

# CanadaWatch

PRACTICAL AND AUTHORITATIVE ANALYSIS OF KEY NATIONAL ISSUES

REVISITING CANADA IN CONVERSATION: CRISIS, CHALLENGE, AND CHANGE

## Guest editors' introduction

Early in the spring of 2020, we had to make the difficult decision to cancel our graduate conference, then titled “Changing Conversations: Canada in a Shifting Landscape.” We could not have foreseen that, for the next 18 months, we would collectively feel and witness all sorts of shifting landscapes and that the world as we knew it would be completely transformed. In a few short months, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the flaws and cracks in many parts of our (and others’) political, medical, and social systems. We also became acutely aware that the mental health consequences of the pandemic, yet to be fully explored or discovered, will be felt for years to come.

At times like these, how could we sensitively return to engaged scholarship? We first had to find a theme that spoke to each one of us on the organizing committee. Ultimately, we felt that “Canada in Conversation: Crisis, Challenge, and Change” would give students both a space to be heard and the comfort of common shared experiences. In the spring of 2021, the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies hosted its annual graduate student conference online. Over the course of four Fridays, 29 students from universities across the country presented their work and engaged in critical exploration of our chosen conference themes.

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Initially nervous about how to host and how to generally organize an online conference, we soon realized that our panellists were as conversation-deprived as we were and equally eager to engage in meaningful discussions. Although we missed in-person interaction, the Zoom platform allowed for the unexpected benefit of making connections: whereas an in-person conference allows one to congregate with friends and colleagues, this format created opportunities for connections that would otherwise not have been fully explored. The conversations that took place and the important intellectual exchanges notwithstanding, it is in those human connections that we hope our panellists found sustaining strength.

Conference panellists were offered the opportunity to submit their work for publication. The 14 articles subsequently selected for this issue of *Canada Watch* cover a wide range of topics in various disciplines. The writers provide insightful commentaries and convincing argumentation on their chosen themes—a testament both to the excellence of their submissions and to their keen eye and intuition for subjects that speak to all members of our community.

### COVID-19: PANDEMIC EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES

We begin with four articles that reflect on the challenge of living in a pandemic. Specifically, the articles express how COVID-19 has exacerbated situations that were already difficult or precarious for African immigrant mothers, fathers in the child-bearing period, Asian Canadians, and Indigenous land defenders.

In “We Are Not in This Together,” Catherine Mutune (York University) shows that African immigrant mothers who return to school do so at a great personal risk (juggling parental duties, housework, and academic obligations) without the accommodations (such as course extensions and access to electronic equipment) and financial support (bursaries) that would give them an honest chance of success. Mutune expands on these circumstances and demonstrates that the COVID-19 pandemic has further hindered the already low rate of success experienced by African immigrant mothers who enter higher education.

In “Families in the Child-Bearing Period: Fathers and the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Josephine Francis Xavier (York University) asks, “Who is fathering the father?” The evidence that emerges from postpartum clinics shows that adolescent and/or single fathers lack confidence in their abilities as fathers and feel high levels of anxiety. The lack of mental health support puts them at risk for mental health disorders, often with fatal consequences. The author advocates for the

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implementation of mental health and well-being programs tailored specifically to fathers.

In "Racism Unmasked: How Racism Influenced Chinese Canadians' COVID-19 Response," authors Terri Chu and Jack Rozdilsky (York University) take us back to the early days of the pandemic, when Chinese Canadians faced a surge of racism. The authors rightly criticize politicians who used racist tropes for personal advancement as well as the permissive environment that does little to halt hate speech and hate crime. They conclude that only the help of allies (educators, media outlets, and public officials) can stop, or at least restrain, this particular course of discrimination and racism.

In the last article in this section, "Rethinking Reconciliation: Problematizing Reconciliation Politics Through the Land Back Lens," Hannah Morikawa (York University) discusses the problematic situation faced by Indigenous land defenders, who as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic have been forced to stay at home and not actively defend the land, while resource extraction is deemed an essential service and the Coastal GasLink pipeline continues to be built. Morikawa writes about the challenges this presents for a reconciliation that is still to come at a time when the nation's settlers, in the throes of a worldwide pandemic, have yet to engage with the true meaning of sharing a territory.

## QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING

We continue with powerful personal accounts of self-determination, identity, and belonging. Singh et al. (Multiple University Project), presents "*i am*: circular questions of *i* identity," a digital media project turned article in which six project participants express their feelings on identity, belonging, and not belonging. "The Past, Present, and Future of Canadian Identity" by Soo Kyung Min (University of Toronto) and "Walking to Self-Determination as a Figure Skater and First Nation Indigenous Person" by

Nicole Lee (Lakehead University) speak to the importance of acknowledging various cultural voices both within ourselves and within society. The authors believe that Canadian identity and belonging should be defined broadly and based on the nation's rich collective mosaic of cultures. The question "Who am I?" becomes more about finding who each of us are in the context of a personal growth process rather than trying to fit into a pre-existing mould to be accepted.

