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PART ONE

Introduction

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Chapter One

The Case Study

Visiting Toronto's International Institute

For almost two decades before Canada adopted multiculturalism as an official policy in 1971, the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto was actively promoting pluralism as a city- and nation-building project. Both a social welfare agency and a socio-cultural organization, the Institute applied what were later called multicultural approaches in its immigrant counselling and casework. Women played key roles in the Institute as leaders, community organizers, and front-line social workers. They comprised a significant proportion of its diverse immigrant clientele and its ethnically mixed membership. During the multi-ethnic festivals that the Institute mounted with its allies and collaborators, women performed on the stage and behind it as organizers. The wealthier women also participated in the making of an urban bourgeois aesthetic that traded in ethnic folk performance and arts and crafts.

The Toronto Institute was officially founded on 1 October 1956. At that time, two existing agencies merged and joined the international institute movement, a US-wide network of pluralist agencies with origins in early-twentieth-century women's reformism. During its heyday in the 1960s, the Toronto Institute was located for several years at 709 College Street in the immigrant west end. The two buildings – an auditorium that had once been a Protestant church and then a synagogue, and a three-storey school building – were connected by a rear passageway. The two-level auditorium was renovated and a basement-level cabaret space was created. The renovated school-turned-main-building housed a lounge, a library, two exhibition spaces, several meeting rooms, and staff offices. Entering the premises meant stepping into a multicultural but heavily European space.

Let's imagine what visitors to the Toronto Institute in, say, 1964 would have observed. The tour's host was Canadian social worker Nell (Nellie) West, the agency's first director and its longest-serving administrator. Greeting the

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visitors in the front hall of the main building, she likened the agency to "a bridge whose traffic is the interpretation of the newcomer to the Canadian, and of the Canadian society to the newcomer." Speaking in a deliberately slow and calm manner, West described her heavily immigrant staff as uniquely placed to fulfil the dual goal of integrating immigrants into Canadian society while preserving their distinctive cultures and promoting ethnic diversity. The Institute, she declared, represented a bold experiment in the making of an international community, or local United Nations, that could act as a model for a more robust multicultural nation. She noted, too, that "native-Canadians," not only newcomers, had to undergo a process of "re-education" that would instil in them a respect for cultural diversity. While admitting to the need for more Canadian-born members, West then invited her visitors to see for themselves how newcomers and Canadians together were pursuing "common purposes on a basis of mutual respect, equality, and non-discrimination in regard to race, nationality, and religion."[1]

As the visitors toured the main building, which was open all week from 8:30 am until 11 pm, they took in various scenes. The tense faces of the men and women waiting for an intake interview in the reception centre or for their appointment with one of the multilingual counsellors conveyed considerable anxiety. One visitor swore that she could hear muffled shouting from behind a door. The chatter and music that could also be heard signalled more upbeat scenarios. In the main floor rooms that were set up with card tables, a dozen men and women of Dutch, German, and other origins were playing bridge or chess, their friendly banter obviously annoying the serious-minded club leaders who wanted quiet concentration. Across the hall, a visitor walked into a group discussion on democratic citizenship. Another joined a group watching a National Film Board documentary on the Calgary Stampede. In an upstairs room near the kitchen, the supper club members were enjoying their monthly dinner, the featured Portuguese meal the work of a cook and some of its fifteen members. Next door, the heavily Eastern European outdoor group was planning weekend camping trips. In the other rooms, some of the Institute's three dozen affiliated groups, the few non-European among them being the Chinese Canadian Association and the West Indian Student Association, were holding their own meetings.

The English classes and conversational tutorials brought a few hundred people into the Institute each weekday afternoon and evening. Finding a tutorial being held in a stairwell, one visitor watched as a blind teacher used a small china dog and some wooden dolls to help her Italian, Greek, and Colombian students learn English. Nearby, some social workers and a public health nurse were learning Italian. Bypassing the lounge, where two women were leafing through magazines, another visitor took in the refugee art show in one of the exhibition rooms.

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As for the music heard in the main building, it came from three rooms. In one of them, an affiliated Latvian choral group was rehearsing for a civic holiday performance at City Hall. In another, a Macedonian folk-dance troupe was getting ready for a popular television show. In the third, some young Hungarian men were listening to jazz records. A visitor who went into the cabaret theatre in the auditorium building found the International Institute Folk Dancers rehearsing for an upcoming festival. On Saturday nights, people took over the space to dance to the contemporary music of orchestras like Jim O'Neil and His Boys or Salvatore's Orchestra, though men always outnumbered women. Had our visitors returned for the opening concert of an Institute United Nations or Ethnic Week program, which was usually held in the main auditorium, they would have witnessed a colourful and eclectic show. By decade's end, someone tracking the Institute's efforts to promote multiculturalism on a wider scale would have attended the first Metro International Caravan in summer 1969. A mega-festival with many organizers and sponsors, dozens of pavilions showcasing ethnic folk culture and food, and hundreds of thousands of tourists and local participants, Metro Caravan's longevity would help to solidify Toronto's image as the most culturally diverse city in Canada.

Women's Pluralism

This book is a study of a model of liberal pluralist multiculturalism in which women were the primary agents. Drawing on the rich archive of Toronto's International Institute and research on the US Institutes,[2] and other sources, it examines multiculturalism as social work and community organizing as well as cultural and nation-building practices. I argue that the Toronto Institute women promoted a progressive but flawed mandate to integrate immigrants and refugees into an increasingly diverse city. And by extension it offered a model of multiculturalism to the rest of the nation.

