Canadian Multiculturalism & *Stó:lō* Cultural Identity

Humanities 10

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December, 1995

> The Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour and religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to **a policy** of multiculturalism, **designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage** of Canadians, **while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians** in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada.
>
> Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988

> The Constitution of Canada recognizes rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada.
>
> Canadian Multiculturalism Act, 1988

Introduction

Multiculturalism is one of the fundamental ideologies of modern Canadian society. It is often referred to when describing the differences between Canada and our neighbouring nation, the United States. As a philosophy, multiculturalism recognizes the equality of all people, while celebrating their diverse, rich and distinct cultures. One of the visions that multiculturalism holds, is the possibility of people from various cultures with different beliefs and histories living peacefully together. Within this diversity, it is assumed there are a common set of fundamental values that everybody holds, which ensures that all people are valued equally. This vision has noble intentions. However, historically, it has been difficult to uphold. The realities of national politics and world economics have made inequalities between people from different cultural and racial backgrounds. Aboriginal people in Canada for instance, live under an additional set of laws called the Indian Act. This has limited and restricted the lives of "Indian, Inuit and Métis" people for over a century. Aboriginal people in Canada also have special rights accorded to them in the Constitution, which are referred to as "Aboriginal Rights." Herein lies the dilemma. How can all people and cultures in Canada be equal, if a different set of laws and rights apply to Aboriginal people?

What Is Multiculturalism?

The philosophy of multiculturalism was first officially expressed in the mid-1960's, when the "Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism" was formed. It addressed the question of the rights of French-speaking people, in what was predominantly English-speaking, ethnically "English" Canada. One result of the Commission was not only should French language and culture be valued and legally supported (as was adopted in the **Official Languages Act, 1969**), but so should all diverse cultural heritages of Canadians. This multicultural (as opposed to bicultural) policy was first adopted in 1971, and became law in 1982 in the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

Multiculturalism assumes that all cultures and people are equally valued in a society.

Under Canadian law, these equalities are the rights and privileges that any person, ensuring that they may participate as a member of the society, regardless of racial, ethnic, cultural or religious background. Multiculturalism promotes gaining an understanding of people from all cultures, despite language, religious beliefs, political and social views, or national origins. Multiculturalism does not require people to shed their own values and beliefs, in order to accept one another. It acknowledges there are many ways in which the world can be viewed and lived in. Multiculturalism essentially promotes respect for people's distinct cultural identity, while ensuring that common Canadian values are upheld.

Although this policy of multiculturalism seems just and worthy in the ideal, in the everyday life of Canadians it is difficult to uphold. Many people of cultural and ethnic minorities continue to feel the effects of racism, prejudice and cultural inequalities in Canada. Although government policies of multiculturalism continually try to address these problems, it takes the efforts of individuals to identify and dispel these inequalities. Establishing what values we share, and understanding other people's cultural identities, are important to make multiculturalism work. However, it is a difficult and challenging task for any individual. It requires every Canadian to be self-reflexive, to challenge the stereotypes of how they think about other people, and to develop not only tolerance, but an appreciation and respect for other cultures.

Aboriginal people have a unique place in Canadian identity and culture. There are many hundreds of different Aboriginal groups and cultures in Canada. The *Stó:lō* live in the lower Fraser River region, from five miles above the town of Yale in the Fraser Canyon, to the mouth of the Fraser River. Although there are at least 30 different communities in this region, there is a shared traditional language, culture and history.

As individuals, we often think of ourselves in terms of our personal qualities, for example honesty, toughness, having integrity, etc. These deeply personal identities are usually only known publicly by people who know you well - like your close friends. There are as many individual identities as there are individual people. These identities tend to change over time - so how you think of yourself as a 10 year-old is different from how you would think about yourself now, or in another 30 years. On the other hand, your cultural identity often defines to the outside world who you are. A cultural identity is constructed very broadly, in terms of your association with a number of important social groups[1], including family, place of residence, economic position and ethnicity. Although none of these social groups on their own build the complete identity of a person, taken in combination they provide some of the basic elements of cultural identity.

How Do We Define Our Cultural Identity?
Part A: From Family Groups to Global Residence

Our cultural identity defines who we are, and how we are viewed by other people. Canadian's have diverse cultural identities. We gain our individual cultural identities from connections with our families, genders, place of residence, economic position in society, and ethnic background. By being able to explicitly understand how individual people see these different social groups, many stereotypes can be addressed and challenged.

