50 שנה לקרן לירושלים
THE JERUSALEM FOUNDATION 50TH ANNIVERSARY
السنة الخمسون لمؤسسة صندوق القدس

مركز الحوار بين الثقافات في القدس
המרכז הבין-תרבותי לירושלים
The Jerusalem Intercultural Center

Equity @ Work- A Toronto Story: from Competence to Rights

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הרצאתה של עוזמה שאקיר – מנהלת המחלקה לשיוויון, שונות וזכויות אזרח עיריית טורנטו

ההרצאה ניתנה במסגרת כנס "ירושלים עיר כשירה תרבותית"
17 במאי, 2016 - ירושלים

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INTRODUCTION:

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this forum in the historic City of Jerusalem. I consider this an invaluable opportunity for learning and exchange of ideas.

To address the theme of the Conference: "A Culturally Competent City" I would like to address three things:

1. Look at demographic and conceptual understanding in Canadian and especially Toronto context of Cultural Competency narrative.
2. Give examples of some alternative approaches that are being used in Toronto.
3. Finally, speak about the role City of Toronto (the Municipal Government) is playing in building equity and inclusion.

However, at the outset I want to point out that this analysis is entirely based on my experience of being in Canada for 28 years, for working in the NGO sector for over 20 years and for working with the government now for approximately 6 years. I believe that any knowledge is always subjective so it is important to understand my subjective history.

PERSONAL HISTORY & LOCATION:

I came to Canada 28 years ago. In one long flight from Karachi, Pakistan to Pearson Airport, Toronto on an evening in August 1988 my entire life changed.

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One day I was living comfortably as a privileged, young woman in Karachi dreaming of taking over the world. Next thing I know I was living in Scarborough, trying to fit into my spouse's life with a small baby who found me just as scary as I found my life. Overnight I lost my home, lost my family, lost my historical connection, lost my cultural mooring and most importantly lost my personal identity! I went from being a carefree young woman whose only interest in life was to make my parents' worst nightmares come true to becoming a sponsored spouse – my life was now measured not in how late I can stay at a party but whether I would lose my legal status in Canada if my sponsorship agreement broke down. Imagine if I was a refugee or an undocumented person? How much more precarious my journey would have been?

Activism, therefore, to me has never been a choice but a moral imperative – it is not charity it is ultimately a selfish act because it allows me to claim my space in Canada with others and to build a new meaning for my life and that for my Canadian born children!

I ended up in social activism when my personal story intersected with someone else's. One night my lawyer spouse asked me to help a client of his – he wanted me to get information about services for Urdu speaking South Asian women so he could help a woman in a violent family situation. That was the day I realized that Canadian stories are connected to each other and with that realization my isolation changed to empowerment.

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This woman and I shared a common bond. We were both from Pakistan, both women who came to Canada as immigrant spouses, both dependent on our partners for support. Whatever our personal histories maybe in Pakistan in terms of class/education/family, in Canada we were bound to each other by our shared immigrant experience. The exception was that she was also being victimized by violence in the home, lack of access to services due to language difficulties, and an inability to navigate Canadian society.

This reality led me to the social service sector but more specifically the ethno-racial/cultural sector. I volunteered & did part-time work in the South Asian sector for about 10 years until my kids were able to go to school full time. I then became the Executive Director of an umbrella organization within the South Asian community called Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA).The reason this is important to know is because the Canadian context of cultural competency is complex and my location allows me to see cultural competency in that light.

Once I embarked on the road to social activism I found many more intersecting Canadian narratives that have given me a NEW sense of identity, community, home, history and cultural reality – all the things I thought I had lost. I also understand now that my personal story is a part of globalization and the role cities play in it and because of that, now I know, for example:

- That women in Canada no matter how different from each other share a common cause

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- That as an immigrant I am tied intimately by experience to strangers from Africa, Latin America, Asia, Middle East, Europe who now call Toronto a home

- That my Canadian born children have changed my sense of personal identity – from **being** a Pakistani in Canada to **becoming** a Canadian of Pakistani origin.

- But most importantly that in that process of **becoming** I have no choice but to fight for an equitable and just society because Canada is a shared experiment worth fighting for…and because my rights are tied inextricably to someone else's struggle.

ROLE OF GLOBAL CITIES:

The emergence of cities, as global entities, is important to understanding the Toronto story. Cities, have always played a crucial role in defining various civilizations and historical trajectories of human experience, learning, cultural production – Rome, Andalusia, London, Paris, Jerusalem, New York, Baghdad, Damascus - just to name a few. But today cities are increasingly becoming the crucible where global forces collide and competing interests and rights play out in the same space. This is where cultural pluralism, competing values, divergent aesthetics and contested political claims are enacted, experienced and negotiated. Factors that define global cities are diverse and often manifest themselves as competing claims over political spaces; different identities; claims to citizenship rights; claims to cultural and linguistic rights; and struggles to define and appropriate spaces crucial to claiming these rights. Access to services, in my estimation, is a part of that contest for equity and ultimately justice.