## RACIALIZED TENSIONS AND MIGRATION

In the categories of immigration and diaspora, we find the articles of Harshita Yalamarty (York University) and Patty Chan (York University). Yalamarty's article, "Being Good Wives and Ideal Migrants: Experiences of Indian Marriage Migrant Women in Canada," relates the experience of Indian women immigrating to Canada. Because they migrate to Canada primarily as spouses or dependants, many of them suffer from social isolation, acculturation stresses, and experiences of downward class mobility, and they often return home. Yalamarty writes that (Indian) women today still pay a price for wanting to better their circumstances. In "Cultural Bridges: Traditional Chinese Orchestras in Canada," Chan writes about the experience of the Chinese diaspora in the context of traditional Chinese orchestras in Canada. The individuals she interviews weave their personal stories into the music and create slices of autobiographies that not only serve to fill in a gap in the scholarship but also leave a legacy for themselves and members of their families.

## ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE

The two articles in this section present an environmental case study and an examination of surveillance in the Arctic. In "Estimating Landcover Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Using Spatiotemporal MODIS Data: A Case Study in Northern Ontario," Ima Ituen

(York University) discusses some of the positive effects of warming weather on the growing season. On the basis of data from crop and livestock farming as well as commercial tree harvesting metrics, Ituen hopes that the estimated carbon fluxes associated with these activities can assist in making recommendations for land management that will minimize greenhouse gas emissions.

In "The Future Arctic," Benjamin T. Johnson (York University) examines how several prevailing cultural and social representations of the Arctic (frozen, untouched, sacred, man versus nature) are intertwined with government policies and discourse. These overlapping narratives often contrast with the Arctic's potential for resource development, which include shipping, exploitation, and conflict over economic interest. Johnson shows that, following years of disinterest and disinvestment, Canada's sovereignty and defence strategy of the Arctic now includes multiple surveillance platforms that support both predictive and preemptive forms of intervention. Johnson also cautions that this type of "defence theatre" might prevent other forms of more equitable and resilient imaginaries from emerging from the future Arctic.

## GENDER AND SEXUALITY: BARRIERS, JUSTICE, AND POLICIES

In our last section, the authors tackle the topics of sexual assault and the challenges of speaking up for marginalized populations. In "UBC (Un)Accountable: On Public Shaming, CanLit, and the Steven Galloway Controversy," Walter Rafael Villanueva (University of Toronto) writes about the effectiveness and limits of public shaming. Public shaming can create awareness around a particular situation (sexual assault in this case) or systemic and institutional deficiencies, but it does not often translate into support or cultural changes. Beyond the end of publicly shaming attackers, Villanueva

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advocates for pivoting toward the creation of avenues of support for survivors of sexual assault.

In "Policing and the LGBTIQ2S+ Community in Canada," C. Emma Kelly (University of Guelph) discusses the challenges faced by Canadian police services and LGBTIQ2S+ communities in their attempts to repair relations against the historical legacy of anti-LGBTIQ2S+ policing and ongoing discontent with police investigations.


Finally, in "Geographic Racializing and the (Re)Colonization of Vancouver During the Sex Work 'Crisis,'" Evania Pietrangelo-Porco (York University) focuses on the sex work "crisis" that took place in Vancouver from 1980 to 2000. She argues that this was a crisis of ideology, image, and identity and that white, heteronormative, middle-class residents adopted the per-

sona of "(re)colonizers." The (re)colonizers wanted the city to embody and reflect their own image rather than the reality, which included an important population of sex workers, biological and trans individuals of Indigenous descent, Indigenous people, and Asian and South Asian immigrants.

## MAPPING FUTURE PATHWAYS

In accordance with our theme, this issue of *Canada Watch* explores many existing pathways for conversations on crisis, challenge, and change in Canada. However, beyond valued contributions to diverse scholarship, our authors also show grit and determination in the face of accomplishing long-term goals during a most challenging time. We recognize their resilience and thank them for sharing their findings with us. We hope

readers are both taken by their activism and inspired to pursue their own, regardless of how the pandemic is shaping our daily lives.

In closing, we would also like to extend our most sincere appreciation to the Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies. The Centre's generous mentoring, support, and encouragement of graduate students, as well as the many opportunities it affords for connection with other Canadianists, students and scholars alike, provide a vital space that fosters both students' enthusiasm for the field and a desire to pay it forward. 

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