

## Immigration policy as population policy

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In their impressive review, Bourne and Rose (*this issue*) have ranged widely in covering the components of population and social change in Canada. We turn in this brief response to an issue that has considerable intellectual and policy significance: the extent to which, by default, Canadian immigration policy has become the nation's population policy, and how this state of affairs is creating a distinctive social and population geography.

The demographic trends in Canada are clear. Fertility levels are below the replacement rate, with no grounds for expecting a turnaround.<sup>1</sup> Mortality rates are also in decline but changes into the future are anticipated to be modest, and of course have little direct effect on the size of the working age population. Immigration, as a consequence, becomes the central component of population growth or decline. This trend is in stark contrast to Canada's past; throughout Canada's history as a nation state, even during the two peak periods of immigrant landings (just after the turn of the previous century and following World War II), natural increase has been the driving force in population growth (Table 1; also see George *et al.* 1997). In the early 1990s, however, net migration accounted for just over half of the growth of the national population and this ratio is sure to rise in the new century. Immigration has a particularly large impact on the size of the active labour force, a key concern as demographers and economic forecasters wonder who will pay for the social programs of the future.

Population policy, population projections, and changes in the population geography of Canada,

therefore, are now in the first instance an outcome of immigration. At one level, this would seem to enhance the state's planning capacity, because the management of immigration – the setting of annual targets and immigrant composition by entry class – is more centralized and subject to the steering capacity of the state than the birth rate or the death rate. But, ironically, immigration is a more unstable component of population change than birth or death rates, which typically exhibit only marginal adjustments from year to year. In contrast, immigration is a notoriously unstable parameter in the short and long term in any planning or projection exercise. For example, when George *et al.* (1997) prepared their national population projections, the annual immigration parameter was set at 250,000, the mean of the three most recent years; however, the mean of the preceding five years had been considerably lower, at 150,000.<sup>2</sup> The result was that after fifty years, estimates of Canada's total population based upon the two estimates varied by nine million or over 20 percent, a range that makes them of little use (also see Ryder 1997). The official policy of the Liberal Party, which the current minister endorses (e.g. Caplan 2000), suggests an annual target of 300,000 (1% of the population), a number that has yet to be reached in the post-war era. Emigration rates are equally capricious. There is reason to believe that more Canadians are moving to the United States since the implementation of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) provisions facilitating cross-border mobility for professionals and entrepreneurs. In the absence of reliable data on departures, however,

**Table 1**  
Components of Canadian population change, 1861-1996 (thousands)

	Total population growth	Natural increase	Net migration	Population at end of period
1861-1871	459	610	-151	3,230
1871-1881	636	690	-54	3,689
1881-1891	508	654	-146	4,833
1891-1901	538	668	-130	5,371
1901-1911	1,836	1,025	811	7,207
1911-1921	1,581	1,270	311	8,788
1921-1931	1,589	1,360	229	10,377
1931-1941	1,130	1,222	-92	11,507
1941-1951	2,141	1,972	169	13,648
1951-1961	3,545	3,148	1,081	18,238
1961-1971	3,330	2,608	722	21,568
1971-1981	2,874	1,908	966	24,900
1981-1991	3,211	1,974	1,237	28,111
1991-1996	1,848	908	940	29,959

SOURCE: Statistics Canada 1999

particularly data distinguishing between those who leave Canada temporarily vs. permanently, it is difficult to verify this trend (DeVoretz 1999).

Projections of Canada's future demography – and the role of net migration in establishing the dimensions of population change – are further complicated by the absence of a clearly articulated national population strategy. In Australia, for example, a country with a similar economic, cultural, and demographic history to Canada's, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs is the official voice on population matters. As part of his brief, Minister Ruddick has repeatedly identified a stationary population of around 23 million by mid-century as a desirable outcome for the country's population policy, a gain of some four million over the present (Ruddick 1999). In Canada, immigration is often portrayed by government as a means to stave off population decline, but there has been no parallel statement calling for a stationary population size, nor an optimal growth rate, for the medium- or long-term future.

We now turn to consider some of the implications for public policy and Canada's social geography, given the present tendency for immigration to drive population growth. We organize our thoughts around three main issues: the highly concentrated geography of immigrant settlement in Canada and related impacts on urban environments and housing markets; the participation of immigrants in the Canadian labour force and concerns over the economic diffi-

culties experienced by many who arrived during the recession of the early 1990s; and the evolving nature of Canadian identity and citizenship in an age of rapidly growing population diversity.

