cut off from the old country. That doesn't happen to today's immigrants; many maintain intimate links to their homelands... (O)nly Canada, through its policy of official multiculturalism, actually encourages newcomers to cling to their original identities rather than fully embrace the identity of their new home. (Stoffman, 2002: 42-3).

The subtext is clear: Earlier immigrants were Europeans; today's immigrants are mostly Asians and Africans. Accordingly, due to the encouragement of the official multiculturalism policy and to the fundamental differences of immigrants from Asia and Africa, more recent immigrants are less likely to embrace Canada's identity. Other critics have also commented on how recent immigrants' tendency to settle in ethnic enclaves and how modern communication technology encourage immigrants to maintain their distinctiveness and slow down integration. For example,

Because of the priority given to family class, there are increasing concentrations of people from the same cultural and linguistic backgrounds in metropolitan areas ... A different factor that has markedly slowed the integration of newcomers has been rapid developments in communications and technology. These developments have enabled new immigrants to continue to be immersed in the culture and concerns of the countries they left, rather than having to concentrate on things Canadian and adapting to their new land. (Collacott, 2002:29-30).

It is clear that these critics share the same underlining assumptions of integration. First, cultural, political and other ties with the old country and urban ethnic concentration in Canada are seen as incompatible with integration. Second, in order for new immigrants to be integrated and to embrace the Canadian identity, they have to abandon their cultural differences and break away from the old country and their ethnic enclave. It is clear that in the critics' version of integration, they see cultural differences as primordial and unbridgeable, and cultural identity as singular and not multiple. Consequently, tendencies of immigrants to maintain differences, whether it is in the form of residing in ethnic neighbourhoods, using non-official languages, or maintaining contacts with friends and relatives in the country of origin, are depicted as in opposition to integration. To accentuate how cultural differences are incompatible with Canadian values, exotic examples, such as dog-eating habits of Koreans and mainland Chinese, or the leaf-chewing practice of Somalis to obtain the effect of hallucination, are often used to highlight how fundamentally different people from Asia and Africa are, and how these practices, if permitted in Canada under multiculturalism, would undermine Canada's traditions and values (Stoffman, 2002: 120-22). Indeed, immigrants' cultural differences are typically depicted in a negative light and rarely as contributing to Canada, and as such, they must be discarded as quickly as possible. Here is one example:

After a few years here, a Chinese immigrant is less likely to want to knock down a tree. He may have learned to appreciate its beauty, and he may have learned that it enhances the value of its property. (Stoffman, 2002: 142).

It can be seen that in the discourse of integration, immigration critics have a tendency to first stereotype and vulgarize immigrants' cultural differences, and then insist upon the need for them to abandon their "distasteful" habits in order to integrate.

The Academic Discourse of Integration

In the academic literature, the notion of integration has been used to understand how different elements of society come together as components of a whole, but the emphasis is on explaining social order and social change. However, the current academic discourse on immigration seldom interrogates the notion of integration as a theoretical concept; instead, it readily adopts a narrow empirical framework of studying immigrants' integration by measuring how they differ from native-born Canadians.² In doing so, the academic discourse has unwittingly accepted the conformity premise of integration, and has equated the extent of immigrants' integration with the degree of convergence to the average Canadian standard. This approach is prevalent in studying immigrants' economic and social integration. Economically, immigrants who can match or outperform native-born Canadians' performance are viewed as well integrated while those who fall behind are seen as social burdens. Socially, immigrants who are quick to abandon their non-official languages and speak the official languages, move away from distinct ethnic neighbourhoods, and adopt a way of life similar to majority Canadians are considered well integrated.

The view that economic integration necessitates immigrants, irrespective of the class of admission, to outperform or match the performance of native-born Canadians is popular in academic writings. The underlying assumption is that the value of immigrants lies in their ability to enrich Canadians, and in order to do so, they have to at least perform as well as the native-born.