Family

The family is the most basic social group with which we identify ourselves. Families consist of a core of parents and children - called a "nuclear family." Our "extended family" which includes the nuclear family, as well as aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews, grandparents (called "consanguineal" relatives), and "affinal" relatives (relatives by marriage and not by blood), is also important to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the particular situation. In Euro-Canadian culture, extended families are recognized, but are often not as important in an everyday economic, political and cultural sense, a social group, as the nuclear family. In *Stó:lō* culture, the extended family plays a very important role. Grandparents and parent's siblings are often called upon to undertake important child raising responsibilities. Contact is maintained with close and distant cousins, and they often participate together in activities like fishing or spirit dancing as a family. People trace their families through many generations, and often call on these "family networks" for economic, spiritual and political support.

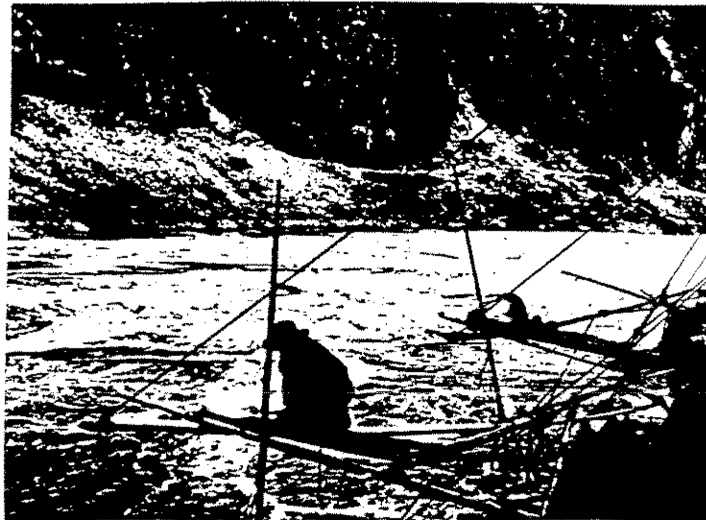


Figure 1: Two men - relatives - fishing on platforms in the Fraser Canyon (BCARS).

The importance of the extended family is further emphasized, when comparing Euro-Canadian

and *Stó:lõ* cultures. Euro-Canadian families have a "patrilineal" system of tracing their heritage, which means they recognize their family names and inheritance through their father's side. In *Stó:lõ* culture, families are recognized "bilaterally," which means both the mother's and father's sides are recognized in the inheritance privileges, such as names, songs, dances and wealth. This bilateral kinship system, allows any individual to be able to make family connections to twice as many people, opposed to a person in a society with a unilateral kinship system, as in the case of Euro-Canadian culture.

Gender

The gender of a person is more than their biological make up. Societies teach men and women to behave differently. This learned behaviour, or "culture" of gender, encourages men and women to identify their genders as a social group. People often use the term "gender" to refer to the cultural differences between men and women, rather than "sex," which often implies biological differences.

Local Residence

Another level of social identity is residence. When we are asked the question, "where are you from?" many of us identify ourselves by the town in which we live. In many cases, we further distinguish this by indicating what part of town we are from, depending on who we are speaking with. When talking with someone who is not familiar with the area, we may describe ourselves as being from a larger region, like "the Fraser Valley" or simply "Vancouver." All of these places hold special meaning beyond just a geographical location on a map. When we think about, for instance, a particular part of town, we often imagine the "kind of people who live there," based upon a pre-supposed notion of their economic standing or ethnicity. Thus, although not all doctors and lawyers live in "the rich neighbourhood on the hill," and not all Chinese people live in "Chinatown," these are common images of social groups that come to mind for these areas. We use these notions to establish a sense of who we are, where we come from, and how to establish the social place of others.

Stereotypes of a location - or the people who live there - often form when preconceptions and generalizations are taken as being the "truth" about an area. People may choose not to visit a particular part of town because they don't feel comfortable there, and in turn, perpetuate their generalizations about that place. We can learn about the districts people come from and gain new insights into their lives by visiting these locations.

Today, the *Stó:lõ* make these same kinds of residential distinctions. In pre-reservation times (prior to the 1860's), people identified themselves with the village where they were born. Since a person usually married someone from outside one's village (called "exogamy"), one or both spouses would have to move from their home village and establish a new residence elsewhere. Generally, this pattern was "patrilocal," (living at the location of the husband's family), where the couple would move to the village of the husband. However, patrilocality was certainly not a hard-and-fast rule. Maintaining family ties in multiple villages expanded

the network of people one interacted with, beyond the extended family and into non-kin. Today, the traditional village has largely been replaced with the Indian reserve. Each reserve generally reflects the location of traditional villages or fishing sites. There are 82 Indian reserves in the Fraser Valley, which are administered by 30 bands. It should be noted that the term "Indian" is used here in a legal sense - the Government of Canada officially recognizes and uses this term to refer to Aboriginal people. Most Aboriginal people feel this term implies a certain negativity, and prefer terms such as "First Nations," "Native" or "Aboriginal."

