

# The Role of Diasporas in Foreign Policy: The Case of Canada

Marketa Geislerova<sup>1</sup>

*Reflecting a subtle but profound shift in recent Canadian foreign policy priorities, the tsunami of last year, the chaos in Haiti, the exploding troubles in Sudan are not foreign-aid issues for Canada, they are foreign-policy priorities. They reflect our demography transformation from predominantly European to truly multinational. Problems in India and China and Haiti are our problems because India and China are our motherlands.*

John Ibbitson (*Globe and Mail*, 5 August 2005)

*Foreign policy is not about loving everyone or even helping everyone. It is not about saying a nation cannot do anything, cannot go to war, for example, for fear of offending some group within the country or saying that it must do something to satisfy another group's ties to the Old Country. Foreign Policy instead must spring from the fundamental bases of a state – its geographical location, its history, its form of government, its economic imperatives, its alliances, and yes, of course, its people. In other words National Interests are the key.*

Jack Granatstein (*Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute Conference*, October 2005)

Societies around the world are becoming increasingly diverse. The myth of an ethnically homogeneous state that dominated international relations in the past century has been largely discarded. Propelled by a myriad of causes including, the nature of conflicts, environmental degradation and persistent economic and demographic gaps, people are on the move. While migration has been a constant trait of the international system for centuries, what is new today are

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<sup>1</sup> Marketa Geislerova is a senior policy analyst at the Policy Research Division at the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Canada. She may be contacted at: [marketa.geislerova@international.gc.ca](mailto:marketa.geislerova@international.gc.ca). The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author. While some conclusions reflect information obtained in interviews with officials from the Canadian government they do not reflect the positions and policies of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

globalisation-related factors that facilitate and at the same time transform this process. Accessible communications and transportation technologies not only permit people to travel and communicate with more ease than ever before, they also allow them to maintain multiple attachments, nurture new identities and pursue a range of activities across national boundaries. This increasingly open international environment provides fertile ground for the flourishing of diasporas – migrant communities striving to preserve their ethnic and cultural heritage and remain connected to their homelands and kin at large.

Canadian society is a reflection of these global trends. Immigration is growing in importance while the composition and characteristics of *New Canadians* are changing. The major source of immigration has shifted away from Europe and currently centres on Asia, which

presently accounts for over 40% of newcomers. The majority of *New Canadians* are different from previous waves of immigrants, contributing to growing cultural diversity. They are also increasingly geographically concentrated and many remain intensely connected to their homelands and kin in Canada and abroad.

New immigrants tend to settle in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, concentrating in the provinces' largest cities. Toronto has one of the highest proportions of foreign-born inhabitants of all major urban centres in the world: 44% of its total population was born outside Canada. Meanwhile, Vancouver has the highest proportion of visible minorities of all urban areas in Canada, with one in three residents being Asian. Montreal was home to the third largest population of visible minorities among the 2001 census metropolitan areas.<sup>2</sup> According to a survey on ethnic diversity conducted in 2003, about half of Canadian population aged 15 years and older indicate that they have a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group. Moreover, about 63% of survey respondents who rate their ethnicity high in importance say that maintaining customs and traditions is important. These sentiments varied across and between groups and sometimes declined over time.<sup>3</sup>

In the recent past, diasporas have acquired more legitimacy and have become more effective in pursuing collective objectives. Experts attribute this development to two main reasons. First, many countries in which diasporas reside have recognised that ethnic minorities are a permanent and important part of their societies. Assimilation or suppression is no longer a viable strategy. Second, the intense and dense networks diasporas weave enable them to interact almost instantaneously through well established channels without

*Immigration is fuelling two-thirds of Canada's population growth and will likely become the only source of gains by 2030.*

**Canadian Census 2006**

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada, *2001 Census: Analysis Series, Canada's Ethno-Cultural Portrait: The Changing mosaic* (Ottawa, January 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey: portrait of a multicultural society* (Ottawa, 2003).

exorbitant costs and censorship. The enhanced effectiveness and newly acquired legitimacy have made diasporas more confident and assertive, propelling them to play an increasingly important role within and across national borders.<sup>4</sup>

The growing salience of diasporas, along with other non-state actors, has led some international relations commentators to lament the decline in the importance of the nation-state. Many also wallow in what they perceive to be a national identity crisis. This is partly due to claims that the trans-national activities which diasporas undertake compromise the coherence of state borders and that the attachments they feel toward their host countries are at best ambivalent. These sceptics assume that it is the interests of their homelands that diasporas maintain and strive to advance. They argue that the promotion of ethnically-based interests erodes the ability of resident countries to identify national priorities and in some instances may be down right subversive. Assimilatory immigration policies or the clamp-down on immigration are often the remedies they prescribe.<sup>5</sup>

Alternatively, enthusiasts have come to embrace diasporas as precursors of post-modern social and political systems. They posit that the process of migration and resettlement in the age of globalisation will continue to blur territorial and national boundaries, bringing a keen focus to identities based on other criteria than national affiliation. Rather than trying to stop the process by reasserting 20<sup>th</sup> century socio-political myths, governments should adjust their practices to affect outcomes in positive ways. Articulation of a multicultural foreign policy where diasporas are seen as aiding rather than hindering national interests would be an example of the latter approach.<sup>6</sup>