The study investigates the contradictions between, on the one hand, the women activists' desire to celebrate ethnic diversity and build a pluralist community, and, on the other, their implication in a nation-building project that sought to manage that diversity and ensure loyalty to the state. To paraphrase and modify Benedict Anderson's notion of imagined communities, their practices of nation-building included the use of popular spectacles and dissemination of a multicultural vocabulary through different types of media to shape a public narrative of Toronto and Canada as a robust multicultural society during an era of mass migration.[3] Drawing on the feminist, class, and anti-racist critiques of nation-building and the scholarship on spectacle and commemoration, I show that these practices involved the manipulation of the Canadian past, the staging of eclectic but packaged displays of ethnic folk cultures, and the inventing of a pluralist tradition meant to allay anxieties and ensure social order at a time of rapid change.[4]

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The book probes the fundamental tensions within liberalism – including the liberal social work variant – between democratic ideals and hierarchies of influence and power by scrutinizing the on-the-ground interactions, negotiations, and conflicts that marked the individual counselling sessions as well as the group and community relations at the Toronto Institute. Among these hierarchies, the imprints of gender, race, and class relations – and often gender, ethnic/race, and class systems based on national or ethnic origins – shaped both quotidian life at the Institute and its community projects and cultural programs.[5]

In offering a warts-and-all analysis of women's pluralism in Canada through a broadly cast case study of the Toronto Institute, this book also reflects an engagement with North American, cross-border, and international as well as national debates and developments. My main goal was not to write an institutional history, but to use the institutional record to explore themes related to women and multiculturalism. But I certainly address the Institute's origins and its demise.[6]

This is also a Toronto story. Pluralism, like all ideologies, can have regional or local variants and inflections. Pittsburgh has its Cathedral of Learning and Winnipeg its International Centre. In both cases, ethnic groups were invited to decorate a room that reflected their heritage culture.[7] Toronto's multiculturalism is a bold, even brash, brand. That Toronto is the most diverse city on the globe comes trippingly on the tongue of its boosters. A statue entitled *Monument to Multiculturalism* stands prominently in the centre of town, a gift from the Italian community. The claim that UNESCO recognizes Toronto as the world's most diverse city is an urban myth by which many Torontonians live. The city's self-styled image is wrapped up in a super pluralism and hyper-diversity brimming with over-the-top food-and-festival spectacles driven by populist ideology and business tourism.[8] The Raptors-mania during the 2019 National Basketball Association championship turned a Toronto basketball team composed primarily of African Americans (but also with a president and two key players of African origins) in a US league into a symbol of Toronto and Canadian multiculturalism. The victory parade put the city's diversity on a national, North American, and global stage.[9] The pluralist boosterism of the Toronto Institute and its allies was aided by the city's growing population, its rise as the country's financial centre, and its increasing influence as a media centre as well as a tourist destination that could project its vision to national and even some international audiences.

Precursors

Toronto's International Institute was part of a US-based umbrella organization with roots in the Progressive era (1890s–1920s), but its origins were local. The initial impetus came from a group of professionals and volunteers who responded to the arrival of refugees in postwar Toronto by organizing practical

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support and cultural activities involving interactions with Canadians. As immigration continued, the Toronto Welfare Council (TWC), later the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto (SPC), secured a commitment from people with links to social and volunteer agencies to expand the existing services for newcomers and to create a community centre where old and new Canadians could meet each other. By 1952, two agencies were formed. The New Canadians Service Association of Ontario (NCSA) focused on securing social services for the newcomers while Old St Andrew's Church Memorial House offered cultural and recreational programs.[10]

With funds provided by several charitable groups, St Andrew's ran its friendly house out of an old downtown Presbyterian church building at 415 Jarvis Street, a location removed from the immigrant areas. Initially, the programs were largely a continuation of the intellectual and cultural activities organized by a group of University of Toronto professors for the early arriving Eastern European refugee intellectuals and professionals. (It was called the Hart House Group after the Gothic-style building on the university campus where the meetings were held.) After St Andrew's assumed operations, the membership and range of activities grew. By 1954, the latter included a lecture series, a series of English tutorials, and "a library of Canadiana" to be used as resource materials. The much-valued intercultural groups – defined as groups where "the Canadian and the newcomer participate equally" – organized some of the social and recreational activities.[11]

The TWC reports undertaken in connection with St Andrew's application for funds from the Community Chest of Greater Toronto (later the United Community Fund and United Appeal Campaign) issued some concerns. One was that programs geared mainly towards a "well-educated clientele" might undercut the goal of building a democratic community by scaring off "uneducated" newcomers. Another was the (not surprising) anti-German sentiment expressed by immigrant and Canadian members towards a large cluster of German newcomers.[12] The arrival of Southern Europeans of humble rural origins diversified the class and ethnic profile, but Eastern Europeans from middle-class backgrounds would remain a strong presence in Institute programs.