Each reserve is administered by an Indian Band. There are 24 Indian Bands in the traditional territory of the *Stó:lō*. These Bands operate in a sense much like a village or town. They receive funds from government agencies and, in turn, create jobs and provide services for members living on or off reserve. *The Stó:lō* frequently identify themselves as being from a particular reserve, or belonging to a particular Band. Reserves and Bands are often made up of a limited number of families, which are allowed to have Band membership. People can live on or off the reserve and still have Band membership. However, a person must live on the reserve to be able to vote for the Chief and Council. Until the mid-1980's, if a woman married a person who was not registered with an Indian Band, she and her children lost their status as Band members (the same did not hold true for men). In 1986, the government passed Bill C-31, which allowed women and their children to retain their membership if they married out of their community.

Just as a person's identity with a particular part of town has implied social meanings, a Stó:lō person's identity with a particular reserve or Band has many levels of meaning associated with it. Most *Stó:lō* can identify a person's family connections by the reserve from which they originate. A non-Aboriginal person frequently has less informed ideas about social connections to Indian Reserves - often in terms of economic status or ethnicity. As is apparent, identity through local residence is complex and meaningful, and shapes our understanding of who each other are.

Global Residence - National Affiliation

Canadians establish our identities within the country and on the globe through being from a province and nation. Both the province of British Columbia and the nation of Canada can be located geographically on a map, but are not physical boundaries. The geographic boundaries are political. One can go to a city and see, hear, touch and feel the material presence of the place. When one crosses the border between British Columbia or Alberta, such distinctions can not be readily made. They are often arbitrary lines on a map. However, the economic and political differences between the two places are often great. The variations in school curriculum between Alberta and British

Figure 2: Map indicating the contemporary Indian Bands within the Stó:lō Nation (B. Thom, 1995).

Columbia clearly demonstrates the non-material differences. The differences between Canada and the United States are even greater, in the realms of politics, economics and culture. These differences can often be noticed symbolically, or through material variations, in public and private areas. Many people say "they can just tell the difference when they cross the Canada-US border."

What makes these national identities distinct? This is a very broad topic and is a difficult question for anyone to answer.

From the perspective of the law and government, the distinction appears clear. Different levels of government have varying levels of jurisdiction over regulating access to the land and resources. They also have various abilities to tax the people living in the different territories, and distinct responsibilities for providing services to people in return. The cultural differences between Canadians and Americans are sometimes less easy to pin-down, although they certainly exist. When a Canadian is in the United States, they are able to "tell" the difference - by the labels on milk bottles; the style of roads and signs; and the flags flying on the front of buildings. National differences extend far beyond these material articles. Other elements of national identity - like language, history, traditions, religion, and symbols - make up ethnicity. However, there are varying opinions in what the specific differences are. As individuals, we have many distinct ideas about who we are as a people.

Part B: "Who Are You? What Do You Do?"

Aboriginal people have a unique place in the Canadian geo-political landscape. Aboriginal people are a part of the nation by the fact that their ancestors lived in this country when it was formed. Unlike all other Canadians, historically Aboriginal people did not "choose" to live here, rather they were made a part of the nation by association. This is why Aboriginal people often prefer to be referred to as "First Nations" or "Aboriginal" people, as opposed to "Indians" or "Natives." The term serves to identify Aboriginal people as having a unique historical connection to the land, being the first people to live here - thousands of years before any non-Aboriginal settlers. Historically, Aboriginal people have been treated as "wards of the state" by the federal government, through the Indian Act and other assimilative legislation. Aboriginal people have, on the basis of prior occupation to the land, "Aboriginal Rights" under the Canadian Constitution. Although these rights have not been defined, they do entrench the legal distinctness of Aboriginal people. Thus, in a very real, political and historical sense, Aboriginal people occupy a unique place in the Canadian national identity.

Eddie Gardner, an Aboriginal person who works for the *Stó:lō* Nation in Sardis, discussed how he sees this history.

> Well, my experience is there are a lot of Europeans - you know, immigrants who do come to this country and they are asked to adapt to the "Canadian Way" - which is the Canadian parliamentary system; which is the jurisdiction of the provinces and the territories and things - jurisdiction; the court system

> which is based on Common Law; all these major elements are key components of the Canadian society as it has evolved from the two dominant societies - the French and the English. In Quebec there is a unique Civil Law system which is different you know, from the English Common Law. And they come offering us their rich heritage and background and they have to conform to maintain their identities. So they willingly accept to come in and adapt to Canadian society and with that encouragement and that they are on their own empowerment to maintain their own culture. Now, when you take a look at what happened to aboriginal people - people were not asked to come and adapt to our culture, system, form of government, or our way of doing things. No, they come in and imposed an awful lot on aboriginal people and have attempted to completely assimilate aboriginal people - to squash them right out - they say "look, you see us, you become one of us." There was no encouragement you know for this cultural mosaic kind of happiness that everyone would like to have.

