

**AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF CIVIC IDENTITY AMONG IMMIGRANTS AND
REFUGEES IN CANADA**

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Presented at the ISA Conference
International Center for Migration, Ethnicity and Citizenship (ICMEC),
Inclusion and Exclusion: International Migrants and Refugees in Europe and North America,
June 5-7, 1997,
New School for Social Research
65 Fifth Avenue, Room 238
New York, NY 10003 USA

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Understanding how newcomers, both immigrants and refugees, develop a civic identity is an important focus of this paper. Civic identity is associated with citizens' actions as they relate to being a member of a community, city (Whitson, 1997?), state or nation (Kymlicka, 1995). Connors (in Boegehold and Scarfuro, 1994) argues that civic identity is more than an ascribed characteristic that is acquired through birth or legal citizenship. It is achieved through civic participation in activities such as voting, serving on public boards (e.g., school boards, community boards, and other boards - committees, public commissions, inquiries) and other related activities. Another important form of civic participation includes running for and being elected to public office (e.g., ranging from municipal to federal).

The type of civic identity being proposed is one that is imbued with agency. That is, those with this type of civic identity are agents that help form the identity not only through their actions, but also based on how they define their actions. Civic identity also enables and possibly encourages further action as there is a conscious understanding of the long term effects. It can also be seen as both a **right** and a **responsibility** to become involved in community affairs and ensure that a group's interests is being considered (Kymlicka, 1992, 1995).

The research that led to the above "working definition" of civic identity was exploratory and the findings are preliminary. This research only provides clues to understanding civic identity amongst newcomers. I began examining historical accounts of settlement and political participation of early minority ethnic groups in Canada. This led to a further investigation of historical and contemporary federal parliamentary guides. After reading through these guides, it was clear that this source could provide information about elected members of parliament from prominent ethnic groups. This source also yielded some biographical details about

parliamentarians, along with specific examples of civic activity which may contribute to understanding civic identity amongst various ethnic groups.

The historical research began with an examination Jewish history in Canada and Ezekiel Hart's bid for the 1807 election in the parliament of Lower Canada -- what is now known as Quebec. As I read through what at first appeared to be a standard case of winning an election, it became clear that his situation was significant. The importance of this case revolved around the issue of citizenship and civic identity. The controversy stemmed from Hart wanting to be sworn into office utilizing the First Testament. It eventually became obvious that this request brought to the surface partisan political tensions, Anglophone-Francophone tensions, anti-semitic feelings and other political splintering. The outcome was not only a stalemate, but more importantly the realization that Jews did not have citizenship rights in Canada. Eventually Jews were granted citizenship rights in 1831; the first enclave of Jews to have citizenship in all of the British colonies (Abella, 1990). Ezekiel Hart's persistence made it possible for other Jews in Victoria, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto to become members of parliament.

After reading through the various federal parliamentary guides, it was apparent that information about various ethnic members of parliament needed to be organized. The solution was the use of a spreadsheet with an x axis of all the prominent ethnic minority groups and on the y axis, the years they were in office. This spreadsheet was a helpful summary for a content analysis of all prominent ethnic minority members of parliament. The parliamentary guides included political information about various stints in office at provincial and municipal levels, along with other political activity. In most guides the time periods served, ridings represented and the various elected and appointed positions, along with the date of birth were also noted.

The problem that still remained was how to identify ethnic parliamentarians. The analysis of the federal parliamentary guides took quite a while of cross referencing between various years, and re-checking various historical accounts of the prominent ethnic groups and individual. These guides were not consistent: only some of them provided birth places, ethnicity and religion. This demographic information along with other facts such as the ridings represented as federal and local politicians helped to determine ethnicity. For instance, depending solely on names for determining ethnicity was not reliable when attempting to determine who was Jewish, German, Polish, or Ukrainian. Especially among Jewish parliamentarians, names were sometimes anglosized and very similar to German, Russian or other eastern Europeans. Through historical accounts of ethnic minorities settling in Canada along with consulting various colleagues, I was usually able to determine what regions, cities or towns various ethnic communities were located. For instance, many Germans settled about in the Kitchener-Waterloo region (about 100 km west of Toronto). There is a notable community of Ukrainians in Alberta and Saskatchewan; and historically, sizable Jewish communities exist in Montreal, Vancouver and Victoria, and later in Winnipeg and Toronto. Therefore, through a myriad of sources beyond the federal parliamentary guides from different eras, ethnicity could usually be determined.

The spreadsheet reveals some interesting patterns based on when certain federal members of parliament were elected, where they were born, when they settled in Canada, if they were elected in an area with a large concentration of their compatriots, and other factors linked to ethnicity. The preliminary findings suggested that certain variables are linked to civic identity formation: community formation (measured in terms of community association, community ethnic markers such as religious institutions, ethnic businesses, ethnic or religiously-based schools and

community centres); community leadership; friendship networks; language; occupational and business interests; class; religion; education; racism /discrimination and other structural factors. These preliminary findings clarified variables related to civic identity and possible elements essential for civic identity formation.

