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## Could it happen here?

**As riots rage across France, troubling parallels emerge among children of Canada's visible-minority immigrants**

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For Canadians smug in their mythology of inhabiting the planet's most successful multicultural society, the riots of France have been cause for national tsk-tsking and self-satisfaction. At least, goes the script, we've got social inclusiveness right.

At least -- maybe more by luck than by design -- we've avoided the creation of racial underclasses: no endless ugly suburbs of brown and black people imprisoned in poverty from which scant hope of escape exists.

At least we've embraced into our national culture the notion of postethnic identity, woven the values of anti-discrimination and equality into not only our laws but into our hearts and national idiom.

Well, hold the complacency, eh?

To be sure, a Canadian mirror held up to the car-BQs of France shows no violent mass unrest brewing in, say, Toronto's Jane-Finch or Jamestown neighbourhoods, Montreal's *quartier* St-Michel or patches of Greater Vancouver's Surrey and the Downtown Eastside.

But what recent research reveals is an alarming and disquieting analogue to the demographic portrait of the French suburban *cités*.

It shows an emerging population of Canadian-raised daughters and sons of visible-minority immigrants *à la* France whose accents and cultural reference points are as Canadian as maple syrup, but who in many respects feel less welcome in the country than their parents.

"Their parents came to improve their lives," says University of Toronto sociologist Jeffrey Reitz, one of Canada's foremost academic experts on immigration and multiculturalism.

"They can make comparisons to where they were. They can [move] on. But for their children born in Canada, they don't have the option of going anywhere else. And they expect equality. Therefore their expectations are much higher."

The data show, in fact, a generation raised in the milieu of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and multiculturalism's rhetoric, who expect to be treated as equals in Canadian society and who angrily are discovering that they are not.

Their disaffection has gone largely unnoticed until now in polls and academic research because, unlike in France, the numbers of the visible-minority second generation are statistically small -- less than a million.

France's wave of visible-minority immigration occurred in the fifties and sixties; Canada's began only in the seventies. Two-thirds of the Canadian visible-minority second generation are still under 16.

As Prof. Reitz observes, "It is striking that indications of lack of integration into Canadian society are so

significant for the Canadian second-born generation, since it is this group which is regarded as the harbinger of the future . . ."

Data collected by Statistics Canada for its 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey and other studies and then analyzed by scholars such as Prof. Reitz and the Institute for Research on Public Policy show that, for the immigrant second generation in multicultural Canada, all visible minorities have less of a sense of belonging to the country than do whites.

The data show that on virtually all indicators used by sociologists and governments to measure integration into Canadian life, visible minorities rate themselves as less integrated than whites.

Add their perceptions of non-belonging to their socioeconomic rankings -- among all ethnocultural groups in Canada, racial minorities clearly have the lowest relative household income and the highest poverty rates -- and the outlines of underclass loom menacingly from the mist.

Indeed, Princeton sociologist Douglas Massey, considered the leading scholar on race and economic underclass in the United States, recently told a University of Toronto audience that some of the indicators of racial underclass are appearing in Canadian cities.

It is not, however, just a matter of economics.

As Prof. Reitz points out, "Although visible-minority immigrants have lower earnings than whites, at an individual level, low earnings contribute little to trends in social integration.

"Rather, the negative trends in integration reflect their more pronounced experiences of [broad] discrimination and vulnerability, which become or remain pronounced for the second generation" -- experiences felt with more acuity and resulting anger by the second generation.

Listen to the voice of 22-year-old Rahel Appiagyei, a third-year student in international relations attending Toronto's elite bilingual Glendon College at York University.

"No, I don't feel accepted," she says. "The one thing I don't understand -- me, personally, and for blacks in general -- is why we're still seen as immigrants."

In the Canada of her experience, she says, "the word 'immigrant' is used to mean coloured and the word 'Canadian' is a code word for Caucasian." Her parents emigrated from Ghana in 1988, when she was 5. Immigrants from Ghana -- along with those from Ethiopia, Somalia and Afghanistan -- have the highest rates of poverty in Canada, between 50 and 80 per cent. She, her parents and five siblings live crowded into a three-bedroom apartment.