In this discourse of contestation for rights, cultural competency can be viewed in two ways: it can either be seen as paternalistic and prescriptive – something you do for others who have either limited or unequal power to claim their rights; or transformative and critical – consciously producing spaces that address those power differentials in a meaningful manner and eventually lead to an equitable and just society. In other words, either cultural competency can mean being nice to people while maintaining the status quo of inequality or it can mean empowering marginalized people to take control over their own destiny and to change the conditions in society to produce equitable and just outcomes for all. However, this requires an honest recognition of who is marginalized and why and then consciously co-creating the conditions for inclusion. In this sense, Toronto has its challenges just like Jerusalem but provides some useful lessons.

Global cities, where these claims and counterclaims are being articulated and negotiated, sometimes use public policy and institutional arrangements to address them. But sometimes those who are marginalized occupy & create their own spaces thus challenging the existing power relations. In my opinion both of these methods are legitimate in any democratic society.

CANADIAN CONTEXT FOR CULTURAL COMPETENCY:

In my experience, there is a distinction being made in Canada between Cultural Claims and Cultural Competency. While cultural claims have historical, legal or citizenship roots, cultural

competency is either a rationale for that claim or a preferred method of service delivery.

To appreciate this observation one needs to understand the Canadian context. There are, in fact, three broad <u>cultural diversity narratives</u> in Canada that are compelling and crucial to understanding who is making these 'cultural claims' and why because they are tied to different historical experiences.

Firstly, there is the Indigenous (Aboriginal) claim of being culturally & linguistically diverse nations and being the original peoples of the land. They are broadly divided into First Nations, Metis and Innuit but within the First Nations category reside multiple national and cultural identities.

Their claim to the land is an important narrative in the social justice movement, in public policy and in service delivery in Canada generally and in Toronto specifically. There are approximately 70,000 Indigenous (Aboriginal) peoples in Toronto. They have a unique relationship as sovereign nations and peoples with the State of Canada - a fact that was recognized in the 2010 *Statement of Commitment to the Aboriginal Communities* by the City Council. This Statement in fact acknowledges the right to self-determination by Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous cultural narratives are those of a colonized people. One of the most pernicious aspects of this history is the Residential School policy which was government sanctioned and operated from about 1870 to 1996. Under this policy Indigenous children were taken forcefully from their home and

placed in Church run residential schools where their names were changed, they were not allowed to speak their language, they were subjected to abuse, those who died were buried in anonymous graves without their parents ever knowing what happened to them and all cultural connections were deliberately broken. The idea was to solve the so-called 'Indian' problem by assimilating the children into mainstream culture and society. Approximately 150,000 children were victims of this policy. This historical fact was acknowledged openly when in 2008 the Government of Canada apologized to the Indigenous populations of Canada and set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to collect testimonials of survivors of residential schools. The Commission ended its deliberations in December 2015 with a Calls to Action report. The City of Toronto has fully adopted this report and is now implementing those actions that fall within its jurisdiction.

Since history of Indigenous peoples in Canada has been violent and oppressive and they continue to be marginalized in society, the cultural competency discourse to them is not a matter of seeking sensitivity and accommodation in society but a claim to self-determination and access to their legal, constitutional and historical treaty rights. Hence, their models of organizing and service delivery tends not to be cultural competency but '**cultural safety**'. This is a concept built on the notion of protecting and in fact resurrecting cultures that are threatened and in some cases lost. The Indigenous histories & worldviews are diverse and distinct from what they call 'settler' society, and they seek to reclaim their land, their identity, and their access to power in society by taking ownership of their own services in a manner consistent with their own histories and

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cultures. Given their 'distance' from power structures in Canada, the act of creating their own cultural practices is in fact their claim to their fundamental rights in society.

The second cultural diversity narrative is the French claim to accommodation of French identity (a minority in Canada except in Quebec) as a distinct nation, culture and language in the national discourse. This is a claim that is asserted and in fact acknowledged by the State as one of the two 'founding' peoples of Canada. Unlike the Indigenous claims, French claim to protection of its culture and language as a minority in Canada has actually found a more significant expression by being embedded in constitutional arrangements of bilingualism and biculturalism. Other than Quebec, not all provinces of Canada are truly bilingual but all federal institutions and practices have to be completely bilingual. Given this 'proximity' to state power, Francophone claims have actually become part of the mainstream society in Canada, unlike Indigenous claims, although both have legal roots in the constitution. But what is interesting is that the French claim has actually institutionalized 'difference' in the Canadian national identity – even without acknowledging the diverse claims of First Nations, Metis and Innuit peoples. At the very least the Canadian identity is dual in nature and this, ironically, has paved the way for other claims to be naturalized.

Lastly, but importantly, there is the immigrant/refugee narrative of diverse populations having migrated to Canada and now calling it home. Their claim to their cultural and linguistic rights has found its expression in Canadian Multiculturalism narrative. However, unlike Indigenous cultural claims to self-

determination their claim is their right to cultural self-expression.

Ironically the Multicultural discourse historically was initiated by public policy in order to give the Quebecois (Francophone of Quebec) the space to claim their rights to language and culture. Under Pierre Trudeau in 1971 Canada adopted a Multiculturalism Policy to address the grievances of the French minority in Canada thereby making Canada in effect a bilingual and bicultural state. In 1982 multiculturalism was recognized by section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which stated: *This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians* (a recognition of the Anglo-French duality of Canadian identity). The Multiculturalism Act of 1988 merely codified this reality but broadened its scope as the demographic landscape of Canada began to change.

