

“The Ways We ‘See’ Ontario’s Underrepresented:
Mythologizing Visible Minorities”

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Introduction

‘Canada is a nation of immigrants,’ we often proselytize. Indeed, it is amongst the most multicultural countries that exist, and Ontario is its most diverse province. Visible minority populations are growing, and statistical data illustrates their impressive demographic weight, particularly in the Greater Toronto Area. Yet, to date there are no sufficient mechanisms to ensure the inclusion of these underrepresented populations at Queen’s Park, Ontario’s provincial legislature. Furthermore, the narrative of this nascent democratic project is far more complicated than its sister politically progressive project based on the feminist agenda lending to number of inherent hurdles in the way of its achievement.

Linked in part to Ontario and Canada’s commitment to “multiculturalism,” visible minority representation easy fits as part of the collective mythology. Multiculturalism (and by extension *multiracialism*) in Ontario and in its parliament is often harkened as an essential element of collective identity—at least in normative or aspirational terms. Yet, multiculturalism is far from a clear-cut polity.

We must muddle through all the intricacies and layers of our identities and classify others and ourselves in order to address the inherent ethno- and andocentrism of our style of democracy. As David Goodhart suggests, our objectives represent a (small-L) liberal brand of post-nationalist multicultural altruism, but equally one that exists in a state of asymmetry, with a minority and majority.¹ Perhaps imitating the much more established feminist agenda², or perhaps just to keep things simple, the racialization of progressive politics is being written as a binary: ‘x’ and ‘colour,’ where x is the norm/normal, never really defined explicitly as ‘white,’ though it essentially is.³

The majority does not require ethnic identity; ‘white’ is x, it is the basis for comparison. As Bhikhu Parekh argues, our social identities (of which race is a part) are many, each with a varying degree of ‘potency’.⁴ In Ontario, race is potent. To be a of visible minority status in Ontario means to be increasingly dogmatized, and also means to be mythologized: as outside the majority, as immigrant, as cultural ambassador, as statistic, as Other. This minority mythology, and the very many nuances of multiculturalism / multiracialism and of the meaning ‘minority’ present many roadblocks to advancing the agenda.

Aside from a tendency towards tokenism, as was or is the case with the feminist agenda, it must also lumber with an appendage of many incipient ambiguities. The ‘visible minority’ agenda (sometimes referred as ‘racialized groups,’ which seems to address only some of the ontological problems with the former categorization) refers to a group so definitively diverse, with a provincial distribution insurmountably more complicated than the binary referent of feminism (where men and women exist in a similar ratio across Ontario).

¹ Goodhart, David. *The New Politics of Identity*. London School of Economics and Political Science (Podcast)

² Women extended the franchise in Ontario in 1917, the first woman was elected to the provincial legislative assembly in 1943

³ Butler, Judith. "Appearances Aside." *California Law Review* 88.1 (Jan. 2000), p59

⁴ Parekh, Bhikhu, *The New Politics of Identity*.

Furthermore, visible minorities are thrust into the bracket of ‘underrepresented groups’ or simply ‘minority groups,’ alongside language minorities, gender groups (including LGBT and women) and the aboriginal community (which are most often categorized separately from other visible minorities).

Increasing the representation of this amorphous group in Ontario is taken as an accepted good, a postulate that is not going to be questioned here. Rather, the hurdles of a incorporating a group-differentiated model of citizenship will be explored; and, to narrow the scope of this exegesis, the focus will remain roughly theoretical, taking into account Ontario’s particular political context and the Ontario Legislative Assembly today.

This paper will seek to explore theories of multiculturalism and their application in the province, other theoretical considerations, and finally the implications for representation at Queen’s Park. First, however, a snapshot of Ontario socio-political context is necessary.

Ontario

Ontario could easily be seen as the jewel in the crown of Canada’s multiculturalism; in fact, ‘visible minority’ is swiftly becoming an anachronistic designation in the province. Already, visible ‘minority’ groups represent demographic majorities in Markham and Brampton, Ontario, at 65 and 57 percent respectively, and Toronto sits not far behind, at 47 percent.⁵

These numbers, which seem rather remarkable, are a cause for concern for some. Questions of whether visible minority groups, usually contextualized as immigrants, are being appropriately incorporated into Ontario are somewhat legitimately asked. As political commentator Michael Adams suggests, however, it is not a project without successful precedence in Canada.⁶ Adams argues that fears of unobtainable integration today echo those that were articulated regarding Catholic communities, whose allegiance to the Pope was considered to undermine their relationship with Canada.⁷

Still, statistics illustrate a growing visible minority population, and one with strong geographic concentrations in Ontario and in particular the GTA—a component of the demographic evolution of Canada that requires special attention. The numbers illustrate such a distinctly new picture of the Canadian mosaic that they have prompted many to drop the notion that these groups should be referred to as ‘minorities,’ though in terms of general population they do remain so. One of Ontario’s three major political parties, the New Democratic Party of Ontario (NDP), have opted for the term ‘racialized groups’ which seems to express the politicized aspects of the visible minority population.

