Immigration that exceeds absorptive capacity is an imposture

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In the post-World War II period, Canada has had a very successful immigration policy that was based on the principle that immigration flows should not exceed Canada’s economic, social, political and cultural absorptive capacity. The proof that this policy was successful is that, after a limited period of time, new Canadians were able to expect to catch up to the level of employment and income of the Canadian born.

Over the recent decades, a toxic mix of forces has derailed this successful immigration policy.

Radical pro-immigration lobby groups have persuaded all the major political parties that in a country:
- where over 20% of the population was born outside Canada, and
- where in the case of Toronto and other major cities close to 50% of the population was born outside Canada
anything that might suggest that Canada is not dedicated to an ever more expansive immigration policy will be interpreted by the new Canadians as a rejection, as a closing of the mind, and as a sign of retreat from a generous and welcoming immigration policy.

This is a fallacious argument and nothing more than the sort of sophistry one would expect from such lobby groups, but all the major political parties were swayed by this sophistry. For fear of being outsmarted by their political competitors, each political party irresponsibly developed a rhetoric bent on promising that it would open wider Canada’s door to immigration. Absorptive capacity went out the window, and securing the votes of new Canadians became the main focus of attention.

The last twenty years

Since the middle of the 1990s, the Liberal and Conservative federal governments have slowly but systematically raised the annual immigration targets for electoralist reasons. To rationalize such unreasonable moves, they have used arguments in good currency they knew to be fallacious. They claimed that larger emigration inflows were a wise move because
- higher immigration rates would significantly stimulate economic growth; and
- higher immigration would compensate for the aging of Canadian population.

Both these propositions have been debunked by experts, as I reminded everyone in Paquet (2012), but they remain staple statements shamelessly parroted by ministers of all stripes in the most disingenuous way.

The impact of this relaxation of our immigration policy has been, as could be predicted, a deterioration of our success at integrating new comers. Higher immigration flows since the 1990s have translated into a much slower progress of the new cohorts toward achieving parity of employment level and salary levels with the Canadian born (Paquet 2012: 44).
This has been well recorded by informed members of various groups of new Canadians who have opposed the increase of immigration levels beyond the absorptive capacity of the country because they realized that it was bound to make life much more difficult for newcomers. Unfortunately all political parties have developed significant learning disabilities about this issue. Despite clear signs that immigration levels beyond absorptive capacity would generate malfits for all (old and new Canadians) except the Canadian businesses searching for cheap labour, politicians of all stripes have continued to deceive Canadians with a rhetoric based on what they know to be false – indiscriminate mass immigration does not necessarily entail significant economic growth, and it would not suffice (unless we accepted millions of immigrants per year) to correct the impact of our aging population.

**Highfalutin arguments as cherry on the sundae**

In parallel with these developments, a variety of supplementary arguments have been concocted by luminaries of the progressive class to bolster the demonstrably deceitful ones in good currency. They were meant to be used when the standard arguments about economic growth and aging population would be exposed for what they are – i.e., deceitful.

The first one of these highfalutin arguments is the defense of mass immigration as *contributing to diversity – presented as an absolute good*. This argument has its roots in Canada’s Charter of Rights but has also been propagated by the Government of Canada under the label of multiculturalism.

Sociologist Jeff Reitz from the University of Toronto and political scientist Keith Banting from Queen’s have invented such a thing as a ‘Canadian consensus’ on mass immigration. This consensus is supposedly built on the conviction that (1) it will bring important economic growth for the country – which we know is unfounded –, and (2) it corresponds to a *moral engagement* of Canadians in favor of cultural diversity as an absolute good to be pursued with absolute determination. This so-called ‘moral engagement’ is a fabricated deceit: it is mostly the result of a federal governmental program of indoctrination about multiculturalism that has tried to shame Canadians into accepting unreasonable levels of immigration (i.e., levels beyond our absorptive capacity) for fear of being called nativist or racist. Yet no reasonable Canadian would support the view that the optimal amount of diversity is unbounded diversity.

The diversity defence has been a most effective stratagem used by the progressive tribe to prevent any critical discussion of the emerging mass immigration policy in Canada. This fluffy argument about a ‘Canadian consensus’ has been used by the pro-immigration lobby groups to make those opposing indiscriminate mass immigration to feel marginalized, and to damn them as opposing diversity – that is being nativist or racist.

The second one of these highfalutin arguments has presented mass immigration as a strategy of *grandeur* aimed at transforming Canada from a middle-power country to a Big-Power country – in the name of international power and national pride.

This is an enterprise in which the Conference Board of Canada (through federal government funding) has been drafted, and in which a few academics and a posse of business and pro-
immigration consultants have invested significant resources in an effort to put a new happy face on the mass immigration movement. It would make Canada great! So if mass immigration may not increase our welfare, it would at least generate national pride now, and putative Potemkin power later.

A motley group of people supporting this strategy of *grandeur* have recently infiltrated the inner circle of advisors of the Trudeau government, and their toxic influence on the government can already be felt.

**Why is such an imposture thriving?**

For the last quarter of a century, the bogeyman of ‘*what if the Canadians born outside Canada were to choose not to vote for my party*’ has been haunting federal politics. This has underpinned a disastrous drive of all parties toward indiscriminate mass immigration to make sure that the Canadians born outside Canada would never be under the impression that these parties are not open to immigration.