This paper explores some of the key pressure points that diaspora activities create for Canadian foreign relations and draws preliminary consequences for foreign and domestic policy. The paper reveals the extent to which globalisation has transformed the international system over the last several decades, bringing supra-state actors and identity to the centre of debate and practice. It analyses competing perspectives on the value of diaspora engagement in foreign policy, drawing on insights from a mature discussion in the United States. The views and concerns of practitioners are sketched out based on interviews with officials from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (DFAIT) and other governmental departments. The paper claims that diasporas are likely to increase their influence

<sup>4</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics At Home and Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>5</sup> Fears about the dilution of national identity and the end of the national interest are expressed by several observers, including Samuel Huntington in the United States and Greg Allan or Michael Bliss in Canada. See Samuel Huntington, "The Hispanic Challenge," *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2004 and "The Erosion of American National Interests," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 1997; Allan Gregg, "Identity Crisis," *Walrus Magazine*, 1 April 2006, and Michael Bliss, "A Working Non-nation?" *National Post*, 24 March 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics At Home and Abroad*, p. 245. For a similar view, see: Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller, *The Age of Migration: International Population Movements in the Modern World* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003) and Yossi Shain, "Multicultural Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1995.

in the future, posing some significant challenges for security and social cohesion but also offering new opportunities for multi-track, multi-cultural diplomacy.

Before embarking, several methodological notes are worth mentioning to lay bare the assumptions this paper makes about diasporas:

- Diasporas are fluid entities that ebb and flow depending on circumstances. While diaspora members by definition care about their homeland and kin, they may be active only on particular issues at a particular time.
- Diasporas have a self-ascribed membership. In other words, it is only the members themselves who can legitimately determine the parameters of their own identities and loyalties.<sup>7</sup>
- The objectives for which diasporas strive and the means they employ depend to a large extent on the reasons behind their displacement and longevity. Some diasporas are generated by a violent conflict while others may be motivated by economic causes. Some diasporas are modern while others are as ancient as the concept itself. Some are linked to established states while others are state-less.
- Diasporas are heterogeneous. The values, practices, goals and interests of their members may not only vary but may differ in fundamental ways. This is especially the case when the cause behind their re-settlement is an intra-state conflict. This makes any attempt at generalising assumptions and conclusions problematic. The conundrum has become especially pertinent in the recent past when terrorist acts perpetrated by a radical few were interpreted in ways implicating entire diasporas from countries with Muslim populations.
- The dichotomy between homeland and host land may be false. The terms suggest that diasporas have an immutable attachment to the country of origin and reside in their final destinations temporarily at the discretion of their “hosts.” This may be true for some, but not for others.

## Engaging the Home Country

### Trans-national Activities for Political Purposes

Diasporas engage in a range of trans-national activities for political purposes. Forcefully dispersed or conflict-generated diasporas are more prone to be politically engaged than diasporas whose members have moved for economic reasons or in order to improve their standards of living.<sup>8</sup> While some of these

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<sup>7</sup> This view is promoted, among others, by Steven Vertovec, “The Political Importance of Diasporas,” *Migration Information Source*, 1 June 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, Terrence Lyons, “Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Peace-building: A Conceptual Overview and Ethiopian Case Study,” paper presented at the University for Peace Expert Forum on Capacity Building for Peace and Development: Roles of Diasporas, Toronto, 19–20 October 2006.

activities support Canadian foreign policy objectives, others contravene them and may create security risks.

Diasporas are playing an ever increasing role in conflicts around the world. Two key reasons account for this trend: the overall decline in state support for insurgencies and the increase in ethnically-based conflicts.<sup>9</sup> Experts agree that conflict-generated diasporas are more likely to engage in destructive actions that perpetuate and fuel conflicts. This is due to several inter-related factors, such as the trauma of exile, safe distance from the consequences of drastic actions, guilt and immutable perceptions about the conflict in question. Sheltered in prosperous democracies, these so called long-distance nationalists are well positioned to offer a range of resources their struggling kin at home may lack including money, weapons, shelter, combatants as well as tactical and logistical support. This is especially true when homelands are emerging democracies, failed and failing states or when they are in a midst of an independence struggle.

Canada is not exempt from such activities and some would argue that its multi-cultural make-up and open democratic environment make it particularly vulnerable to abuse by segments of diasporas motivated by homeland struggles. This is the case, for instance, when radical Somali-Canadians are recruited to Islamist militias mounting a civil war in Somalia under the banner of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU), when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) finance a bloody civil war in Sri Lanka with funds generated in Canada, or when those promoting a Sikh Khalistan attack national symbols associated with their perceived oppressors on the Canadian soil.

The involvement of diasporas in fuelling or perpetuating conflicts undermines international security and contributes to the persistence of failed and failing states. In some instances Canada's relations with homelands and their regions are affected, in others its relations with allies may be irritated. Legal and ethical conundrums arise in situations where Canadians end up fighting other Canadians, as is the case in Somalia where Canadian nationals backing the transitional government are pitted against those supporting the loose ICU coalition. The situation is bound to become even more entangled if other Canadians are called upon to intervene as a part of an international effort to stem bloodshed.