The dilemma of multiculturalism does not only come from the side of Aboriginal people. In the following statement, made in the Annual Report on the Operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development stated:

> In recognition of the principles of Indian self-government and the policies of constitutional development in the North, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act does not apply to the territorial governments or to organizations that perform a governmental function in relation to Aboriginal people. Since most of the activities of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development focus on Aboriginal people and the territorial governments, these activities are not included in the department's annual report under the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.[2]

From the Government's perspective - Aboriginal issues must be dealt with through the Indian Act, not the Multiculturalism Act. On the surface, this may appear to be a severe inequality. However, many Aboriginal people do not like to be lumped in with immigrant ethnic groups. The Indian Act acknowledges the Aboriginal Rights of people that are enshrined in the Constitution of Canada.

Economic Position

A commonly asked question when people first meet each other is, "What do you do?" - or in the case of students, "What do your parents do?" The typical response is to say what job or occupation you or your parents are involved in. Knowing what someone does gives you an idea about their lifestyle, interests, skills, and economic class. People can often trace mutual friends through common occupational interests and experiences. These ties indicate the importance of economic standing in Euro-Canadian society, but this is not universally important. There are some societies in the world that do not have "occupations" or work

specializations such as taxi drivers, factory workers, poets, or anthropologists.

Figure 3: Gathering activities. This woman is gathering reeds from near a river. These reeds are likely to be used in weaving a mat. Such life skills were taught broadly, so that people could live (Langley Centennial Museum).

Figure 4: Canoe building. This man is carving a traditional Stó:lõ canoe. Some people were specialists or experts in certain things. These experts were well respected, but did not limit their activities to such specialized tasks. In contemporary Canadian society, a person who works in a canoe factory may earn all of their income from this occupation, without ever stepping foot on a farm to get food, or cut down a tree to build their house (CMA).

Contemporary *Stó:lō* culture has its roots in a tradition where few people were full-time specialists. Historically, all *Stó:lō* were involved in fishing and gathering of plants. Children were taught "how to live" rather than "how to make a living." Certain people had training and abilities to do other things like hunting, canoe making or basket weaving. However, these specializations were not full-time occupations. When two *Stó:lō* people first meet, they commonly establish their family connections, often being able to trace their kinship through several generations. Thus, even a simple question like "what do you do for a living?" has different implications and importance in a multicultural society.