Hence, the Multiculturalism discourse has since then been applied to and claimed by mostly ethno-racial and ethno-cultural peoples. These people have migrated to Canada throughout its history but in large numbers since the 1980s, and come from across the globe especially Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America.

Multiculturalism Act explicitly: *recognizes and promotes the understanding that multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage.*

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So when immigrant & refugee population in Canada lays its claim to citizenship it does so both to seek accommodation of its needs in mainstream & public institutions of Canada – and cultural competency seems to be the preferred approach - but more importantly as a claim to self-expression through the creation of culturally specific services. This has led to the establishment of a vibrant ethno-racial/ethno-cultural sector in Toronto. The very raison d'être for this sector is that their governance and service delivery is shaped by and for a specific cultural community and that in fact defines their claim to cultural competency. For example, I worked for over 20 years in the South Asian specific sector.

TORONTO DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE:

To understand the context for these competing claims in Toronto, it is important to appreciate the demographic profile of the City.

Toronto Village of 100 - Adapted by Office of Equity, Diversity & Human Rights, City Manager's Office, October 2011
Created by Toronto Public Health with the permission of Miniature Earth - www.miniature-earth.com

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Toronto Village of 100

If Toronto were a village of a 100 people,

it would look something like this:

Citizenship Status and Language

- 48 born in Canada

- 50 born outside of Canada (over 200 other countries)

- 2 refugees or temporary residents

- 47 have a mother tongue other than English or French

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1 would be Arab   9 would be other Asian   1 would be Other

12 would be South Asian   8 would be Black

3 would be Latin American   53 would be White

11 would be Chinese   1 would be Aboriginal

Racial Identity and Ethnicity
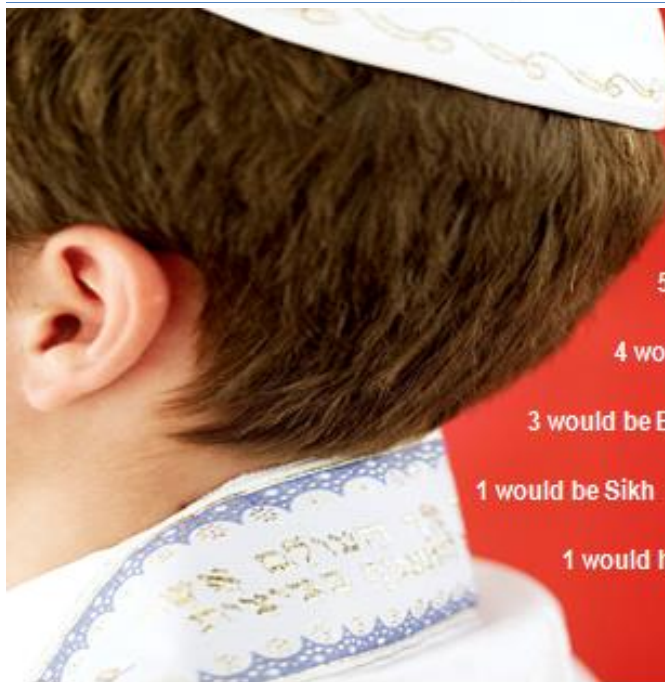
60 would be Christian

19 would be non-religious

7 would be Muslim

5 would be Hindu

4 would be Jewish

3 would be Buddhist

1 would be Sikh

1 would have another Faith

Faith / Religion

13 would be between 15 - 24 years

57 would be between 25 - 64 years

14 would be 65 years and over
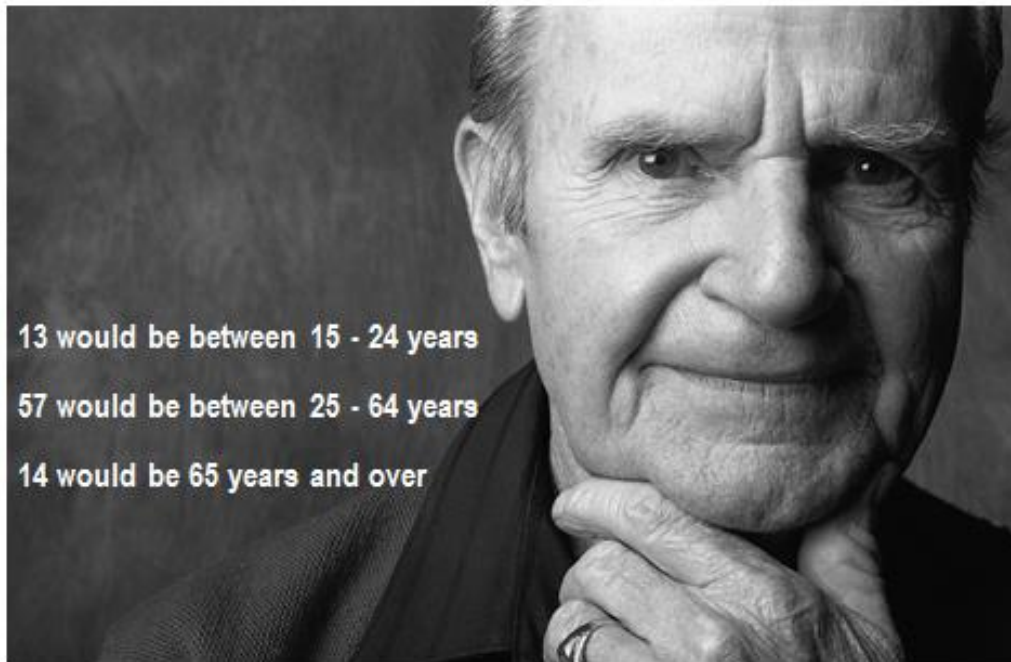
Age

10 to 15 may be:

