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# Debunking the Narratives of Inclusion: Immigration Policy in Quebec, Canada, and the United States in the Age of Trump

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Narratives of inclusion and successful immigration stories permeate Canadian popular culture. Often compared as an equally desirable destination to the United States, Canada is frequently heralded as a refuge for immigrants; specifically, those seeking asylum. Frequently exalted as a morally superior nation to its southerly neighbors, Canada represents itself in the international arena as a country that celebrates, respects, and cares for all of its members—regardless of their sometimes precarious immigration status by emphasizing the multiculturalism of Canadian society. Such stories also permeate national history and therefore leave out the voices of the “other” and ignore episodes of overt discrimination. As such, this account of the Canadian narrative as a welcoming safe harbor is not always accurate as globalization and concerns over national security threaten to uproot the hegemonic perpetuation of racial stereotypes and justifications of exclusion. Illustrating these failures of the Canadian government to uphold its revered image, are the stories of Abdoul Abdi, a Somalian refugee who faced deportation after the Canadian government neglected to apply for his citizenship while he was a minor in the foster care

system; and those of Haitian refugees once living in the United States with protected status crossing into Quebec by the hundreds in 2017 to seek asylum in Canada. With the aid of the two aforementioned case studies, explored through review of academic literature and news stories, this paper seeks to dismantle the commonly believed fallacies surrounding the immigration and refugee policies in the United States, Canada, and Quebec in the Age of Trump.

Stories are integral to the remembering of the past and the shaping of the future. National narratives are created, reinforced, and bolstered to suit political motives. Sometimes, however, these narratives are dissected and examined to reveal fallacies and insidious hegemony. In the United States, Theodor Seuss Geisel, more commonly known by his penname Dr. Seuss, challenged national histories in his children’s books and cartoons. Specifically concerned with environmental, social, and political problems plaguing the United States and world, Dr. Seuss is still celebrated today as an activist and beloved storyteller. A political cartoon from 1941 created by Seuss criticized America’s policy on denying European Jews escaping the Holocaust entry to the United States. It read, “...and the world chewed up the children and spit out their bones. But those were foreign children and it didn’t really matter.” Additionally, the depiction of the mother figure is seen wearing a shirt that boasts the words, “America First!” This type of egocentric rhetoric mimics that of the political climate of the United States in the Age of Trump as neoliberal policies and laws restricting immigration to the country are aimed to “Make America Great Again” (Gilbert, 2017). This idealization of the role that strict immigration policies can play in society can be a tool to perpetuate discrimination. Yet, discriminatory policies are not limited within the borders of the United States

and are additionally visible in Quebec and Canada.

As a result, stories told in the United States, Canada, and Quebec concerning immigration are not only inaccurate, but also dangerous. Canadian popular culture promotes multiculturalism and inclusion in line with the country's 1988 Official Multiculturalism Act, which was passed at the federal level of government. Yet, the reality of multiculturalism often differs from the official policy as immigrant groups are often confronted by barriers following their emigration from their home countries. Instead of successful multiculturalism wherein immigrants are encouraged to retain their heritage and practice their customs, the reality is assimilationist in nature (Lambert and Taylor, 1988). Hence, an imagined collective national history minimizes the plight of those unable to fit into this vision of the typical Canadian immigrant that assimilates easily into society. Quebec, with its additional immigration policies and requirements, furthers the perpetuation of exclusion within the Canadian federation as it favors interculturalism rather than multiculturalism. The paradigm of interculturalism seeks to unite diverse groups and promote integration of newcomers into society. Multiculturalism, as imagined by the Canadian federal government, is founded upon the idea that all cultures are equal and can exist more independently of one another under the mirage of pluralism and inclusion (Meer, 2016). Thus, interculturalism and multiculturalism are tools that aid Canada and Quebec in being viewed as more inclusive and less discriminatory than their neighbors to the south, who are regarded in popular culture as a "melting pot." Canadian exceptionalism often overshadows the crimes committed against immigrants and asylum seekers north of the United States border. The dialogue sparked through the campaign and later election of United States President

Donald Trump continues to unravel the alarming racism embedded in American society and, thus, Canadians are compelled to examine their own biases and problematic immigration policies. The first case study to be examined in this paper is the story of Abdoul Abdi, a Somalian refugee who faced deportation after the Canadian government neglected to apply for his citizenship while he was a minor in the foster care system. The second case study focuses on the plight of Haitian refugees once living in the United States with protected status crossing into Quebec by the hundreds in 2017 to seek asylum in Canada. These two examples encapsulate the way in which the North American continent is rife with racism and exclusion, specifically in regard to immigration policy and unofficial practice.