Part C: Ethnicity

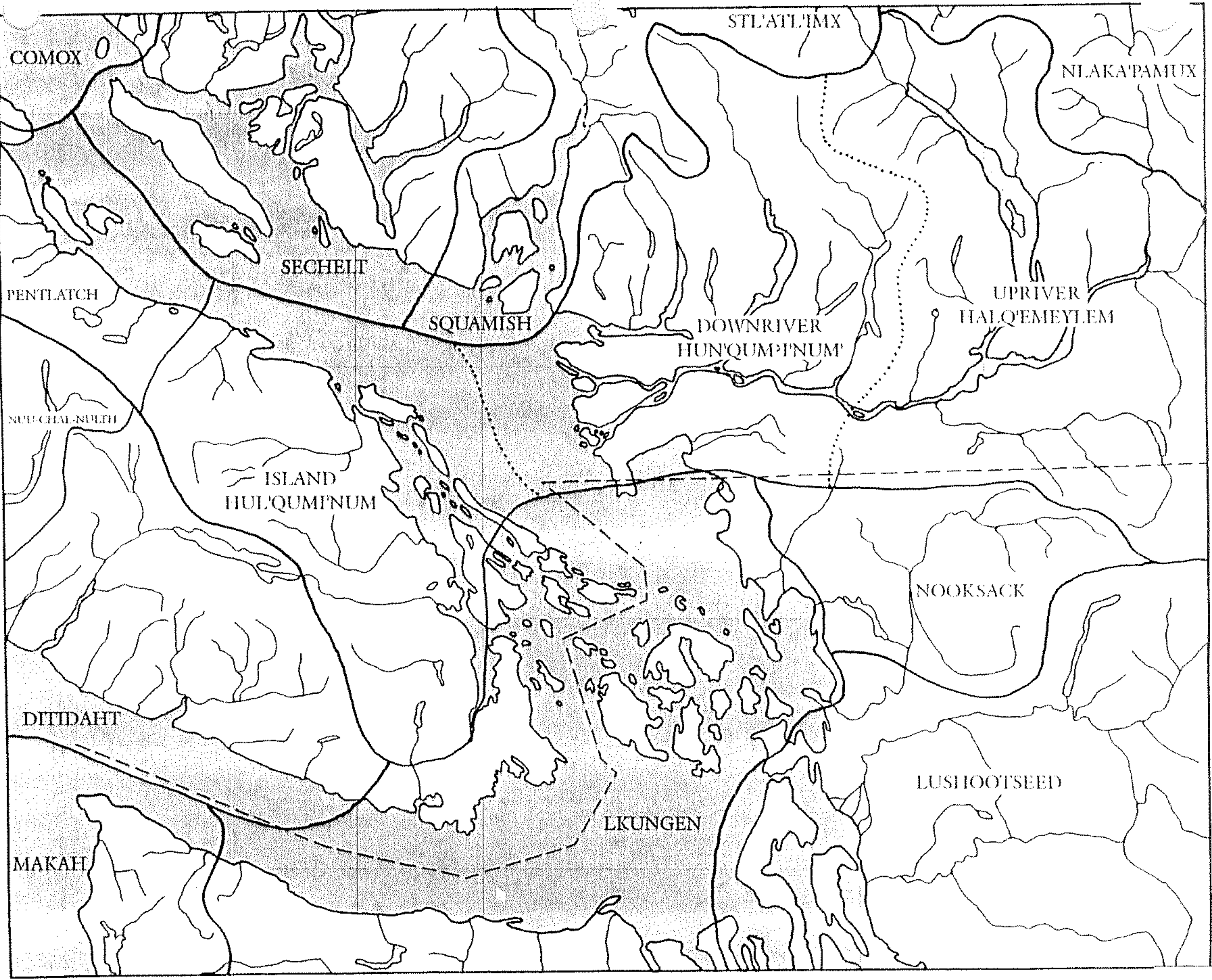
Ethnicity

> Ethnicity (the classification of human beings by race, religion, language, cultural traditions, and other traits held in common) can be like a futon mattress; it can cushion and comfort, it can provide a safe and warm place - but the stuffing sometimes shifts, becomes lumpy and irksome, and the lumps must either be accepted or pounded out. Accepting the lumps makes for uneasy sleep. Too often, ethnic communities accept the uneasy sleep.[3]

The term "ethnicity" refers to the cultural, linguistic, religious, historical and racial background of a group of people. As individuals, we often do not explicitly think of our own ethnicity, but frequently do in relation to other people. Identity with an ethnic group is useful for defining general differences in the life-styles of people. The term "Euro-Canadian" refers to the ethnicity of Canadians who come from European cultures, speak European languages, such as English and French, hold primarily Christian values, if not being Christian themselves, and are by-in-large "white;" "Indo-Canadians" have cultural links to the Indian sub-continent in Asia, speak one of the Indian languages (such as Hindi or Punjabi), are frequently Sikh, Hindu or Muslim, and are of Asian decent; and so on. Although these descriptions of ethnicity do not reflect the nature and personalities of individual people, it does provide a point by which people identify themselves as a member of a larger group of people.

The *Stó:lō* identify their ethnicity in a number of ways. Linguistically, the traditional language spoken by the *Stó:lō* is *Halq'eméylem* (although the main language spoken today is English). Culturally, Stó:lō people share many traditions with the larger "Central Coast Salish" area, which includes people in the lower Fraser River watershed and the southeast corner of Vancouver Island. Stories and oral traditions about locations in the Fraser Valley and the history of *Stó:lō* people distinguish them culturally from their Aboriginal neighbours. Today, many *Stó:lō* people also identify themselves as "Aboriginal people," connecting them to the broader First Nations population of Canada.

However, making broad statements about "Native ethnicity" can be somewhat problematic, because of the differences in the various Aboriginal cultures in Canada. Aboriginal people come from a diverse number of backgrounds, in various regions across the country. Several hundred different Native American languages are spoken. There are a great range of diversities in beliefs and religions among Aboriginal people from these different cultural and linguistic areas - ranging from Christianity to the traditional spirituality of the *Stó:lō*. Along with these variations in language and religion are a host of other historical,



Languages Spoken in Fraser River/Gulf of Georgia Region

Figure 5: Map indicating the languages spoken in the Coast Salish region (B. Thom, 1995).

economic and social differences, which make the many Aboriginal societies in Canada distinct from each other. To classify all Aboriginal people simply as "Indians," is an unsatisfying description of diverse ethnicities.

Language, culture, history, tradition and religion all shape how we act day-to-day, and how we view other people and the world. As ethnicity is based on a combination of all these things, different ethnic groups frequently have varying perspectives on life and how to live it. One can think of many examples where these diverse ethnicities can, and do, co-exist - a preference for foods from one's own culture (East Indian curry/*Stó:lō* roasted salmon); separate religious practices and beliefs (Japanese Shinto/*Stó:lō seywen)*; unique forms of music and dancing (Quebecois folk music/*Stó:lō* spirit song); distinct traditional clothing (German bayrische tracht (cap and stockings)/*Stó:lō* mountain-goat blanket); etc. Learning about the significance of these cultural traits, often enriches our own lives and understandings of other people. It also gives us the knowledge and sensitivity to not make "ethnocentric" value judgements about other people.

