

GLOCAL RURAL: HOME IN THE WORLD AND THE WORLDING OF HOME

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ABSTRACT

Before embarking on the lengthy studies that will follow during this colloquium, it is important to define the stakes of cultural diversity in a “glocal rural” context. What does “glocal” mean? How can the “global” be reflected in the “local”? How is cultural diversity in a rural area different from cultural diversity in an urban context? How are the concepts of “pluralism” and “identity” experienced in various regions of Canada? The speaker will try to answer these questions in order to help the conference’s participants better appreciate the scope of the presentations they will be hearing over the next two days.

RÉSUMÉ

D'entrée de jeu, il est important de définir les enjeux de la diversité culturelle dans un contexte de ruralité et de mondialisation. Comment la mondialisation affecte-t-elle les milieux ruraux comparativement aux milieux urbains? Comment se définissent les concepts de « pluralisme » et « d'identité » dans les différentes régions rurales du Canada? La conférencière tentera de répondre à ces questions afin de permettre aux participants de ce colloque de mieux apprécier les conférences qui seront prononcées au cours des deux prochains jours.

Being an immigrant is a profound ongoing act of invention.

—*Kirin Desai*

Perhaps what we are seeking is “an ethic of living together.”

—*Bhabha, 2001, Montreal*

I am here

I'd like to begin by clarifying the position from which I will speak in this talk, as it is a complicated one. Our bodies speak even before we open our mouths, and mine is a complex speaking position.

In my teaching and research, I identify myself as an Anglophone *Néo-Québécoise*, one with limited personal history or lived familiarity with the most influential movements and events in modern Quebec or the changing ethnic relations in the Eastern Townships. I am also one keenly aware of the privileged position from which I speak: a white Canadian-born citizen; insulated from the slightest danger of deportation, refusal of entry at the border or indefinite detention for reasons of national security; financially secure; an Anglophone; and unconcerned that my Canadian professional degrees will ever be questioned. Yet based on my twenty year commitment as a social justice and antiracism educator, I hope in my research and comments to approach questions of pluralism and inclusion from the sightline of the most vulnerable in our society (I'm thinking of racialized allophone immigrant and refugee youth that are the subject of other research I conduct). These identificatory and epistemic commitments inform my goal of contributing to the collective construction of a distinct society committed to equity, solidarity and metamorphosis.

Reframing the Eastern Townships as a space of the 'Glocal Rural'

This conference is aimed at raising the question of social and cultural diversity in relation to the Eastern Townships. The discursive novelty of this premise raises a series of questions:

1. Is diversity only about culture? Is ethnicity really lived so homogeneously in the Eastern Townships? Which ethnic (ethnolinguistic, ethnoracial) affiliations set the terms within discourses of "cultural diversity" and which are silenced even as they are spectacularized?¹
2. Is ethnic diversity solely a product of immigration (and, by implication, a historically recent phenomenon)?
3. Are we thinking of immigration as a single unidirectional event, or do we consider the forms of diversity produced by the movement of people over a period of time? (Research shows migration is increasingly lived as a dynamic field of transnational and intraregional flows and allegiances; much of the to-and-fro of homes reflects different moments in people's lives and occurs within the region and province, as well as interprovincially and internationally.)
4. Is diversity a problem (even the term "challenge" still implies problems and demands) or is it an opportunity? Thinking about diversity in terms of language we see a vivid example of different orientations to this question: do we see and treat

- immigrant/refugee students as kids who can't speak French/English or as polyglots expanding their linguistic resources (and our collective ethnolinguistic and human capital)?
5. Do immigrants and refugees carry this diversity, and can one measure it in terms of the number of racialized bodies in a given space? (This is the implication when school board administrators and teachers tell me: "We don't have a lot of multiculturalism here.")
 6. A grave weakness in seeing diversity primarily as a product of immigration is the erasure of First Nations Peoples; at the same time, in organizing a conference, is it tenable to presume that questions of pluralism and citizenship can be productively discussed within a framework that collapses distinctions between the claims and projects of these very different equity-seeking groups?

About the term "glocal": research attests that our society is undergoing profound changes associated with changing demographics, new immigration patterns and an increasingly interdependent, globalized cultural economy. According to the 2001 census, 47% of Canadians claim ethnic heritage other than British, French or Canadian, while it is projected that by 2016, visible minorities will account for fully 20% of the Canadian population (Statistics Canada 2002b). The numbers we see in relation to Sherbrooke are less dramatic (Statistics Canada, 2002b) and yet we think of ourselves as Québécois and Canadians in relation to national discourses of identity; clearly, the changing face of our society is reflected in our evolving sense of national and ethnic identity.

Changing demographic and discursive² formations (or 'landscapes' if you like) also pose an urgent challenge to researchers, service providers and community groups interested in understanding and building upon social diversity in order to develop a wealth of knowledge and understanding within our society to form the basis of a larger movement to transform inequitable cultural and material relations.

Compounding the challenge is the uneven spread of racialized minority communities across our society. In terms of immigrant communities, it is worthwhile to note that according to Statistics Canada immigrants tend to prefer cities, comprising 27% of urban populations versus 6% of rural populations (Statistics Canada, 2002a). In the case of Aboriginal communities, the opposite tendency holds true. According to the Canadian Institutes of Health research, over 50% of Aboriginal peoples live in rural or Northern Canada (2003). Yet within education and other sectors, multiculturalism

tends to be perceived as a strictly urban issue, irrelevant to rural areas even as “so much change that is inherently multicultural in nature is affecting and will drastically affect rural schools in the years to come” (Yeo, 1999, p. 6).

