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The Face of the New West: An Emerging Identity Crisis in Stampede City

DEREK COOK
City of Calgary

The West is changing. Over the past 30 years, population growth in the four western provinces has greatly exceeded that of Canada, to the extent that these provinces are now home to close to one third of Canada's population – and more than three quarters of their population is urban. A thriving economy continues to attract people from across Canada and around the world to vibrant and growing western cities.

As the West grows, its face is changing. It has always been a multicultural milieu, built on the strength of immigrants from diverse places such as Ukraine, Scandinavia, China and other regions of the world. Recent changes in immigration have added to this rich cultural heritage by welcoming new citizens from new areas. As cultural communities continue to establish themselves and develop in cities such as Calgary, the face of the West grows increasingly diverse.

Calgary proudly proclaims itself to be the "Heart of the New West." More and more, however, it is also the "Face of the New West." Over the past two decades, immigration to Calgary has steadily increased while the source countries of immigration have shifted. As in the rest of Canada, immigration to Calgary from western regions of the world has declined while immigration from non-western regions, such as Asia, has grown. This has contributed to increasing cultural diversity in Calgary as approximately half of new immigrants are

members of a visible minority. By 2001, Calgary had become the fourth most ethnically diverse urban area in Canada. According to the 2006 Census, approximately one in four Calgary residents are now visible minorities, and roughly the same percentage are immigrants.

Growing cultural diversity brings to cities like Calgary tremendous opportunities to build on the rich traditions, skills and resources of our many cultural communities. As Calgary establishes itself as a global centre of influence, capitalizing on this cultural heritage is even more important. At the same time, there are very real challenges to realizing this potential.

Multiculturalism and exclusion in Canadian cities

As the Canadian population becomes more and more diverse, there is rising concern about the potential exclusion of immigrants and racialized groups from the social, economic and cultural life of the community. This is of particular interest in Canada's large urban centres, where the possible emergence of entrenched patterns of exclusion is a source of concern. This is fuelled in part by the increasing importance of immigration for Canada's social and economic prosperity, with immigration being one of the key factors accounting for the growing multicultural character of Canadian society.

Canada's multiculturalism policy was enacted to avoid the risk of social exclusion by facilitating the coexistence of multiple identities within society. Recently, however, this policy has been the object of criticism, as some suggest that it is detrimental to social cohesion, since it fails to establish common values and goals for society as a whole. This criticism stems from the observation of increasing patterns of marginalization and exclusion.

Economic exclusion is one of the most significant dimensions of exclusion. Whereas previously, immigrants faced challenges with settlement, they were able to "catch up" on an economic level to their Canadian-born counterparts within a matter of years. There is growing concern, however, that more recent immigrants are not advancing as had previous generations. Poverty rates for immigrants and visible minorities remain persistently high, while income and employment rates remain low.

As patterns of disadvantage become entrenched, there is concern that patterns of cultural

segregation and exclusion are also becoming entrenched. While Canadian cities do not yet exhibit racial segregation to the extent witnessed in the United States, there is evidence of the emergence of neighbourhoods where race and poverty converge. This may result in entrenched exclusion where the opportunities for advancement are limited by the mutually reinforcing factors of race, class and geography.

The socio-economic conditions of Calgary's diverse communities

Despite a robust local economy, immigrants and visible minority persons continue to face significant economic challenges. In 2005, the median income of immigrant families in Calgary was only 87% that of the rest of the total population, down from 89% in 2000. The income of recent immigrants was even lower, at only 67% of the total population. Labour market outcomes are similarly weaker for recent immigrants. In 2006, the unemployment rate for recent immigrants was 7%, almost double the Calgary rate of 4%. Participation and employment rates were also roughly 5% lower (Statistics Canada 2008). Although 2006 data are not yet available, recent immigrants and visible minority persons have historically reported poverty rates significantly higher than the average.

In 2006, the City of Calgary commissioned a comprehensive assessment of the issues and needs of Calgarians (Calgary 2008). According to this survey, titled *Signposts*, recent immigrants and visible minority persons face significantly greater economic challenges than the rest of the population. Immigrants and visible minority persons were significantly more likely to be concerned about not having enough money for food or housing, not saving enough, or having too much debt. In fact, approximately half of visible minority persons and recent immigrants were somewhat or very concerned about not having enough money for food.