Indeed, the notion of ‘racialized’ groups speaks to a trend much larger than demographics. Much is changing in the way Ontarians themselves view their province, and much debate surrounds the often non-White face of Ontario’s marginalized. Ontario’s Minister of Children and Youth Services Deb Matthews has been vocal about

⁵ Statistics Canada, *Canada’s Ethnocultural Mosaic*, 2006 Census. Minister of Industry, Government of Canada, 2008, pp29, 31

⁶ Adams, Michael. *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism*. Toronto: Viking Canada (Penguin Group), 2007, pp52-53

⁷ Will Kymlicka in Adams, pp52-53

the role of race in experiencing poverty,⁸ as have other ministers recognized enduring problems with race-based hate crimes,⁹ and differing needs in elementary and secondary education.¹⁰

Indeed, in education Ontario is testing its boundaries; racialization has become, in this field, the wary new doctrine—one only partially accepted by the Province. As the Toronto District School Board moves to implement new Africentric schools, and the Ontario Human Rights Council has directed the Ontario government to collect race data for pupils across the province, there is much resistance by Premier McGuinty and Education Minister Kathleen Wynne. Both reject the creation Africentric schools in Toronto, arguing the project—which seeks to address higher-than-average dropout rates among black students—is overly divisive, though they do acknowledge a problem.¹¹

Comparing the ways in which the Ontario government has and has not allowed race to become a category speaks to the complicated role race places in the province's political context. The paradox appears to be that racial differentiation is cited both as a tool but also as a peril in the framework of multiculturalism; it exists as both the objective and the point of departure. To quote Paul Ricoeur, "the discovery of the plurality of cultures is never a harmless experience."¹²

Though mastering cultural and racial diversity seem to be a key to Ontario's political stability, as it is elsewhere, global experiences in integration have had some very high-profile failures. Not only are the potential hurdles of integration discussed at an academic level, but also make for a common discussion in more mainstream media.

Toronto-based pollster Allan Gregg, writing for *The Walrus* magazine in 2006, points to some of the post poignant examples of 'unsuccessful' integration. To take two other highly diverse world metropolises for instance, Paris and London have both experienced lash backs of what Gregg describes as disaffected second-generation immigrants. This is the group at the greatest risk for disenfranchisement, he argues.¹³

Interestingly, Gregg parallels the experiences of France and the United Kingdom in attempting to incorporate this group, despite divergent approaches. Both the 'staunch assimilationist' approach taken by France and the Ontario-style approach of the ethno-racial / cultural mosaic currently taken by the UK both resulted in violence and protest. Though Canada has yet to suffer bombings and riots as in Europe, Gregg is still want to label multiculturalism "a twenty-first-century conundrum,"¹⁴ it is our contemporary socio-political quandary.

⁸ Talaga, Tanya. "Kids Come First in Poverty War, Minister Says." *Toronto Star* April 29 2008: A12

⁹ McGuinty Government Supporting Community Projects. Toronto, 16 May 2008. 26 May 2008
<<http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/May2008/16/c9461.html>>

¹⁰ Walters, Joan. "Ontario Looks at Gathering Race Data for 2 Million Pupils." *Toronto Star* May 1 2008: A3.

