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**Benefitting from popular culture through education in enhancing
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Benefitting from Popular Culture through Education in Enhancing Social Cohesion in Multicultural Canada

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Abstract: Social cohesion has been one of the core concerns of various nations in the world. Globalization and international migration is making this concern increasingly paramount for many contemporary multicultural states including Canada. In Canada, some perceive the diverse cultural values of immigrants as a threat to social cohesion. This article, based on a synthesis of existing literature, argues that emphasizing elite culture or high culture in various educational contexts and processes could be harmful to maintaining and enhancing social cohesion, as this cultural form is highly sophisticated, specific to some elite groups, and sometimes exclusivist. This article also contends that intelligently employing popular culture in various educational contexts and processes could prove to be very effective in enhancing social harmony in Canadian multicultural context. As popular culture is more accessible than high culture, popular culture may be more easily internalised by diverse peoples. This process may facilitate mutual understanding and harmony in multicultural societies. This article proposes specific ways to employ popular culture elements in lifelong learning contexts, namely, schools, workplaces and social media platforms in order to achieve that goal. In the information age, benefiting from popular culture through both formal and informal education could turn out to be conducive to creating and enhancing social cohesion and harmony, especially in multicultural nations like Canada.

Keywords: education, popular culture, elite culture, high culture, lifelong learning, social cohesion, multicultural Canada

The term social cohesion has been used interchangeably with terms such as social harmony, social integration and social solidarity. Broadly speaking, these terms represent similar connotations. The contemporary research on social cohesion usually takes Durkheim as the critical starting point as he often related his research on education and sociology with social integration or solidarity. His theory on the role of education in socialisation, building and maintaining social solidarity and harmony (Durkheim, 1956)

has been particularly influential to the next generations of writers who focus on social cohesion issues. David Lockwood later elaborated the concept of social cohesion by dividing it into social integration and system integration, arguing that the problem of social integration focuses upon orderly or conflicting relationships between actors. In addition, Lockwood argued that the problem of system integration focuses on orderly or conflictive relationships between the parts of social system (Lockwood, 1964). More recently Nils Mortensen (1999) compared Lockwood's interpretation with subsequent writings of Habermas, Giddens and Mouzelis and concluded that the writers agree that system integration refers to the macro-structural principles that govern the relationship between economic and political institutions in modern capitalism. However, each writer has different views on social integration. For Giddens, effective social integration concerns how face-to-face encounters take place; for Habermas, it is the uninhibited reproduction of communicative competence within the life-world; for Lockwood and Mouzelis, it is the strategic action of collective groups, such as those representing capital and labour (Gough & Olofsson, 1999). The studies on 'social cohesion' have expanded in recent years depending on Lockwood's above two dimensional integration theories.

More detailed studies on the concept of social cohesion emerged in the following decade. Green, Preston, and Janmaat (2006) have summarised the meaning of social cohesion in different contexts as:

- (1) shared norms and values;
- (2) a sense of shared identity or belonging to a common community;
- (3) a sense of continuity and stability;
- (4) a society with institutions for sharing risks and providing collective welfare;
- (5) equitable distribution of rights, opportunities, wealth and income; or
- (6) a strong civil society and active citizenry (p.5).

Thus, shared values seem to be very essential in creating and enhancing social cohesion in various contexts including the case of Canada. This article primarily analyses how popular culture could contribute to the formation and enhancement of shared values, and thus social cohesion, among diverse populations in the Canada.

Culture and Habitus

Habitus, as a concept re-elaborated by Bourdieu (1977), is the 'durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations' that 'produce practices which tend to reproduce regularities' through all stages of human learning experiences, especially through formal education (p. 78). Bourdieu (1990) further argues that habitus is very

durable and operates below of the level of consciousness. It is also the embodiment of a particular culture among a particular group of people during the socialization process beginning from early childhood. This indicates culture and habitus are more like two sides of the same coin, as they cannot be understood separately.

