Canada: Multicultural Model or Cautionary Tale?

Abdolmohammad Kazemipur, *Social Capital and Diversity: Some Lessons from Canada*. Oxford & Bern: Peter Lang, 2009, 245 pp. $US 68.95 paper (978-3-03911-710-9).

Jeffrey G. Reitz, Raymond Breton, Karen K. Dion, and **Kenneth L. Dion**, *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion: Potentials and Challenges of Diversity*. New York: Springer Publishing, 2009, 196 pp. $US 139.00 hardcover (978-1-4020-9957-1).

The political wave favouring multiculturalism, heralded by philosopher Will Kymlicka as widespread in the late 1990s, has come crashing down. Academics, policymakers and the voting public question their societies' ability to deal with diversity, spanning concern over how diversity might weaken national culture and social capital, to fear that a lack of common identity and social cohesion encourages home-grown terrorism.

The Canadian case has become a touchstone in many of these debates. For some, Canada epitomizes the successful accommodation of diversity. One in five Canadian residents is foreign-born, and within a single generation Canada's major cities have been transformed from overwhelmingly European-origin to some of the most diverse in the world. This has largely occurred without major social upheaval or violence. Canadian thinkers such as Kymlicka and Charles Taylor were pivotal in advancing normative arguments for minorities' cultural recognition. Canadian officials proudly and repeatedly highlight multiculturalism as a core value of Canadian society and government.

Other observers, at home and abroad, see things differently. They point to Canada as a cautionary tale about the dangers of celebrating diversity, from the secessionist threat of Quebec nationalism to the ghetto-

izing tendencies of hyphenated identities. While Islamophobia is less evident in Canada than Europe, controversy over sharia law in Ontario and the niqab in Quebec shows that Canadians share deep concerns over diversity with those in other Western countries.

Two recent books on diversity in Canada breathe fresh air into these debates. Both situate themselves firmly in the larger normative, political, and policy-making controversies, but their authors' primary goal is to bring social science evidence to bear on the debates. Abdolmohammad Kazemipur investigates the dynamics and determinants of social capital in Canada, with special attention to the influence of immigration and ethnic diversity. Jeffrey Reitz, Raymond Breton, Karen Dion, and Kenneth Dion ask whether the actual social and psychological processes of intergroup relations match the behavioural assumptions held by the proponents and critics of multiculturalism. Both books provide a rich and nuanced portrait of the successes and challenges facing Canadian society.

Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion encompasses four closely knit empirical essays written by the principal authors in collaboration with Mai Phan and Rupa Banerjee. The essays are bookended by introductory and concluding chapters written by Reitz. To set up their analysis, the authors underscore the two key assumptions of Canadian multiculturalism: that ethnic identity and attachments can facilitate, rather than hinder, integration and attachment to Canada, and that government endorsement of diversity furthers the goal of equal opportunity for all.

The book evaluates the evidentiary basis for these claims by making use of the *Ethnic Diversity Survey*, a remarkable dataset of responses from 41,666 Canadian residents to questions ranging from feelings of belonging to reports of discrimination. If Canada's demographic reality makes it a critical case on how to deal with diversity, the *EDS* provides the tools to study this diversity, since the survey over-samples first and second-generation ethnic minority populations.

On the positive side of the ledger, for supporters of multiculturalism, Phan and Breton (ch. 4) indicate that fully 80 percent of EDS respondents report a high sense of belonging to Canada; identification with the country also increases with time and generation. Contrary to those who worry that ethnic ties isolate, they further document that respondents with ethnic, mainstream or pluralist identities report quite similar trust in neighbors, volunteering, membership in associations, voting behavior and life satisfaction. Those who score lowest on these measures are people without strong ties to the mainstream or an ethnic community.

Given fears that multiculturalism reifies ethnic attachments, it is perhaps surprising that Karen Dion and Mai Phan (ch. 2) find only 33.5% of EDS respondents report an ethnic identity. Less surprising, recent im-

migrants are most likely to hold a highly salient ethnic identity, at about 83%. The centrality of this identity decreases with time spent in Canada and with successive generations, but its erosion occurs much more quickly for whites than for visible minorities. Here we see the first of a series of findings underscoring how race affects individuals' experiences in Canada.

Chapter 3 by Dion, Dion, and Banerjee examines how discrimination could affect identities and feelings of belonging. Experience with discrimination appears to increase ethnic attachments; these can, in turn, somewhat buffer individuals from the negative psychological consequences of discrimination. However, they show that individuals' reports of discrimination are associated with lower levels of social inclusion, trust and life satisfaction, providing strong support for a model of prejudice as a psychosocial stressor.