¹¹ Macleans.ca. "McGuinty Not Happy with Decision to Establish an Africentric School, but Won't Prevent it." *Maclean's* (Feb 1, 2008),
<http://www.macleans.ca/education/universities/article.jsp?content=20080201_113702_4516>

¹² Owens, Craig. "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism." *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Ed. Hal Foster. New York: The New Press, 1998, p66

¹³ Gregg, Allan. "Identity Crisis." *The Walrus* March (2006) . 26 May 2008

<<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/2006.03-society-canada-multiculturalism/1/>>

¹⁴ Gregg, regarding London bombings 2005 (July) and France 2006 riots

Ontario risks allowing its diversity to overtake it, and one hallmark according to Gregg is the proliferation of “ethnic enclaves,”¹⁵ particularly acute in Toronto. From six ethnic enclaves in 1981 to 254 in 2001,¹⁶ many of these enclaves of visible minority populations experience rates of poverty greater than provincial averages. Ethnic enclaves have been shown to have a negative impact on income,¹⁷ a finding that is echoed in a report by the United Way of Toronto, which determined a poverty rate among visible minorities that is nearly double the average, and which is furthermore concentrated in particular neighbourhoods.¹⁸

It seems an ominous trend, one that illustrates the tension between the politics of recognizing race and the race-based disparities that seem to exist, and avoiding a “cult of ethnicity”¹⁹ that exaggerates divisions and differences. Yet, there is room to defend the Ontario’s track record, including in terms of representation at Queen’s Park.

Though only one of its political parties has elected visible minorities as Members of the Provincial Parliament, others in Ontario (such as the NDP) are meeting affirmative action objectives in running candidates from a variety of underrepresented groups.²⁰ Similarly, a third of the handful of visible minority MPPs in Ontario have been awarded positions in cabinet (there are three out of 28 cabinet ministers)²¹ – and no matter how or why they were given the post, many argue that the symbolism of their race and title are encouraging.²²

Yet, there is inevitable substance that comes with these symbols, visible minority MPPs are more than just skin colour but bring with them unique experiences and perspectives (as does each Member, arguably). As well, ethno-racial categorization brings with it certainly responsibilities, namely the expectation to represent more than just a geographically-based constituency but also a trans-provincial community which share their “difference”.

This transcendental responsibility is one that has been equally attached to women through the feminist movement. In the case of visible minorities, however, formal categorization often does not enjoy the same clarity. In making a case for the Ontario Liberal Party’s lack of formal quota for visible minority candidates, former Ontario Finance Minister Greg Sorbara, who chaired the provincial Liberal campaigns for the past two elections and was heavily involved in candidate selection, argues that one can easily be caught up in nuances.²³ Far from the biological binary of woman and man, racial groups are often complicated by cultural sectarianism. This is not to suggest that women represent a cultural homogenous group either, however the feminist movement

¹⁵ Defined as a community in which the population consists of 30 percent or more of a single visible minority group (Gregg)

¹⁶ Adams, p45

¹⁷ Warman, Casey. "Ethnic Enclaves and Immigrant Earnings Growth." *Canadian Journal of Economics* 40.2 (2007), p417

¹⁸ United Way of Greater Toronto, and The Canadian Council on Social Development. *Poverty by Postal Code*. Ed. John Anderson, MacDonnell Susan, et al. Toronto: United Way of Greater Toronto, 2004

¹⁹ Gregg

²⁰ See Appendix for Ontario NDP candidate statistics , 2007

²¹ These are Margaret Best, Michael Chan and Harinder Takhar

²² Sorbara, Greg. Interview. Toronto, 16 May 2008

²³ Sorbara

has been successful in articulating sex as a basis for differentiated representation; “women’s issues” are taken as a transcultural project.

Streaks of religious and national identity differences cut through race, as does the possibility for mixed racial heritage that make tidy categories either impossible or impossibly multifarious. Consider: how might an MPP from Trinidad, of Indian heritage be categorized? Must (s)he identify with and represent Indian communities from India, black communities from Trinidad? Both? Neither? Should or could different identifications be imposed or prioritized? Current Ontario minister Margaret Best has, alternatively, suggested that her presence in the Ontario Legislature—as a person of visible minority status—has important reverberations for Ontarians from across the world, conceivably from a variety of different racial identities.²⁴ In this case ‘visible minority’ could be seen as articulated as part of the more reductive minority / majority binary.

The way certain identities are prioritized, or prescribed reflects not only perhaps a natural tendency to ‘see’ visible minority and give meaning to it, but also perhaps different philosophical approaches to multiculturalism / multiracialism. The nexus of these philosophical foundations and understanding political representation in a practical way provide the space to discuss the hurdles of seeing race in the Ontario legislature.