The official stories that these North American nations promote are shockingly different, as the narratives of "Land of the Free and The Home of the Brave" and "The True North Strong and Free" contrast with the reality of racism and exclusion. With the aid of the two aforementioned case studies, explored through a review of academic literature and news stories, this paper seeks to dismantle the commonly believed fallacies surrounding inclusivity of immigration and refugee policies in the United States, Canada, and Quebec in the Age of Trump.

Global migrants are charged with overwhelming responsibility as they leave their homes and families in search of settlement or seek asylum someplace else. Application delays, financial difficulties, linguistic challenges, unestablished or under-established ties to the new community, or barriers to access to social services are common (Aubrey, 2017). One of the most difficult and important challenges faced by refugees and immigrants is the access to healthcare

both in their countries of origin and in their new homes (Liu, 2016). As such, language barriers, lack of information about how to access or navigate services, long wait lists, and lack of culturally suited services in the destination country contribute to the dilemma of improper or insufficient healthcare amongst immigrants to both the United States and Canada (Kalich, 2016). Canadian exceptionalism is present in the reality of public healthcare. While it is true that immigrants can be eligible for coverage under the public plan, vast inequalities exist in the care that is received and the timeline in which it is provided (Lu, Kaushal, Denier and Wang, 2017). For the very old and the very young, this reality is felt even more strongly (Yeo, 2017). Long waitlists for surgeries, difficulty in accessing family care physicians and the price of pharmaceutical drugs can be overwhelming to newcomers. Also, access to the public regime of healthcare can take months to secure as there is often a waiting period and varying criteria to be satisfied before the issue of a card. This discrepancy between real and imagined narratives can cause confusion and distress in immigrant populations and can contribute to further displacement and insecurities (Browne, Kumar, Puente-Duran, Georgiades, Leckie and Jenkins, 2017).

Furthermore, especially following the 2010 Haitian earthquake, Haitian migrants to the United States spiked in numbers. Yet, under Donald Trump's administration, the protected status of these Haitian nationals soon ended (Campbell, 2017). Haitians living in the United States under this protected status therefore have three choices. The first would be to go into hiding in the United States and risk deportation and isolation. The second choice is to return to Haiti at their own risk, where the economic, political, and social conditions are still dire. The third option would be to attempt to cross into Canada, and most specifically Quebec, where

the majority of the population speaks French. This linguistic factor is especially important as knowledge of the majority language directly corresponds to work opportunities and education (Abelson, 2017). Many Haitians that cross into Canada face a 90% rejection rate for their refugee claimant applications, filed after illegally entering the country (Campbell, 2017). Temporary shelters, being in Quebec and Ontario, place further burden on an already financially stressed and backlogged immigrant processing system (Press, 2017). Haitian refugee claimants make up a visible portion of the nearly 50,000 applications awaiting review in Canada this year (Markusoff, 2018).

Consequently, discourses surrounding Haitian asylum seekers that migrate from the United States to Canada often ignore the direct contribution of these two countries to the deplorable realities currently facing Haiti, and more generally the global South (Esses, 2017). Policies of exploitation of labor and resources have shaped Haiti both in colonial and neo-colonial times. With Canada and the United States as active participants in the problems facing Haiti, even more so following the devastating earthquake at the beginning of the decade, North America owes Haiti a substantial debt. From environmental exploitation to human displacement and dispossession, Canada and the United States have ravaged Haiti. Moreover, the United States explicitly removed its clause about America being a nation of immigrants from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services mandate (Hjelmgard, 2018). The previous mission statement read: "USCIS secures America's promise as a nation of immigrants by providing accurate and useful information to our customers, granting immigration and citizenship benefits, promoting an awareness and understanding of citizenship, and ensuring the integrity of our

immigration system.” The current mission statement says: “U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services administers the nation’s lawful immigration system, safeguarding its integrity and promise by efficiently and fairly adjudicating requests for immigration benefits while protecting Americans, securing the homeland, and honoring our values” (Tropp & Okamoto, 2018).