There are also significant domestic repercussions. Insurgents engaged in bloody struggles eventually return to Canada and may radicalize a new wave of extremists.<sup>10</sup> Radical segments of diaspora often use organised crime to fund

<sup>9</sup> RAND, *The Role of External Support in Insurgent Conflicts*, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> The impact of combatants returning to Canada on diaspora radicalisation is an important subject of inquiry. According to Stewart Bell, Ottawa is concerned, for instance, that Somali-Canadians who joined hard-line Islamic militias in Somalia return to Canada and radicalize a new wave of extremists. See: Stewart Bell, "Somali-Canadians join African Taliban," *National Post*, 3 April 2007. The growing role of diasporas in terrorism and the role of war veterans returning to their host countries on radicalisation were also raised in a conference held jointly by RAND and the Center for Security Studies in Zurich on the Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism. See: Bruce Hoffman, William Rosenau, Andrew J. Curiel and Doron Zimmermann, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism*, RAND, 2007.

their activities and to support their long-distance causes. Finally, troubles in far away places can easily spill over to host countries. The riots in France instigated by Algerians in support of Islamists fighting the militarily-controlled government in Algeria or the insurgency mounted by Kurds in Germany in support of their kin against Turkey, both in 1990s, are illustrative of this possibility.

Despite the growing role of diasporas in conflict, many trans-national political activities emanating from Canada are constructive. Many of them are facilitated by the ability of Canadians to hold multiple citizenships and therefore participate in their home countries' political processes. The following four types of diaspora activities actually complement Canadian foreign policy objectives that are linked to supporting freedom and security, democracy, rule of law, and human rights:

1. Diasporas can play a potentially transformative role in their homelands by transferring skills and know-how accumulated in host countries. This is especially the case when home countries are embarking on a transition to democracy after a period of authoritarian or totalitarian rule or following a conflict. Proponents of this process argue that the linguistic and cultural characteristics returning diasporas share with the residents of their homelands make the transfer more seamless.<sup>11</sup> Somalia serves as an example with several Somali-Canadians holding high-ranking positions in the transitional government aimed to bring Somalia back from the brink of a disaster.<sup>12</sup> The Haitian community in Canada also expressed the desire to institutionalise a repatriation programme to help reconstruction in Haiti.<sup>13</sup> However sceptics point out that the seamless transfer of skills and know-how may be complicated by two re-entry challenges: first, returning expatriots may have lost touch with the reality on the ground and second; their return may be resented by those who remained behind under difficult circumstances.
2. Diasporas can strengthen pluralism around the world by promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. The desire of Gino Bucchino, a Toronto Doctor elected to represent the Italian diaspora residing in North America, to "bring Canadian values to the Italian political scene" is illustrative of this point.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This is the aim, for instance, of the Repatriation of Qualified Afghans program ran by the International Organization of Migration.

<sup>12</sup> At one point, 18 Canadians were part of the Somali Transitional Federal Government, including four Cabinet Ministers. The government leader thought of himself an "honorary Canadian." See Stewart Bell, "Canadians hold power in Somalia," *National Post*, 20 January 2007 and Margaret Wente, "When citizens go a'warring," *Globe and Mail*, 25 January 2007.

<sup>13</sup> FOCAL, *Final Report: Conférence de Montréal avec la Diaspora haïtienne*, 10–11 December 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Italian-Canadians acquired the ability to elect their representatives to the Italian parliament in 2006. Bucchino won a seat in the North and Central America district and is now representing 400,000 Italian citizens living in a riding that encompasses 16 countries, including Canada. See CBC News, "Canadian wins seat in Italian parliament," 12 April 2006.

3. Experts are exploring ways to harness diasporas as peace-brokers. For instance, a university professor at Lancaster University in the UK, Feargal Cochrane argues that the ability of diasporas to act as an integrative force has been underestimated and largely unexplored by theorists and practitioners alike. This is partly due to the prevalent view that diasporas are a part of the problem rather than a solution. Cochrane has been drawing lessons from the positive role Irish-Americans have had in building peace in Northern Ireland. Related issues were also the topic of a recent University for Peace conference in Toronto, Canada.<sup>15</sup>
4. Diasporas can promote human rights and democratic governance in authoritarian home countries. By monitoring and publicising human rights infractions, they can make homeland governments more accountable. However, effective diaspora involvement in trans-national political activities is often constrained by lack of resources. Refugees from authoritarian regimes are often focused on issues related to their re-settlement rather than their home country's human rights record. Moreover, mistrust generated by the regime at home may make such political action undesirable. These are some of the challenges facing the Colombian community in Toronto, for instance.<sup>16</sup>

Growing number of observers in Canada agree that diasporas give Canada a hidden advantage which is currently underutilised. They argue that trans-national activities often constitute a form of public diplomacy that shapes the image of Canada abroad and influences the ability of Canadian policy makers to achieve their objectives.<sup>17</sup> Diasporas returning to their home countries to make positive contributions are seen by some as our best diplomats since they spread the "Canadian Creed" by applying knowledge, experience and values acquired in Canada.<sup>18</sup> Diasporas' ties with home countries may also serve as vehicles to expanding and deepening Canada's relationships with the rest of the world. Finally, the integrative power that diasporas can wield helps resolve conflicts, promote democracy, strengthen human rights and ultimately, enhance international security. Proponents of deeper diaspora engagement argue that it is not only beneficial for foreign policy but also facilitates social cohesion, diminishing the desire of *New Canadians* to support far-away struggles and lost causes.