There are, unfortunately, many times when even the most basic of ethnic differences create prejudice, racism or even violent conflict. Everyone can probably remember a time when they spoke with someone who's first language was other than their own, and had difficulties in communicating because of an accent or a limited vocabulary. People often have little patience and understanding in this situation, making it difficult for the second language person to get by. The news has been full of the conflict between Irish Catholics and British Protestants in Northern Ireland. Many of the southern clan rivalries in Africa are deeply rooted in events that happened long ago in history. Although many of these ethnic conflicts seem far away, or not applicable to us in Canada, stereotyping of other cultures is a subtle discrimination, and sometimes worse between ethnic groups.

Multiculturalism & Canadian Values - Political Pragmatism vs. Cultural Ideals.

It is at this point, that I would like to return to the idea of multiculturalism. Having discussed a few of the elements which make up the cultural identity of people - both personal and social - it should be clear there is an incredible amount of room for people to be "different." The idea behind multiculturalism is to support the distinctness of all cultures in Canada, while promoting the common values that each hold. This philosophy and legislation explicitly attempts to counteract many of the problems of stereotyping, prejudice and racism discussed above. However, in practice addressing these problems is not so straightforward.

Although multiculturalism espouses equality of all people in Canada, in practice not everybody is treated the same. Many of the social, cultural and ethnic differences between people result in major social inequalities between those with power and those without. The question, in part, boils down to what values and beliefs do all Canadians hold in common, if any? If the majority of people hold certain values, shouldn't everybody follow them?

We are limited by the idea of a common set of Canadian values. These values have been

defined through the history of Canada, particularly through the British and French cultural traditions. These values have not been defined specifically, and are subject to interpretation and re-interpretation. They certainly change over time and between individuals. However, such values that do exist provide us with a sense of who we are, and what it means to be Canadian.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Canadian Constitution are the two main pieces of legislation that outline the basic values of Canadian society. They are possibly the closest statements of the common values, which all Canadians are supposed to hold.

Recently some people have asked themselves, "whose documents are these? who are they written by and for? Do they represent the interests and ideals of all Canadians?" We recently heard in the news that some people think these are "laws made by men, for men," in regards to a recent Supreme Court decision requiring women to pay tax on child support payments, while allowing men to write these payments off. Similar accusations of the process of law making not representing the concerns of all Canadians, have been made by some Aboriginal people, about not being included in the law making process. Aboriginal leaders have been struggling to define their Aboriginal Rights, as they are entrenched in the Canadian Constitution, as a means to acknowledge that their rights do not stem from Canadian Law, but, rather, from their pre-existing rights as Aboriginal people. Although questions like these are not easily resolved, they constantly require governments to re-evaluate their position in a democratic society. It may be that as Canadians we really don't know what our common values are and how the practical differences should be resolved.

What about other cultural values not enshrined in the Constitution? What happens when these clash on a day-to-day basis - not on the Constitutional level? How far is multiculturalism able to go in providing an avenue through which to increase peoples' understanding of and respect for each other? Take the example of the *Stó:lō* winter dance. During the winter months, many *Stó:lō* people gather in "smokehouses," in order to take part in the winter dance ceremonial. This is an extremely important part of *Stó:lō* culture and spirituality. Up to several hundred people gather in one smokehouse to witness the dancers do their work. Dances take place at night, and involve almost continuous singing, drumming and dancing, until the early hours of the morning. Many of these smokehouses are located in urban areas, such as Chilliwack and Sardis. What happens when the non-Aboriginal neighbours, who were neither invited to the dance, nor explained of the importance of the ritual, were disturbed in their sleep every night for the entire winter? Who's cultural values should be taken as more important? How can this be decided? Is multiculturalism only acceptable as long as it doesn't step on the toes of the dominant cultural values?

How far does this situation go? Is rejecting and condemning such activities simply "ethnocentric?" Are basic "human rights" really just a reflection of "Judeo-Christian" values? Questions such as these are continually being raised in many aspects of Canadian public life - from the issue of whether a woman's name should be changed after marriage, to if Mounties should be allowed to wear turbans, to the rights of Aboriginal people in having a say in how

the land is used. Although there can be problems in interpreting the Canadian Constitution and Charter of Rights and Freedoms, this legislation serves as a starting point from which we all must live.