Lesbian

Queer

Transsexual

Transgender

Gay

Questioning

Bisexual

Sexuality & Gender Identity

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17 people age 15 and over…
would have some form of disability

Disability

39 of those 25 years or older have a university degree, certificate or diploma

18 of those 25 years or older have not graduated from high school

Education

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52 Female
$21,153 Median
Income

48 Male
$28,800 Median
Income

Gender and Income

50 are employed
4 are unemployed

Median household income $59,671
- lone **female** parent $35,176
- lone **male** parent $45,745

25 are low income

Socioeconomic Status

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At least 1 person would use an emergency shelter

About 2 people would use a food bank

Socioeconomic Status

46% of households are renters
- Average rent/month for 2-bedroom apartment **$1,060**

54% of households are owners
- Average value **$413,574**

Socioeconomic Status

Canadian landscape, therefore, is made up of what I would describe as '*claims*' that are cultural and institutional arrangements that are tied intimately to claims over rights of self-determination and citizenship. The areas of contest cover a wide range of sectors from health to social services, settlement services for immigrants and refugees (including language instruction for newcomers), welfare, social housing, child care, youth services, legal services, violence against women, advocacy & social justice, research and policy, employment, recreational services, social planning, cultural activities, educational services etc.

Ultimately these cultural claims are a means to an end. They are seen by Indigenous, French and Ethno-racial communities as a way to achieve equity and inclusion in society.

When it comes to notions of cultural sensitivity, or appropriateness or competency these terms are used more to describe the modalities or types of service delivery rather than the desired aim of services. Interestingly just like Jerusalem, it is the health sector that has taken the lead in Canada generally and Toronto specifically in this field. Partly because of the demographic shift in Toronto where immigrant population is now approximately 50% and in some jurisdictions in the Greater Toronto Area above 60%. And partly because the health care sector has been influenced by the emerging discourse of social determinants of health research.

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH:

Research in social determinants of health has provided very strong and compelling evidence that social and economic barriers - such as poverty, social exclusion, job insecurity, inadequate housing, food insecurity, level of education, immigrant/refugee status and systemic racism – are equally or more important to a person's health status than personal health behaviors or medical care. So the health sector has responded to this reality by actively investing in and adopting a Cultural Competency approach but one that is based in '**organizational change**' theory. Health organizations focus on two things: (a) changing the nature of the organization to meet its pluralist demands in terms of diversity in staff & governance and types of services they deliver; (b) investing in social justice interventions under the terminology of 'health equity'.

HEALTH EQUITY:

To give you my personal experience - for the past one year I have been a member of a Health Equity community advisory panel to a body called Health Quality Ontario – it is an arms-length body established by the Provincial Ministry of Health to provide advice to the health care system in Ontario. We just finalized our report to the Ministry on how to embed health equity considerations in the entire delivery of health care services in Ontario. We define Health Equity as:

> *Allowing people to reach their full health potential and receive high-quality care that is fair and appropriate to them and their needs, no matter where they live, what they have or who they are.*

We worked on the premise that certain life experiences have a profound impact on our ability to stay healthy and access the health system. They include: poverty, discrimination, level of literacy, cultural and linguistic barriers, homelessness, job insecurity, uncertain status (immigrant/refugee/undocumented/Indigenous), risk of criminalization etc. For example, my nephew – who is a doctor - has established his clinic in a priority neighborhood in Toronto and is part of a group of young doctors who are moving their focus away from just primary care to social care. Their clinic focuses on community health model where they engage the community in working on its own health outcomes thus paying attention to their cultural/religious beliefs, notions of healing etc. but then also taking responsibility as professionals themselves for improving the social conditions of their clients in order to improve their overall health outcomes. So, for instance, they run financial literary classes, do job search training and work with employers, liaise with municipal government and institutions like the police to deal with issues of racial profiling, carding that impact negatively young racialized men.

Increasingly it is becoming quite clear that social justice interventions are critical since rights and claims to citizenship are inextricably tied up with realities of access to services. Hence, in Toronto the Municipal government, whose mandate is to serve all its residents in an equitable manner, and the community based sector (Indigenous/Ethno-Specific/Mainstream), whose mandate is to serve their communities, have developed a symbiotic relationship – they

rely on each other to ensure that the rights of all citizens are protected, without any exception. City of Toronto, in fact, has a two-fold relationship with the community based sector: it funds community based agencies to deliver those services that government just cannot deliver; but it also relies on the service sector to empower communities and build civic resiliency of its clients in a manner that creates the conditions for a robust civil society where democratic practices can flourish.