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<sup>15</sup> See University for Peace, "Capacity Building for Peace and Development: Roles of Diaspora, Final Report," Diaspora Conference 2006.

<sup>16</sup> Pilar Fiano-Alcala and Luin Goldring, "A Colombian Diaspora? Characteristics, tensions and challenges in trans-national engagements," Diaspora Conference 2006.

<sup>17</sup> Luin Goldring et al., "The Politics of Trans-national Ties: Implications for Policy, Research, and Communities," YCAR-CERLAC Workshop Report, 7-8 March 2003.

<sup>18</sup> The word "creed" was borrowed from Yossi Shain who has written on diasporas in the U.S. and their role in spreading what he calls the "American Creed." Yossi Shain, "Multicultural Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, Fall 1995.

## Trans-national Activities for Non-political Purposes

Diasporas engage in a range of economic activities for non-political purposes. Among them, remittances, trade and investment are perhaps the most significant. These activities are pertinent to Canadian foreign policy inasmuch they alleviate poverty, contribute to economic development of poorer countries and make Canada more prosperous.

Remittances, or financial transfers from diasporas to their kin at home, are growing world-wide. In 2006, recorded remittances sent home by migrants from developing countries exceeded \$200 billion US dollars, up from \$193 billion in 2005 and more than double the level in 2001.<sup>19</sup> Approximately 21% of landed immigrants remit money to friends or relatives abroad during their first two years in Canada. This translates into an average of \$62.9 million Canadian dollars or \$1966 per capita sent abroad each year.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of remittances for poverty reduction in homelands has been well researched.<sup>22</sup> In some countries, such as Somalia and Haiti, remittances provide a lifeline for the poor. In these instances, remittances are used to finance basic human needs, education, health and entrepreneurship.

### Selected Facts about Remittances<sup>20</sup>

- *Largest source of external finance for the developing countries as a group.*
- *Larger than foreign direct investment.*
- *More than twice as large as official aid received by developing countries.*
- *Exceed 10% of GDP in 22 developing countries*

On the one hand, remittances are more stable than private capital flows and may even be counter-cyclical relative to the country's economy. They alleviate credit constraints and may act as a substitute for financial development. On the other hand, remittances may reproduce and exacerbate social divisions, facilitate a brain-drain and may cause currency appreciation or lead to dollarisation of nascent market economies.<sup>23</sup> Some critics would add that rather than supporting collective development goals of poor countries, they simply fuel individual consumption. While some community-based remittances do exist, they are rare. Therefore, good policies in home and host countries are necessary to enhance their positive developmental effects.

<sup>19</sup> Dilip Ratha, "Leveraging Remittances for Development," Paper presented at the Second Plenary Meeting of the Leading Group on Solidarity Levies to Fund Development, Oslo, 6–7 February 2007.

<sup>20</sup> Per Unheim, "New Data Sheds Light on Remittance Sending Patterns of Immigrants in Canada," *Focal Point*, March 2007, Volume 6, Number 2, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> Dilip Ratha, *Leveraging Remittances for Development*.

<sup>22</sup> Kathleen Newland and Erin Patrick, "Beyond Remittances: The Role of Diaspora in Poverty Reduction in their Countries of Origin," *Migration Policy Institute*, July 2004.

<sup>23</sup> Dilip Ratha, *Leveraging Remittances for Development*.



For many countries, diasporas are a source of trade and investment. By facilitating host to home country transfers of resources, goods and services, knowledge, technology and investment; trans-national entrepreneurship contributes to economic development in home countries. Many now have diaspora policies aimed at attracting investment from ex-patriots. China is a good example of this model, with 60% of incoming Foreign Direct Investment coming from the Chinese diaspora.

Trans-national businesses also bring benefits for the host country. They can bridge cultural and linguistic divides and facilitate Canada's economic activity around the world, generate new business, and ease socio-economic integration. The benefits of the bridging role are especially apparent when entering new markets such as those of China and India.<sup>24</sup> According to a recent study by the Asia Pacific Foundation, there is a positive relationship between the inflow of immigrants and bilateral trade. The study claims that in Canada, each 10% increase in immigrant inflow leads to a 1% increase in exports and a 3% increase in imports. For instance, between 1995 and 2004, each 1000 increase in the number of immigrants from China was associated with about a \$700 million increase in Canada's trade with China. Furthermore, nearly three-quarters of trans-national entrepreneurs have helped Canadian firms to do business in their home countries or home country firms to do business in Canada.<sup>25</sup>

Entrepreneurs from diaspora networks also create businesses that generate opportunities and jobs for all Canadians. Finally, some argue that entrepreneurship offers an alternative way of immigrant socio-economic integration. This is because doing business in Canada requires the ability to navigate within the Canadian system and the financial independence achieved through successful entrepreneurship means *New Canadians* do not have to rely on social assistance programmes.

Trans-national political and economic activities occur at the backdrop of intense social and cultural linkages. These linkages may be based on family ties or kinship obligations and are facilitated by well established communication

*More than 3 in 10 of the 9.1 million people who had family living in their homelands reported contact at least once a month during the past year. The level of contact varied across and among groups and declined over time.*

**The Ethnic Diversity Survey**

networks. Peggy Levitt, a sociologist studying trans-nationalism at Harvard,

<sup>24</sup> See Wenhong Chen and Barry Wellman, "Canada in China: Doing Business at Home and Away," *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada*, February 2007 and Prithi Yelaja, "Trade deal with India a natural fit for Canada," *Toronto Star*, 18 June 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Wenhong Chen and Barry Wellman, "Canada in China: Doing Business at Home and Away."

refers to these flows from host to home country as “social remittances.”<sup>26</sup> She posits that frequent contact between diasporas and their kin at home transforms both communities at the same time – remoulding ideas, behaviours and identities in ways similar, or perhaps even more efficient, to those of formal and informal repatriation schemes in time of reconstruction.