Theories in Multiculturalism

Ontario’s provincial parliament has certainly appropriated the multiculturalism narrative first articulated by the federal government in 1971. It has become a new *modus operandi* of the Ontarian brand of liberalism. Multiculturalism, however, is far from a coherent project. Furthermore, our conceptualization of visible minority does not reference culture or ethnicity, but race. Thus, the terminology of *multiculturalism* should perhaps be substituted with *multiracialism* in this context, however the former still makes for a somewhat appropriate term if we take into account the mythology of ‘minority.’

Sasja Tempelman offers an interesting, if admittedly crude, exegesis of the tripartite typology of collective identity developed by Eisenstadt and Giesen in the mid-1990s of *primordial*, *universal*, and *civic* multiculturalisms. Tempelman uses the works of Charles Taylor, Will Kymlicka and Bhikhu Parekh to explore each part, and offers many observations that are of import. Her arguments will be paralleled here, with reference to Ontario, in the hopes of fleshing out the philosophical context of multiculturalism / multiracialism.

It is important to point out, however, at the outset of this (my own exegesis of Tempelman’s work), that she describes each of Eisenstadt and Giesen’s three approaches to collective identity as relatively exclusive to one another. Rather, it seems as though it is very possible and in fact most likely that each exist in synchronicity; elements of each are present in Ontario, and the major critiques of each also all seem applicable. Ontario, despite an open and articulated dedication to multiculturalism, also seems to be unequally unsure of or unattached to any particular philosophical approach. Indeed, this is one of the assumptions made in this study.

Similarly, Eisenstadt and Giesen have their assumptions as well, ones that are accepted here and by Tempelman. They are twofold; first, that collective cultural identity

²⁴ Coyle, Jim. "Minister Finds Reason to Smile." *Toronto Star* May 5 2008: AA8

is a social construction. To interpret this with the help of Butler, this idea of social constructivism can be extended to race²⁵, thus making this postulate appropriate to maintain in terms of visible minority representation (which, again, is more a racial idea rather than a cultural one). This assumption necessitates, according to Tempelman, a “drawing of boundaries that demarcate the collective entity,” thus implying a necessary process of either exclusion or inclusion.²⁶ This process is also fundamental to the notion of political representation; those elected never represent their entire constituency, sometimes not even a majority, in a single-member plurality voting system as in Ontario.

The second assumption is that the exclusion/inclusion process occurs in one of three ways, thus the basis for the three-part typology (*primordialist*, the *universalist*, and the *civic* modes of collective identity / multiculturalism). The core of the identity, the basis of its membership, its vision of outsiders and their relationship with them, and the mode by which outsiders are excluded define each.

Tempelman expresses the first, the primordialist approach, through the work of Taylor. Primordialism attributes (cultural) identity to ‘quasi-natural’ attributes, which are seemingly prescribed by nature—unable to be questioned.²⁷ No more easily can the link between this type of ‘cultural’ identification be made with race than in this model. Race is most reductively a biological consequence, and very easily are we willing to ascribe identity based on racial terms.

In fact, the primordialist approach is most appropriate in terms of how ‘visible minorities’ are viewed in Ontario. With modernity and the Enlightenment, Western cultures began to rely on systematic methods of observation and measurement; thus, statistical analysis of demographics has become an important tool in the ways we understand our society. To identify groups in such a way, to categorize groups based ethno-racial self-identification as is done in national censuses, produces an image of unified ethno-racial-cultural groups that is perhaps not accurate.²⁸

Taylor’s assumption is that all members of a particular group connect with the collective in the same way. In fact, the cultural (or racial) community is considered to represent the essence of *individual* identity. As a result, says Tempelman, Taylor’s arguments rely on the ‘us’ / ‘them’ mindset. As it has been argued in this paper, this binary resembles that which exists in Ontario.²⁹ Perhaps the result of the sheer complexity of Ontario’s ethno-racial diversity, the ‘visible minority’ is set in contrast to the visible majority and is identified as such in terms of their entitlements to political representation.

As ethno-racial categories form the basis for identity (at least in part), Taylor suggests a non-assimilationist ‘politics of difference’ over a universal model. He argues that the politics of difference

... asks that we give acknowledgement and status to something that is not universally shared. Or, otherwise put, we give due acknowledgement only

²⁵ Butler, p59

²⁶ Tempelman, Sasja. "Constructions of Cultural Identity: Multiculturalism and Exclusion." *Political Studies*.47 (1999), 17

²⁷ Tempelman, pp17-18

²⁸ In contrast to this is to distinguish native- and foreign-born citizens, lending to a more visceral interpretation of differentiated experience or relationship to “Ontario”

²⁹ Tempelman, p23

to what is universally present – everyone has an identity – through recognizing what is peculiar to each. The universal demand powers an acknowledgement of specificity.³⁰

The tension within Taylor's arguments relate to this rigid oppositional identity and the desirability of inclusion. Through his emphasis on the homogeneity within cultural groups, and the differences amongst them, Taylor tags outsiders as different. This "hard pluralism,"³¹ as Appiah would have it, seems to deny an important element of contemporary / post-modern cosmopolitanism: that of cultural and racial hybridization.³² It ignores the possibility that categories as seemingly coherent as race are in fact fluid, amorphous and perhaps incidental.