In Toronto the three cultural competency narratives mentioned before co-exist. Each has its own dynamics, history and indeed philosophy. If I were to give some coherence to their perspectives, I would say they fall mainly into three broad approaches to service delivery in Toronto:

- Indigenous Approach
- Ethno-racial/cultural Approach
- Mainstream Approach (which includes Francophone services)

(*Private sector is also increasingly becoming aware of the diversity of City of Toronto and responding to it by making diversity, inclusion and cultural competency a part of its business model but I will not speak to it since its motivation and role in society is fundamentally different from that of the public and service sector that I am focusing on).

INDIGENOUS APPROACH:

CULTURAL SAFETY:

Given the history of cultural destruction and loss of identity, when Indigenous communities organize and deliver services

they demand self-determination (services by and for Indigenous peoples). It is their claim to constitutional/legal rights. Hence, all City of Toronto divisions that work with the Indigenous communities make sure that they do not impose their own processes on the communities. Our approach has been to provide the resources and conditions for the communities to self-organize and be independent in delivering services be it housing, or child welfare or health or employment. Even the criminal justice system in Ontario recognizes the need for an Aboriginal Justice Strategy and approach. Apart from respecting the unique position that Indigenous populations have within Canadian context, it is quite clear that the Indigenous world view that underpins all issues of justice & governance, including service delivery, is often completely different from the mainstream society.

For example, Indigenous traditional models of service delivery, in fact, question the Western paradigm which they see as being based on individual psychology contrary to Indigenous notions of health which is based on balance between four aspects of a person's nature (mental, physical, spiritual and emotional). Indigenous approaches to health & justice are about collective orientation; non-linear; emphasizing oneness with nature; holistic and focused on wellness and community healing.

Indigenous communities place special emphasis on 'Cultural Continuity' – to re-build an understanding of individuals of their place in a particular cultural history so that they feel connected with the culture. Cultural "Competence" is actually seen as a step along a continuum with the end goal being "Safety". It is a circular model that connects 'Cultural Awareness' that is

acknowledgement of difference; to 'Cultural Sensitivity' that is respecting difference; to 'Cultural Competence' that is having the requisite skills, knowledge and attitude to deal with difference; to the ultimate goals of 'Cultural Safety' that is self-reflection leading to empathy and advocacy for self-determination.

It is important to understand that to Indigenous communities, cultural competency alone is not sufficient. In the context of Indigenous histories in Canada an inclusive society is one that respects their differences and acknowledges and asserts their historic rights. Failed by the State, provided sub-par services (e.g. housing, education, health care), they take ownership of services with the expectation of an understanding and acceptance of their historic relationship to the Canadian society.

ETHNO-RACIAL/CULTURAL APPROACH:

ETHNO-SPECIFICITY:

In contrast to the Indigenous approach to self-determination, the Ethno-racial/cultural sector seeks to claim its right to citizenship through self-expression. The very raison d'être for the sector is that given Toronto's enormous diversity the mainstream service provider cannot possibly address the needs of all those diverse communities in a sensitive/competent/linguistically specific manner. The issue then is not competency but (a) revealing the cultural limitations of mainstream society that privileges European culture and values; and (b) community building by creating equitable but

negotiated spaces to accommodate the diversity of the population. Hence, the presence of the sector is both a critique and an opportunity.

I ran an ethno-specific advocacy organization for 8 years – Council of Agencies Serving South Asians. Our rationale was that we are an umbrella organization of social service organizations that serves the diversity of the South Asian community in Toronto (Indians, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis, Sri Lankans (especially Tamil), Nepalese, Bhutanese and Maldivans). We acknowledged that South Asian-ness is a very Canadian experience but one that provides both a unique opportunity to build a new Canadian cultural identity amongst us but more importantly a way to build solidarity amongst us and with other ethno-racial/cultural groups to claim our rights to citizenship in Canadian society. Our board, staff, membership, volunteers and programming had to pay attention to representation of the diverse religious, linguistic and settlement needs of South Asians but the ultimate aim was to fight for social justice and equity for us and others who are marginalized in society by collectively taking ownership of our own needs. Our claim to our citizenship was grounded in the belief that Canadian multiculturalism is founded on the principle of <u>unity within diversity</u> so we have a right to self-expression while being Canadian.

In my experience, the ethno-specific approach actively uses 'Culture' but not in the context of competency but rather as a form of organizing & critique. This approach provides the sector with the legitimacy to seek resources from the state so that it can create spaces for its own cultural community to assert its

right to citizenship while simultaneously showing that even the mainstream society has a culture. The very justification for this sector lies in the fact that an ethno-specific approach allows those communities that are 'distant' from the European Canadian cultural norms and its system of power and privilege to create their own culturally/linguistically safe spaces where they can assert their rights to citizenship and equitable treatment in a manner that they find appropriate.

In this sense, our very *modus operandi* (the way we operate) is a challenge to mainstream practice and in that process of challenge makes a claim to writing the new chapter of Canadian multiculturalism. In our organization we spoke all the major languages of South Asia, our board/staff/volunteers represented all the countries/faiths/cultures of South Asia, we celebrated all the major religious and cultural events of South Asia, we supported each other in our particular struggles here and abroad but most importantly we delivered our services in a manner that was consistent with the cultural, spiritual and physical needs of our communities. Sometimes this required us as service providers to fight with government funders to fund programs that they did not understand according to their criteria but that our communities needed, for example, involving faith based solutions in violence against women services.