Some argue that Canada should capitalise on the bridge-building and wealth-generating role trans-national entrepreneurs from diaspora communities can play and call for the development of a diaspora policy. They say that Canada could also learn from countries like China or India and try to engage better its own growing “Canadian diaspora” living abroad, be it in Taiwan or the United States.<sup>27</sup>

## Engaging the Host Country

### Diasporas: Legitimate Influence or a Parochial Capture?

Many diasporas complement their trans-national activities by exerting direct pressure on host governments through organised lobbies. The phenomenon is much more prevalent in the United States, where the power of the so called “ethnic lobbies” has been a subject of heated discussions in the past. American political scientist Thomas Ambrosio defines classical ethnic lobbies as “political organisations established along cultural, ethnic, religious or racial lines that seek directly or indirectly influence foreign policy in support of their homeland and or kin abroad.”<sup>28</sup> While comprehensive, the definition does not capture the reality that diaspora organisations are often driven by elites that may not fairly represent all their members. This is especially the case for new diaspora members who are impoverished refugees who find integration into Canadian society daunting and often rely on these organisations for their resettlement needs. In this context they may be subject to manipulation. Another point worth mentioning is that governments are reactive in engaging diasporas and therefore leave out silent “diaspora majorities.”

The degree of success that diaspora lobbies or organisations have in affecting foreign policy depends on the strategies they employ. In democracies diasporas may have a decisive voice in winning key electoral ridings. Elected officials may either belong to a diaspora community or represent a large diaspora-based constituency. In some instances, diaspora organisations may also serve as key coalition partners to political parties running for office. Once in power, such pre-election partnerships bear on attitudes, policy formulation

<sup>26</sup> Peggy Levitt, *Social Remittances: Migration Driven Local-Level Forms of Cultural Diffusion*, *IMR* Vol. 32 No. 4 (Winter 1998) p. 926.

<sup>27</sup> See, Kenny Zhang, “Recognizing the Canadian Diaspora,” *Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada*, Number 41, March 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, “Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *Ethnic Identity Groups and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Praeger, Westport, 2002), p. 2.

and resource allocation. In Canada, commentators are increasingly wary of what they call “ethnic politics.” Indeed, in a recent newspaper article, Naresh Raghubeer argued that ethno-politics is poisoning Canadian democracy and warned about the dangers of “ethnic and religious vote-buying.” He went on to say that “the quest for votes means politicians are less willing to differentiate between moderates and extremists.”<sup>29</sup> Another consequence of the tendency on the part of some Canadian politicians to cater to ethnically-based interests is that homeland issues, including conflicts, may be increasingly reflected in government policies.<sup>30</sup>

The appointment of Sergio Marchi – a Canadian of an Italian descent, as Canada’s Minister of International Trade in the late 1990s generated increased attention to bilateral relations between Canada and Italy and led to a myriad of diaspora-driven official events. The keen desire to strengthen ties between the two countries led some close observers to wonder about which country the former Minister actually represented.<sup>31</sup> The electoral balance held by the Tamil diaspora in some ridings serves as another example of what some see as undue influence of powerful ethnic lobbies. Sceptics would argue that it was among the main factors explaining the lateness in the Government of Canada decision to add the LTTE to the list of terrorist organisations. Furthermore, the desire of some Members of Parliament to cater to their large Tamil constituencies has in the past contradicted Canadian policy toward the conflict raging in Sri Lanka by catering to Tamil separatist groups while ignoring protocol and concerns on the part of the Sri Lankan central government. The blindfold approach some politicians take when dealing with the Sikh community in Canada has also raised eyebrows. Many have ignored that some of their Sikh interlocutors openly revere fallen terrorists, including the suspected perpetrators of the Air India bombing.<sup>32</sup> Visits to the Punjab, that have little to do with official business, have been made in the past, at the cost of our relationship with the Indian government.<sup>33</sup>

Diaspora organisations also seek to shape the agenda of the media, public organisations and governments by drawing attention to pertinent issues, sharing information and providing policy oversight. In some instances, the ultimate goal of these efforts is to influence public opinion in order to gain wide-spread sympathy and backing. The LTTE was particularly successful in the

<sup>29</sup> Naresh Raghubeer, “How ethno-politics poisons democracy,” *National Post*, 31 July 2007.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance: Elizabeth Riddell-Dixon, “Domestic Demographics and Canadian Foreign Policy,” paper presented at the CDFAI Annual Conference, 31 October 2005.

<sup>31</sup> Off the record interviews with officials from DFAIT.

<sup>32</sup> Air India Flight 182 originated in Vancouver, stopped in Toronto and Montreal and was en route to India *via* London when a bomb went off on June 22, 1985. It was Canada’s worst mass murder, 329 people were killed. A second, linked bomb, which was planted in a suitcase on another Air India flight on the very same day, killed two baggage handlers when it exploded at Japan’s Narita airport. See CBC coverage of the Air India Bombing at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/airindia/>.