Academics have used three broad approaches to study the economic value of immigrants (Li, 2003). The first approach is to estimate an optimal level of immigration to maximize the benefit and minimize the cost to Canadian society. This type of research has succeeded in developing highly constrained simulation models used to calculate the impact of various levels of immigration on the size of the population, and in turn, on the increase in economic aggregates such as per capita gross domestic product. The best conclusion this type of study has suggested is that given a hypothetical level of immigration every year and assuming a constant fertility rate, the Canadian population will peak at an optimal point, beyond which the increase in population will only bring a diminishing rate of return on productivity. The general conclusion is that high levels of immigration would increase economic aggregates such as production, but the real per capita impact is relatively small (deSilva, 1992; Marr & Percey, 1985; Rao & Kapsalis, 1982; Seward, 1987; Economic Council of Canada, 1991). In other words, proper integration necessitates immigrants performing at least as well as the average Canadian in terms of per capita productivity, but successful integration requires immigrants doing better than the native-born so the resident population can benefit from immigration.

The second approach is to use the idea of a balance sheet to calculate the net cost or net benefit of immigration. Studies using this approach indicate that immigrants contribute more taxes than social benefits they receive, and that immigrants do not pose a burden in the transfer payments of Canada (Akbari, 1989, 1995; Baker & Benjamin, 1995a; Samuel & Conyers, 1987; Wang & Lo, 2000). Other studies have shown that immigrants have lower participation rates in unemployment insurance and social assistance than native-born Canadians (Baker & Benjamin, 1995a, 1995b; McDonald & Worswick, 1997; Sweetman, 2001). Again, the approach implies that successful integration requires

immigrants perform similarly or outperform the native-born in not having to rely on unemployment insurance or social assistance.

The third approach compares earnings of immigrants and native-born Canadians to see how immigrants fare in the labour market. The general findings indicate that immigrants earn as much or more than native-born Canadians, but when differences in schooling, occupational and other individual and work features are taken in account, immigrant men and women typically earn less than their native-born counterparts (Li, 2003). However, there are disagreements in interpretation as to whether net earning disparities between the two groups should be interpreted as differences in individual productivity or as inequalities of opportunities. Some studies have noted that compared to the average earnings of Canadians, recent immigrants tend to earn less than their predecessors; other studies have shown that over time, earnings levels of immigrants converge with Canadians (Beaujot et al., 1988; Beaujot & Rappak, 1990; Bloom, Grenier, & Gunderson, 1995; Bloom & Gunderson, 1991; Grant, 1999; Li, 2000).

Much research on immigrants' social integration also attempts to find out how they are similar to or different from native-born Canadians. Studies of immigrants' social integration covers many topics, such as patterns of linguistic retention, family structure, rates of endogamy, religious affiliation and residential segregation (de Vries, 1990, 1999; de Vries & Vallee, 1980; Driedger, 1978; Harrison, 1999; Kalbach & Richard, 1990; Li, 2001; O'Brian, Reitz, & Kuplowska, 1976; Reitz, 1980; Richard, 1991; Richmond & Kalbach, 1980). The general findings indicate that more recent immigrants tend to maintain more distinct patterns of behaviour, especially in terms of choice of residential neighbourhoods, language characteristics, occupational status and earnings. Over time however, these differences attenuate, as the forces of assimilation remain strong in Canadian society (Reitz & Breton, 1994). Research also shows that compared to immigrants of European origin, minority immigrants, mostly from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, are more likely to be racialized or stigmatized, due to racial discrimination and a greater reluctance on the part of native-born Canadians to accept them as legitimate Canadians or Canadians of equals (Basavarajappa & Verma, 1985; Beaujot, Basavarajappa & Verma, 1988; Henry & Ginzberg, 1985; Reitz & Breton, 1994; Li, 2000, 2001).

There is little doubt that academics have adopted conformity as a de facto empirical benchmark in assessing immigrants' integration. The framework automatically accepts the national standard as the objective and logical benchmark for assessing immigrants' integration. As such, they have not considered the theoretical option of an integration model that respects immigrants' differences rather than insisting on immigrants conforming.