In this way, ethno-specific approach uses 'Culture' as a dynamic tool to forge new identities and practices that actually do not exist in our countries of origin and that is our claim to Canadian-ness. Hence, today my Canadian born kids call themselves 'Brown' and share a common symbolic cultural

identity with their other brown friends in terms of shared language, dress, music, behaviors which makes them different from me as much as other Canadians. South Asian-ness is a Canadian construct but one that is both creating a new form of cultural community and also challenging the strictly European norms of Canadian society. This makes the cultural competency narrative both transformative and empowering.

MAINSTREAM APPROACH:

The presence of these competing claims and approaches and the changing demography of a City like Toronto has also necessitated a change in the narrative of the mainstream society. Increasingly mainstream institutions are being forced to unpack their own power and privilege in order to be truly inclusive. Organizations are becoming aware that power and privilege influences decision-making, distribution of capacity to enforce decisions and access to resources and opportunities.

Working on the assumption that cultural values often reflect and give privilege to the norms and values of the dominant culture, mainstream institutions (like governments, hospitals, schools/colleges, service providers) are beginning to understand that even though they were made by and for the society as a whole, in effect, in a pluralist society like Toronto, they actually reflect European culture and values. The dramatic demographic shift in Toronto has meant that mainstream institutions are no longer able to retain their universal neutrality and thus are increasingly being seen as 'specific', just like Indigenous or Ethno-racial sector, but with one major difference – they have cultural power that the others do not!

Hence, to address this contradiction the sector is moving away from 'accommodation' of diversity to the reality of 'being' diverse – from being sensitive to the minority to acknowledging and reflecting the diverse majority in order to remain relevant and effective.

It is here that cultural competency narrative is actually being discussed, developed and implemented but that is because the sectors own cultural limitations have become obvious. As the notion of society is changing – from mainstream to diver-stream – inclusion and cultural competency is increasingly being viewed as a business imperative but with the understanding that in order to be relevant and effective there needs to be transformative change through 'organizational change'.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE:

Seeing that delivery of services in Toronto are sites where rights to access to services are being articulated and given their contested status, mainstream institutions and services are acknowledging that to be relevant to all, they have to change in a structural/systemic manner. In a sense to re-imagine themselves to both reflect & equitably serve the diversity of their clients.

A whole new discourse and practice of diversity organizational change has developed that is holistic and strategic. In this context cultural competency is increasingly being seen as a strategic priority that is supported by the organization's leadership, embraced by staff as an essential skill that enables

them to properly serve their clients, and leading to creation of a diversity infrastructure where cultural competency is no longer a 'special initiative' for the organization, but becomes 'business as usual.'

In order for an organization to succeed on this journey several factors are considered important:

Leadership commitment – several major hospitals have equity and diversity in their mission and vision while service organizations have developed clear policy statements on equity and diversity.

Resource allocation – major hospitals have now established Cultural Competency or Equity & Diversity Officers and/or departments.

Representative Governance – large hospitals, service organizations, agencies and boards are making conscious efforts to bring diversity on their board in order to diversify their governance and decision-making power. In this effort private foundations have played a key role – e.g. DiverseCity initiative (led by the Maytree Foundation) actively trains immigrants to sit on the boards of large public and social institutions like hospital boards, child welfare agencies etc.

Service Delivery – major hospitals and most school boards in Canada are training staff to be sensitive, building their awareness/knowledge/skills so that they become competent

through an anti-oppression framework. For example, Toronto School Board has areas where close to 80% of their students are culturally, racially, religiously diverse. They are having to pay attention to different religious days of significance, cultural events, bringing diverse histories into standard curriculum, providing training to their teachers and administrators on issues of anti-racism, cultural sensitivity, religious accommodation.

Diverse Staff – the simplest route to competency is often seen through staff representation, in other words, actively hiring people who reflect the diversity of the client population. Most large organizations realize now that given the cultural and linguistic diversity of clients no one institution can be everything to everyone especially given financial constraints. Hence, diverse staff is one way to address that challenge.

Community Engagement – another aspect of organizational change is to pay attention to meaningful community engagement so that the diverse communities especially those most marginalized are actively engaged with the institution. This allows the organization to tap into community knowledge, to gather pertinent cultural information, accelerate their introduction into communities, and attract diverse volunteers.

Institutions and service providers pay particular attention to:
- Examining their own values, behaviors, beliefs and assumptions.
- Acknowledging racism and the institutions or behaviors that breed racism.

- Engaging in activities that help to reframe thinking, allowing them to hear and understand other world views and perspectives.

- Familiarizing themselves with core cultural elements of the communities they serve, including: physical and biological variations, concepts of time, space and physical contact, styles and patters of communication, physical and social expectations, social structures and gender roles.

- Understanding that no amount of cultural knowledge can prepare one for unique experiences and histories that result in differences in individual behaviors, values and needs.

- Learning how different cultures define, name and understand their own needs.

- Developing a relationship of trust with clients and co-workers by interacting with openness, understanding, and a willingness to hear different perceptions.

The best example of this type of approach is to be found in City of Toronto Public Health (TPH) Division. It is responsible for the health and well-being of all 2.8 million residents of Toronto and best exemplifies the equity based approach that the health care sector in Toronto has adopted. Its mission and vision is to strive to reduce health inequities and improve the health of the whole population. It does this by:

Delivering services that are responsive, equitable and accessible to Toronto's global community…and through culturally competent programs, translated materials, language interpretation, partnerships with community agencies and continuous community engagement.