<sup>33</sup> Off the record interviews with officials from DFAIT.

past in using publicity and propaganda to galvanise international support for the Tiger cause while discrediting Colombo.<sup>34</sup> In another example, the Armenian Community in Canada has claimed a major victory when Prime Minister Harper did not back away from his commitment to recognise the deaths of an estimated 1.5 million Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915 as genocide when he was in the opposition. In retaliation, the Turkish government recalled its ambassador to Canada, withdrew from a planned joint military exercise and cancelled a visit of Turkish Parliamentarians.

In rare instances, radicals within diaspora communities in Canada attempt to influence policy or raise awareness by resorting to violence. This was the case when Sikh terrorists blew up the Air India flight 182 in 1985 or assassinated the editor of the *Indo-Canadian Times*. Opponents of Sikh violence have been frequently intimidated or beaten, including the former British Columbia Premier and Liberal Health Minister Ujjal Dosanjh. Violence was used by Armenian extremists expressing their opposition to the Turkish government on several occasions. In 1982 the Turkish Commercial Councillor to Canada was paralyzed by Armenian nationalists at his Ottawa apartment. In the same year, a Turkish military attaché was assassinated while sitting in his vehicle at a traffic light. Three years later, a group of Armenian terrorists seized the Turkish embassy, killing a Canadian security guard. The latest threat of violence is perceived to come from radical Muslims associating themselves with the causes of Osama Bin Laden and other terrorist organisations. The link between their activities and diaspora politics is tenuous and highly contentious since these individuals often act on their own and appeal to ideological and religious causes rather than those based on national or territorial lines.

Stephen Saideman at McGill University points out ethnic lobbies can have disproportionately large influence in public policy for three key reasons: 1) advantages related to organising small groups, 2) unity facilitated by a narrow focus, and 3) apathetic majorities.<sup>35</sup> Their influence is further enhanced if they have mainstream support, access to government and a range of supportive relationships, including kin abroad. The factors that limit diaspora influence include: lack of political mobilisation, political repression by host states, fierce competition from rival groups or a focus so narrow that coalition building is impossible.

Many observers in the U.S. agree that ethnic lobbies play an important and sometimes even decisive role in the formulation of foreign policy. Recently, John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt created a controversy following a release of a paper they co-wrote on what they argue is the great and undue influence of the Israel lobby on U.S. foreign policy.<sup>36</sup> It would seem that Canadian

<sup>34</sup> RAND, *The Role of External Support in Insurgent Conflicts*.

<sup>35</sup> Stephen Saideman, "The Power of the Small: The Impact of Ethnic Minorities on Foreign Policy," *SAIS Review*, vol. XXII, no. 2, Summer-Fall 2002.

<sup>36</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy," *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28, No. 6, 23 March 2006.

foreign policy is more insulated from the pressure of diaspora organisations as well as other interest groups. Nevertheless, the benefits and pitfalls of engaged diasporas in the policy-making process are debated in Canada, much as they are in the U.S. This is especially true now, following the release of some of the 2006 Census data, which underline the importance of immigration for Canada’s growth and prosperity and the potential for minorities to assert their voices in Canada’s affairs more authoritatively.

Ambrosio summarises the U.S. debate in a dichotomy which posits diasporas either as “legitimate influence” or “parochial capture.” While the former category includes arguments in support of multicultural foreign policy, the later insists that ethnic engagement is detrimental to foreign policy formulation. Both arguments are summarised in the table below:<sup>37</sup>

<b>Diasporas as Legitimate Influence</b>	<b>Diasporas as Parochial Capture</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Multicultural foreign policy is a reflection of the liberal democratic ethos.</li> <li>2. It respects the diversity of the United States.</li> <li>3. It serves as a correction for historically “white” foreign policies.</li> <li>4. It helps to resist the trend toward isolationism.</li> <li>5. It spreads democratic principles throughout the world.</li> <li>6. Ethnic identity groups can reinforce U.S. interests.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ethnic interest groups often put their own interests ahead of “American” interests.</li> <li>2. They undercut the foundations of American democracy.</li> <li>3. They may be agents of foreign (and possibly hostile) governments.</li> <li>4. They promote an incoherent foreign policy.</li> <li>5. They resist/prevent necessary changes in foreign policy.</li> <li>6. Certain ethnic interest groups are too powerful.</li> <li>7. They may get the United States involved in conflicts where no American interest is threatened.</li> </ol>

Both views have resonance in Canada. Some Canadian academics would argue that diasporas, represented by ethno-cultural organisations, are comparable to narrow interest or pressure groups and are largely detrimental to the pursuit of a coherent national interest.<sup>38</sup> These observers point to the drawbacks of catering to ethnic interests and caution that such practice could have dire consequences for foreign policy. The proponents of diaspora engagement argue that they are legitimate actors on the Canadian political scene, forging

<sup>37</sup> Ambrosio, 200–201.