In order to further elucidate and understand the definition and process of civic identity formation, it was necessary to do a more in-depth case study comparing Jews and Italians to two recent refugee groups: Somalis and Cambodians. I focused mainly on the Somalis and Cambodians who settled in Toronto. These four ethnic groups were selected for several reasons: all but the Cambodian community are large and have established communities in Toronto; there is literature about these groups; there are people at York who studied the groups; all groups but the Cambodians have been civically and politically active; and other factors which will become apparent below.

A more specific spreadsheet (See Appendix A) was created in order to compare these four ethnic groups. The x axis contains the names of the ethnic groups: Jews, Italians, Somalis and Cambodians and the y axis includes variables such as language, friendship networks, community associations, leadership, serving in political office, political party affiliations, economic success, occupation, education and training, class, religion, years of immigrating to Canada, community size and civic participation.

When examining why those from the Jewish community were elected to political office, many variables were considered. The English Jews arrived in the 1760s in what is now known as Quebec. It was the second generation of the Hart family, Ezekiel Hart, who ran for office in 1807. Another group of English Jews arrived in Victoria and the Vancouver, British Columbia

between the 1850s and 1860s. This group was elected to office within ten years of arriving in Canada.

In both cases those Jews that settled in Quebec and British Columbia were all established and successful merchants and property owners. They lived in a geographically-bound areas demarcated by synagogues and various Jewish businesses. Their community was modest, but quite active. Those elected to office were leaders in the Jewish community and their local community. There were also clear indications that they were well connected politically through associations with various politicians, military leaders and others. In short, those elected to office were primarily middle-class and were reported to be well respected in their communities.

It was during the 1950s and 1960s that the first Italians were elected to Federal office. In all but one case, most of these elected members of parliament were second and third generation Italian-Canadians. Upon arriving in Canada between 1871 and 1971, most Italians did not speak English and few spoke French. The first wave of Italians were recruited in Italy as labourers to build the railways, work in the mining industry and other industries. Often they did not bring their families and had intentions of returning to Italy. They formed communities in Montreal, Toronto, Hamilton, Sudbury, Thunder Bay and other large and smaller cities mainly in Ontario. They formed tightly knit communities with sizable populations, and geographically demarcated areas. Many community associations and clubs are still evident, along with a strong leadership base. Religious affiliations are also important for uniting this ethnic group. Through religious affiliations Italians formed community links with other Catholics.

The Somali community arrived in Canada between 1988 and 1993 mainly as refugees from the civil wars and clan-based uprisings in Somalia. While some Somalis have been educated in

Europe and speak English when arriving in Canada, many do not. Somalis quickly formed community ties based on Clan affiliations (Opoku-Dapaah, 1995). They arrived in Canada with a strong sense of their own community and an established clan-based leadership structure. The estimated number of Somalis in Toronto alone is between 25,000 and 30,000 and they mainly live in a geographically demarcated area. Somalis have established themselves as small business owners and work in various service-based and commercial industries. In a very short period of time three Somalis ran as NDP candidates in the 1995 provincial elections. This involvement in provincial politics is significant given the time they have been in Canada.

The Cambodians arrived in Canada as refugees between 1979-1987. Most Cambodians were fleeing the Khmer Rouge and arrived in fragmented family and friendship units. The leaders and the educated classes were killed in the genocide. This small community of under 2000 do not have an established geographic community in Toronto. McLellan (1995) suggests that Cambodians derive their sense of community through religious affiliations primarily with Buddhist temples and some in Christian communities. They are mainly small business and working people with limited resources. Many Cambodians arrived in Canada not knowing how to speak English or French. With such a limited community base and a dispersed community, they are mainly organized into networks revolving around internal community matters. Other matters take priority over aspects related to forming a civic identity which does not seem to be a main concern for them.

The overall analysis suggests that those ethnic groups with strong and established communities could use their community as a springboard for successfully running political candidates. Forming a community, however, is based on the ability of an ethnic community to

form community associations and leadership structures. Attributes that seem to be associated with political activity and eventually forming a strong civic identity include all of the variables listed and other variables such as systemic and other forms of discrimination, structural opportunities and factors related to valuing political activities and achievements.

Conclusion

The major limitation of this exploratory research is that it only focuses on ethnic candidates who were confirmed as running for political office or being elected. This, of course, does not address other forms of civic participation which is important to establishing the civic identity of newcomer groups. Other factors also have to be considered such as whether civic identity is an outgrowth of ethnic identity. Or, is civic identity a way of by-passing ethnic identity? Also, are there structural prerequisites for civic identity, and are social organizations a by-product of this identity?

In addition, the portability of civic identity must be examined. Can civic identity from a person's native country be transferred to their host country? How does status and reputation acquired in a person's native country get converted into civic identity in the host society?

How gender influences civic identity needs to be pondered. The roles men and women play in forming civic identity does not appear clear. Levels of participation among men and women in various communities should be examined in order to understand civic identity. Both quality and quantity of gendered participation in ethnic communities and civic affairs should be highlighted in order to determine the difference in civic identity. Overall, the question of patriarchy must be considered when examining civic identity. Are women inhibited from

participating in civic society because of established sexist practices? Is there selective recruitment as well as selective "exclusion"?