Aboriginal Rights In The Canadian Mosaic

Canada has often been referred to as a "cultural mosaic" because of its multicultural philosophy - with people of diverse cultures all being valued equally, in term of their status and rights. However, according to Aboriginal people, they have special rights under the Canadian Constitution on the basis of prior occupation of the land. One question commonly asked coming out of this difference in rights is: "why do aboriginal people have special rights, if we are all supposed to be equal?" Aboriginal people, in turn, have challenged the idea of multiculturalism, saying that the philosophy of the Canadian mosaic denies them their Aboriginal rights, which are ensured in the Constitution.

The following discussion between anthropologist Brian Thom and Grand Chief Clarence Pennier of the *Stó:lō* Nation highlights some of these issues from an Aboriginal perspective.

> BT: How do you view yourself as being a Aboriginal person, as a member of Canadian society, particularly in the context of Canada having a philosophy of multiculturalism?
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> CP: I guess I'll start by saying that as I was growing up, I really never did give much thought to what I was. All I knew was that I was Clarence Pennier, that I came from *Scowlitz*. We weren't referring to ourselves as *Scowlitz* Indians or *Stó:lō* Indians, we were just Indians. And that didn't change for a long time, until about 1970-71 when I started working with the Union of B.C. Indian chiefs and learning the different politics involved in this country. So, as I began to learn more history and began to understand that we came from different tribes in the valley, and that we were all part of a *Stó:lō* people, which extended, all the way up and down the river, in our language groups. I gradually did learn that we were different.
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> When I was growing up I never felt racism or being treated different too much because I was in a residential school environment for a long time. I never did really mix with non-Indians. In those early years it didn't really mean a lot to me. But, as I learned the politics, I began learning history and understanding that we are treated differently because we have the Indian Act. It dictates most of the things that we can and can't do on our reserves. It sort of, in one sense, segregates us from society. We are supposed to stay there on the reserve and not get out and work, or whatever, and not mix with the greater society.
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> I had always thought that I considered myself a Canadian. But, as we began going deeper into politics, you know, we just, basically, found out that we were

not part of the Canadian mosaic because we were still basically wards of the government, and treated as such. As we got into the early 80's and the constitutional era, that's when we finally got some recognition, from the governments of this country, that we were separate. So they finally did include the Aboriginal people in the Constitution, and referred to us as Indians, Innuit and Métis people. It basically said that our rights are recognized and affirmed and that those rights aren't identified and defined yet.

That's part of the process that we still have to go through. We must make sure that we have enough land and define what our rights are and what our traditional territory is. So, there is still a lot of work to do. With the radical switch in how we managed to assert some rights through courts and through direct action, we have been getting a big backlash from the public. A lot of the non-Indians do not believe that we should have any special rights, and we should all be treated the same. We can forget about history and get on with life, for the future. After being involved in politics, it is a little difficult to really get along with some of the other non-Indians, because they, sort of, treat you a little different now. They don't know how to take you, whether you are going to be radical, or whether you are going to be peaceful towards them.

BT: Then that issue comes up about people claiming "everybody should be equal. We are all equal." How do you talk about resolving, or explaining that there is something like an Aboriginal right? How do you get at that when you talk to people?

CP: Well, it's hard to explain to others. I guess it takes a long time to be able to try to explain something to another person who doesn't understand what we mean by Aboriginal rights. We can explain what an Aboriginal right is, but there is a lot of history to it. And without the two parties taking a lot of time to learn about it, we are not really accomplishing much other than explaining that we have an Aboriginal right because we were here first, but that doesn't mean anything unless you really go into all the other legal reasons why it is necessary to be recognized that we were here first. We don't spend enough time doing it. And people don't have the time to understand it either, and take it down.

BT: Do you think that once that issue of Aboriginal rights which to me seems basically based on prior occupation of the land, that these rights were never extinguished or anything like that? Do you think that Aboriginal rights go beyond those issues? Making Aboriginal people unequal in other ways? This is the kind of thing that...

CP: It's not so much unequal, it's just that we will always remain different. People call themselves Canadian, but a lot of people refer to themselves as Irish-

Canadian, or whatever. They trace their ancestry back to whether it's Europe or Asia or Africa. They can always trace their ancestors back to some place outside of North America, and we can't.

BT: And so in a sense then, once you have the Aboriginal rights and title issue aside, the philosophy of multiculturalism sort of works, because you sort of have Canadian-Canadians which are Native people, and English-Canadians like people from my background, or French-Canadians.

CP: Yes. We have to live with each other in this country now. There is no way that just because we are Aboriginal people and we have Aboriginal rights that we are going to revert back to living like we did in the 1800's, where there were no non-Indians. Everybody's here, coming here, trying to create their own opportunities to try to get some benefit from this country. Like I say, we have to co-exist with each other and respect each other. But that's not happening.

BT: Yeah. That seems key. Within Aboriginal communities, do you see issues of identity as being important? Things that people should work out for themselves - their identity as Indian, or their identity as a Scowlitz tribe member, or their identity as Canadian?