Yet, as Edgerton and Roberts (2014) contend, habitus is not immutable at all, and it also operates at a conscious, reflective, and deliberative level. That is why we can have innovations and changes in our societies. Some scholars (Crossley, 2001; Sweetman, 2003) assert that various dramatic forms of economic, cultural, and social shifts in the post-modern societies have been making habitus more flexible and reflexive. This may have been the case especially in multicultural societies like Canada where growing number of immigrants and new comers have been dramatically changing the social, cultural and economic landscapes. This progression also reassures our assumption that deliberately facilitating cultural exchange, especially sharing popular culture in lifelong learning processes could effectively rebuild or create new habitus that are conducive to mutual acceptance and social harmony.

Social Disharmony in Canada

Recent global events (e.g., radicalisation, terrorism, political conflicts) have turned social cohesion into a major hot point in academic debates. For Canada, these events denote the same implications, especially after the recent radicalization issues among local people, which resulted in terrible consequences. These consequences include various forms of violent attacks against innocent people. Since 2000, these kinds of incidents have been on the rise, whether they are triggered by religious extreme forces or other factors such as anarchism, anti-Semitism, environmentalist perspectives, the 'Sons of Freedom' movement. Recent terrorist attacks in Quebec and Ontario, which ended up killing two army officers, have heightened public attention on radicalization and terrorism in Canada.

War against terrorism was initiated more than a decade ago to tackle this problem in many countries including Canada. Trillions of dollars have been spent and thousands of lives have been lost for this international cause. However, the radicalization and terrorism still seem to be continuing or were perhaps even exacerbating by this effort. In this sense, religious radicalism presents an extreme form of counter-culture that negatively affects both religious and non-religious populations. These extreme cases could demonstrate the severity of the social defragmentation in the developed West including Canada. They may also mean that the less serious cases are widespread.

Underneath these cases or events may exist the racial, ethnic and socio-cultural misrecognitions, which are, to a great extent, contributing to those conflicts among different groups.

High Culture and Popular Culture

Recently, many scholars have studied the role of education in peace making and preventing radicalization among people (Bar-Tal & Rosen, 2009; Bryan & Vavrus, 2005; Gereluk, 2012; Nussbaum, 1997, 2006; Pels & Ruyter, 2012). More specifically, some argue that learning about other peoples' cultures could broaden our minds and enhance mutual understanding and this in turn helps us to become 'global citizens' (Nussbaum, 1997). However, this process may turn out to be very challenging as culture itself is a highly complicated phenomenon.

In my view, using lifelong learning sites to encounter and learn about different popular cultures could be highly effective in enhancing social cohesion and harmony in multicultural societies like Canada. Culture is a complex entity that encompasses high culture (proper culture) and low culture (popular culture) and the boundary between these two categories of culture is somewhat hazy. As Weaver (2005) notes, this kind of demarcation of culture in the literary world first started in Plato's time. High culture includes traditional art, literature, music, dominant values, views, and philosophies for example, which are specific to certain elite groups. High culture is directly connected to the core values of the dominant or elite groups in a given society. Popular culture includes popular art, literature, music, fashions, images, and symbols, etc. Since high culture, as Jones (2013) argues, is more sophisticated, only the elites can appreciate it. Therefore, many ordinary people may not be able to integrate it within their everyday lives, let alone the people beyond that particular culture. In Scruton's (2005) words, 'the high culture in our civilization contains knowledge which is far more significant than anything that can be absorbed from the channels of popular communication' (p. 2). Comparing to this, the simple, light, and more appealing nature of popular culture (Jones, 2013) can be consumed and internalized by the people with various backgrounds, over political borders and across the world. For example, ballet is generally considered high culture and hip-hop is considered popular culture. Ballet has a very long history, but it has not gained much popularity among diverse nations. Hip-hop is relatively young, despite having stemmed from long African American history of musical genres. Despite how recently hip-hop has existed, it has been seamlessly incorporated into local popular cultures in various places in the world. In the same way, the high culture of opera is

mostly enjoyed by those with high-brow tastes and pop music is consumed by a global audience. Popular sports games can be played enjoyably by diverse groups who do not share common languages. Ramsbotham, Woodhouse and Miall (2011) value the importance of popular sports in the process of international conflict resolution.