<sup>38</sup> Denis Stairs et al., “In the National Interest: Canadian Foreign Policy in an Insecure World,” *Canadian Defence and Foreign Affairs Institute*.

a new style of democratic governance. Their exclusion is seen as detrimental not only to the quality and effectiveness of foreign policy but also the cohesion of Canadian society.<sup>39</sup>

## Views from Within

Foreign policy makers at DFAIT have mixed views about the value that diaspora organisations bring to foreign policy. Many agree that their involvement raises the cost of decision making. This is especially the case when government policies differ from those promoted by diaspora groups. Officials are required to respond to criticism and manage potential public relations implications while navigating in a highly charged political environment. Policy makers consumed by finding solutions to complex ethnically-based conflicts expressed their frustration with lobby groups representing the conflicting parties, arguing that their engagement undermines Canada's position as an honest broker. From their experience, conflict-generated diasporas rarely contribute to peaceful, equitable solutions. Despite this caution, several policy makers insisted that diaspora oversight does make for a better foreign policy as long as it is adequately balanced.

A majority of those interviewed did not believe that diaspora organisations have a significant influence on the formulation of Canadian foreign policy, although they do sometimes shape the agenda by drawing attention to their concerns and causes. The small "r" realists pointed out that "it's the United States, stupid" and that the importance of Canada's relationship with its Southern neighbour subsumed foreign policy issues involving distant diaspora concerns. Others believed that diasporas may have important insights but qualified their statement by stressing the necessity of getting the whole picture. A sentiment that it is inevitable to engage diasporas in public policy within the framework of a multi-cultural society was also voiced along with the view that diaspora engagement can be used as a tool to send messages to targeted domestic and international audiences and help *New Canadians* better integrate into Canadian society.

The issue of the pressure that diasporas put on resource allocation by appealing to the Government's obligations toward Canadians traveling, visiting and living abroad was also broached. The implications of these obligations came to sharp relief in the recent evacuation of Lebanese Canadians from southern Lebanon. The attention and resources directed to addressing consular cases, including those of Maher Arar and Zahra Kazemi, were also, at least in part,

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<sup>39</sup> Audrey Kobayashi, "Advocacy from the Margins: The Role of Minority Ethno-cultural Associations in Affecting Public Policy in Canada" in Keith Banting eds., *The Non-profit Sector in Canada: Roles and Relationships* (Kingston, Ont.: School of Policy Studies, 2000) and Lloyd Axworthy et al., "The Role of the Canadian Diaspora in Global Diplomacy and Policy-making," Paper prepared for the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, University of Winnipeg, December 2005.

garnered by diaspora pressure. The cost of the Lebanese evacuation in particular unleashed a public debate about Canada's multiple citizenship policy and its impact not only on Canada's resources but also the country's identity and social cohesion. Critics of the government policy asked whether "Canadians in passport only" should be entitled to the same bundle of benefits as those Canadian nationals who make their permanent home in Canada and regularly contribute to the state coffers.<sup>40</sup> To these rumblings, one high-ranking DFAIT official, now retired, retorted: "Canadians are Canadians, are Canadians."

Officials at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) have worked with diasporas for development in the past in informal ways. They engage diasporas as development actors and policy stakeholders in three key ways: through supporting research, funding projects and promoting dialogue. Reflecting Canadian interests in Haiti, CIDA has recently launched a development initiative involving the Haitian diaspora. The initiative provides financial support to *Regroupement des organismes canado-haïtiens pour le développement* (ROCAHD), by financing volunteers (some of whom are Haitian but not all) and through the financing of nine projects run jointly by diaspora organizations and Canadian NGOs. Since these projects are in their initial stages, evaluation is not yet available. Officials admit that there are still many questions surrounding diaspora-based development policies. They are grappling with definitional issues and have sought lessons learnt from other countries. Concerns about fair access to programmes based on merit rather than "ethnicity" have also been expressed. However, they acknowledged that remittances and participation in policy dialogue are among the two biggest contributions the Haitian diaspora is currently making to foreign and development policy.

## Multicultural Foreign Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

Trans-national activities are diverse, increasing and difficult to manage. Some undermine Canadian foreign policy objectives while others complement them. A growing body of observers is advocating foreign policies that impede those activities that are harmful to international security and prosperity and to facilitate those that are beneficial. There is also a growing consensus that Canada is not capitalising on the positive roles diasporas could play in international relations as teachers, bridge-builders, diplomats, wealth-generators and peace-makers, wasting away what they would call a "hidden advantage." Instead, much attention and resources are dedicated to addressing security-related challenges some diasporas pose within open, multi-cultural democracies like Canada.

While it is difficult to measure the impact diaspora organisations have on foreign policy by directly engaging the Canadian government, it is clear that as diasporas become more represented in the governing structures their con-

<sup>40</sup> See Andrew Cohen, "Canadian in passport only," *The Ottawa Citizen*, 24 July 2007.

cerns push their way into the Canadian mainstream. Many of these concerns parallel Canadian interests abroad. However, when they do not, they present policy makers with a challenging balancing game, which often leaves them doubting whether diasporas are a legitimate influence or a parochial capture. Policy makers will come under increasing pressure to formulate policies that are responsive to the needs and concerns of diasporas without compromising Canada's overall security and prosperity. Care will also have to be taken that policies are well balanced, diaspora contributions evaluated in a regional context, and the interests of Canada's allies considered.

Trans-national activities will continue to blur territorial boundaries and diminish state monopoly over foreign relations. Foreign Ministries around the world, many of which are already seeing their influence in international relations diminished, are re-evaluating their role. Among the options they have before them is to harness the dynamic trans-national networks diaspora weave in order to become more relevant and effective. Facilitating and enhancing constructive activities diasporas undertake on behalf of their homelands and kin could strengthen Canada's multi-track diplomacy and make DFAIT more relevant to all Canadians.