In response to criticism from the members, the St Andrew's board rescinded an English-only policy meant to discourage Old World animosities and attract more English Canadian members. Significantly, the decision followed a discussion of the International Institutes' philosophy of encouraging immigrants to retain their cultural heritage while also accepting the dominant US culture. English Canadian nationalism continued to inform Toronto Institute pluralism, but so, too, would the insistence that Canadians not simply create programs for newcomers but also participate in cross-cultural activities that would make them better citizens too. A visit by a St Andrew's delegation to Detroit's Institute influenced later developments.[13]

The NCSA's orientation and referral services focused initially on the Eastern Europeans who used St Andrew's House. It, too, enjoyed the support of

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sponsors. The funds provided by the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE) allowed the agency to rent downtown office space. In 1954, the wealthy Anglo women of the Junior League of Toronto adopted the NCSA as a charitable project. The NCSA moved into St Andrew's and hired West as director. A pluralist by virtue of her social work training and experience in interwar Chicago, West (and colleagues) spoke of modelling the NCSA after the International Institutes. Two years later, the NCSA and St Andrew's merged and joined the American Federation of International Institutes.[14]

The IODE's involvement with the NCSA and then the Institute requires some additional comment given its history as an imperialist organization that had long promoted the assimilation of immigrants into a British-defined Canada. After the Second World War, the IODE, like many other English Canadian groups, shifted its focus away from Britain, whose status and prestige in the world had declined, and towards North America and to Canada in particular. In the process, notes Katie Pickles, a belief in the racial hierarches that had undergirded imperialism gave way to a preoccupation with what made Canada unique. Active Cold Warriors as well, the IODE women proclaimed Canada's uniqueness by emphasizing the values and institutions the Communists sought to destroy. In highlighting such virtues as liberalism and parliamentary democracy, they also confirmed the continuing value of a British heritage. As for newcomers, the IODE's assimilationist stance gave way to an integrationist one that accepted the immigrants' cultural distinctiveness provided they adopted the dominant norms of Canadian society.[15]

An upper-middle-class women's organization associated with charitable activities both elite (as in support for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra) and popular (clothing drives), the Toronto Junior League's decision to "adopt" the NCSA and then support the Institute arose out of the overlapping networks among influential volunteers within the respective organizations. But its spokeswomen also spoke of the desire to foster "a community project" in immigrant integration that would involve many more Canadians. The continuing support that both the IODE and the Junior League offered an agency serving non-English-speaking immigrants also reflected other postwar developments, including the decline in animosity towards ethnic minorities occasioned by the revelations of Nazi and Communist atrocities, the rise of global movements in human rights and ethnic consciousness, and the resurgence of liberal internationalism.[16]

Toronto Institute Profile

The Toronto Institute, like its US counterparts, was a volunteer agency heavily reliant on the community chest funds collected to support municipally based, semi-private charity agencies. Admitted to the United Community Fund in 1956, it received most of its funding from the UCF/United Appeal organization.

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(In 1964, a good year, the agency's income stood at $34,547.) Occasional grants came from private charity organizations, from various departments within the federal and provincial governments, and from Metropolitan Toronto Council.

The Institute functioned with a volunteer board of directors, a director (or executive director) and other paid staff, and volunteers. In 1960, the budget allowed for sixteen full-time staff positions, which consisted of professional and semi-professional social workers with training in group work or counselling as well as half a dozen clerical and secretarial staff, and two maintenance workers. The multilingual secretaries also did duty as home visitors. The annual membership numbers ranged from a low of about 600 to just over 2,000, with more people attending the major cultural events. Male members outnumbered female ones.

The International Institutes, including Toronto's, combined the settlement movement concept of a neighbourhood house with that of a community hub, or social centre, that drew people from beyond the neighbourhood. After spending its first years of operation in the cramped quarters of St Andrew's, the Toronto Institute acquired the lease on the College Street address in 1959 and moved in after completing the renovations. In winter 1966, it moved again, to 321 Davenport Road. By 1973, a newly decentralized Institute consisted of four offices spread across Metropolitan Toronto.

Personnel

All together, the Institute was more ethnically diverse than the city's mainstream agencies and government departments. Overall, women outnumbered men in paid and volunteer posts, though at various points in time, a majority of the board members and senior administrators were men.

The greatest degree of ethnic diversity existed among the combined staff of the Department of Group Services, which oversaw the clubs and house programs, and the counselling staff of the Department of Individual Services. In addition to the professional social workers and semi-professional practitioners, staff included social work students who were placed as group workers (but not counsellors) and educated newcomers who received on-the-job training. In keeping with a now familiar multicultural principle, the Institute deliberately recruited from the immigrant communities it served, though most of the staff it employed were from a middle-class background. The previous occupations of those who were retooled as counsellors included teacher, engineer, trade official, lawyer, doctor, and university student. By 1970, a more racially diverse staff included social workers from Korea, India, and Guyana, but the financial and other troubles that led to the agency's demise by the end of 1974 meant their terms were short-lived. Even so, the refugee or immigrant profile of many Institute staffers precludes a simple categorization of them as so many

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Canadian bourgeois agents of Canadianization acting upon poor and marginalized foreigners.

The multi-ethnic Institute board included politicians, businessfolk, professionals (lawyers, accountants, dentists), and social welfare personnel who supported immigration and saw in pluralism a means by which to preserve social order in a time of rapid change.[17] Prominent male members included the Russian-born David Croll, a leading Liberal and Canada's first Jewish senator. Progressive Conservatives included lawyer and city councillor William Archer and, later, Allan Grossman, a Jewish Canadian cabinet minister in the Ontario government. C.D. Milani, an Italian Canadian developer who subsidized the Institute's summer outdoor fundraiser, and Leon Kossar, a Ukrainian-Canadian journalist and festival promoter, were among the ethno-Canadian (as in neither British nor French in origin) men who served on the board.