Financial pressures can result in high levels of stress. While stress levels among immigrants and visible minority persons are comparable to the rest of the population, their ability to access recreation and leisure opportunities to manage such stressors appear to be significantly more constrained. Over 40% of visible minority persons and almost 50% of recent immigrants reported concern that they did not have recreation or leisure time.

FIGURE 1
Population of 18 years and older reporting basic needs challenges, by immigrant status, Calgary, 2006

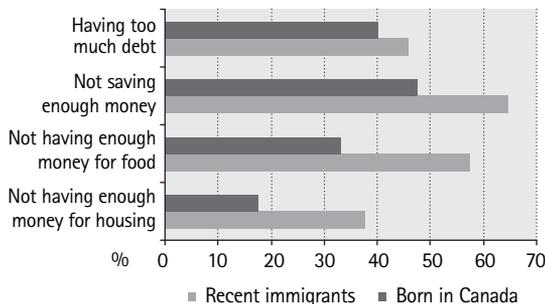


FIGURE 2
Population of 18 years and older reporting basic needs challenges, by visible minority status, Calgary, 2006

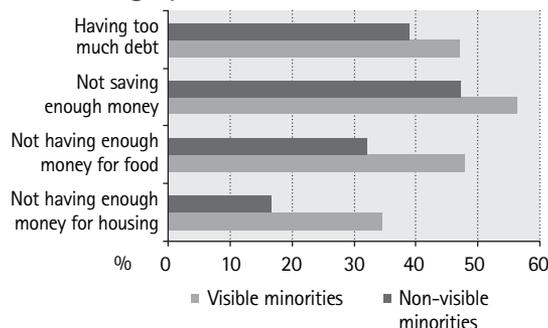


FIGURE 3
Population of 18 years and older reporting stress concerns, by immigrant status, Calgary, 2006

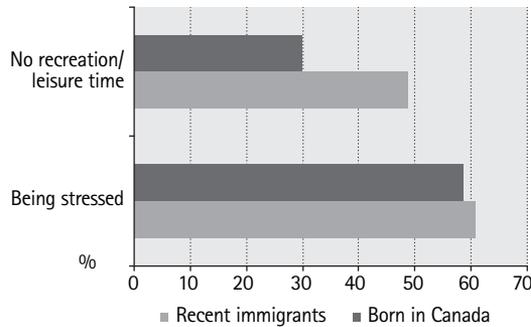
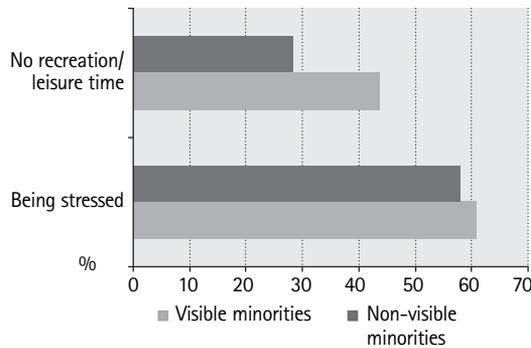


FIGURE 4
Population of 18 years and older reporting stress concerns, by visible minority status, Calgary, 2006



A city for all? Social inclusion in Calgary

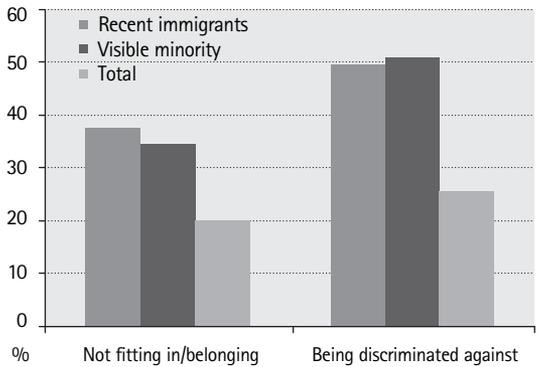
In light of the important issues of economic marginalization facing immigrants and racialized persons in Calgary, concern arises about the extent of social and cultural exclusion as well. The 2006 *Signposts* survey revealed that immigrants and visible minority persons were no less likely than other Calgarians to report that Calgary is a good place to live, that they trust others, that they feel like they belong, and that others accept them. This suggests that immigrants and visible minorities do not feel particularly excluded from community life.