While emphasizing the health of Toronto as a whole, TPH **prioritizes the most marginalized** groups who have the greatest health needs but the least resources, for example, low income people, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, racialized women, immigrants & refugees etc. TPH relies on research, policy and advocacy to address health inequities and promote an **inclusive City. There is a lot of focus on** continuously measuring its health equity achievements & being accountable and transparent to the people it serves. TPH delivers its services through a **diverse workforce** that reflects the communities it serves so that it can leverage the perspectives, experiences and community connections that a diverse workforce brings. In order to make sure TPH staff diversity is effective, continuous commitment is also made for staff to receive ongoing education to expand competency in equity-based practice for serving diverse communities with complex health needs. In its partnership with the Indigenous communities, Toronto Public Health provides institutional resources and supports for the communities to self-organize, to develop their own traditional healing models and deliver community specific services through Indigenous health workers. In this regard, TPH sees health equity as a social justice issue that supports Aboriginal claims to self-determination.

ROLE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & PUBLIC POLICY:

Similarly, the City of Toronto as a Municipal Government is also making strides towards organizational change. As a microcosm of the NGO sector with one difference – it has the power to shape public policy – City of Toronto, being an order of government, is taking a more rights based approach to Toronto's diversity.

City has made an official commitment to equity and diversity. Our motto is "Diversity Our Strength". Also in 2011 the City of Toronto created a division called Equity, Diversity and Human Rights that is placed in the City Manager's Office. Although City has always been committed to issues of inclusion and equity, it is the first municipality in Canada to create a division with a corporate mandate that is not housed in its Human Resources division. This is a critical structural commitment since it allows the division to initiate and implement corporate policies, programs and services while also taking responsibility for corporate compliance for key pieces of legislation that are pertinent to promoting and enshrining rights based equity in society like the Ontario Human Rights Code, Occupational Health And Safety Act, and Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act.

Municipal public policy and action is guided by two main factors:
- At all times, but especially when in doubt, public policy must be consistent with the Municipal obligations emanating from relevant pieces of legislation, policy, by-laws.
- City of Toronto's historical aim has always been to promote the objective of building a shared agenda and producing equity of outcomes.
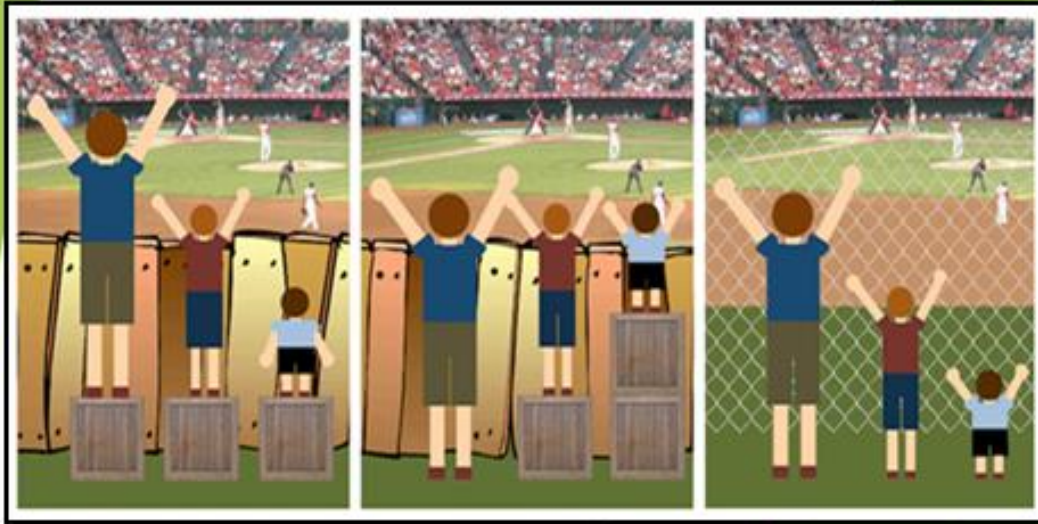
City has always taken a bit of an activist role in society in order to fulfil its mandate to build an equitable, diverse and just society.

Taking this as a starting point, City has enacted multiple policies & strategies that ensure that the right to equitable access is the foundation of all City practices. For instance, in 2014 City of Toronto became the first municipality in Canada to become a sanctuary city for undocumented residents. Since the criteria for accessing City services is residency and not immigration status, Council unanimously voted to allow all residents of Toronto, including those with no documentation, to access its services as long as they can show proof of residence in the city. This means that City staff effectively follow the principle of "Don't Ask Don't Tell".

Under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disability Act, City is now mandated to provide accessible services to people with disabilities and to be fully accessible by 2025.

My division has also produced many resources to drive equity in the corporation like guidelines on Creed, on Race, an Accommodation Policy. All of these allow us to be responsive to our diverse employees and service recipients. For instance, we provide religious accommodation to all staff e.g. to those employees who are fasting while involved in physical labor they are allowed to get prayer breaks, be offered alternative duties during really hot days, change work hours, have access to prayer rooms etc.