The educators who served board terms included, early on, J. Roby Kidd, director of the left-leaning Canadian Association for Adult Education, and later, Freda Hawkins, a political scientist specializing in immigration policy at the University of Toronto. The Institute was a non-denominational though heavily Protestant agency, but the presence of Catholic leaders such as Father C.J. Mulvihill, an administrator of Catholic immigrant services and charities, was a nod to the many Catholic immigrants entering Toronto. A civil servant with expertise on English and citizenship programs, Stephen Davidovich belonged to the "nationalist" or mainstream Ukrainian Canadian community.[18]

Many of the board's female members came through the Institute's networks. Social worker Charity Grant worked with the SPC and the federal Canadian Citizenship Branch while Helen Ignatieff (who married into the celebrated Russian Canadian family) was a curator of "Canadiana" at the Royal Ontario Museum. Well-connected Canadian volunteers included Mrs Douglas (Margaret or Peggy) Jennings, considered "foster mother" to the Institute for having secured the Junior League's support for the NCSA.[19] Ethno-Canadian members included Mrs S. Di Giacomo of the Catholic Women's League (CWL) and Jean Lumb, the Chinese Canadian businesswoman and human rights activist. A wartime arrival who had worked with the Red Cross and the Allied intelligence services in Europe, and later became an immigrant counsellor with Canada's department of labour, the multilingual Irene Ungar represented the Canadian Polish Congress (Toronto District) and Canadian Polish Women's Federation.[20] In the early 1970s, Dr Nalla (Nallamma) Subramaniam Senathirajah, a sixties-era professional immigrant of Sri Lankan origins who held faculty, government, and private positions as an urban planner and policy analyst, became one of the few racialized members on the board. One of the few women to serve as board president was Mrs S. Gordon (Elizabeth or Betty) Isserstedt (née McBain), a long-time volunteer who in 1962 married a German Canadian.[21]

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The half-dozen people who served as Institute director were predominantly white middle-class Anglo-Canadians, though they were not a monolithic group. The first director, Nell West (1897–1973), began her career in the mid-1920s as a prairie schoolteacher. The eldest of six daughters of Protestant Irish-Canadian farmers in Manitoba, West (née Wark) later claimed that teaching Hungarian and Finnish immigrant children in Saskatchewan and Alberta gave her insight into the challenges facing newcomers. Inspired by reform and suffrage leader Nellie McClung, whom she knew as an adolescent in Winnipeg, West later turned to social work. After graduating from Winnipeg's Wesley College (later United College), she went to the University of Chicago, where she earned a social work degree under the supervision of settlement movement leader Edith Abbott, and then worked in the settlement movement. She also spent time at the London School of Economics and at the American College of Education in Vienna. On returning to Canada, she spent more than a decade in public welfare administration in Windsor, Hamilton, and St Catharines, Ontario. In 1934, Croll, then minister of public welfare in the Ontario government, hired West as an assistant deputy minister.

In 1940, West married a man twenty-two years her senior, and at whose request she retired. Two years later, however, she accepted a wartime invitation from the federal government to head the Division of Voluntary Services in the Department of National War Services. At war's end, a recently widowed West accepted a position overseas with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), becoming chief welfare officer for the displaced persons operations in Austria. West's subsequent involvement with the NCSA and Toronto Institute combined her experience in refugee and public welfare work. Her Chicago training in social work mirrored that of many of her US Institute counterparts. As did her love of international travel: she made several trips to Europe and visited India and the Soviet Union. After stepping down as Institute director in 1962 amid a budget crisis attributed to an inept assistant director,[22] West became director of services, overseeing the group services and counselling departments. Upon retiring in 1965, she joined the board until her death in 1973, a year before the Institute ceased to exist on 31 December 1974.

There is a touch of sexism in the nickname that colleagues gave West, a childless widow, in acknowledgment of her "zealous" devotion to the agency: Mrs International Institute. But she also received formal tributes. Upon her retirement, Senator Croll called her "a pioneer in a pioneer field" (immigrant services) and reaffirmed her position that for pluralism to take root both the newcomer and the Canadian had to undergo a transformation or re-education. A few years later, Archer said of West that "without … the foundation she built," the Institute would not exist. West later received an Order of Canada for a distinguished career of service.[23]

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Apart from Black Trinidadian Milton Philip (1966–7), none of West's successors matched her professional credentials. Philip was part of a small but important wave of university-bound Caribbean immigrants who entered Canada well before its adoption in 1967 of a nominally race-neutral immigration policy (the points system).[24] The Institute's only director of colour, Philip held a bachelor's degree in social work and a master's degree in sociology from the University of British Columbia.[25] West's longevity, combined with the high turnover in directors, also helps to explain her continuing influence within the Institute.