Critique of the Integration Discourse

Despite a difference in language and approach, policy makers, immigration critics and academics converge on what they regard successful integration to be and how it should be benchmarked. The integration discourse clearly upholds conformity as the desirable outcome of successful integration of immigrants. Accordingly, immigrants who adhere to their linguistic, social and cultural patterns

are considered segregated from mainstream society and such self-imposed segregation is depicted as detrimental to the interests of immigrants and the well being of Canadian society. Studies have confirmed the advantage for immigrants who conform, and have underscored the force of conformity in Canadian society (Reitz & Breton, 1994; Kalbach & Kalbach, 1995). As Kalbach and Richard (1990: 179-80) said, “[I]mmigrants who have been in Canada the longest and who came from cultural backgrounds most similar to the two charter groups have always been favourably regarded as well as those more recent immigrants who have been quick to assimilate...and have been able to diminish their ‘visibility.’” A careful reading of the comment suggests that the authors are referring not only to the rewards of assimilation, but also to Canadian society attributing unequal value to immigrants from different cultural and racial backgrounds and how such unequal attribution affects the life chances of immigrants. In other words, it is not so much immigrants’ adherence to different behavioural and normative patterns as Canada’s bias towards diversity that affects immigrants’ life chances, which in turn produce unequal economic outcomes.

Despite the policy objective of defining integration as a two-way street that requires the accommodation on the part of both immigrants and Canadian society, the integration discourse suggests that it is immigrants and not Canadian society and its institutions that are required to change. In fact, social changes in metropolitan centres that are attributed to immigration are generally interpreted not as desirable, but as imposed urban problems brought about by the surge of the immigrant population, especially those from a different cultural and racial background. Thus, Canadian institutions are seen as being forced to change, and the federal government is sometimes being blamed for developing the national immigration policy without providing sufficient matching resources to local communities to deal with the impact of immigration. The following comment, taken from the 1994 national immigration consultation, illustrates this point.

The federal government must adjust its support for settlement programs to take into account that more and more newcomers are arriving with little or not familiarity with Canada and Canadian society, or facility in either of Canada’s official languages...Local communities and in particular, the school systems, are having to address a much wider spectrum of needs... (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1994:42).

The discourse makes it clear that there are increasing financial and social pressures for Canadian institutions having to accommodate to the rising needs of immigrants, and that local institutions would be seriously strained unless the federal government allocates sufficient resources to support immigrant settlement. In general, institutional changes brought about by immigration are seen as imposed and costly.

Underlining the expectation of conformity is the belief that cultural differences of people from diverse backgrounds are unbridgeable and irreconcilable with core values of democracy and liberalism.³ The official discourse of integration constructs a language of integration that pays nominal service to diversity and multiculturalism but warns against the peril of excessive diversity to the fundamental character of Canada and its cohesion. Immigration critics tend to be more direct

in stressing how cultural differences are incompatible with Canada's values and traditions, and how Canada's democratic principles and foundations are under siege in the face of increasing diversity. Thus, their version of conformity is premised upon cultural essentialism and its conflicts with liberal democracy. In contrast, academics investigating the integration of immigrants generally adopt conformity as the logical benchmark of integration, without seriously interrogating the relationship between diversity and integration.

If integration is meant to be a two-way street as officially endorsed, the integration discourse has only succeeded in insisting upon a report card to show how immigrants have been changing or not changing in Canada, and not a similar report card to indicate the degree of institutional openness with which Canadian society is accepting newcomers as equal partners to shape the future of the nation. Academics, immigration critics and policy makers have clearly recognized that immigrants have substantially changed the urban landscape of Canada. But such changes are usually depicted as imposed changes on Canadian society, often at too fast a pace and too diverse a manner that native-born Canadians are prepared to accept. In other words, the kind of social changes immigrants have produced in Canadian society is mainly viewed with caution and sometimes opposition, while the changes immigrants are expected to make in the process of integration are considered necessary and positive.

The discourse of integration underscores the unequal relationship between old-timers and newcomers, and the power and influence of the former to set terms and expectations under which newcomers are expected to change. In comparison, immigrants are much more vulnerable and powerless in relation to those already established in Canadian society in being able to claim their legitimacy to chart the future of the country in ways that reflect their differences. This unequal relationship is sometimes justified in the immigration discourse on the grounds that immigration is a policy option for Canada, and immigrants make an active choice to join a pre-existing society, thus implying an a priori claim of the resident population vis-à-vis the latecomers.