The effect discrimination and racism have on civic identity must be taken into account. Members of a host community may not encourage civic involvement of certain ethnic and refugee groups. Discrimination and racism could confound the agency of recognition for civic identity, taking the form of a host community recognizing civic participation differently from the newcomer community. Conversely, discrimination can have the inadvertent effect of influencing heightened civic identity.

Are structural opportunities in Canada such as political parties soliciting ethnic and female candidates really going to help newcomer groups? Soliciting ethnic candidates is by no means a new practice; Canadian political parties having been doing this for years and there are many ethnic candidates who run unsolicited. The question that I am concerned about is whether there is realistically a mutually rewarding relationship between ethnic candidates. Especially in the case of the Right of centre parties who seem less concerned with ethnic rights and more interested in their political image and attempting to shed perceived racist connections. Put more bluntly, can civic identity of ethnic groups be co-opted by political parties.

Finally, this paper focuses on the challenge and process of those newcomer groups, both refugees and immigrants, forming a civic identity in a post-multicultural environment. Post-multiculturalism represents a structural re-arrangement of service deliveries with the withdrawal of state as interventionist. The outcome has been to effectively distance newcomer groups from mainstream society and from their counterparts going through similar experiences. Does post-multiculturalism of necessity encourage "agency" in defining civic identity as no one

else will do it for newcomers since the state is pulling away from such endeavour both technically and structurally? In short, this implies that civic identity is a means for newcomers to integrate into Canadian society through developing their own sense of agency.

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A Case Study of Civic Identity Among Immigrant and Refugee Communities in Toronto

	Jews	Italians	Somalis	Cambodians (Khmer)
Variables				
Language	Jews settling in Lower and Upper Canada during the 1700s could speak at least one of the official languages (if not both).	Italians first settling in Quebec could learn to speak French, close to Latin-based Italian.	Upon arrival in Canada most Somalis do not speak either official languages as their native language is very different and they have difficulty learning.	Upon arrival in Canada most Cambodians do not speak either official languages as their native language is very different and they have difficulty learning.
Friendship Networks	While close ties are maintained with the mainstream Jewish community, friendships with those outside the community is common.	While close ties are maintained with the Italian community, friendships with those outside the community is common.	Close ties are maintained with the relatives and clans. Friendships with those outside the community is not common.	Close ties are maintained with the Khmer community and friendships with those outside the community is not common.
Community Associations	Strong and well organized community associations.	Strong and well organized community associations.	Strong and well organized community associations primarily based on clan affiliation.	Limited community associations.
Leadership	Strong community leadership.	Strong Community Leadership.	Strong clan community leadership.	Weak community leadership.
Political Office	Hart, Ezekiel elected Lower Canada in 1807 and 1808 for Trois Rivières and was not sworn in. Franklin, Selin elected Vancouver Island leg. 1860-3. Franklin, Lumley Mayor of Victoria, B.C. 1866. Nathan, Henry. 1870 B.C. leg.; MP - L Victoria, B.C. 1871-4.	Badanal, Hubert Alderman in Fort Williams, Ont. 1940-8, Mayor 1949-52; MP - L 1958-66. Martini, Quinto Hamilton E. MP - PC defeated 1953, elected 1957-8, def. 62-63. Macaluso, Joseph an Alderman in Hamilton W., Ont. 1960-3; MP - L elected 1963 and 1965.	In the 1995 Ontario provincial elections, three Somalis ran as NDP candidates in the Dixon road area (Etobicoke).	No Cambodians have ran for political office.
Political Party of Candidates	Primarily Liberal, some CCF or NDP and Conservative affiliation among Ontario MPP and other provinces.	Primarily Liberal, but some PC and NDP.	Primarily NDP.	Unclear.
Economic Success	Significant.	Significant.	Limited.	Very limited.
Occupation	Professional and business people.	Professionals, business and trades.	Few professionals, small business owners, and working people.	Some small business people and working people.
Education and Training	High level of post-secondary education.	Significant level of post-secondary education.	Notable post-secondary education.	Few with post-secondary education.
Class	First Arriving primarily as middle class. Today primarily middle and upper-middle class.	First arriving mainly as working people. Today they are primarily middle and upper-middle class. Some working people.	Arriving primarily as Middle-class and working people.	Arriving primarily as working people.
Religion	Jewish	Primarily Catholic	Primarily Moslems.	Primarily Buddhists
Level of immigration (years)	1760; 1871-1886, 1890-1914, 1920-1930, 1941-60, 1975-1981.	1871-1931; 1947-1971	1988-1993	1979-1987
Size of the community	Very Large - Over 114, 730 as of 1991.	Very Large - Over 311, 215 as of 1991.	Moderate 3,735 as of 1991. Today it is estimated to be Large - Between 25,000 -30,000.	Very small -1,765 as of 1991.
Civic participation	Strong.	Strong.	Emerging gradually.	Limited.