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Down but Not Out – A Comment on the 15th Canadian National Metropolis Conference "Building an Integrated Society"

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Canadians Take Immigration Seriously

"Metropolis is here to stay!" stated a defiant Jack Jedwab, Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies, in his welcoming remarks at the 2013 National Metropolis Conference, held in Ottawa, Canada, on March 14. A product of the Metropolis Research Network, a collaborative partnership between academia, immigrant-serving community groups and all levels of Canadian government, the annual Metropolis conference brands itself as a unique outlet for sharing academic and community-based research findings with policymakers and service providers. Under the overarching title "Building an Integrated Society/Construire une Société Intégrée," the 2013 conference encompassed over 100 workshops and presentations and approximately 500 attendees (Taylor, 2013).

Up until a few months prior, it had been unclear if the longstanding conference would happen at all. As of 2013, the Network had its funding decimated by the Canadian Conservative federal government, a move many settlement workers and immigration activists considered part of a deliberate strategy to undermine research documenting the needs of many vulnerable immigrant groups (Keung, 2013). Amidst widespread pessimism regarding the conference's financial prospects, the Association for Canadian Studies, a well-known progressive Montreal-based think-tank, stepped in at the last minute, saving the day and offering to take on financial responsibility for the event indefinitely.

The Canadian Context: "Revitalized" or Economically Revised?

Notwithstanding this important, if small victory, many conference panels and plenary sessions appeared at a loss as to how to tackle the slew of ongoing neoliberal policy shifts within the Canadian immigration field. Beginning in the 1980s, 'social investment rhetoric' has made steady advances in the national discourse and trickled down to many arenas of immigration policy and research (Jenson, 2010; Jenson/Saint-Martin, 2003). Presently, social policy is oftentimes viewed merely as a vehicle to shore up economic prospects, with integration efforts focused on reducing newcomers' dependence on the state, rather than facilitating their overall welfare (Good Gingrich, 2010).

Canada has long been applauded as an exemplar global destination for migrants. Yet immigration reforms are increasingly institutionalizing precarity for many. Canada is now actively recruiting individuals at the socioeconomic margins, while simultaneously dismantling its much-touted universal social services. The current emphasis is on attracting vulnerable temporary foreign workers (TFWs), with limited ability to advocate for citizenship

or benefits, or wealthy entrepreneurs and seniors, who need not rely on Canada's collectively funded benefit programs. Since the Conservatives took power federally, Canada has had its family reunification and humanitarian streams of immigration diminished significantly. There have been a record-breaking number of deportations (16,511 people in 2011-2012) (Hussan, 2012) and a 50% jump in the number of migrant workers (Harper, 2012). Moreover, Canadian employers are now legally permitted to pay highly skilled TFWs 15% less than Canadian citizens or permanent residents (Black/Keung, 2013; Goar, 2012).

"If Data is Not Collected Will Questions Still Be Asked?"

The Metropolis opening plenary session, "Fostering an Integrated Society," focused on measuring outcomes of integration. Canada's long-form census, recently eliminated by the federal government, was a traditional representative data source used to highlight problems experienced by newcomers (Black, 2013). As large-scale quantitative analysis of migration outcomes often constitutes the only way to define a problem initially or frame it in a manner that garners public attention and credibility (Boyd/Schellenberg, 2008; Boyd/Thomas, 2001; Schellenberg/Hou, 2008), the cuts to the census have come as a huge setback for many immigration researchers and activists, and were widely criticized in informal discussions throughout the conference. Yet during the plenary session, speakers presented research from international and community-level datasets, without directly addressing the very real gaps such approaches leave in impacting policy at the national and provincial levels.

Cécile Thoreau, Administrator of the International Migration Division of the Directorate for Employment, Labour and Social Affairs at the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), stated that all countries share the challenge of integrating highly educated immigrants. Presenting OECD data, she suggested that Canada should be situated within a comparative framework, wherein its newcomers fare relatively well in terms of employment outcomes. However, nationally based research states otherwise (Lightman/Good Gingrich, 2012; Reitz et al., 2009), as numerous scholars document newcomers' high levels of social exclusion (Richmond/Shields, 2005), economic marginalization (Galabuzi/Teeluckksingh, 2010), and their systemically entrenched inability to fully participate within Canadian society (Reitz/Banerjee, 2007; Simich et al., 2005). In the same panel, Catherine Poole, from the Ministry of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training in the Government of British Columbia, promoted the development of a Pan-Canadian Framework for settlement outcomes. Collecting landing information from newcomers to Canada, she detailed initial findings from a survey of migrants during their first five years in the country (between 2007 and 2011). While data was not yet available at the national level, Poole's approach, equating settlement with successful integration, again appeared to frame public responsibility for immigrants primarily as a means to improve Canada's overall economic performance.

In a critical reflection on the state of Canadian data collection, Professor Howard Ramos, from Dalhousie University, contested the federal government's claims of transparency and open access, particularly in terms of the recent launch of the so-called "Google hub" of data. Demonstrating the minimal content available within this resource, Ramos opened up discussion to the opportunities and limitations inherent within data collection conducted outside government, including "big" data gathered by corporations and "gorilla" data col-

lected by lay individuals. Within a context of state imposed secrecy, where scientists doing research in partnership with the Canadian federal government cannot openly report their findings, and civil servants must oftentimes vet their comments before going public, Ramos concluded that we should not take for granted what data we can access and collect, and suggested going beyond traditional norms by utilizing new forms of quantitative analysis.