If we include John Gellner, a Czech-Canadian writer with Liberal Party connections who served as interim director in 1962, three of the directors were retired officers with the Royal Canadian Air Force. After settling the Institute's 1962 budget crisis, Gellner returned to the board. West's official successor as director was H.C. Forbell (1962–4), who claimed expertise in immigrant cultures largely on the basis of having commanded a multinational NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) squadron in Europe.[26] John T. Seaman (1964–6), who had served with a reconnaissance aircraft squadron in England and Europe during the war, became director after retiring from the Air Force College in Toronto.[27] He then left to join the staff of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B, 1963–9), created by the Liberal government in response to growing unrest among nationalists and separatists in Quebec. Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau's "unexpected" response to the B&B, which highlighted French-English relations and led to sweeping changes in French-language education across the country, was to officially endorse multiculturalism within a bilingual framework.[28]

The only other female director, Mrs M.D. (Tine) Stewart, held the post during the agency's last five years. A Dutch war bride, she had been a long-time Institute volunteer. Two other women deserve brief mention. Kay Brown served as assistant director during the early 1970s, following earlier stints as group work supervisor and editor of the Institute's newsletter, the *Intercom*. Veteran social worker Edith Ferguson directed two major community projects out of a branch office of the Institute.

The mainly female and middle-class volunteers were more ethnically mixed than the directors. Whether volunteer group workers, reception staff, or teachers, most of them worked part-time. The IODE supplied many of the Anglo-Protestant volunteers but also some Canadians of European origins. Other volunteers came through the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the SPC, and the CWL. Some Anglo volunteers spoke languages other than English, but many of the bilingual and multilingual volunteers came from women's groups or branches connected with ethno-Canadian organizations. Some working-class women, including immigrants, volunteered their labour to Institute events. The male volunteers came from the Institute membership and service groups such as Rotary Clubs.

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Nell West and colleagues host an Institute open house. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

An IODE volunteer assisting the Institute offers a congratulatory handshake and a picture book on Canada to a new citizen during a citizenship reception at Toronto City Hall in May 1959. Archives of Ontario, F884-2-9, B427166.

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Members and Clients

The people who used the Toronto Institute, and helped to shape its character, differed in terms of their class and cultural capital. The fee-paying members who joined the intercultural clubs and groups played an active role in running the house programs. In the mid-1960s, the membership represented about sixty different "nationality" groups.[29] The members and their guests made the Institute a lively place, though newcomers always outnumbered the Canadian-born. Middle-class members outnumbered their working-class counterparts, and men dominated overall.

The immigrant clientele that tapped the Institute's counselling services was much larger and more culturally diverse than the membership. There were many more women clients than female members, but men dominated the clientele as well. Newly arrived and usually speaking little if any English, clients sought assistance for a range of problems. Altogether, the clients in my database of 7,000 case files for the period 1952–72 represent 120 different nationality or ethnic groups. At any given time, however, that number was much smaller. The single largest number of case files were referrals to the Institute for English classes, which were quickly processed. The most common request was help with employment, but many of the clients who booked a counselling session were facing a range of problems, from inadequate housing and mounting debts to marital conflict and mental illness (see Appendix). By 1960, the initial staff of three counsellors had more than doubled, and could provide services in more than two dozen, mostly European, languages. The social work sessions involving Institute staff and clients thus constituted multicultural encounters.

The Institute's mandate to serve non-English-speaking newcomers explains why only a small number of white immigrants from the United Kingdom became clients. (A handful of British immigrants did become members.) The presence of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society and other Jewish agencies in Toronto surely explains the Institute's small number of Jewish clients. The clients of the late 1960s and the early 1970s included English speakers from the Caribbean, South Asia, and Africa, though the scarcity of information in many of the post-1967 case files hinders an in-depth analysis of their encounters with Institute staff.

My large database of confidential case files represents a significant sample of all the files preserved in the collection of the Toronto Institute at the Archives of Ontario. The Appendix explains the process of selection and provides a profile of the clients and types of cases. The anonymized case files featured throughout the book include both brief and lengthy files, but the thick files involving more complicated cases receive more attention. My scrutiny of the featured files is informed by a familiarity with all the cases in my database, but, setting aside the referrals for English classes, the examined files cover two-thirds of the total files in the database.

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The American International Institutes

While Canadian precedents also mattered, West et al. chose to embark on their ambitious project by joining a forty-six-year-old American movement. Historians such as Raymond Mohl and Kristin Hoganson have examined the women's reform movement that propelled the creation of the Institutes and their evolution into pluralist organizations. The initial impetus came from the US-based YWCA movement, which had responded to the growing presence in US cities of new immigrants by providing immigrant women and their daughters with social services and recreational activities. In 1909, the national YWCA hired Edith Terry Bremer, a University of Chicago–trained settlement worker who had worked with the Chicago Juvenile Court, the Women's Trade Union League, and the United States Immigration Commission, to help them address immigration matters. Under the auspices of the YWCA, Bremer – who would go on to become the long-term head and national spokesperson of the international institute movement – created the first Institute in New York City in 1910. Within five years, local YWCA branches had established affiliates in Pittsburgh, Los Angeles, and elsewhere. The rapid spread of Institutes after the First World War then led the YWCA to create a separate department devoted to a whole range of immigration concerns. By the 1920s, fifty-five Institutes existed, mainly in industrial cities with large immigrant populations. Most served primarily Eastern and Southern European newcomers, but West Coast Institutes served Asian immigrants too.[30]

Almost from the start, the Institutes expanded beyond the initial aim of aiding foreign-born women and began working with immigrant families and immigrant communities as a whole. In the 1920s, Bremer's conversion to cultural pluralism would have a major impact on the Institutes, making them vocal advocates of pluralism. Certainly, the liberal assimilationist currents that had circulated within the Chicago-based academic and settlement networks in which Bremer initially trained rejected the calls for immediate Americanization. They also advocated for services to facilitate immigrant adjustment and showed a sensitivity towards ethnic cultures. But they expected the children of immigrants to become assimilated through their participation in the schools and other institutions of modern American society.

