

*Becoming Multicultural: Immigrants and the Politics  
of Membership in Canada and Germany*

by Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos  
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Canada and Germany are often considered polar contrasts when it comes to immigration and multiculturalism. Yet in this provocative, insightful, and original analysis of the two nations, Triadafilopoulos observes that the two countries have more in common than may initially be apparent. He notes that that Canada and Germany followed similar trajectories over the 20th century. “Both countries began the century by prohibiting the entry and incorporation of immigrants deemed undesirable because of their putative racial or ethno-national characteristics[...] Yet by the end of the century, both [...] had developed into de facto multicultural societies” (p. 2). This outcome came about as both nations responded to labour force needs and adjusted to the emergence of new international ethical norms against racism. Within this common trajectory, the research reported in this book documents wide differences in policy process and specific immigration policy and multicultural outcomes between the two nations.

*Becoming Multicultural* addresses the politics of immigration for the two national cases by carrying out a long historical analysis of these politics, covering three periods: the first wave of globalization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the dismantling of colonialism in the mid-20th century, and the resurgence of immigration and foreign worker flows in the late 20th century. This breadth of perspective for the comparative study of immigration and multiculturalism builds on the work initiated by various eminent scholars, such as Aristide Zolberg, researchers associated with the Stanford School of research on nations within the international system of states, and writers such as Joseph Cairns who have examined the ethical dimensions of policies concerning ethnic diversity and controlled borders. The analysis focuses on the “migration-membership dilemma” faced by all liberal states, and by Canada and Germany concretely, when they engage in inviting foreigners—as immigrants or as guest workers—to take jobs that contribute to national economic development and, at the same time, “construct” norms, narratives, and policies on how the foreigners and their children fit into an emerging multicultural nation.

The book consists of six short, lucidly written chapters, covering in total a mere 166 pages of text. This makes it readily accessible as a “read it all” volume for senior research seminars and graduate courses. The main substantive chapters can be read independently, without reference to the book as a whole. Chapter 2, “Building Walls, Bounding Nations,” assesses changes in immigration flows and citizenship norms in the international system over the 20th century. Chapter 3, “Between Two Worlds,” covers the similarities and differences between Canada and Germany as they responded to the rise of anti-racism in the period covering the decline of the colonial system and the rise of the post–Second World War global system. Chapter 4 is a detailed examination of the end of the racist polices in Canadian immigration. Chapter 5 examines the transformation of guest workers into German citizens. These chapters are all framed within the same approach, and integrated by a clear introductory chapter and a synthetic concluding chapter. In addition to the

relatively short texts constituting the six chapters, the book contains 60 pages of source notes, 48 pages of bibliography, and a detailed index.

The main argument in the book is that Canada and Germany approached the migration-membership dilemma from different initial contexts, but responded in a similar direction to colonialism, the end of the colonial era, and the rise of human rights on the international stage in the post-war period through to the end of the 20th century. While the final stage of responses were more inclusive of diversity in both cases, the measures taken and the outcomes achieved in each country differ in important ways between the two nations. In the early 1960s, as the main source-regions of Canadian immigrants shifted south, Canada retained a large-scale immigration program that encouraged applications from all parts of the world, regardless of race or ethnic origin. Soon afterwards, Canada proactively adopted a multicultural nation-building rhetoric and supporting policies. Germany, which had engaged in importing foreign labour from ethnically similar neighbouring countries in the early 20th century, turned to an ambitious program of bringing in foreign workers from farther away, particularly Turkey, during the post-war recovery period. When it turned out that temporary workers from Turkey and other nations were in fact permanent workers, and that they would bring their families with them, Germany adopted de facto arrangements to accommodate the presence of these immigrants and their descendents, but has remained far more challenged in making them feel at home.

This book goes beyond the broad differences outlined above, to provide an original detailed step-by-step assessment of policy debates in both countries. The analysis is illuminating. It draws attention to policy uncertainty and groping for solutions. The findings suggest the dominance of “trial and error” policy within relatively fixed national immigration goals in Canada. This experience contrasts with a more politicized and chaotic policy in Germany, where there was profound disagreement on the goals of foreign labour admission and eventual settlement. Contrasts between the cases lead the author to elaborate a comparative immigration policy-development framework around the concepts of policy “stretching, unravelling and shifting.”

The chapter on “Dismantling White Canada” parallels my own analysis (see Chapter 4 in Alan Simmons’ *Immigration and Canada*, 2010). The two analyses agree that shifting norms against racism and the demand for labour combined to bring about the end of racist immigration. Triadafilopoulos concludes that of these two causes, the shift in international norms against racism played the stronger role in bringing to an end official racism in Canadian immigration policy. I agree, but note that in my analysis that the specific timing of the policy shift, and the way it took place, were dependent more on state assessments of labour force needs and best options for meeting these needs. Worries about finding the kind of skilled immigration for industrialization led to a quick end to racist immigration, without any significant parliamentary debate.

Our analyses also differ in other respects. Triadafilopoulos emphasizes policy-formulation processes (through policy papers and parliamentary debate) and gives less attention to the analysis of such matters as elite political interests and influence in policy, winners and losers in immigration, and national trade strategies as factors that shape immigration and multiculturalism. In the end, our analyses overlap on key points, and are complementary to one another in areas where they differ in focus and interpretation. Triadafilopoulos’ analysis of multiculturalism as socially “constructed” is similar to my own, and, for that matter, to other recent research on Canadian multiculturalism from a comparative perspective—see, in particular, Elke Winter’s *Us, Them and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies* (2011).

The policy developments examined in this book end in the 1990s. But the questions the book raises and its analytical approach seem well adapted to new research on more recent developments in Canada, Germany, and other liberal nations. Since the early 2000s, Canadian immigration policies have shifted dramatically, and new ethical and practical policy debates have emerged in Canada with regard to rising numbers of foreign workers in a context of relatively high unemployment and apparently weak or ineffective job-training programs. Similar debates have emerged in Canada on policies designed to make it far more difficult for asylum seekers to enter and remain in the country. Germany, for its part, continues to struggle with pockets (if not more) of racism and a widespread cultural alienation of the foreign-born and their increasingly numerous German-born descendents. The United States is currently (May 2013) engaged in efforts to approve a new immigration policy that will address, in both ethical and practical terms, the migration-membership dilemma

arising from the presence in the United States of millions of largely Mexican undocumented migrants who have been living in that nation for years.

In sum, this book makes a significant and welcome contribution to the comparative understanding of international migration and multiculturalism policies and outcomes for Canada and Germany. It is highly recommended for readers interested in the origin, development, and outcomes of policies shaping immigration and multiculturalism, in these two countries and in all other nations where the analytical concepts developed in this study may be usefully applied.

### **Reference**

- Simmons, A.B. 2010. *Immigration and Canada: Global and Transnational Perspectives*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Winter, E. 2011. *Us, Them and Others: Pluralism and National Identity in Diverse Societies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.