Both the current and former statements employ the word “integrity.” In the mandate put forth by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), there is no mention of integrity and instead, the Canadian government seeks to “maintain Canada’s humanitarian tradition by protecting refugees and people in need of protection” (Citizenship Canada, 2018).

The aforementioned “tradition” of protecting refugees and the propagation of a just immigration system is misleading. The tradition of the Canadian government has been to exclude migrants from entering the country’s borders based upon race and religion. The tradition extends from Chinese Head Taxes to the rejection of Jewish migrants escaping war-torn Europe and the atrocities of the Holocaust. These policies, both official and unofficial were rife with overt discrimination. Meanwhile, around the time of Canadian Confederation, thousands of British subjects were welcomed with opened hearts. The open-door-policy was viewed as a progressive and positive endeavour but was laden with racism and exclusion (Décoste, 2014). This imagined humanitarianism is further debunked with the case study of 25-year-old, Abdoul Abdi. Abdi, who came as a child and grew up alongside Canadian citizens, never believed that he was anything but. As a minor in the foster care system for over a decade, he should have been properly cared for as a ward of the Canadian

state. He recently was released from prison after serving four-and-a-half years with charges including aggravated assault.

Yet, following his release, he was immediately detained by the Canada Border Services Agency on immigration grounds. He spent months facing deportation to Somalia, a country where he had never set foot. He was born in Saudi Arabia to Somali parents and following his mother’s death, Abdi came to Canada at age six with his aunt. According a CBC article from January 2018, Abdi wants the Canadian government to do a better job with managing the foster care system countrywide. The article goes on to say that now that he is out of prison, Abdi said he is no longer a danger to society and just wants to be a father to his child. After spending his childhood in 31 placements within Nova Scotia’s foster care system and with no secondary education, Abdi wishes to remain a constant figure in his child’s life (Zimonjic, 2018).

Just as Abdi’s child will grow up with the influence of Canadian norms and narratives, Abdoul Abdi was a product of the Canadian state (Williams, 2018a). Abdi’s story is not unique as religious or ethnic minorities are often not given proper resources in the foster care system. This furthers the notion that within the social, political, and economic domains of Canadian and American society there exists ongoing pervasive racism and a deeply embedded colonial story (Williams, 2018b). As such, two advocacy groups have intervened on behalf of Abdi for his judicial review. Both the Canadian Civil Liberties Association and Justice for Children and Youth groups believe that the country has failed Abdi (Canadian Press, 2018). Abdoul Abdi stands as a symbol of the inequality and racism woven into Canada’s immigration policies and further diminishes

the belief of Canadian exceptionalism.

The Canadian government's detainment, deportation, and deplorable treatment of certain individuals in precarious situations of "status" within Canada is often exacerbated if one belongs to a racialized minority group. Yet, for immigrants to the United States, obtaining American citizenship was less "identity-changing" and more of a logical "next step" in the procedural trajectory of naturalization. In contrast to this bleak regard for citizenship, immigrants to Canada were more likely to respond with pride for Canadian citizenship and a feeling of inclusion within the Canadian mosaic (Aptekar, 2016). However, these responses were complicated and challenged by race and status upon arriving in the new country.

Narratives of inclusion and successful immigration stories saturate Canadian popular culture. Often considered as an equally desirable destination to the United States, Canada is frequently heralded as a refuge for immigrants seeking asylum. Frequently exalted as a morally superior nation to its southerly neighbors, Canada represents itself in the international arena as a country that celebrates, respects, and cares for all of its members—regardless of their sometimes precarious immigration status by emphasizing the multiculturalism of Canadian society.

Such stories also permeate national history and therefore leave out the voices of the "other" and ignore episodes of overt discrimination. As such, this account of the Canadian anecdote as a welcoming safe harbor is not always accurate as globalization and concerns over national security threaten to uproot the hegemonic perpetuation of racial stereotypes and justifications of exclusion. Excluded from these narratives are the Haitian nationals seeking asylum in the Canadian federation

with the looming reality that their protective status in the United States is coming to an end in 2019. Excluded from this account is Abdoul Abdi, a product of his environment within Canada, not in spite of it. These case studies are only two of the thousands each year that serve to obliterate Canadian exceptionalism. Quebec, Canada, and the United States in the Age of Trump are just as they have always been. They have been, and continue to be built on stolen land and both sustained and bettered by diverse immigration. Whether or not the national narratives will ever align with this reality is to be determined.



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