With respect to issues of participation, however, immigrants and visible minorities were less likely than the total population to report participating in the community. Only 57% of recent immigrants reported that they participate in community activities and events, compared to 65.9% of visible minorities and 68.2% of the total population. Similarly, only 54.2% of recent immigrants indicated that they volunteer for organizations, compared to 58.0% of visible minorities and

59.3% of the total population. Recent immigrants and visible minorities were also significantly less likely to report that they vote than the total population, although this may reflect eligibility to vote.

In addition to beliefs and measures of participation, the survey also asked respondents about issues of concern to them. Here, there were significant differences between the immigrant and visible minority populations and the total population. Despite originally stating that they “belong” in Calgary, when asked specifically about their concern with not fitting in or belonging, 37.6% of recent immigrants and 34.6% of visible minorities were concerned, compared to only 20% of the total population. Further, when asked about concerns regarding racism and discrimination, half of recent immigrants (49.7%) and visible minorities (51%) expressed concerned, compared to only 25.7% of the total population.

FIGURE 5
Population of 18 years and older expressing concerns regarding belonging, by immigrant and visibility minority status, Calgary, 2006



According to the survey, therefore, while recent immigrants and visible minorities tend to feel that Calgary is a good place to live and that others accept them, one third also remain concerned about not fitting in or belonging. At the same time, there is strong concern about racism and discrimination. Both recent immigrants and visible minorities also tend to report lower levels of participation in community activities, volunteering, voting and membership in a community association.

Stampede city: An identity in need of a crisis

In a Calgary grocery chain, stores include an “ethnic food” aisle containing items such as rice,

TABLE 1

Indicators of social inclusion and civic participation, Calgary, 2006

	Percentage "somewhat" or "strongly" agreeing with statements		
	Recent immigrants	Visible minorities	All Calgarians
Is Calgary a good place to live?	96.7%	96.2%	97.2%
Do you socialize with other Calgarians?	91.2%	93.2%	95.2%
Do you volunteer for organizations?	54.2%	58.0%	59.3%
Do you participate in community activities and events?	57.0%	65.9%	68.2%
Are you able to influence what goes on?	65.5%	56.0%	58.3%
Do you feel like you belong in Calgary?	92.3%	93.0%	91.9%
Do you have a lot in common with others?	83.9%	87.6%	90.1%
Do Calgarians accept you?	95.5%	91.1%	94.9%
Do you trust other Calgarians?	94.5%	87.7%	93.5%
Do you vote?	47.9%	80.4%	88.1%
Are you a member of your Community Association?	18.1%	25.7%	31.3%

curry paste and other such foods. The concept of "ethnic food" is instructive as its corollary is "non-ethnic" food which, by default, includes all the other food in the store. However, there is of course no food that is non-ethnic by nature. The singular categorization of rice and curry as "ethnic" to the exclusion of everything else speaks to the deeply rooted idea that non-western cultural traditions are "other." By extension, this reflects the equally deep-seated notion that persons of non-European heritage are not "from here" and gives rise to the much despised question "Where are you from?" that persistently greets visible minority persons regardless of their citizenship. The assumption that those of non-European origin are not "from here" gets to the heart of Calgary's self-identity, which is rooted in cultural traditions such as the Calgary Stampede, which is based on a celebration of western cultural heritage.

In fact, Calgary's "cowboy" persona, while strong, has never been an entirely accurate fit. This identity does not account for the critical role of numerous cultures in the development of the city, including prominent Sikh and Chinese settlers and communities that have been part of the city from its foundation. The ongoing assumption of non-Europeans and non-Caucasians as being "other" further belies the fact that fully one third of Calgary's visible minority population was born in Canada. Nor does the cowboy persona accurately reflect the extremely global nature of Calgary's economy, which is largely based on energy. As a key player in global energy markets, there is a strong international business connection which sees the regular interchange of professional and skilled workers between Calgary and countries in the Middle East, Africa and Southeast Asia.