Bremer's transition to pluralism, which endorsed ethnic diversity as a permanent feature of American life, stemmed from her experience in immigrant work and her opposition to the wartime Americanization campaigns. The pluralist turn taken some years earlier by Chicago settlement leaders such as Jane Addams and Edith and Grace Abbott also played a role. As did the writings of interwar ethnic pluralists such as Isaac B. Berkson, a Jewish-American educator who endorsed pluralism as a form of cultural democracy. By the 1930s, Bremer was entertaining the radical ideas of Louis Adamic, a left-wing

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Slovenian-immigrant-cum-popular-US-author whose pluralism celebrated the contributions of the immigrant working classes and denounced racism and fascism. Berkson and Adamic themselves belonged to a broadly leftist tradition of intellectual pluralism whose origins lay in the writings during the 1910s by intellectuals such as Randolph Bourne, who praised the virtues of cosmopolitanism, and Horace Kallen, the German American philosopher credited with coining the term cultural pluralism. Kallen envisioned America as a federation of autonomous and enduring ethnic communities.[31]

During the interwar decades, the Institutes ran active pluralist programs that owed much to the energetic leadership of Bremer, who also helped to found new affiliates and lobbied for immigration reform. In opposition to the era's reigning assimilationist forces, the Institutes promoted an ideology of immigrant cultural gifts, which preached that immigrant customs did not threaten but rather enriched US society. Integration, they added, required not only the immigrants' acceptance by the wider society, but their ability to participate fully in American life while also remaining ethnically distinct members of a culturally pluralist society.

The Institutes rejected the biological determinism that informed racialist theories of superior and inferior races and instead applied a modestly relativist understanding of culture to ethnic and race relations. Institute directors, many of them female professional social workers, sought out representatives from the ethnic communities to help shape programs. They spoke of building multi-ethnic community centres. The policy of hiring immigrant and ethnic staff distinguished the Institutes from other agencies. Young foreign-born and first-generation women with social work training became nationality workers providing services in different languages and liaising with the immigrant communities.

The YWCA's founding of the institute movement had reflected its shift from a more evangelical concern with moral uplift to a greater engagement with social reform issues such as public health, labour reform, and women's suffrage.[32] During the 1930s, however, many Institutes abandoned the YWCA largely because of its more melting-pot approach to immigrants. YWCA staff might speak of peoples of diverse origins fusing to make a new people, but conformity to Anglo-American ideals was paramount. The Institute folks spoke instead of a mosaic where ethnic groups maintain their distinctiveness while functioning as a part of the whole society. The Institute affiliates then incorporated as a new national organization, the name of which became the American Federation of International Institutes (AFII) in 1944.

The Institutes were independent entities but they were expected to pay fees to the central body in New York City and abide by its training and program guidelines. The ethnic make-up of many affiliates was heavily European, but it also varied depending upon a city's demographic profile. Besides the educational and cultural programs, the Institutes offered clients concrete help in

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navigating the web of immigration laws and bureaucracy, though, as Andrew Urban notes, they never advocated subverting them. The interwar staff of the San Francisco Institute procured legal aid services for the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean clients negotiating the era's anti-Asian exclusionary regime. In Boston, they assisted Armenian Americans desperate to sponsor relatives fleeing the genocide.[33] To carry out their goal of promoting a more pluralistic society but with one common loyalty to the nation, the Institutes, argues Hoganson, pursued a contradictory agenda that combined celebrations of ethnic folk cultures with instructional programs aimed at Americanization[34] – a point to which I return below.

The post-1945 US Institutes navigated a contested terrain. Reformist impulses that championed a tolerant and democratic nation bumped up against Cold War discourses that, as Donna Gabaccia notes, celebrated America's ability to enforce straight-line (one-directional) assimilation and "the acquisition of a distinctive American 'national character.'"[35] Growing demands for ethnic inclusion and liberalization of the immigration laws stood alongside calls for conformity to conservative gender and family models.[36] A strict immigration regime remained in place until 1965, but the door was opened to refugees from the Soviet Union and Europe. A product of US imperialism, waves of migrants from Puerto Rico and the Philippines also arrived. Caribbean and Latin American migration increased markedly largely in response to postwar labour demands.[37] In response, the AFII reaffirmed its goals, though leaders varied in their estimation of its accomplishments. In 1949, Bremer optimistically claimed that pluralism, helped by the war, the United Nations, and decades of Institute work, had replaced "the old Americanization concept." William Bernard, who replaced the retiring Bremer in 1954, admitted that pluralism still had many opponents and that much work needed to be done.[38]

A Canadian International Institute in Toronto

One of several new Institutes created after the Second World War, Toronto became the AFII's lone Canadian affiliate. There was talk of founding a Vancouver or Montreal Institute, but neither materialized. Still, the Toronto Institute's networks included plenty of liberal and progressive Canadians as well as US Institute colleagues. Other social agencies and groups in Toronto and in other Canadian cities, including London, Ontario, developed similar mandates.[39]

The post-1945 US Institutes initially focused on time-consuming refugee resettlement and naturalization cases, though many later renewed active social and cultural programs. Toronto immediately adopted a wide-ranging social and cultural mandate that more closely resembled that of the interwar US Institutes. Far from being merely derivative of US patterns, that mandate, as we shall see, drew as well on a history of Canadian pluralist experiments that,

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through a mix of celebration and appropriation, portrayed Canada as a mosaic of integrated cultures.