Though affirmative action policies, such as the NDP's³³, are set out to conquer entrenched discrimination, there is a tinge of primordial forced identification. If you are of visible minority status, the philosophy suggests, you are representative of the collective that is in turn disadvantaged (socially, economically and politically). Interestingly, this also appears in the civic model of multiculturalism (to be discussed shortly) but as a peril of strategy versus paternalistic recognition as in Taylor; seemingly affirmative action could fit into both of these columns.

In contrast with Taylor, where cultural differences are distinct, judged and disciplined from within, Kymlicka argues for a universal judgment based on liberal values. Though in Taylor there was an expectation to preserve the liberal state, in Kymlicka's *universalist* approach the central principles of the liberal state are unalterable.³⁴ Ergo, Tempelman argues, a moral hierarchy is established whereby proximity to those principles is privileged.

Additionally, Kymlicka's model prioritizes 'national' minorities, which are seen to have a more authentic claim to special or differentiated representation or status. Immigrants, argues Kymlicka, relinquish their right to live with special cultural status by voluntarily leaving their countries.³⁵ Immigrants, and existing communities in Canada, are expected to 'naturalize,'³⁶ in other words, he seems to suggest, there exists a 'Canadian' identity which must be appropriated on top of or in addition to others.

Ontario, and Canada generally, does mark the difference between its national minority groups, i.e. aboriginal and French-Canadian communities, and in fact does give these groups special moral weight. Immigrants, however, are recognized as an integral feature of the province and a main contributor to demographic stability and growth.³⁷ Minorities are free to benefit from their identification with particular cultural, racial or national communities, but only deserve the special recognition and protection if the cost

³⁰ Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism: Examining The Politics of Recognition*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994, p39

³¹ Kwame Anthony Appiah *The Ethics of Identity*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005

³² Tempelman, p22

³³ See Appendix

³⁴ Tempelman, p28

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Kymlicka, Will. "Immigration, Citizenship, Multiculturalism: Exploring the Links." *The Politics of Migration*. Ed. Sarah Spencer. Malden, Massachusetts: The Political Quarterly (Blackwell Publishing), 2003, p196

³⁷ Adams, xiv

of their integration into the mainstream is unduly high.³⁸ This is a criterion that has been met by national minorities, says Kymlicka, where the preservation of cultures is only necessary otherwise if it relates to their integration into the national culture.³⁹

The scale of diversity in Ontario does suggest that a focus on integration might be the only workable model. The capacity of the province to afford various groups special status is perhaps not there—still, the attempts at differentiated education (i.e. Africentric schools or curricula) demonstrates the latter most facet of Kymlicka’s argument discussed here. Racialization in Ontario is adequately labeled as an attempt to integrate, not to divide, and this is Kymlicka’s approach. Furthermore, in the context of the visible minority agenda in Ontario again we see some parallel; aboriginal people are not categorized as ‘visible minorities’⁴⁰ but are given a distinct standing in terms of political needs (including representation).

It is interesting to note, consequently, that whereas Ontario has successfully elected a number of visible minority MPPs, it has yet to elect a self-identified aboriginal MPP. Perhaps this is a result of the divergent ways in which Ontario approaches aboriginal peoples (as a morally separate national minority), and other visible minority populations, of which Kymlicka takes note.

Parekh, used by Tempelman to illustrate Eisenstadt and Giesen’s final model, the civic model, also has certain groups lying on the margins of ‘normal’ politics—into which aboriginal peoples might likewise be coarsely thrust. In Parekh model, however, the periphery is sustained much less intentionally.