As Calgary's cultural composition becomes ever more complex, its self-definition is being challenged. Over the coming years, Calgary will need to reconcile its public identity as Stampede City with the reality of a diverse multi-ethnic and internationally engaged citizenry and business community. Recent events suggest that this redefinition will not be without stress. According to Statistics Canada (2008), in 2006 Calgary had the highest rate of hate crime among major Canadian cities, roughly three times above the national average, and in 2007, Calgary accounted for 19 of Alberta's 28 anti-Semitic incidents (Klein and Bromberg 2008). In early 2007, a White supremacist organization, the Aryan Guard, was formed in Calgary after unsuccessful attempts to establish itself in Edmonton and Kitchener, Ontario. Since then, the Aryan Guard has staged a number of public demonstrations that were met with strong counter-protests by anti-racism activists.

The challenge to respond to ever greater cultural complexity is also being posed to Calgary's public and voluntary sectors. In 2007, a community forum was organized in Calgary by the United Nations Association in Canada (UNAC). Participants raised a variety of concerns regarding diversity, notably that diverse groups and visible minority persons are not well-connected in the community and are consequently excluded from power and decision making. The lack of public role models who are members of a visible minority group was also seen as a challenge, particularly for youth. While it was acknowledged that public and community organizations are striving to respond to the needs of an increasingly diverse community, participants felt that they were not well-equipped to do so, nor did they

know how to respond to people from diverse backgrounds who wish to participate (UNAC 2008).

Responding to this challenge will be critical for the future well-being of Calgary's social as well as economic environment. Recent research indicates that while new immigrants are increasingly drawn to Calgary, there is a net outflow of more established immigrants (Pruegger and Cook 2008). As the local labour force increasingly relies on and competes for immigration to meet employment needs, making Calgary a community of choice will be necessary to enhance Calgary's national competitiveness as a city.

Forging ahead: Through the looking glass darkly

As Calgary, as a community, collectively grapples with its emerging identity, several policy initiatives are worthy of note. The City of Calgary has, over the past several years, developed a number of policy initiatives aimed at enhancing the social sustainability of the city. In 2003, the City adopted a Triple Bottom Line approach to planning and decision making, which requires all decisions to take account of their social, economic and environmental impacts. One of the key policy goals embedded in this policy is the creation of an "Inclusive City." In 2007, the City of Calgary further adopted the Fair Calgary policy, which aims to ensure that City programs and facilities are accessible to citizens regardless of cultural and other characteristics. Finally, the City's Sustainable Ethical and Environmental Purchasing Policy also gives special consideration to suppliers that have corporate diversity strategies.

On September 11, 2006, the City of Calgary publicly signed a declaration to join the Canadian Coalition of Municipalities Against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD). In doing so, the City committed to sharing initiatives with other municipalities and developing an action plan to eliminate racism and discrimination towards all marginalized groups defined in human rights legislation including Aboriginal peoples, visible minority persons, and persons with disabilities. In 2008, an action plan was completed and passed by Council, and is currently awaiting Council approval for funding allocation.

The City of Calgary also seeks to further the understanding of issues of diversity through the support of research in partnership with the University of Calgary. The Urban Alliance is a unique City-university partnership that seeks to connect university researchers with City business units that have operationally focused research needs. In 2008, the Urban Alliance defined immigrant integration as one of its highest priorities for research and innovation.

If Calgary is truly emerging as not only the heart, but also the face of the new West, it will need to continue to look closely in the mirror to discern what that face is. Undoubtedly, Calgary's western heritage tradition will always figure prominently in the city's identity, so the face in the mirror will most likely continue to wear a cowboy hat for some time to come. However, the challenge now presenting itself to the community is how to reconcile that identity in a productive way that makes room for multiple identities and allows everyone to see themselves in the public face of the city. In the end, the city's long-term social and economic viability may depend on it.

About the author

DEREK COOK is a Research Social Planner at the City of Calgary, with research interests in issues of poverty, diversity and the labour force as they affect social inclusion and sustainability.

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