## Metropolitan concentration

Bourne and Rose note the 'extreme geographical concentration' of recent immigrants that has occurred in Canada's gateway cities, Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal. This outcome is heavily responsive to chain migration, though also to perceived economic opportunities in the largest cities. Immigrant landings, peaking at almost 89,000 in the Toronto CMA and over 37,000 in the Vancouver CMA in the mid 1990s, have transformed these metropolitan areas in little more than a decade. Undoubtedly, such concentrated growth has facilitated a robust consumption sphere, notably in retailing and construction, and has supplied an abundant work force. The scale of movement has also created institutionally complete communities for some groups that have aided newcomer settlement and integration, both through informal networks and also through the political visibility that accompanies large numbers.

But, equally, the costs of growth have become apparent. Infrastructure, notably transportation systems and the provision of affordable housing, has been unable to keep up with growth rates. Congestion costs are substantial, registered in ever-slower and longer journeys to work and more expensive infrastructure, including new transportation corridors. Second, the concentrated nature of population growth is associated with declining environmental conditions in land, water, and urban air pollution. While environmental quality has not been a part of the immigration discussion in Canada, in Australia environmental deterioration accompanying growth, particularly in Sydney, has sparked an environmental argument for heavily reduced immigration, leading some groups (including the Green Party) to suggest a zero net immigration policy. Third, rapid growth is associated with rising land costs. The relationship between immigration and housing costs is not straightforward, but over the period of the past 25 years, the two are clearly linked in correlation/regression analysis in Toronto and Vancouver (Ley and Tutcher 2001).

Since the mid 1980s, immigration has become the major component of population growth in Canada's gateway cities, in part because of a net decline, even

an absolute loss, of domestic migrants. The cause of these opposing migration streams is uncertain. One distressing suggestion has attributed domestic out-migration to 'white flight', cultural avoidance of immigrant visible minorities (Ley 2000a). Certainly, inter-ethnic residential segregation has not declined under the regime of high immigration (Hiebert 1999a); indeed among the largest visible minorities in Vancouver, the Chinese Canadians in suburban Richmond, or the Punjabi Canadians in Surrey, the size of communities has arguably slowed linguistic and cultural integration.<sup>3</sup> But the scarce studies of the reception of immigrants by long-settled residents suggest the avoidance thesis is too simple (Rose 2001). Another possible cause of the opposite trajectories of domestic and international migration is that high shelter prices in gateway cities are encouraging out-migration by the long-settled, through *displacement* from submarkets they can no longer afford to enter. In addition, replacement takes place, as empty-nest owners cash in the considerable equity of their family home and relocate to cheaper markets. Through both processes, the cultural composition of gateway cities is becoming more distinct from other parts of Canada.

According to immigration officials, the growing concentration of immigrants and refugees in the Toronto metropolitan area has led to a saturation of settlement services. For this reason, a decision was made at an early stage not to settle Kosovo refugees in that city. In this unusual case, and following the highly supervised airlift of the Kosovars to Canada, spatial dispersion of the population was possible. But in a democracy, more widespread strategies of dispersion are not on the agenda; indeed they are precluded by the Canadian Charter.<sup>4</sup>

### **Immigration, economic development and poverty**

Immigration of course has other purposes than demographic replacement. The humanitarian objectives of family reunification and refugee settlement have been significant ends in Canadian immigration policy, but in recent years the balance in the annual immigration targets has been moving to the economic classes, which comprise skilled workers, business migrants, and their families. In the current year, 2001, of a total projected immigrant and refugee intake of between 200,000 and 225,000, between 116,900 and 130,700 are planned to fall into economic classes (CIC 2001).

It is clear that immigration is making a fundamental contribution to the Canadian labour force. As Bourne and Rose (*this issue*) note, close to 70 percent of labour force growth may be attributed to immigrants. Significant variation in accomplishments has accrued among immigrant cohorts. It is well known, for example, that in the past it has taken 10-15 years after landing for personal incomes to reach the national average, but thereafter they tend to move above the average. Systematic variations exist among different entry classes and national groups in this regard. The most remarkable achievements are attained by independent economic immigrants (skilled workers) entering Canada through the points system<sup>5</sup>. The employment earnings of skilled workers exceed the average of the overall population of tax-filers within two years of landing in Canada; not surprisingly, in the current year, the planned contribution of skilled workers to overall entry has risen to 50 percent. In contrast, other immigrant classes experience a longer trek to the Canadian average: close to a decade for business immigrants and nearer fifteen years for refugees and family sponsorships (CIC 1997, 1998).