The organization of this conference is inspired, then, by a vision of diversity as an ongoing process of social and political change. Rural areas such as the Eastern Townships have long histories of intercultural contact, including, amongst others: across the international border; between linguistic and faith-based communities; between settlers and both European and African American United Empire Loyalists; and between First Nations and settler/immigrant communities.

Particular to the current period of globalization are: expanded transnational labour demands; economic interdependency; and accelerated flows of mediated culture (see Appadurai, 1996) that reflect not only the commodification of difference as marketing goes global, but also a Manichaeian³ securitization of difference within the War on Terror (we live in an age in which borders barely exist for products like satellite television, *YouTube* and financial investment, while an increasingly sophisticated system of walls, no-fly lists and security technology is mounted to selectively welcome and police flows of bodies). Living in rural communities, we *learn cultural difference* and participate in competing inventions of cultural identity and diversity through 9/11 commemorations and through representations of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. We learn cultural difference and identity through Disney, the marketing of commercial hip hop and the new racially segregated *Survivor* series; through our increasing imbrication within globalized modes of production and distribution; and through reruns of old Jackie Chan films, *Land-o-Lakes* butter and *President's Choice* couscous and takeout dinners. I would be remiss if I forgot to include the ways Molson's “I am Canadian” advertising campaigns teach us cultural normalcy and difference within a particular hegemonic narrative of national identity. We live cultural diversity through student exchange programmes, through university-community linkages and through the kinds of conversations in contemporary artistic practice opened by galleries such the Foreman Gallery here at Bishop's. We experience it through the networks and activities of growing immigrant communities attracted by government services, refugee sponsorship programmes, and seasonal farm work. Ghassan Hage (2006) has described this experience of living in local spaces that are increasingly imbricated and implicated within media and

commercial economies as a sort of “mundane globalization,” an awareness of the presence and force of the global in the local.

In my own field, I find that the global cultural and economic integration of rural communities raises important questions for multicultural and antiracism educators; for instance *what* students know of the interdependent histories of their own and other ethnic groups, as well as *whence* they draw their impressions and knowledge. Statistics Canada research shows there is little disparity between rural and urban students’ access to information and communication technologies at school, and only minor disparities at home; more significant differences exist in terms of access to cultural activities in their communities (Statistics Canada, 2004).

The role of community environment and media has also been noteworthy in my current SSHRC-funded research which surveys youth across the country to determine what they know of the histories, struggles and achievements of racialized communities and where they learn it (Taylor & Hoehsmann, 2006). While a consistent 20–30% of respondents in our pilot tests claimed school as the source of their knowledge, family, community and media made dramatically uneven contributions to youth knowledge of specific ethnoracial groups. While media, family, friends and community were important sources of knowledge about Middle Eastern and pan-African or African diasporic cultures (15–20% of respondents claimed knowledge from these sources), the role of these sources in relation to youth awareness of First Nations Peoples was negligible (less than 10% claimed knowledge drawn from family, community or the media). The limited knowledge students did have of First Nations’ cultures and histories was drawn overwhelmingly from school.

In terms of understanding the ways intercultural contact and cultural pluralism are experienced from the perspective of immigrants and refugees, Michele Vatz-Laaroussi has argued that in rural areas interculturalism takes the form of interpersonal interactions rather than inter-community (2005). There is therefore a more assimilationist expectation that individuals or individual families will insert themselves into what is presented as an established, ethnically homogeneous society. Her research has been vital to developing conceptual frameworks for understanding migration and cultural diversity that reflect the unique ways these are lived in rural areas, rather than borrowing models developed in urban settings.

Globalization is also being lived in Québec through informal, non-governmental, transnational networks of solidarity and exchange.

Today, Quebeckers with transnational family, cultural and faith-based commitments increasingly link local communities with the world. They extend a dense web of transnational relations between Canada and the rest of the world through expanded trade and investment relations; through remittances, technology transfers and other forms of philanthropy in their countries of origin that support economic, social and institutional development there; and through the integration of their new local communities here into transnational communities and global knowledge networks. As émigré actors, they take the lead in civil conflict transformation and post-conflict reconstruction in their countries of origin (Robinson, 2004).

These findings highlight a complex interplay of global and local dynamics that shape the construction and lived relations of cultural diversity and ethnic identity in a context that is host to competing images and histories circulating within an uneven playing field. The papers presented at this conference elaborate the challenges and opportunities posed to researchers, educators, policymakers and community leaders by this shifting sociopolitical terrain we call home.

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NOTES :

- 1 Postcolonial theorists (Gunew, 2000; Hage, 2000) argue that discourses and policies of multiculturalism (and, I would argue, interculturalism) spectacularize the racialized allophone Other as culturally determined, originating outside the nation state, and existing at the margins of the unquestioned normalcy of whiteness (in Canadian terms, this refers to the white Anglophone/ Francophone settler paradigm of Canadian identity).
- 2 My use of the term 'discourse' is Foucauldian, referring not so much to ideologies as to bodies of power/knowledge, which circulate with hegemonic authority within civil society and powerful institutions.
- 3 I use this term to refer to the discursive polarization of global cultural diversity into 'good and evil'.