CP: Well it is becoming a little bit more apparent now that the younger people are recognizing that they are different, and I guess we are coming to have to learn it because of some of the politics we play. The children have born the brunt of it because they have been probably beat up in the schools, or shoved, or whatever because of the actions of the Chiefs and the Councillors. They are going to have to learn that they are different, and why they are different, and that is something that is going to have to be accepted a little more.

BT: So it looks like teaching culture to Aboriginal people and to non-Indians is sort of a way to go to get all these issues resolved in mainstream and within Native society.

CP: Oh, it's important. It's critical. It won't resolve all the problems, but at least it should open people's eyes to why Indians are different.

Thus, although on one level multiculturalism is problematic in regards to the Aboriginal rights protected in the Canadian Constitution, the underlying ideas behind it - learning about and respecting the history and culture of other people - enables diverse groups to respect each other, and acknowledge the legitimacy of their differences.

Understanding Other Cultures

Given that one of the main goals of multiculturalism is to promote understanding of other cultures, we need to be equipped with the tools to do this. We must continuously be aware of our own ethnocentrism which bias our views and understanding of other cultures, and acknowledge the stereotypes and misconceptions that we might have. This is a difficult task. It is a challenge for us to constantly question our own assumptions - to ask ourselves how we know what we know about other people. Talking with them and sharing common experiences is, possibly, the best way to do this.

The philosopher Gilbert Ryle from Oxford, constructed a useful example for us to think about when considering how we know what we know. The following thought-exercise, re-presented by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, clearly demonstrates that even relatively simple actions such as a "wink" are culturally constructed, where the meaning in such an action is not inherent in the action itself, but defined by the shared ideas and rules of the culture in which it takes place.

> Consider... two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, this is an involuntary twitch; in the other, a conspiratorial signal to a friend. The two movements are, as movements, identical; from an I-am-a-camera, "phenomenalistic" observation of them alone, one could not tell which was twitch and which was wink, or indeed whether both or either was twitch or wink. Yet the difference, however unphotographable, between a twitch and a wink is vast; as anyone unfortunate enough to have had the first taken for the second knows. The winker is communicating, and indeed communicating in a quite precise and special way: (1) deliberately, (2) to someone in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) without cognizance of the rest of the company... [T]he winker has done two things, contracted his eyelids and winked, while the twitcher has done only one, contracted his eyelids. Contracting your eyelids on purpose when there exists a public code in which so doing counts as a conspiratorial signal **is** winking. That's all there is to it: a speck of behaviour, a fleck of culture, and - *voilà* - a gesture.
>
> That, however, is just the beginning. Suppose... there is a third boy, who, "to give malicious amusement to his cronies," parodies the first boy's wink, as amateurish, clumsy, obvious, and so on. He, of course, does this in the same way the second boy winked and the first twitched: by contracting his right eyelids. Only this boy is neither winking nor twitching, he is parodying someone else's, as he takes it, laughable, attempt at winking. Here, too, a socially established code exists (he will "wink" laboriously, over-obviously, perhaps adding a grimace - the usual artifices of the clown); and so also does a message. Only now it is not conspiracy but ridicule that is in the air. If the others think he is actually winking, his whole project misfires and completely,

> though with somewhat different results, as if they think he is twitching. One can go further: uncertain of his mimicking abilities, the would-be satirist may practice at home before the mirror, in which case he is not twitching, winking, or parodying, but rehearsing; though so far as what a camera... would record he is just rapidly contracting his right eyelids like all the others. Complexities are possible, if not practically without end, at least logically so. The original winker might, for example, actually have been fake-winking, say, to mislead outsiders into imagining there was a conspiracy afoot when there in fact was not, in which case our descriptions of what the parodist is parodying and the rehearser rehearsing of course shift accordingly.

Thus, although a wink may seem like a simple and straightforward action to someone, its meaning is completely <u>culturally constructed</u>, and its' interpretation depends on the context in which it happened. Now suppose one of the boys observed a wink of a person from another culture. And suppose further, that a wink generally indicates dissatisfaction or disagreement in the tradition of this other culture. The boy observing it may think that the person was agreeing with him, or even being conspirational in his agreement. Such a simple act can be completely misconstrued, because of the "ethnocentric" interpretation of the meaning of the wink.

ENDNOTES:

1. "Social group" may seem like an odd or vague term, somewhat cumbersome to use. This term is utilized, because it more accurately reflects the fact that groups of people one socially identifies with are quite diverse. Using a more concrete term would betray the complex nature of this word.

2. Diversity, 1992-3 Annual Report on the operation of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

3. Neil Bissoondath - "I am Canadian" - Saturday Night Magazine, October 1994.

Suggested Further Reading
for: Canadian Multiculturalism and *Stó:lō* Cultural Identity

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