Moreover, there is considerable evidence that conditions deteriorated during the first half of the 1990s as high immigration levels coincided with severe recession. These circumstances have been captured by the 1996 Census; in Vancouver, for example, which typically receives immigrants with financial and human capital well above the Canadian average, 48 percent of immigrant households who landed between 1986 and 1996 had incomes below the poverty line in 1996. The intersection of immigration and poverty has become a growing concern in the major urban centres of arrival. In Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal, immigrant concentrations in 1991 were correlated positively with poverty, but weakly in comparison to structural factors, such as the rate of male unemployment or the concentration of female-led, single-parent families. Moreover, the effect was limited primarily to immigrants with less than ten years' standing in Canada; indeed there was a negative correlation between the incidence of poverty and the distribution of immigrants who had been resident for more than 20 years (Ley and Smith 2000). While one should not underestimate for a moment the difficulty of the early years of settlement, the evidence up to 1991 was that long-term mobility prospects remained positive. Nonetheless, the relationship between immigration and poverty

became more entrenched in the following five years (Kazemipur and Halli 2000), and immigrants are one of the groups most likely to be living in poverty in Canada (after Aboriginals and female-headed, single-parent families). Since 1996, unemployment has been falling, while real incomes have been rising in Canada; the 2001 census will enable analysts to see whether immigrants have shared in this growing prosperity, or whether poverty has become ingrained in immigrant neighbourhoods.

The growing poverty rate among immigrants reflects their changing participation in the economy. Earlier periods of rapid migration to Canada coincided with buoyant economic times and a labour market that held out prospects for workers with relatively little formal education. Since the mid-1980s, these jobs have been scarce, especially during the recessionary early 1990s. Immigrants have therefore had to confront a changed labour market that provides poor jobs for those deemed unskilled and significant prospects for those hired in professional and managerial capacities. Given the new opportunity structure, together with the increased emphasis on economic immigrants selected for their education and experience, immigrants have entered the labour market at both ends, as professionals and entrepreneurs on the one hand and domestic servants, janitors, etc. on the other (Preston and Giles 1997; Hiebert 1999b).

In the 1980s, the tendency for immigrants to pursue self employment grew, a complex result of several factors that included: the increasing prominence of business immigrants (who entered Canada under the Entrepreneur and Investor categories); an unwelcome labour market; and the general shift to entrepreneurialism associated with economic restructuring (Hiebert *et al.* 1999). The rising level of immigrant entrepreneurialism is yet another ingredient in the polarized fortunes we have already noted, but in more complex ways than is generally acknowledged. While many immigrants have established thriving enterprises, there is also considerable qualitative and quantitative evidence that immigrants entering Canada through the business programs have not been as successful as official statistics seem to claim; return migration and early retirement have removed entrepreneurial activity, while the 'astronaut' household – with family members dispersed on opposite shores of the Pacific Ocean – has displaced that activity overseas (Ley 2000b). Business failure has been a frequent outcome of those business immigrants who have sought to join the economy.

## Immigration, identity, citizenship

A final set of questions has to do with the relations between immigration and issues of citizenship and national identity. Nudged by high levels of non-European immigration, Canadian identity has undoubtedly evolved away from the fully Eurocentric model of dual English and French charter groups. Multiculturalism has moved discourse and identity toward a more plural model where difference is seen as an inherent part of Canadian character (Day 1998). In Australia a similar evolution and a comparable concentration of immigrants in gateway cities prompted the nativist reaction of the One Nation Party, as outer suburban, small town, and rural Australians objected to the re-invention of the nation they perceived to be taking place in the metropolitan centres. Immigration became a central element of an anguished discussion about national identity (Fincher 2000). While the steam has been taken out of One Nation politics for now, the same electoral configuration re-emerged in the recent referendum to establish a republic, as small town and outer suburban voters endorsed a traditional model of national identity and countered the republicanism of big city cosmopolitanism (Betts 1999).

Canada has seen only a pale imitation of this degree of national anxiety. The politics of the Reform Party (now the Canadian Alliance Party) never came close to the adopted policies of One Nation, nor has there been an equivalent politicization of national anguish over the cultural re-working of the country. This is not to say of course that Canadian inter-group relations have reached some idyllic state – far from it. Despite this calmer demeanor, the umbrella of official multiculturalism has come under concerted attack from the left (for posing an equality that does not exist), from the right (for encouraging a tribalism that challenges any national unity), and from some immigrant groups themselves (who reject the implication of inherent and permanent difference from the mainstream that a hyphenated cultural identity seems to bestow upon them). In this critical environment, the Liberal governments of the 1990s have back-pedaled on multiculturalism, preferring the language of integration (Abu-Laban 1998).