As Canada's most popular immigrant destination, Toronto made sense as the site of a Canadian Institute. As did the timing. In Canada, too, officials initially adopted a cautious approach to liberalizing the admission laws, but they would open the doors more widely than did their US counterparts. Between 1946 and 1971, a period of virtually continuous immigration, more than 3.5 million immigrants entered Canada. In proportional terms, that volume rivalled the intake of the ten times more populous United States. The newcomers who arrived in Toronto, which drew one-quarter of the nation's immigrants, added to its British population, at least initially, and significantly boosted its European profile. Already by 1954, when the City of Toronto and its surrounding suburbs became Metropolitan Toronto, the increased density of the downtown immigrant areas led middle-class Canadians to move out. Some immigrants, among them Eastern Europeans and Germans, followed them to the suburbs. The rates of suburbanization among groups such as the Italians grew markedly in the 1960s while the post-1967 immigrants settled more broadly across the northern suburbs and the Greater Toronto Area.[40]

Post-1945 migration challenged really for the first time Toronto's Anglo-Protestant profile. Despite the importance of Irish Catholics in the city's history, the sheer number of Protestants, and their dominance within the city's and the province's elites, ensured that Toronto was still very much a WASP city into the 1970s. The hegemony of Protestant culture also owed something to the blue book laws that upheld "Toronto the Good" moralism, though different groups of immigrants would contest the restrictions on outdoor gatherings and other activities.[41]

With 37 per cent of its population composed of foreign-born persons in 1971, Metropolitan Toronto had become an ethnically diverse but still primarily white city.[42] Canada's points-based immigration system contributed to the substantial increase in immigration from Asia and the Caribbean, the proportion increasing from 10 per cent in 1965–6 to 23 per cent in 1969.[43] In 1971, though, still only 20 per cent of Canada's newcomers were born outside Britain or Europe.[44] In Toronto, the members of the "other" ethno-racial groups represented only 5 per cent of the 2.6 million people across the Toronto metropolitan census area. Of these "others," East Asians topped the list (61,785), followed by those from the Caribbean (15,325), Africa (12,135), and South Asia (5,650). Apart from the East Asians, all these immigrant groups, as well as Toronto's Indigenous and Canadian-born Black population, represented less than 1 per cent of the metropolitan census population. The figure for East Asians was just over 2 per cent.[45] Continuing immigration from "new" source countries would certainly impact Toronto, which in 1981 recorded a major spike in the number

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of newcomers from South Asia, the Caribbean, and South and Central America. By then, however, the Institute had long shut its doors.[46]

The Toronto Institute's immigrant membership and especially its clientele reflected the broader patterns of migration to Canada and Toronto. During the 1950s, Eastern European refugees, the most numerous of them Hungarian refugees of the 1956 revolution, dominated programming and counselling work. But there were also clusters of German, Dutch, and other immigrants from Western Europe. Southern European immigrants of rural origins dominated the agency's 1960s-era counselling, community, and charitable work. In the late 1960s, Institute counsellors were serving Czechoslovakian refugees of the 1968 invasion as well as newcomers from Asia (including from South Korea and India); the Caribbean (including Jamaica and Trinidad); and Latin and South America (including Ecuador, Uruguay, Colombia, and later Chile). A handful of Arab immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa were involved in Institute programs.[47]

The Institute women were promoting pluralism in an increasingly heterogeneous though mostly white city, but they also witnessed the racism that white Torontonians unleashed on the South Asian and other racialized immigrants who began arriving in significant numbers in the 1970s.[48] The presence of racialized newcomers, some of whom arrived before 1970 and became Institute members or clients, created an opportunity to recast, or at least to begin to rethink, pluralism in a less Eurocentric fashion. The materials dealing with the post-1967 newcomers are disappointingly sparse, but they do allow me to talk about opportunities both taken and missed.

Possibilities, Limits, and Paradoxes

Like the debates over multiculturalism, the US-based scholarship on the International Institutes is heavily polarized. Those who emphasize the US Institutes' progressive features argue that they represented the humanitarian as opposed to social control side of immigrant social welfare. The multi-ethnic events, they add, offered a critical means by which to preserve im/migrant cultures and present them to wider US audiences.[49] The critics argue that the Americanizing forces that inflected Institute festivals and other activities betray a delayed melting-pot stance that accepted diversity "only for the present,"[50] and that turned ethnic folk cultures into tourist commodities.[51]

The Canadian and American scholarship on pluralism more broadly is similarly polarized between those who praise and those who damn multiculturalism (see chapter 2). The observation applies as well to the wider international arena. It is not only that polarized debates also rage within individual nations such as the United Kingdom. The spectacle of state leaders declaring the failure of multiculturalism in Europe also reflects very different understandings

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of this liberal ideology from that within self-defined nations of immigrants. Instead of the positive connotations historically attached to pluralism in North America and Australia (however contested or unevenly implemented), multiculturalism in post-1945 European countries such as France, Germany, and the Netherlands was more about managing the diversity of foreign guest workers who were supposed to, but did not, return "home" when their labour was no longer needed. Europe's "immigrant crisis" predated the more recent arrival of refugees fleeing violence and war in the Middle East and Africa, but their presence both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent further fuels the multiculturalism backlash.[52]

Moving beyond a dichotomy of liberal pluralism as either a progressive or retrograde ideology, my analysis of the Toronto Institute, and of multiculturalism more broadly, offers a more complex framing that probes the possibilities and limits as well as the paradoxes of an influential (if now besieged) approach to incorporating immigrants into the nation-state.[53] The study sheds light on several themes. Here, I note two of them.