Popular culture connects the values and identities of diverse peoples in the world to a great extent, which should be considered highly precious in our increasingly conflict-ridden world. For many multi-cultural countries like Canada, knowledge of popular culture can be an 'icebreaker' to help immigrants integrate with the locals (Bhatt, 2013).

On the negative side, dominant socio-political or philosophical views and values, which are the by-products of cultural values of ruling elite groups, have been dividing people throughout history. These elite views and values have been used to oppress the populace with their socio-political and philosophical views and values, detaching them from the diverse and multicultural world. The situation in North Korea is an extreme example of this phenomenon.

Religious Extremism as a Form of High Culture

Scruton (2005) contends that religious culture is the root of high culture, highlighting 'the continuity' between them, as high culture primarily depends on written texts that are also the foundation of monotheistic religions (p. 20). Religious fundamentalism could be seen very close to high culture because it strictly follows traditional religious texts and also represents some religious elites' particular ideals, which are not widely accepted as a mainstream religious culture. While religious fundamentalism mostly exists in a minority group among a population that follows a particular religion, it has the potential to grow and spread among masses, especially among youth (ICAN, 2014; 'ISIS name added', 2014; Simeone, 2014). Moreover, the possibility that high elite culture could transform into popular culture may have been increasingly salient with the advent of modernization (Weaver, 2005). In many cases, this transformation may involve all forms of high or elite culture. Radical and elite cultural and political ideologies may have obtained more fertile soils to disseminate with the unprecedented level of development of communication technologies,.

Currently, we can see the signs of this phenomenon in the propagation of global Islamic extremism through digital media. For example, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) is now operating a highly sophisticated propaganda machine to disseminate their ideologies, according to the previous director of the US National Counterterrorism Center Matthew Olsen. According to Olsen: "It [ISIL] turns out timely, high-quality

media, and it uses social media to secure a widespread following" (Yan, 2014). Online lectures of the Al-Qaida leader Anwar al-Awlaki are believed to instigating Western youth to become involved in violent extremism in the past half a decade (Bergen, 2015). In the context of Canada, the so-called Toronto 18 terror-cell listened to an al-Awlaki sermon at their training camp in Orillia, according to evidence submitted at their trial. Damian Clairmont, a Nova Scotia-born Islamic State recruit, said that hearing al-Awlaki's preach was a "life-changing event." Ottawa-born jihadist John Maguire's radicalization path also began with listening to the online lectures of al-Awlaki (Duffy & Harley, 2015). The danger of high culture in the form of extreme religious ideology is that it has the potential to seep into the public sphere in our digital era.

While modern technology has exacerbated the situation, popular parts of religious culture have always been incorporated into local cultures of many populations. Through this process, religion, as Chatterjee (2001) argues, has been creating harmony and cohesion among diverse groups through establishing practices that bond groups. She also highlights the conflictive role of religion which separates people as certain religious communities' claims to authority may challenge both individual consciousness and state laws (Chatterjee, 2001). In recent years, it could be argued that those very claims of authority by religious extremists have been creating unprecedented challenges to the global public and states. The positive relationship between religion and social harmony as mentioned above could be attributed to the popular portions of culture rather than its elite and fundamental version. On the other hand, we can see the common roots of world religions when we look at their popular facet. Conversely, religious fundamentalism ignores or downgrades that common root, which leads to conflict among different groups.