Of course, in an era where many individuals, especially immigrants, maintain personal networks that transcend national boundaries, the whole meaning of citizenship has evolved, though there are not many whose fluidity equals the celebrated trans-Pacific

astronaut households of the West Coast (Ong 1998). Citizenship is fundamentally about rights and responsibilities (Kymlicka and Norman 1994), though to date the literature has had much more to say about rights than responsibilities. Certainly the rights of immigrants and minorities are entrenched in the Charter and in federal and provincial multicultural legislation. This is not to say they have always been secured. Local government, for example, has often failed to come to terms with cultural diversity in its service delivery, particularly where immigrants form unpoliticized minorities (Edgington *et al.* 2001). There is abiding evidence of exclusion practiced in the labour market (Reitz 1998) and the housing market (Hulchanski 1998) against certain groups. Underrepresentation and misrepresentation remain unacceptable features of media coverage of race and ethnicity across print, radio and television (Dunn and Mahtani 2001).

There has been a recent call for citizenship studies to give greater weight to issues of participation, not least to counter a somewhat passive view of immigrant agency implied in much research (Bloemraad 2000). While the literature is limited in this field in Canada, there are hopeful indications at the level of political participation particularly among the larger immigrant groups including Italian-, Indo-, and Chinese-Canadians. Immigrant activism is visible too in the lobbying of Japanese Canadians over the redress settlement for wartime expropriation and of Chinese Canadians over immigration and tax reform. We should also remember that the birth of an official multicultural policy in Canada followed an intense lobbying effort led by Ukrainian- and Jewish-Canadian communities. Finally, a rich matrix of immigrant advocacy and settlement agencies has emerged in the major cities. While subject to the whims of state policy, these non-governmental organizations have nonetheless established a vigorous presence to press for rights and services for new Canadians (Creese 1998; Owen 2000). At this grass-roots level, immigrant and minority participation in the democratic public sphere is intense.

## Conclusion

With immigration already accounting for more than half of Canada's population growth, a proportion likely to rise in the short- and medium-term future, it has become a key component of the political economy and cultural life of the nation state. It is hard to imag-

ine what Canada's labour market – and therefore Canada's economy more generally – would look like 25 years from now if immigration were to be curtailed; with the impending retirement during this period of the largest generation in Canada's history, how would the workforce be replaced? The current (summer 2000) minister has responded to this challenge by seeking to increase immigrant landings. This strategy will not be implemented smoothly, however. Other countries, notably the United States and more recently European nations, have already mounted efforts to recruit highly qualified workers from abroad. Increasingly, these invitations are attracting the attention of Canadians, and many believe we are experiencing a 'brain drain' of medical practitioners, software engineers, and other well-paid individuals to the US (DeVoretz 1999). In the coming decades, Canada is likely to be a country of pronounced immigration and emigration.<sup>6</sup> The effects of these twin migration circuits will be profound, leading to a spatial redistribution of Canada's population as well as new cultural trajectories. While we can anticipate some of the changes immigration will bring, others are much more unpredictable. Significantly, even some of the most obvious issues remain to be settled, such as the articulation of new immigrant communities, and the increased diversity they bring, with the more 'traditional' social movements of First Nations' and Québec nationalism. There are already strong hints that the meaning of Canadian citizenship is shifting, but the exact direction and magnitude of this change remain far from clear.

## Notes

- 1 See the useful review of causes of low fertility in Australia in McDonald (2000), a discussion that is eminently transferable to Canada.
- 2 If they were repeating their analysis today, the mean for the most recent three years would be around 190,000. In just three years after publication their primary parameter has assumed an error term of 60,000 or 24 percent.
- 3 Though the need for, even the desirability of, cultural integration is debated in Canada, given the adoption of official multiculturalism.
- 4 Notwithstanding this statement, in Sweden widespread dispersal policies have been undertaken to move immigrants to different regions of the country. A common view, however, is that these policies have not been successful as secondary migration has led to metropolitan concentration.
- 5 Individuals who apply as independent immigrants (i.e., not to join family members already in Canada) must fill out an application form that specifies their age, educational background, work experience, language abilities, and so on. Points are assigned to these individual characteristics (e.g., 9 for facility in one of Canada's official languages), and applicants who receive a cumulative total of more than 70 points are granted landed immigrant status.

6 Emerging international migration patterns reveal a particularly transformative aspect of contemporary globalization. European countries, long associated with emigration, are expected to admit literally millions of immigrants in the early 21st century, while countries like Canada, long associated with immigration, are becoming more important sources of emigrants. Similar role reversals are occurring in the global south; for example, India already supplies many thousands of high-tech workers each year to fuel Silicon Valley's high-tech economy (Saxenian, 1999).

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