Canadians born abroad have the same interest as Canadians born here. They wish to welcome in Canada as many outsiders as we can absorb fruitfully or at least without damaging significantly our country – economically, socially, politically and culturally. They have no interest in excessive immigration flows that would only bring to Canada persons condemned not to thrive or to remain underemployed and underpaid.

This is the message that was sent loud and clear to the Canadian government by the focus groups around the country during the federal consultation about what immigration levels should be. But the voices of those real Canadians (old and new) have been swamped by the incantations of pro-immigration lobbysts, businesses looking for cheap labour, or diversity-obsessed progressives.

Minister John McCallum has displayed a tiny whiff of prudence in not fully following the advice of these lobbyists in the Fall of 2016: he has decided not to increase the existing levels of immigration by 50% as they had suggested. But his body language, when announcing a standstill in immigration levels for the moment, was quite worrisome. In fact he was all but promising that indiscriminate mass immigration was coming soon, as he parroted some nonsense about mass immigration automatically generating growth and correcting our age distribution.

McCallum needs to be reminded about the perils of ignoring the absorptive capacity constraints and of falling prey to the electoral songs of the sirens of mass immigration.

**Two arguments likely to lead McCallum to postpone any mindless leap forward**

One approach is reminding those being tempted by mass immigration that it would make no sense to go that route until Canada has improved immensely the ways in which it can help immigrants to become fully integrated into Canadian society – economically, socially, politically, and culturally.
Until, a sufficiently potent apparatus that can ensure proper integration of the newcomers in Canadian society is in place, it would be unreasonable to open the gates wider. It would be putting the cart before the horse. Once the host society is equipped with a more effective integration process for the newcomers, we could evaluate what is our refurbished absorptive capacity and decide on that basis what sort of increase in immigration flows is warranted, and what filters should be put in place. Acting otherwise now would be most imprudent.

Another approach is relentlessly reminding governments of the important risks that imprudent improvisations on the immigration front might entail.

These risks are obvious on the economic front where mass immigration would yield a local *lumpenproletariat*. But they are equally toxic on the social, political and cultural fronts where it might trigger an erosion of some of our fundamental values, and a silent surrender to the pressures calling for an erosion of our common public culture.

A majority of Canadians are still favorable to immigration, but more than two-thirds of them are already significantly worried about newcomers not becoming sufficiently integrated into Canadian society. When local philosophers-kings Bouchard and Taylor suggested that, in the inter-adjustment with newcomers, Quebeckers should adjust three-quarter of the way to the modus vivendi of the newcomers, and the newcomers adjust the other quarter. The reaction of Quebec civil society was that Bouchard and Taylor had got it wrong – the newcomers should be expected to shoulder most of the adjustment. And the Bouchard-Taylor report was shelved. It is clear that Canadians would agree with Quebeckers on this issue.

Will Canadians continue to be favorable to immigration when it is perceived that abruptly the Canadian common public culture is being threatened by decisions of unwise and electorally-motivated governments?

On this front, the Canadian paradoxical frame of mind might be a predicament.

Canadians are favorable to immigration but want new comers to be more fully integrated in Canadian society. Therefore more effective and robust integration policies would appear to be called for. But how does that mesh with the Charter’s imperative to maintain and enhance our commitment to multiculturalism (whatever this sentence may mean?) and the active federal government propaganda to support it?

One can already anticipate that radical multiculturalists – those cultural relativists who believe that not only persons from different origins should be regarded as equal, but that cultures should also are regarded as of equal worth, and that of our Canadian way of life deserves preferential treatment over other ways of life – will resist such efforts to better integrate new comers into Canadian society. I can already hear opposition to vibrant policies of integration, condeming them as *cultural genocide lite* in a multicultural society, So, the doctrine of diversity as an absolute may stand in the way of effective integration into Canadian society by newcomers.
Coda

If political parties in Canada remain hostages of the pro-immigration lobby, Canadians have reasons to be pessimistic. The utopia of 100-million Canadians in 2100 will put a happy face on a catastrophic immigration policy, but sane Canadians (old and new) should not be hoodwinked by such nonsense. One should pay attention to the Cassandras drawing attention to the perils of such actions, although there is a real danger that they will not be heard. Nobody listened to Cassandra in the past, even though she was right.

Those who believe that our political parties are educable may be more optimistic but they will have to wake up their politicians in short order – remembering, as the Somali proverb puts it, that it is difficult to wake up persons who only pretend to sleep.

This must start with expurgating them of their toxic oikophobia – their disregard and contempt even for the common public culture that has underpinned their personal accomplishments and Canada's successes. Canadians (old and new) know that there are things in Canada worth preserving since they are the reasons old Canadians stay here and new Canadians queue to come here. Therefore it might be worth taking sufficient time to sort out what, in our socio-economy and polity, is worth preserving as essential, and what might be dispensed with or be merrily modified.

Once we have ascertained what there is in our past that is essential to preserve, we might be able to gauge better what our absorptive capacity in immigration is.

This requires serious reflection, and it will take time.

Enemy Number One in the immigration file is undue haste, unnecessary hurriedness. So it might be wise to take the advice of the famous French writer Nicolas Boileau – Hâtez-vous lentement – when it comes to abandoning the principle of absorptive capacity, .

References