One is that the Institute espoused a double-edged pluralism marked by positive and negative features. A desire to encourage integration so as to preserve distinctive traditions and promote cultural diversity existed alongside the insistence that immigrants absorb core Canadian values. As its theoreticians posit, ethnicity is socially constructed, or invented. Also, pluralism and assimilation are not simple opposites, and a given cultural event might well contain elements of both. But frequent blurring of the lines between integration, assimilation, and Canadianization produced ambiguity and confusion.[54] In their group, community, and counselling work, Institute staff sometimes served as empathetic and progressive pluralists; other times they operated as intrusive experts. The popular festivals they mounted harnessed traditional folk cultures to a modernist nation-building project that also traded in nostalgia, market tourism, and an elite culture. Mobilized in support of a model of "good" citizenship and to celebrate a liberal internationalism in a Cold War context, the pageants and folk arts sidelined Indigenous peoples and racialized immigrants while also turning them into colourful folk figures.

A second theme concerns the Toronto Institute's mixed record of success and failure and its uneven legacy. The cultural activism of the women and their male colleagues and various partners, I argue, helped to lay the groundwork for a later acceptance of multiculturalism among many ordinary Canadians. But it never resolved the tensions owing to the paradox of simultaneously celebrating and appropriating immigrant customs for city- and nation-building ends. Staff efforts to apply pluralist, or social-cultural, approaches in their counselling practices have not been entirely forgotten, but their categorical characterization as assimilationist by some social work scholars underscores the slipperiness of the concepts used.[55]

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A Book in Four Parts

The book is organized thematically. The Introduction, or part 1, is divided into two chapters: the case study just presented and a discussion of the extensive scholarship on multiculturalism. The three sections that follow part 1 roughly correspond to the Institute's major types of activities: counselling and casework, group and community programs, and promoting cultural diversity among wider publics. Just as the focus of the different but overlapping activities shifted, so too does the scale of investigation. The initial focus is on the individual clients (or couples) and their counsellors; it then shifts to the clubs and community projects meant to foster a collective sense of belonging and to ensure the integration particularly of low-income immigrants. Finally, the lens is on the cultural events and festival spectacles intended to delight, inform, and inspire the audiences in attendance to embrace cultural diversity.

In part 2, Narrative, Subjectivities, and Affect in the Multicultural Social Welfare Encounter, the chapters draw on my database of case files in order to examine the interactions particularly between the immigrant counsellors and immigrant clients. Like other social welfare scholars, I highlight the "theatre of encounter" captured, albeit unevenly, in the social worker's case file. Moving beyond the dichotomized debates over whether these texts reflect reality or the file-maker's fiction, I approach the case records as professional constructions that create clients, authorities, problems, and solutions, but that also often include the narrative traces of the client's subjectivities. I interpret them through a narrative and an emotions framework and highlight the affective dimension of these interactions.[56] Paying attention to both the material and the discursive, my analysis considers how front-line workers sought to apply the contradictory demands of the Institute's agenda while experimenting with different narrative forms of case-record writing, and how the clients' subjectivities, their grim circumstances, and their compliance or resistance entered the story. I also draw comparisons between Institute and contemporary multicultural approaches to immigrant counselling.

The chapters in part 3, Community-Building Experiments, Integration Projects, and Collective Belonging, explore the theme of building a democratic pluralist society from different vantage points and spatial scales. They address the multifaceted, even contradictory, character of the Institute – as a multicultural, intercultural, and intermediate social space[57] as well as a contact zone marked by hierarchical relations[58] – and how it affected individual and group identity formation and social dynamics. The analysis of the Institute's charity, health and welfare, and vocational training projects examines the Institute's community-based efforts to improve access to health and welfare resources and trade-training programs. Together, the chapters explore social work as both a progressive and a regulatory practice.

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Turning to cultural spectacles, folk revivals, gendered performances, and nation-building, the chapters in part 4 – Ethnic Folk Cultures and Modern Multicultural Mandates – explore the cultural scripts, contestations, and negotiations that shaped the Institute's popular pluralism. The analysis probes the Institute's immigrant-gifts pluralism and the cross-border links that shaped its eclectic multicultural extravaganzas. It highlights the cultural assertion of the ethnic elites who engaged in a dialectical dance of accommodation and resistance with the Institute.[59] Another focus is the roles that women played in shaping and enacting Institute pluralism during an era that saw a resurgence in liberal internationalism and a folk revival movement. Attention is given to how middle-class and wealthy women embraced their role as guardians of ethnic folk culture and cultivated a bourgeois aesthetic built around the collection of immigrant arts and crafts. The section also looks at the ways in which women's and men's costumed bodies performed an attractive, even therapeutic, pluralism, and one that aligned with conventional gender norms. Finally, I explore how the young women who performed the traditional folk culture scripts navigated Canadian modernity.

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