immigrant

by Andrea Valente

Abstract:

Português: *Esta entrada tem como objetivo explorar a palavra **imigrante** no contexto canadense, uma vez que o Canadá foi o primeiro país a declarar **multiculturalismo** como sua diretriz nacional para tratar da integração de novos imigrantes que chegam a cada ano. Esta entrada oferece uma visão crítica ao situar a palavra **imigrante** e suas representações sob uma abordagem de topo para base assim como de base para o topo. Isto é, a primeira aborda **discursos e posições governamentais,** enquanto que a segunda trata de **narrativas pessoais**, como por exemplo, escritas de minorias étnicas.*

*Podemos observar que a história nacional do Canadá tem sido marcada por importante contribuições de seus imigrantes. Desde sua **Confederação (1867)**, a presença de imigrantes têm sido essencial para formação social e econômica do país. Mediante isto, o governo canadense vem criando estratégias para atrair determinados imigrantes ao longo de sua história, seja por questões de etnia ou de mão-de-obra, como profissionais qualificados, hoje em dia.*

*Assim, a sociedade canadense é constituída como um **mosaico**, com várias peças que ilustram histórias de vida de imigrantes. Neste sentido, a criação de uma **literatura de imigrantes** oferece uma perspectiva de base para o topo, onde narrativas pessoais descrevem como imigrantes se adaptam ao país, enfrentam os seus desafios, e celebram suas vitórias.*

This entry aims to explore the word **immigrant** in the Canadian context. It offers a critical view by situating the word and its representation from top-down and bottom-up positions; in other words, the former relates to its use in **government discourses**, whereas the latter in personal narratives such as **ethnic minority writings**.

Etymology:

The noun **immigrant** in English refers to a person who has immigrated to a foreign country, that is, a person who moves into another country. The noun **immigrant** derives from the verb **migrate** which has its origins from Latin *migratus*, which means to move from one place to another. The Latin word derives from the Proto-Indo-European root -mei which refers to "change, go, move" (cf. Online Etymology Dictionary). The word was mostly used in reference to animals dislocating from one place to another. It was only in the 18th century that the word started referring to individuals or groups in terms of moving to distant residences. Subsequently, it was added to the American Webster Dictionary in a time when the British colonies in America were being populated.

Cultural specificity:

As a result of globalization, national borders have become porous, enabling high mobility among professional skilled workers, international students, and refugees. Hence, the concept of **immigrant** has become more elusive and relativistic than ever before. In other words, the concept of immigrant becomes fluid, vulnerable to governments' immigration policies, regulations, and attitudes towards newcomers. Due to its amplitude and complexity, this entry focuses on **Canada** and its immigration practices since it has been the first country in the world to have adopted **Multiculturalism** as a governmental policy in **1971**. In this context, the concept of immigrant becomes an umbrella term referring to different categories such as skilled workers, business people, family member reunion, and refugees. With the adoption of **Multiculturalism Policy** and of its upgrade to Act in 1982, the status of being an immigrant became protected by anti-discriminatory laws along with a recognition of immigrants being an asset to the Canadian economy, therefore, gaining a privileged status when compared to other immigrants' conditions across the globe.

Problematization:

Canada has being respected worldwide for attracting and welcoming immigrants and refugees to its 'mosaic' society for the past five decades; however, the history of immigration in Canada has not been as inclusive as one would imagine. Federal and local governments have used immigration policies for their own advantages, as for example, using immigration as part of electoral discourses by attracting or rejecting certain ethnic groups. This trend can be traced since the **Confederation**, when the government allowed entry of groups of immigrants such as British citizens and northern Europeans, while denying entrance to others such such as Chinese and Japanese citizens. The selection of the 'ideal' immigrant was to comply with the the perpetuation of the WASP (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) culture in the new founded country. Yet, selective immigration has been reverberated throughout Canadian history, with the promotion of identity politics.



Figure 1: Selective Immigration Policy

Figure 1 is an example of editorial cartoon published in 1907 in a local Vancouver newspaper (*Saturday Sunset*) denouncing a selective immigration policy that discriminated the 'Orientals' by denying them entrance to Canada.

More recently, with the implementation of immigration **point-based system**, the selective strategy has shifted from ethnicities to 'in-demand occupations', mostly seen in the field of business, engineering, and computer sciences.

The Multiculturalism model emphasizes **integration**, which has been considered more suitable than **assimilation** because immigrants can keep their heritage culture and language while adding the Canadian one during **acculturation process** (Berry 2001). While integration strategy might be seen as favorable to **immigrants' wellbeing** - as they can maintain their sense of self and identity - it can also lead to a position of **duality** in which immigrants may feel divided between their heritage culture and the Canadian in their everyday lives.

Communication strategies:

From a **top-down approach**, the Canadian government has launched immigration campaigns throughout the country's history in order to attract labor force and to increase population.



Figure 2: Poster Propaganda

At the turn of the 20th century, **poster propagandas** were part of a common communication strategy to attract new immigrants to the newly founded country, as shown in Figure 2. Those posters had explicit intentions to attract ethnic groups 'like us' to immigrate to Canada.

After the Second World War, Canada attracted lots of immigrants who had lost their work and lands across Europe. The Canadian government set up offices in post-war Europe to deal with the immigration process and recruitment.