Ms. Appiagyei, whose idiom and accent with trademark raised *ou* diphthong are flawlessly Canadian, says with pride that her family has never needed a penny of welfare, that her father has steadily worked since he arrived, and that she is the first in the family to be accomplishing what her mother and father brought their children to Canada to do.

She cites the Toronto school board's policy of zero tolerance for violence and points out its targets are overwhelmingly black students. Something can't be right with a policy that winds up being aimed at a single racial group, she says. "It gives me a lot of messages."

Ms. Appiagyei tells the story of living one summer in Quebec with a family to learn French. The father made clear that he associated blacks with poverty and one day commented that he had never thought blacks attractive until he met her. "It was a compliment and insult at the same time."

The Ethnic Diversity Study found 37 per cent of Canada's visible minorities report discrimination, and for blacks alone the figure is 50 per cent.

Ms. Appiagyei says the more engaged and involved in Canadian life she becomes, the more she encounters gaps between her expectations of what Canadian society should be and the reality she encounters.

She tells of being often asked: " 'You're from Africa, how come you know English so well?' I feel I'm always being assessed with lions and tigers, with remoteness. Why is it we're not allowed to feel we belong here?"

On her sense of remoteness, one of Prof. Reitz's findings from the data carries special weight: "Although most Canadians deny harbouring racist views," he says, "they express 'social distance' from minorities -- that is, preferences not to act with members of other racial groups."

And so, Prof. Reitz says, the alienation of today's visible-minority second generation is a harbinger of the future.

"Perspectives on racial discrimination divide racial groups, and such racial divisions do matter for the broader cohesion of Canadian society."

Canada's visible-minority population is rapidly growing and, by 2017, will be 20 per cent of the population, with the percentages significantly higher in Canada's largest cities.

The research data show that about 30 per cent fewer visible minorities than whites have voted in federal elections (although only 20 per cent fewer visible minorities than whites are citizens). The same 30-per-cent gap exists between visible minorities and whites in identifying as Canadian. A smaller percentage of visible minorities than whites report satisfaction with life and trust in others; a smaller percentage engage in volunteer work in their communities.

And, of course, the data show clearly that as second-generation white immigrants nestle comfortably into Canadian life, their visible-minority counterparts lag behind.

What the data also show is that white Canadians tend to discount the claims of discrimination reported by their non-white fellow countrymen and countrywomen. It's not the mythology of multicultural inclusiveness. And yet discounting those claims, Prof. Reitz warns, may make matters worse.

"Lack of [racial] conflict in the present may not be a good predictor of the future."

### **Shades of disaffection**

Recent research by sociologists has found that the Canadian-born and raised sons and daughters of non-white immigrants feel less welcome in their country than their parents do.

### **Satisfaction with life**

Recent immigrants

Whites 34.4%

Visible minority 39.3%

Second generation

Whites 45.9%

Visible minority 34.6%

### **Level of trust in others**

Recent immigrants

Whites 56.4%

Visible minority 52.5%

Second generation

Whites 55.2%

Visible minority 44.8%

### **Sense of belonging to Canada**

Recent immigrants

Whites 47.9%

Visible minority 60.7%

Second generation

Whites 57.3%

Visible minority 44.1%

### **Who votes in federal elections**

Recent immigrants

Whites 19.8%

Visible minority 20.1%

Second generation

Whites 77.3%

Visible minority 41.4%

### **Who volunteers**

Recent immigrants

Whites 22.1%

Visible minority 21.0%

Second generation

Whites 36.5%

Visible minority 36.2%

**Who feels Canadian**

Recent immigrants

Whites 21.9%

Visible minority 21.4%

Second generation

Whites 78.2%

Visible minority 56.6%

SOURCE: PROF. JEFFREY REITZ, UNIVERSITY  
OF TORONTO, FROM A PAPER PRESENTED AT THE  
INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH ON PUBLIC POLICY.  
RICHARD JOHNSON/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

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