The theme of race-based inequality is developed more fully in Chapter 5, by Reitz and Banerjee. The authors outline how measures of objective economic inequality — income and poverty — as well as subjective social inequality — perceptions of discrimination and vulnerability to hate crimes — reveal a clear division in the experiences of visible minorities and residents of European origins. Perhaps most troubling from a policy and equality perspective, while visible minorities born in Canada face less economic inequality than their parents, they report higher levels of discrimination. As Reitz and Banerjee put it, "Economic integration contributes to social integration, but does not guarantee such integration. Despite success, if the second generation feels excluded and demoralized, significant social costs may be incurred" (p. 152).

The upshot of *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion* is two-fold. First, the evidence supports the contention that ethnic groups, and attachments to those groups, can help with integration; some collective identification, even if ethnic rather than mainstream, is better than none. This is not a trivial conclusion, since critics of multiculturalism often hold up French republicanism as an alternative model of civic belonging. Under the French model, residents should only identify with the mainstream, not with ethnic or subnational attachments. The EDS data suggest that this could do more harm than good.

Second, however, the book suggests that Canadian multiculturalism is falling short to the extent that a central policy goal is ensuring equal opportunity to participate and flourish for all Canadians. Visible minorities hang on to ethnic attachments longer than those of European-origin, in part due to a greater perception of discrimination, and they face objective inequalities in the economic system. As Reitz sums up, "white/

visible minority differentiation constitutes a significant fault line affecting social cohesion" (p. 164).

These are powerful, and important, findings, reflecting one of the major strengths of *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion*. The book's analysis does, however, raise a larger question for the heated public debate over diversity. Reitz and his collaborators criticize multiculturalism to the extent that the policy failed to solve equality concerns. But did it make the situation in Canada better or worse? If Canada had not embraced multiculturalism, as an ideology and policy, in the 1970s and 1980s, would visible minorities' identification with Canada, reports of discrimination, and economic inequality be higher, lower, or unchanged from current levels?

This question is, of course, unanswerable without a parallel universe in which we could watch a Canada evolve without multiculturalism. Perhaps for this reason, the authors of *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion* do not take up the larger question. They hint that the focus on multiculturalism, especially its celebration by government officials, deflects energy from fashioning stronger racial equity policies. They do not suggest, however, that recognizing diversity has made Canadians more likely to discriminate, by exacerbating feelings of difference or increasing the sense of inter-group conflict, as critics of multiculturalism sometimes imply. In the face of racial inequality — a problem that any single policy, including multiculturalism, cannot solve alone — the book's analysis suggests that it is better to value ethnic identity, even when generated through discriminatory experiences.

If we cannot re-run Canadian history, another way to get at the question of how multiculturalism might matter is to compare Canada to other countries. This is the tack taken by Abdolmodhammad Kazemipur in setting up his study of social capital. Canada, he argues, is a critical case: research in other settings suggests that more diverse places suffer from lower trust, less interpersonal contact and less communal engagement. In his book, Kazemipur describes and offers some preliminary analysis of the social capital landscape in Canada.

Kazemipur warns readers that he presumes a certain familiarity with the literature, but he does a good job summarizing the academic debates, so that newcomers to the field can quickly get up to speed. Kazemipur also includes a chapter that breaks down the encompassing term, "social capital," to examine whether the measures used by researchers really tap the same thing. He concludes that this is not necessarily so, identifying 15 different components out of 45 possible measures.

Like the book by Reitz and colleagues, Kazemipur uses the Ethnic Diversity Survey, but he also mines the World Values Surveys from 1981

to 2001 to place Canada in international context, and he examines a number of other Canadian datasets. The result is a heavily quantitative book, but one that uses many simple graphs and maps to provide accessible visual representations of the data.

The broad brush strokes of the early chapters, focusing on trends across the 15 social capital components, suggest that "Canada's general stock of social capital seems to be in relatively good shape, compared to that of many other industrial nations in Europe as well as the United States" (p. 7). The second half of *Social Capital and Diversity* focuses on one particular measure, social trust in others. Kazemipur defends this focus by appealing to the large body of research already done on whether, in general, an individual thinks that most people can be trusted.

Perhaps the most significant, and potentially controversial, finding is the positive relationship Kazemipur documents between diversity and trust, which directly contradicts research in other countries, notably the United States. Looking at cities and even neighborhoods in Canada, Kazemipur argues that places with greater ethnic diversity and with more immigrants tend to be more trusting than homogeneous localities.