Labor Shortages at the Margins, Super Visas, and "Threat Analysis"

Several workshops at Metropolis focused specifically on TFWs. Presentations reflected the contradictions within the discourses framing the TFW program in Canada: it is simultaneously flaunted as a beneficial solution to country-wide labor shortages, as documented by David Manicom, Director General of CIC, in a workshop on "Temporary Foreign Workers: Recent Research And Current Policy Issues," and vilified for diminishing national wage growth, exacerbating youth unemployment and reducing domestic workers' human capital gains (Fudge/MacPhail, 2009; Gross/Schmitt, 2012). Yet publically framing the program as a niche tactic to address specific labor market demands, while disregarding its (lack of) human rights imprint, is once again reflective of the market-state fusion (Good Gingrich, 2008) grounding TFWs' ongoing exclusion.

Professor Mehrunnisa Ali, from Ryerson University, reported on the Making Ontario Home Survey. Conducted by the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI), the survey was designed to evaluate the settlement needs, not only of migrants entitled to future citizenship claims, but also of undocumented residents and TFWs. From a service provision perspective, Ali captured an interesting dynamic: although settlement services are targeted to permanent residents, they ignore the unique needs of more vulnerable migrants, including guest workers, those *sans papiers*, and family class members. The lack of settlement services for TFWs is associated with the exclusion of non-citizens from the welfare state service provision (Goldring/Berinstein/Bernhard, 2009), perhaps implying that the TFW program, although transnational in nature, is not de facto materialized through transnational social support.

Alexandra Charette, a PhD student at University of Ottawa, presenting in a workshop entitled "Temporary Status Migrants in Canada: Challenges and Best Practices in The Provision of Settlement Support," questioned the stratification of citizenship rights in Quebec, specifically by identifying how refugee claimants are unable to apply for rent-geared-to-income social housing. Highlighting the precarious working environments of migrant workers employed in the former Olympic Games sites in British Columbia and other hospitality-based businesses on the West coast, Saleem Spindari, Coordinator at MOSAIC, a drop-in center for TFWs, and Rida Abboud, from the Calgary Local Immigration Partnership, both indicated the need to replace TFW programs with permanency-geared immigration streams.

Examining migrants in a seemingly alternate position of precarity than that of TFWs, Professor Monica Boyd of the University of Toronto took on the many flaws within the newly implemented "Super Visa" policy, which mainly targets relatives of landed immigrants. Allowing holders multiple entries to Canada within a 10-year period, the policy offloads health insurance and other social responsibilities onto the individuals and their families, many of whom cannot afford it (Keung, 2013). As permanent sponsorship of parents/grandparents has been suspended in Canada since 2011, Boyd predicted this policy

would lead to scenarios of increasing dependency for the overwhelmingly female senior migrant population, as they will not be allowed to work or utilize language programs and any others initiatives aiming at welcoming permanent newcomers in Canada.

Finally, in a bizarre-seeming equivocation between immigration and terrorism, Metropolis hosted a four-part round table entitled "Towards A Holistic Approach to Societal Resilience for National Security and Counter-Terrorism" and a plenary session on a similar topic. This followed a recently introduced bill in Canada (C-34) that allows for easier deportation (with no right to appeal) of permanent resident migrants who have been sentenced to six months or more for a crime (Black/Keung, 2013; Clark, 2012). Quirine Ejikmann, Senior Researcher/Lecturer at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, spoke of the need for "threat analysis" of immigrants, while Lasse Lindekilde of the University of Aarhus, Denmark, emphasized the development of specific indicators to track this increasingly "radical milieu." While such policies were couched in terms of fostering improved integration and resilience within diverse communities, the underlying implications and assumptions inherent in these panels was disturbing for many within the audience, along with the lack of representation of Muslim or other targeted groups among the plenary speakers.

Looking Forward: Bridging Research to the Realm of the Transnational

The Metropolis conference left many questions unanswered. In terms of data collection, there is a need to consider *how we compare* what we compare: Which perspective should matter? In scenarios where government data collection is not representative of threatened minorities in society (including many immigrants and First Nation individuals), what content can we use to do research? How can we effectively adapt to (or diminish) threats to a particular data source? And how do we bridge the global and the national to get to the transnational?

In terms of the increasing institutionalization of precarity within Canada's immigration policy, many ethical difficulties arise in considering TFWs solely in terms of their economic returns for the majority population. Yet this is the dominant discourse that abounds. Evidently, they are societal implications in *how we define* "migrants" and, subsequently, how we target policies to "integrate" them. It is unclear if TFWs even desire integration in a transnational context and even less clear how to best provide services for individuals without permanent residency. In such scenarios, what does it mean to inclusively measure settlement but have it institutionally applied in an exclusionary style? Will the provision of settlement services to temporary residents inherently settle them in temporariness and diminish the potentiality for their permanency to ever be materialized?

As ongoing funding cuts to Canadian higher education increasingly undermine academic inquires, perhaps we must reconsider *for whom* we are doing research. Depending on the audience, should we rely on theoretical frameworks, testimonies of individuals, or secondary analysis of representative data to direct the questions asked? What purpose should immigration research serve? Is the goal to advocate on behalf of, or work as allies with, vulnerable newcomers? Or, is it to assist the government in efficiently and effectively utilizing the economic potential of individuals to fill the gaps in our labor markets? Are these two perspectives fundamentally contradictory, or is it possible to have them aligned? And is

there inherent value in immigration research, independent of its utility for policy-making or policy-shaping?

In a context of shifting borders and fluctuating ideologies, where such questions are much more easily identified than satisfyingly deliberated or resolved, future national immigration conferences, such as Metropolis, will have the challenging task of negotiating the oftentimes competing considerations of migrants, academics and policymakers.

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