In commenting on the history of immigration, Breton (1984: 128) argued that historically immigrants and their children "were being progressively incorporated into a collective identity and an institutional system whose symbolic character was fundamentally British, but regarded as Canadian". Such ideological dominance explains why the conflict between those who see themselves as charter members and others who have immigrated more recently may be attributed to the former group's insistence and the latter group's challenge of the status hierarchy and the established symbolic order (Breton, 1984). Similarly, Mercer (1995: 171-172) described how changes brought by immigrants to Canada in the 1980s and early 1990s are seen as a challenge to Canadians who have historically assumed a "white tenor" and a "Eurocentric perspective" in interpreting themselves and the immigration experience. These observations suggest that there are strong expectations and pressures of conformity for newcomers who are seen as radically different from the European stock, as old-timers continue to resist changes brought about by newcomers and to insist upon their conforming to pre-existing normative and behavioural standards.

The imbalance of power between those well entrenched in Canadian society and others who enter Canada as latecomers impinges upon every aspect of integrating immigrants. Academic writings on immigrant integration have often ignored this unequal relationship by taking a convenient

approach to integration in implicitly endorsing the normative and behavioural standards of the old-timers as the only acceptable standards of integration. However, it cannot be presumed, because of the dominance of those already established in Canada and their successful claim of legitimacy, that their predominance and their ability to set norms and conditions for newcomers, constitutes, ipso facto, a logical scientific benchmark against which immigrants must be measured and evaluated (Li, 2003).

Academics' general acceptance of the multicultural ideal has sometimes tarnished their ability to distinguish between the force of assimilation as a social fact and the social expectation of their doing so as an ideology. The multiculturalism policy may have created an ideal of incorporating diversity, but it in itself is no assurance that immigrants in Canada are not expected to succumb to the forces of assimilation, especially when the actual forces of conformity remain compelling. Thus, in their passive acceptance of a normative yardstick of integration based on the aspirations and standards of those already well established in Canadian society, academics have internalized the social norms of the powerful voice as though these norms have unquestionable scientific merits of their own for immigrants' integration.

Concluding Remarks

If integration involves immigrants being accepted by old-timers as equal partners in the building of a nation's future, it would have to be a partnership that is premised upon a respect and an appreciation of difference, and not an imposition of uniformity as defined by those who have successfully claimed and defended their charter status. The narrow perspective of integration makes it hard to see how differences can complement what Canada does not have, and not necessarily undermine what it already possesses as a nation.

A more enlightened view of integration would take into account how Canadian society and its institutions perform towards newcomers. Assessing successful integration would also mean determining the degree to which institutions are open or closed to immigrants, communities are welcoming or shunning newcomers, and individual Canadians are treating newcomers as equal partners or intruders. Such an approach requires policy makers, immigration critics and academics to abandon an ethnocentric complacency and to begin issuing a report card for Canada as a society to see how it fares in the two-way street of integrating immigrants. It is also a commitment that Canada too does have to change willingly for the sake of integration. Successful integration can also be conceptualized as the process of granting citizenship rights and social entitlements to newcomers and allowing them to exercise their rights, including the right and legitimacy to challenge the status quo. In other words, integration is about giving newcomers the right of contestation, the legitimacy of dissent, and the entitlement to be different, in the same way that old-timers enjoy such legitimacy, rights and entitlements. Integration is about incorporating newcomers to a democratic process of participation and negotiation that shapes the future, and not about conforming and confining people to pre-established outcomes based on the status quo.

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Notes

- 1 Discourse analysis provides a useful tool for deconstructing the syntax, rationale and subtext of language. See Foucault, 1972; Henry & Tator, 2002; Mills, 1997; Morley & Chen, 1996; van Dijk, 1993.
- 2 Academics' published writings are used here as sources to illustrate the academic discourse of integration. A reviewer suggests that the mandate of the Metropolis Project can be analyzed to see how such mandate supports the conformist version of integration. The Metropolis Project, formed in 1996 to support four centres of excellence for research on immigration and integration in Canada, essentially created the funding and organization structure which enables researchers to engage in research on immigration and settlement. Even though the term "integration" is used in the documents of the Metropolis Project, it is actually used loosely to refer to the process of immigrant settlement without a strong theoretical position regarding the concept. Individual researchers tend to define and to use the concept integration in a way they see fit in their work. The analysis here shows that there is a convergence in the way academic writings assume what integration implies.
- 3 For an excellent critique of cultural essentialism, and how essentialism and not cultural diversity challenges liberalism, see Abu-Laban, 2002, and also Vertovec, 1996.

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