Beyer's study (2014) on home-grown radicalism in the West and specifically in Canada revealed that religion serves as an immunizing force rather than an inculcating factor in radicalization. While young people do not have enough knowledge about certain types of religion as popular culture, they might accept whatever extreme forms of that religion as a true and authentic version of that particular belief system. Both Martin Rouleau who killed Warrant Officer Patrice Vincent in Quebec City and Michael Zehaf-Bibeau who shot and killed soldier Corporal Nathan Cirilloin in Ottawa were both recent self-converts to Islam (Gyulai, 2014; 'Ottawa shooting suspect', 2014). Apparently, these attackers did not possess enough information about mainstream popular Islamic culture, therefore they were easily drawn to the radicalized form of Islam which is condemned by the majority of Muslims in the world.

Popular culture in multicultural societies

Popular culture, as it is generally secular (Schultze, 2001), can be accepted by diverse peoples without any complicated processes. Examples of the proliferation of popular culture include soccer being played all over the world, the music of Celine Dion in the remote villages of Turkey, Mickey Mouse entertaining people in the Muslim part of China, hip-hop being well absorbed and even modified by the local youth in Korea, McDonald foods being eaten by the kids of Ethiopia, and Hollywood blockbusters being dubbed and watched in Indonesia. These cultural events are part of the phenomenon Nussbaum (1997) called 'global citizens' and serve as evidence that Western pop culture is being internalised by international audiences. The power of popular culture could be used in the Canadian context if some incentives are given, such as introducing popular cultures of foreign nations to the daily lives of native born Canadian population through education, media, and various cultural activities. This could help native born Canadians better understand other peoples and their popular cultures, therefore create better environment for mutual acceptance. As Aslan (2014) highlights, exchanging popular culture through various ways is a very rewarding process in reshaping perceptions, breaking down the barriers and enhancing social harmony among diverse groups in any society.

In Canadian multicultural context, which includes large proportion of immigrants, emphasizing high culture in mainstream education or informal education may only lead to more alienation and division among the masses. The so-called 'Quebec value' charter and its unpopularity among immigrant groups signifies this reality. 'Quebec values' could be seen as a sort of high culture, which belongs to the value systems of the ruling elites but not of the majority residents. Thus, its forceful implementation could cause disastrous social disharmony. Former Premier Pauline Marois once attacked multiculturalism saying that: "In England, they get into fights and throw bombs at one another because of multiculturalism and people get lost in that type of a society" (Leblanc, 2013). While multiculturalism is not without its critics, its policies may offer solutions to the conflicts among diverse peoples (Kim, 2010; Kunz & Sykes, 2007). Marois's perception of the dressing codes of religious population in Quebec as a threat to Quebec's secularism is superficial and also dangerous. The policies resulting from such a perception may only lead to defragmentation of Quebec multicultural society. The issue, which should be addressed, is the religious high culture - religious extremism - which has been infiltrating into the minds of the local youths who lack the proper understanding of

the popular parts of those religious cultures. The popular parts of religious cultures may be crucial cultural elements for keeping diverse peoples closer to each other.

Benefits of popular culture to lifelong learning

All of the previously mentioned experiences indicate that we need to promote popular culture in our lifelong learning processes. However, as Reynolds (2013) points out, the importance of popular culture in students' lives is often disregarded as trivial, despite the fact that popular culture is increasingly becoming a dynamic factor that shapes individuals' identities. As a response to this situation, and an attempt to better understand the synergy between popular culture and social harmony, the following recommendations are presented.

First, some healthy, interesting and well-accepted elements of various popular cultures could be incorporated into formal educational curricula and also during classroom teaching and activities. This could start with incorporating well-known and positive Western popular culture elements into multicultural classroom. New immigrant students most likely have been largely familiarised with the popular culture originated from the Western social context, prior arriving in the host country thanks to globalization. This, in turn, means if those immigrant students can experience that familiarity again in the classroom, this process could greatly contribute to their classroom integration, as well as social integration. As Ghosh notes, stressing unfamiliar aspects and concepts can easily alienate students rather than unifying them. She sees alleviating the tension between school culture and home culture as the main target of the redefined multicultural education (2002). Popular culture may contribute to easing that tension to a great extent. Thus, schools should not underestimate the role of the pop-cultural elements in teaching processes. The popular culture of immigrants could be illustrated during class in terms of their similar elements with their Canadian counterparts, rather than focusing on their dissimilarities or possible contradictions. Actually, as Pieper (1952) argues, the roots of all cultures cross at leisure. Popular culture could be seen as much closer to that common point than elite culture which involves more complicated or sophisticated tastes and goals. Also, that is why we could more effectively avoid encountering conflictive elements in different popular cultures (Ramsbotham et al., 2011).