Kazemipur's primary aim is not theory-building, but as the book progresses, he places increasing weight on a contact theory of prejudice and trust. Suggesting that trust is in many respects the opposite of prejudice, he speculates that when people have more contact with diverse individuals, they are more likely to be trusting. This applies, according to Kazemipur, not only to people you meet in your neighbourhood, but also to people in your family. He concludes, "As far as trust is concerned, having been exposed to, and influenced by, more than one culture seems to make it easier for people to trust the anonymous other.… This exposure seems to add a certain degree of plasticity to one's attitude toward others" (p. 146). Although he has no direct evidence to evaluate the claim, he further speculates that multiculturalism policy helped build trust in Canada, since contact theory requires a supportive environment for positive interpersonal relations.

Kazemipur is to be commended in his detailed treatment of ethnic diversity, in which he studies dozens of groups, largely distinguished by national origin. He doesn't examine, however, whether visible minority status has an independent, and negative, effect on his outcomes. This speaks to a central tension between the two books. *Social Capital and Diversity* implies that social contact on an equal playing field provides Canada with a competitive advantage in dealing with diversity, while *Multiculturalism and Social Cohesion* suggests that the playing field is far from level, requiring stronger remedial action to avoid serious problems of social cohesion in the future.

It would have been interesting if both books had more critically engaged notions of social trust and social cohesion. The two concepts are presumed, especially by policymakers, to be positive for society, such that public and private actors should try to maximize trust and cohesion. While on the face of it an uncontroversial goal, excessive focus on cohesion can quickly become a preference for homogenization. Furthermore, moderate levels of distrust might be a rational feeling for disadvantaged social groups. If distrust is viewed as a signal of racial, class, or other structural inequalities that society must tackle, identifying those who trust less is a valuable exercise. Learning that trust decreases much more between the first and second generations for visible minorities than white immigrants, as Reitz and Banerjee show, or that lower trust is correlated with higher poverty across ethnic groups, Canadian cities or neighbourhoods, as Kazemipur documents, sends a warning signal. Studying trust is less helpful, however, when those who trust less are pathologized, as sometimes happens in these debates.

Rather than cohesion or general social trust, it might be more important to study engagement in political and civic life, or even trust in public institutions. From this perspective, some distrust and conflict within society can be positive if people believe — and are able — to make changes to address inequalities. On this basis, Reitz and colleagues offer a useful definition of social cohesion, as "the capacity of a society to set goals and implement means for attaining them" (p. 21). However, the bulk of the book's chapters focus on belonging and identity, which do not have a direct relationship to setting and attaining social goals. The analysis of engagement measures, which are included, tend to take a back seat. Looking at such measures, we find some further warning signs: whites' electoral participation remains relatively stable between the established immigrant generation and the second generation, but declines for visible minorities. However, we also find some bright spots: an increase in volunteering across generations and relatively low reports of discrimination by public institutions, such as schools, and authorities, such as the police. The latter is particularly noteworthy, given very high levels of distrust of the police among minorities in the United States and Western Europe.

Future research will have to delve more deeply into examining whether and how institutional and policy variation *within* Canada might generate variations in trust, engagement and belonging. In this regard, both books touch tentatively on the question of Quebec exceptionalism within Canada. As Kazemipur ably documents, residents of Quebec have a different social capital profile than those elsewhere: they trust each other less, and have lower communal ties, but they express more con-

fidence in public and private institutions. Reitz and Banerjee observe, but do not analyze, a surprising puzzle: the earnings gap between visible minorities and whites is larger in Quebec than the rest of Canada, but reports of discrimination and vulnerability are quite a bit lower in Quebec. At the same time, Kazemipur notes that the positive relationship between trust and ethnic diversity, which holds for virtually the whole country, does not appear in Montreal, where the relationship is negative. Kazemipur speculates that stronger ethnic residential segregation might have a role to play. Clearly this is an area for further research.

University of California, Berkeley Irene Bloemraad

Irene Bloemraad is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley and a Scholar with the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. She studies the intersection of immigration and politics, and has published on citizenship, immigrants' political and civic participation, and policies of multiculturalism and integration in journals such as *Social Forces*, *International Migration Review*, *Annual Review of Sociology* and *Journal of International Migration and Integration*. She has a special interest in comparative studies that include Canada, as reflected in her book *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada* (University of California Press, 2006).
bloemr@berkeley.edu