Figure 3: Canadian Immigration Office Abroad

Eventually, more offices were added to other parts of the world in order to attract immigrants mostly from Asia, as shown in Figure 3. Nowadays, Canadian government deals with the immigration process mostly via online, through websites that attract future candidates to apply for immigration via an entry-system pool.

From a **bottom-up approach**, minority/ethnic writings (e.g. literary texts such as auto-fiction) can be seen as a mode of expression and communication in which readers can identify themselves with characters who deal with immigrant experiences in Canada. Thus, **immigrant narratives** can offer those readers some emotional support for the ones who struggle to live in **duality**, that is, feeling divided between two (or sometimes even more than two) cultures and languages.

The duality has been a constant point of tension in ethnic writings since it deals with stress as the protagonist undergoes a process of acculturation. For example, to communicate points of tensions in immigrants' life, the Italian-Canadian writer, C.D. Minni, narrates a story of an Italian boy as he lives through his adaptation to the Canadian society, as seen in the following extract:

"He did not know at what point he had become Mike. One day looking for a suitable translation of his name and finding none, he decided that Mike was closest. By the end of the summer, he was Mario at home, and Mike in the streets." (1985, p. 33)

This duality is a result of the **hyphenated identity** promoted by multiculturalism, allowing ethnic immigrant groups to develop strategies of integration to the host society.

Subversion:

Representations of immigrants' experience in Canada are usually mediated by editorial cartoons and minority writings. Editorial cartoons usually take a provocative look to criticize government policies and discourses by using visual rhetoric to denounce systemic racism, selective immigration, and social inequalities that immigrants and ethnic groups may encounter in Canada.

Yet, minority narratives can be a space where ethnic writers can reflect about their own or their ethnic group experience as immigrants during their acculturation period in Canada. Somehow, they become the translator or spokesperson of their ethnic group by recounting immigrants' struggles during their adaptation as they deal with the everyday challenges of different languages, cultures, and value-systems. Not only are these narratives based on ethnic groups' experiences in Canada, but also on individuals' perspectives of their daily lives as an immigrant in a multicultural society. Issues of **sense belonging** and of **redefinition of the Self** are constant themes in minority writings since they can affect immigrants' health, physically and mentally. Thus, those narratives can be seen as a space for **building resilience**, not only for the protagonist but also for the reader, who may project themselves into those stories in an attempt to reframe their lives as they deal with **acculturative stressors** (e.g. language, belief system, culture, etc.) with more confidence.

Discussion:

While immigrants in Canada have been given much more opportunities to integrate and succeed than in any other countries due to the Multiculturalism model established 50 years ago, the selective practice is still in place, reinforcing an imbalance in the society, by triggering discrimination among ethnic immigrant groups and by increasing social inequalities. Moreover, it may create ethnic enclaves and socio-economic divisions which can hinder **social cohesion** (Bissoondath, 1994) not only on an urban level but also on the fabrics of the Canadian society.

Editorial cartoons and minority writings can be seen as a critical response to immigration policies, laws, and incentives. These responses not only deal with external challenges imposed by a new environment, culture, and language, but also with internal ones such as the redefinition of the Self, as mostly seen in immigrant's writings. The **Canadian immigrant duality** that emerges from those stories usually shows ethnic characters dealing with **ethnic identity crisis** while in attempt to restore their 'selves'. As one of the pioneer scholars in ethnic minority literature in Canada, Joseph Pivato mentions that those characters "feel rejected by the larger society because they are different, or because they are seen as inferior. Their sense of otherness causes them to have not only identity problems but feelings of self-hatred" (2003, p.51). Furthermore, the author states that "self-disesteem" becomes a ubiquitous mark in those narratives.

Most of arguments on ethnic writing has been supported by examples taken from ethnic literature produced between 1980s and 1990s in Canada, with a majority of writers coming from the margins of Europe, with Italian, Greek, Ukrainian, and Jewish backgrounds. Yet, with the advent of the 21st century, Canada has seen a shift of groups of immigrants mostly coming from Asian as **skilled workers** and **international students** who have been able to apply to permanent residence from within. Simultaneously, ethnic studies seem to have withered and been decentralized because new paradigms have taken place such as **transnationalism** and **diasporas** as these frameworks challenge traditional notions of ethnicity that is marked by being "nationally bounded, localized, and essentialized" (Wong and Guo, 2018, p. 18).

In this respect, we can raise some questions for further thoughts:

- How could this new paradigm offer a resilience space for immigrant's stories when dealing with self/group ethnic identity crisis?
- How can immigrant's experiences challenge top-down discourses of Canadian immigration policies from a transnational paradigm?
- Taking into account that most immigrants come from countries with strong ethnic identities, how can transnational writing deal with questions of Othering?
- What is the place of current immigrants' stories in a transnational paradigm while Canadian Multiculturalism evolves?

References/Further Readings:

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Figure 1:

1907. Black and white cartoon depicting the illustrator's interpretation of immigration policy.[Poster]. Vancouver Public Library, Special Collections, VPL 39046. https://www.canadashistory.ca/explore/settlement-immigration/the-lessons-of-the-anti-asiatic-riot

Figure 2:

1911. *40000 Men Needed in Western Canada. Poster to encourage American immigration* [Poster]. Library and Archives Canada. https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=2837964

Figure 3:

1972. Political Cartoon depicting a Canadian Immigration Officer and Uganda Asian Refugee. Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21.Political Cartoon depicting a Canadian immigration officer and Uganda Asian refugee, 1972 | Pier 21

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