In some of our community recreational centers, for example, City staff have initiated 'special' programs (as permitted by the Ontario Human Rights Code) like all-female swim classes one day a week.

City has also been using the Equity Lens to develop its policies, programs and practices – this encourages divisions to identify the various dimensions of diversity but focus particularly on equity of outcomes.

City also has a *Human Rights and Anti-harassment/discrimination Policy* which applies to all City employees and service recipients. My division has responsibility for the Human Rights Office that actually investigates violations of the Policy and the Code.

Recognizing the impact of social determinants of health, City recently launched a Poverty Reduction Strategy with the understanding that some people are more likely to be poor because of their race; or immigration status; or Indigenous

status; or disability or gender etc. and that access to employment is a key factor if we are to change people's socio-economic outcomes. Hence, in the spirit of 'being the change that we seek' the City has initiated a workforce plan called Talent Blueprint that acknowledges that City itself is a large corporation and an employer. Diversity Hiring is one of its four key strategic goals for the corporation. One of the deliverables for this goal is to increase representation of diversity in our staff and senior management. Under this corporate plan and under Council direction we have also initiated three dedicated actions targeted towards specific equity seeking communities: an Aboriginal Employment Strategy; an employment strategy for people with disabilities; and a very successful mentoring program for internationally trained immigrants called Profession to Profession Mentoring. We have engaged in the largest number of mentoring relationships of any level of government – over 1500.

Another very promising initiative that has recently been approved by Council is the Social Procurement Policy, the first of its kind in Toronto. The aim of this policy is to embed supply chain diversity and workforce development initiatives within the City's Procurement Processes to drive inclusive economic growth. Understanding that City as a large corporation conducts business with a variety of vendors, it has chosen to take a lead in setting an example of social responsibility in its business dealings. Therefore, the policy is developed to:

- Encourage vendors to diversify their supply chain by including in their bid businesses owned and operated by equity seeking groups. In this way the strategy aims to address economic disadvantage, discrimination, and barriers to equal opportunity that disproportionately

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THE JERUSALEM FOUNDATION 50TH ANNIVERSARY
السنة الخمسون لمؤسسة صندوق القدس

مركز الحوار بين الثقافات في القدس
המרכז הבין-תרבותי לירושלים
The Jerusalem Intercultural Center

impact women, immigrants, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities and others.

- To encourage a culture of social procurement – that is, adding social investments like local hiring, youth programmes, community building etc. to their bid.

Recently my division has also initiated a discussion within the Toronto Public Service on the notion of Implicit or Unconscious Bias. Implicit bias is not a new concept but it is now gaining new recognition precisely because our society is so culturally diverse. It is especially pertinent in recruitment but also service delivery and makes one aware of bias, both for and against, as a subconscious phenomenon – recognizing that we all have biases based on our experiences, exposure to social messaging, historical factors that can lead to discriminatory practices. It allows us to understand that being consciously biased is not the only challenge – we may actually not know how we are producing differential outcomes for some people given our unconscious bias. This initiative seeks to produce mitigating strategies to minimize the negative impact of bias in City practices.

Underlying all of these City policies & strategies are two fundamental principles: *Duty to Accommodate* and *Up to the point of Undue Hardship*.
Duty to Accommodate: states the obligation of the City to take steps to eliminate disadvantage caused by systemic, attitudinal, or physical barriers that unfairly exclude individuals or groups. Under the *Ontario Human Rights Code* every person has the right to equal treatment with respect to employment & service on the basis of: race, ancestry, place of origin, color, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender

identity, gender expression, age, record of offences, marital status, family status, or disability. In addition, City's policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of: level of literacy, political affiliation, membership in a union or staff association, or any other personal characteristic.

Undue Hardship: refers to the extent to which an employer/service provider must attempt to accommodate the needs of an employee/service recipient. The three factors under the Code that are considered in determining undue hardship are: (1) cost of accommodation – that is, whether or not the cost threatens the viability of the City of Toronto; (2) outside sources of funding; (3) health and safety requirements.

However, none of these initiatives are without their own challenges and conflicts. We at the City understand that in a pluralistic society conflict will happen. As someone once said: in a democratic society we have earned the right to offend each other without breaking the law provided there is agreement that the law is leading to a just result. Hence, the Ontario Human Rights Commission has developed a policy on Competing Rights. But conflicts that we often deal with are not always resolvable through law or policy application. In such circumstances the City has chosen to create *safe spaces* for contentious issues to be raised and discussed. We are calling it a 'Competing Interests' framework that allows the City to create the conditions for communities to resolve their own issues (some historic and some contemporary) using an Alternative Dispute Resolution involving neutral/trusted third parties as mediators without government intervention.

So, in conclusion, the landscape of equity and inclusion in Canada is clearly to use Cultural competency as one of the means to make claims to fundamental rights. In my estimation, if we do not use cultural competency to address inequality in

society than it is not a useful construct and can in fact be dangerous because it is merely saying I will not make you equal but I will be nice to you by appropriating your culture selectively. However, if we were to say let's co-create a society where we can be equal and let's use cross cultural solidarity through competency so that we do not get lost in translation, than it does become a powerful tool for transformative change. Ultimately, any global city that is proud of its diversity and multiculturalism must practice social justice as a moral and social responsibility - we have no choice in this matter!