In terms of culture-sharing, Disney has been introducing non-Western popular cultures to Western audiences for several decades. These types of works can be viewed as replacing inherited and dying popular cultures by 'the commercialized mish-mash' (Scruton 2005, p.3). Yet, on the other hand, this process could also be seen as reviving

popular culture through emphasizing and sharing their universal elements. For example, in the film *Aladdin*, which is based on an Arabian popular legend, western young audience members can enjoy a wonderful legend. At the same time, they also may find many similar cultural elements in those characters and plots. For example, Aladdin's genies may be perceived as similar to another supernatural character-type: fairy godmothers. Another successful Disney film *Mulan*, was based on a Chinese legend and included rich feminist elements, which are essential parts of the contemporary Western culture. In multicultural classrooms, incorporating these kinds of foreign cultural elements into learning activities (e.g. arts classes) would effectively help the Canadian students who belong to majority groups build a concept that the newcomers are actually not strangers who have completely alien cultures. The students who come from those foreign cultures would also feel more at home and accepted when their popular culture is positively appreciated, not neglected or downgraded in classroom learning processes., as Nussbaum (1997) described:

Through this exposure to foreign and minority cultures, students will learn to deal with one another with respect and understanding. And this understanding and respect entail recognizing not only difference but also, at the same time commonality, not only a unique history but also common rights and aspirations and problems (p.69).

One could emphasize the popular elements of culture in this process, as these elements could be more easily shared and appreciated. And through this mutual process students could more effectively develop harmony and mutual trust, which will eventually be spread to their families and communities and the wider society in the long run. Yet, it is extremely important to avoid misinterpreting any popular culture that could only lead to alienation of those students who belong to that particular culture. Nevertheless, effectively and accurately introducing foreign popular culture may demand some specific knowledge and skills from the instructor. In terms of skills, this strategy necessitates a multicultural education paradigm, which involves the psychological as well as the cultural relocation of teachers in the class so that student-teacher interactions become relatively equalized, dialogic and responsive to the specific needs of the learner (Ghosh, 2002).

Second, beyond formal education, in everyday life and work people also experience and learn about, consciously or unconsciously, diverse cultures. The first and most direct contact among different groups of people may always occur within the

spectrum of their popular cultures. Through this contact, they learn more about others and that process can make them more familiar with one another. Now the challenge is how to promote that positive effect of popular culture in lifelong learning processes. Employers should be aware of different cultures and values among their diverse workforces and their own biases and assumptions towards those culture and values. They should also encourage employees to identify their own biases and assumptions of other cultures in the work place (Blanding, 2013). This would be conducted through some specific approaches in work places and beyond. Employers could consider implementing more after-work cultural exchange activities. They should try to carefully monitor the discussions related to elite culture (e.g., highly ethno-centric or traditional culture, dominant political attitudes). One very possible consequence of these kinds of discussions or conversations would be the increase of disharmony among diverse employees. Instead, employers and senior employees should encourage all personnel to share their own popular cultures through various activities. In this process, both similarities and differences should be shared and celebrated. However, as Hammer (2012) suggests, this should be followed in a constructive and balanced way, as focusing too much on similarities could lead to 'minimization,' which is a diminished understanding and consideration of cultural differences, while overemphasizing differences may cause 'polarization,' a judgmental mindset that views cultural differences from an 'us versus them' perspective among both culturally dominant and non-dominant group members (p.122). The stereotypes in any form of culture should also be treated carefully. They may seem to bring amusement and fun, but actually cause harm as they lead to inaccurate expectations and judgments (Young & Adler, 2000).