Tempelman’s summary of Parekh and the civic model focus heavily on the notion cross-boundary communication. These boundaries can be represented by, for instance, the variety of social identities of which we each have a multiplicity.⁴¹ As in Taylor, multiculturalism takes the form of a ‘politics of recognition,’ which exists within the framework of the liberal state. The difference, however, is that group identity is not considered fixed or even shared, it stands for debate—to be “defined and defended for the outside world” by appointed spokespeople.⁴² Only a base level of coherence is needed to maintain a so-called cultural community, where notions of ‘authentic’ cultural identities are not employed.

The focus on process, communication and the progression of a state as a result, however, seemingly disallows the space for nationalist or separatist mentalities.⁴³ Thus, the communities that Taylor sees as worthy of protection and differential treatment (i.e. French-Canadian and aboriginal peoples), the civic model likewise pushes to the outskirts of mainstream society—but for functionally opposite reasons.

Similarly, the very intangible nature of communities, i.e. racial groups, (again versus Taylor) provides little foundation on which to judge their legitimacy in terms of their role in any dialogue. Indeed, this uncertainty present the civic model with a paradoxical hurdle. If group differentiation and internal unity could be said to foster an image of legitimacy (i.e. if it makes for a more legitimate claim to differentiated rights,

³⁸ Tempelman, p27

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/concepts/definitions/vis-minorit.htm>

⁴¹ Parekh, *The New Politics of Identity*.

⁴² Tempelman, p23

⁴³ Tempelman, p24

treatment, or actions by the government), than a sort of ‘strategic primordialism’ could very likely be employed.⁴⁴ In this case, differences are exaggerated, and homogeneity and unity of a community might be overemphasized or simply rhetorical in order to achieve objectives. Here, identities are ‘dogmatized’⁴⁵ when the civic approach, of the three here, accepts the most open-ended interpretation of identity and of the image of liberal state (and its values).

Beyond the multicultural framework

The visible minority agenda does not only share common ground with multiculturalism however. It is also linked to other broad dialogues, including feminism. Jennifer Lawless describes gender consciousness as a “potentially empowering cognitive evaluation,”⁴⁶ and perhaps this is the case with race consciousness, as well—certainly both are often forced onto their subject.

Lawless continues, presenting research suggesting the importance of group identification in terms of political support; voters tend to prefer those that elicit such identification—in particular their own—which lend to sentiments of inclusion.⁴⁷ Furthermore, this trust and sympathy increase constituents’ “perceptions of policy congruence” with their representative, which are “arguably, the most important determinants of policy satisfaction.”⁴⁸

Again, a correlation of her arguments here regarding the impacts of symbolic representation can be made with race. Yet, demographically, women can expect to solicit this type of ‘symbolic sympathy’ from approximately half the population—something very few, if any, visible minority representatives can do (at least while wearing their ‘visible minority’ hats, so to speak).

Regardless, race is not an “objective” term of classification,⁴⁹ rather, it has important discursive meaning attached to it. As multiracialism, or racialization, progresses the signifier of race becomes more important, and along with this increased weight come a number of caveats.

To some great extent, our thinking is very much based on Enlightenment philosophy: seeing is believing.⁵⁰ Race has become an emblem of marginalization,⁵¹ and we have come to ‘see’ visible minorities officially through statistics of Ontario’s demographics and also wanting to ‘see’ them represented at Queen’s Park—a base liberal democratic desire that has particular capital in Ontario, indeed, with a majority of the visible minority population in Canada.⁵²

⁴⁴ Tempelman, p25

⁴⁵ Keane, John. *The New Politics of Identity*.

⁴⁶ Lawless, Jennifer. "Politics of Presence? Congresswomen and Symbolic Representation." *Political Research Quarterly* 57.1 (2004), p83

⁴⁷ Lawless, p84

⁴⁸ Lawless, p86

⁴⁹ Appiah, Kwame Anthony. "The Conservation of "Race"." *Black American Literature Forum* 23.1 (1989), pp38-39

⁵⁰ Owens, p80

⁵¹ Owens, p71

⁵² Statistics Canada, *Canada’s Ethnocultural Mosaic*, p19

As a result of this need to see, however, the visible minority MPP has become a political asset in the caché of any political party—as are women. Despite their individual qualifications, the power of race makes a visible minority MPP a potential victim of strategic appropriation, and some even tokenism. One needs only take a look at legislative seating arrangements in Ontario to realize the import places one having a visual reminder to publics of the successes of their efforts to match more accurately the ‘face of Ontario.’