Identities and loyalties will also likely continue to fragment, posing significant challenges for formulating foreign policies based on collective goals. Indeed, the rapidly changing demographic make-up of Canada has many Canadian thinkers pondering about Canada's destiny at the outset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Metaphors describing Canada's shifting identity abound. Just to mention a few, Yann Martel has sparked a lively debate when he referred to Canada as the "greatest hotel on Earth" upon accepting a Booker Prize in 2002. Since then Michael Bliss has called Canada a "working non-nation," Don Gillmor an "abstraction," Andrew Cohen a "virtual nation" and Allan Gregg a "no-name supermarket." These seemingly abstract sociological musings raise important questions about directions in Canada's foreign policy and point to future debates. The challenge for policy makers will be to bridge growing cultural divides so that collective goals can be set and national interests pursued as current demographic trends continue and trans-national activities intensify.



## ANNEX 1

### Selected facts about immigration and *New Canadians*:<sup>41</sup>

- Immigration to Canada is growing. Census data show that the proportion of population born outside of Canada has reached 18.4% – the highest level in 70 years. This makes Canada second only to Australia in terms of its proportion of foreign born inhabitants.
- The source regions are also changing. In the past decade, over 40% of all immigrants came from Asia, with China being the leading country of birth, followed by India, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Taiwan. Migration flows from Europe, the traditional source region of immigrants in the past, has been steadily declining. European immigrants come from Poland, United Kingdom and Romania. Other source countries include: Jamaica, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Mexico, Somalia, Algeria and South Africa.
- *New Canadians* bring with them diverse cultures and religions that are quite different from the initial waves of predominantly European settlers. More than 200 different ethnic origins were reported in the Census question on ethnic ancestry.
- New immigrants and their descendants account for most of our visible minorities (soon majorities in big cities), with the Chinese being the largest visible minority group, followed by South Asians and Blacks. The proportion of individuals who identified themselves as visible minorities has grown, reaching 13.4%.
- New immigrants tend to settle in Ontario, British Columbia and Quebec, concentrating in the provinces' largest cities.
- Two thirds of new immigrants come in the economic-class category (67%). Family-class immigrants represented about 27% and the smallest proportion of new arrivals, about 6%, were refugees.
- High proportion of newcomers has university education and most reported knowledge of at least one official language.
- The majority of the newest immigrants tend to fall into younger working age brackets.
- Immigrants settled where they could join family and friends, however, job prospects are important for economic-class immigrants.
- Many *New Canadians* speak a non-official language at home.

<sup>41</sup> Sources include: Statistics Canada, *2001 Census: analysis series, Canada's ethno-cultural portrait: the changing mosaic* (Ottawa, January 2003); Statistics Canada, *Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada: Process, progress and prospects* (Ottawa, 2003) and Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey: portrait of a multicultural society* (Ottawa, 2003).

## ANNEX 2

### Key Ethnic Diversity Survey findings:<sup>42</sup>

- Half of the population aged 15 years and older indicated that they had a strong sense of belonging to their ethnic or cultural group. These sentiments vary across and between groups and decline over time. Strong sense of belonging was reported by 78% of Filipinos, 65% of East Indians, 65% of Portuguese, 60% of French Canadians, 58% of Chinese and 56% of Italians.
- About 63% of survey respondents who had rated their ethnicity (other than Canadian) high in importance said that maintaining customs and traditions was important. Some ethnic groups, regardless of the number of generations in Canada, had a high proportion of those who had rated their ancestry highly and who also rated their customs and traditions as important. For example, 92% of Punjabis who rated their ancestry highly also rated their customs and traditions as important, as did 81% of Greeks, 79% of Filipinos and 76% of Jamaicans.
- Participation in groups or organizations was less common among the first generation of immigrants than among their descendants, but it increased over time. The first generation tended to have a higher participation rate in ethnic or immigrant associations.
- First generation of immigrants was more likely to vote the longer they are in Canada. Nearly 8 in 10 Canadians eligible to vote said they had voted in the last federal and provincial elections, while 6 in 10 said they had voted in the last municipal election. This was true regardless of the number of generations a person or their family had lived in Canada.
- Some immigrants feel occasionally uncomfortable or out of place because of their ethno-cultural characteristics. 13% said they feel so only rarely and 10% had such feelings most or all of the time.
- Visible minorities are more likely to feel uncomfortable or out of place. In total, 24% of all visible minorities in Canada said that they felt uncomfortable or out of place all, most or some of the time. Visible minorities may feel uncomfortable for a longer period of time than their non-visible minority counterparts after arriving in Canada.
- 86% of Canadians said they did not feel they had experienced any discrimination or unfair treatment in Canada because of their ethno-cultural background during the previous 5 years. 6% said they felt it rarely, 5% sometimes and 7% sometimes or often.
- One in five visible minorities reported discrimination or unfair treatment sometimes or often (20%), 15% said they experienced such treatment

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<sup>42</sup> Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Diversity Survey: portrait of a multicultural society* (Ottawa, 2003).

only rarely. Among visible minorities discrimination or unfair treatment does not seem to diminish significantly over time.

- Race or colour was the most common reason for perceived discrimination or unfair treatment.