Moreover, sharing positive elements of popular culture through social media could play a crucial role in enhancing social cohesion as well. This procedure could mainly target the Canadian-born populations who may lack the knowledge of immigrant cultures and values. TV, radio and various sorts of publications should give more space for introducing popular cultures of the immigrant groups. This could be sponsored by government or non-governmental agencies alike. New social media like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, etc. have already been contributing to the exchange of international popular culture and values to a great extent since their launches.

However, it should be noted that, as Young and Adler (2000) maintain, not all cultures are "equally functional." Some cultures may be more effective and less maladaptive than others (p.37). This is the case in popular culture as well. Certain popular cultures may have the elements, which could lead to dangerous or disastrous

consequences. For example, the bride kidnapping culture in Kyrgyzstan causes suicides among kidnapped girls and this custom is still considered as an important part of ethnic Kyrgyz folk culture. This is a form of popular culture as it is widespread among the ordinary Kyrgyz people who harm their own members therefore the entirety of the Kyrgyz society to a great extent through practicing such a practice. Female genital mutilation practice in Africa can be seen another parallel example that does not belong to the 21st century. Thus, when dealing with any type of culture, one should be highly cautious as well, because not all cultural elements are neutral. Some of those elements, as mentioned above, can turn out to be extremely harmful to social cohesion and integrity if they are accepted and appreciated in the name of multiculturalism.

Conclusion

Social cohesion or harmony has been one of the top priorities of multicultural nations around the world. Since Durkheim (1956) started the discussion the relationship between social cohesion and education as an academic topic, the scholarly debates on this issue have always been growing. This article, takes Green and colleagues' (2006) stance that puts shared values at the center of social cohesion in their comprehensive study on education and social cohesion. Based on this stance, this essay argues that shared values can be effectively fostered through sharing diverse cultures in the formal and non-formal educational settings.

This set of arguments is in line with Edward Said's (2001) Clash of Ignorance Theory that highlights the possibility that cultural ignorance, rather than mere differences among diverse cultures, has been contributing to the conflicts among the various groups of people. Relying on this theoretical framework, this article criticizes Huntington's (1993) so called Clash of Civilizations Theory that has greatly overshadowed the role of culture in the process of building peace and social cohesion.

This article further contends that popular culture may have more potential to facilitate peacebuilding processes. High culture, on the other hand, could not be a very effective tool to build and enhance social cohesion, not because one high culture is prone to 'clash' with another, but this form of culture may not be easily appreciated by diverse groups of people, due to its more particular and sophisticated nature. It has also argued that religious extremism that has been increasingly becoming a global threat to social harmony and cohesion could be seen as a form of high culture. This form of culture could be more effectively countered through popular form of religious culture that has been followed by the majority of religious people.

Following these assumptions, this article contends that intelligently employing popular culture in lifelong learning sites and processes, namely schools, workplaces, and social media platforms could prove to be very effective in enhancing social harmony in Canadian multicultural context. It also suggests some specific ways of sharing and exchanging popular culture elements in various lifelong learning settings.

As popular culture is more entertaining and accessible than high culture, it could be more easily accepted and internalised by diverse peoples. This process could effectively facilitate the mutual understanding, acceptance, tolerance and harmony in multicultural societies. The shared values, which are at the core of social cohesion, could be to a great extent enhanced through sharing constructive elements of popular culture in lifelong learning environments among diverse groups in Canada. Moreover, the study of and learning about popular culture allows us to see the obstacles in our path towards a more democratic and egalitarian society (Reynolds, 2013), which is one of the most important preconditions of social cohesion. As Ramsbotham and colleagues (2011) suggested, we should not ignore anymore the roles of popular culture in peacebuilding initiatives, especially in education. As popular cultures possess rich democratic and egalitarian elements compared to other forms of cultures, actively benefiting from them in various educational contexts could to a great extent contribute to the goal of building a multicultural and cohesive Canadian society.

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