Looking through the sightlines of the television camera, behind both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition are a strip of women and, in the case of the Liberals, also its collection of visible minority cabinet ministers. Question Period, undoubtedly the most important broadcasted work of the legislative assembly, becomes a method of appropriating the capital provided by visible minority MPPs.

Conclusion

Despite both symbolic and substantive advantages to having elected visible minority MPPs at Ontario’s legislature, the visible minority agenda can likewise be problematized. The dispersion and diversity of the ‘visible minority’ demographic, and the easily appropriated political capital they can represent are caveats to an agenda that seeks to progress beyond the presumptive hegemony of majority whiteness.⁵³

Multiracialism is unavoidably a discourse of difference, and as we mythologize visible minorities in various ways, are we forcing the adoption of an inappropriate typology? By ‘marking’ the race minorities and leaving the majority ‘unmarked,’⁵⁴ and having the former represent the ‘underrepresented,’ the ‘margins,’ do we approach simply a reinvented ethnocentrism⁵⁵?

The philosophical foundations of multiculturalism / multiracialism lack coherence, and as a result, the implementation of those ideals in Ontario have also been met with debate. As in the case of racialized education, for instance, we can witness the grey area occupied in the space between recognition and division. Certainly racial identities are, as is sex, “fundamental to social reality,”⁵⁶ but are they incommensurable? Are racial categories necessarily discriminatory, as Appiah would suggest,⁵⁷ and does our binary way of thinking about race in Ontario promote this?

One alternative, a post-modern approach, would see a pluralism so nuanced that it obscures any attempt to classify (everyone as an ‘Other’); another alternative, to remove race from our lexicon entirely, results in a similar ends. In contrast, are there implications in the prolonged use of the type of binary multiculturalism employed in the rhetoric of ‘visible minority’ political representation today? Certainly the demographic changes in Ontario suggest that the white majority is poised to become a statistical minority one day, after which point a rhetorical shift would seemingly be forced. Yet, it is just as easy to see how non-White racial groups might still remain underrepresented in provincial politics—minority then might be more accurately described as a lack of power and

⁵³ Butler, p59

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Owens

⁵⁶ Butler, p59

⁵⁷ Ibid.

influence, something that even further obscures race and the relationship of race with other social identifications and the objectives of the visible minority agenda.

We must question the motives of this agenda: what problems are we truly trying to address, what do we mean when we say ‘visible minority’? The way we mythologize those words perhaps suggest we are really attempting to reconcile the non-integrated and the establishment, or perhaps to reconcile varied socio-economic classes, but this is not reflected in the actual objectives of the agenda.

Ontario is at the forefront of a changing Canada. It has few places from which to draw its lessons, few places more diverse, and must instead forge new paths in Canadian multiracial integration and ergo must give serious thought to the implications and nuances of the political project they pursue. Primarily, the mythology of ‘visible minority’ must be deconstructed and re-evaluated; increased visible minority representation is taken as a granted good, but rarely are the potential risks or roadblocks explored.

The questions posed in this paper are, in fact, not easily answered and likely for that reason seem to be avoided in mainstream political rhetoric. Nonetheless, they have important implications for Ontario’s legislature, as the creation of an inclusive and appropriately integrated collective identity—and enshrining similar values in political representation—are keys in avoiding the kinds of racial and socio-economic violence that has occurred in many of our most diverse capitals.

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APPENDIX

Ontario NDP Candidate Search 2007

2007 Candidates by Affirmative Action Target Groups

Women	42	39.2%
Racialized Groups (<i>Visible Minorities</i>)	19	17.7%
Francophone	6	5.6%
Youth	3	2.8%
LGBT	6	5.6%
Persons Living with Disabilities	3	2.8%
Aboriginal	0	0%

63 AA candidates (out of 107)

58.8% of all candidates were AA

2003 Candidates by AA Target Groups

Women	34	33%
Racialized Groups (<i>Visible Minorities</i>)	10	9.7%
Francophone	5	4.9%
Youth	8	7.8%
LGBT	1	.9%
PLWD	3	2.9%
Aboriginal	0	0%

55 AA candidates (out of 103)

53.4% of all candidates were AA

1999 Candidates by AA Target Groups

Women	31	30 %
Racialized Groups (<i>Visible Minorities</i>)	9	8.7%
Francophone	4	3.8%
Youth	6	5.8%
LGBT	2	1.9%
PLWD	0	0%
Aboriginal	0	0%

45 AA candidates (out of 103)

43.7 % of all candidates were AA

Cope:343

(Provided by the ONDP)