The Macro Context of Immigration

In previous chapters, we discussed how interactions with other individuals and organizations influence QIs' sensemaking of themselves and their environment. This chapter explores the link between individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking and the broader societal context. We will explore the ways in which the macro-environment, through master narratives, imposes a set of constraints, representations, and logic principles on individuals (DiMaggio, 1997) that may influence the availability and attractiveness of courses of action they may take. Maha's[1] story below demonstrates how her course of action (re-establishing herself as a photographer) after moving to a new country (Canada) was informed by master narratives guiding who gets to belong in society, as well as shared narratives of Toronto as a big city full of opportunities and with a desirable 'art and photography scene.'

> I am half Iraqi, half Syrian, and I was born and raised in the UAE. I've been in Toronto for 2.5 years now. When I first moved to Toronto, it was very difficult because Toronto is a huge city, it was overwhelming…It was really difficult at the beginning, but I started warming up to the city much faster than I thought I would. Toronto has a lot to offer, and I think that's one of the things I love about the city. Opening a new chapter coming to Canada, I seized this opportunity to start a new chapter in my life as well. I worked as an architect for ten years as well as a photographer. But I decided to become a full-time photographer here. So, the art scene and photography scene in Toronto is amazing, and it's the best place to

be right now. To date, I've had three photography shows, two of which are part of the contact photographer festival here in Toronto, which is the biggest in North America. I've also been a TELUS newcomer artist finalist, which is a great milestone for me. I think it's overwhelming to be here because you've left everything behind – life as you know it, and you're starting over. But there's a lot that Toronto can offer you, and I am really excited about this new life and all the opportunities that it has.

Maha, in her story narrated above, made sense of her situation and any discrepancies in her expectations by looking for *reasons* that would allow her to understand what was going on and how she should act. Furthermore, Maha made sense of the challenges of settling in a new country and city by drawing on societal narratives of Toronto as a big city with many opportunities. Maha's *reasons* are extracted from institutional frameworks and cultural traditions, in other words, the macro context of sensemaking (Helms Mills et al., 2010; Weick et al., 2005). These reasons constitute master narratives, as explained below.

6.1   MASTER NARRATIVES AND SENSEMAKING

Master narratives are shared cultural scripts that underpin behavioral norms and shape individuals' narratives (Rogers, 2018). As such, master narratives are society-specific and influence individuals' sensemaking as it guides individuals on how to be good members of a given culture (McLean & Syed, 2015). According to McLean and Syed (2015), master narratives are characterized by five basic principles:

1. *Utility*: master narratives are useful because they structure expectations regarding what is perceived to be socially acceptable and desirable.
2. *Ubiquity*: master narratives are shared across a wide range of individuals.
3. *Invisibility*: master narratives are taken-for-granted social conventions and can be difficult to clearly define and articulate.
4. *Rigidity*: master narratives are slow to change and difficult to dismantle.
5. *Compulsory nature*: master narratives shape collective notions of who is valued and what types of behaviors are normative, thus

marginalizing or excluding those whose personal narratives do not fit.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to identify and discuss all relevant master narratives informing QIs' work integration. Building on previous discussions of culture, we begin by discussing multiculturalism as a master narrative present in several immigrant-receiving countries. We then explore how multiculturalism is practiced in everyday actions to link the institutional to the individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking. Next, we explore master narratives that inform who is worthy of inclusion in society.

6.2 Multiculturalism

There are three dominant conceptualizations of immigrants' socio-cultural incorporation in the receiving country: assimilation, segregation, and integration, all of which are hotly debated and being revised continually. Assimilation and segregation are two extremes on a continuum of participation of newcomers in the receiving society (Alba & Foner, 2014; Drouhot & Nee, 2019). As the word implies, assimilation refers to immigrants and their children becoming *similar* to the receiving society by abandoning their culture, while segregation implies that immigrants remain separate from the receiving society. This paradigm originated in American debates on immigrant cultures; 'successful assimilation' is measured by the degree of economic and social success achieved by newcomers (Schneider & Crul, 2010).

Integration assumes that the 'mainstream,' which different generations of immigrants are assimilating to, is not static—change occurs on both sides—for immigrants and residents of the new country. In Canada, for example, integration of immigrants is defined as a gradual two-way process. It requires newcomers to tap into available supports, connect with their communities, as well as learn about and adhere to Canadian laws. In turn, Canadian society should promote their inclusion by reducing discrimination, alienation, and radicalization (IRCC, 2017). Integration does not occur 'within a fixed time frame' (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018, p. 3). While 'successful integration' is oftentimes measured by the educational attainments of subsequent generations of immigrants and employment figures (Schneider & Crul, 2010), it also includes having 'a

sense of belonging in the community' (Kaushik & Drolet, 2018, p. 3), often emphasizing language as a key to social cohesion.

Multiculturalism is the legal, political, social, and cultural accommodation of different ethnic groups. In its specific local or societal iteration, multiculturalism is used to manage large inflows of racially, ethnically, and culturally distinctive immigrant groups. Multiculturalism can function as a shared cultural script, informing policies, practices, normative behaviors, and individual actions. It draws on the central tenet of 'successful integration,' which is that despite their different cultures, residents, and immigrants can function together to contribute positively to the societal fabric. Multiculturalism, therefore, articulates a social contract that recognizes the integration of new citizens as a two-way street. Immigrant citizens and the receiving society are 'parallel societies.' Just as immigrant citizens are expected to commit to their new country and learn about its language, history, and institutions, so too should the receiving society express a commitment to its immigrant citizens and adapt its institutions to accommodate their identities and practices.

Multiculturalism is often conceived of as a celebration of ethnocultural diversity and acknowledges, encourages, and embraces 'a panoply of customs, traditions, music, and cuisines that exist in a multiethnic society' (Kymlicka, 2012, p. 35). It selects specific cultural markers of ethnic groups—clothing, cuisine, and music—to be taught in schools and reproduced at cultural events. Multiculturalism as a master narrative brings discussions of cultural tolerance and diversity into the mainstream.

Multiculturalism has also been enshrined in the constitution by several immigrant-receiving countries like the UK, Canada, and Australia and adapted in variable ways by others (Ashcroft & Bevir, 2018; Ghosh, 2018). As a policy, multiculturalism is typically a mix of anti-discrimination measures and forms of recognition and accommodation, such as cultural diversity training for police and healthcare professionals, government funding of ethnic cultural festivals, and ethnic studies programs, among others (Kymlicka, 2003, 2021). Most importantly, it is an attempt to establish democratic models of citizenship and human rights ideals to replace historically racist and unjust policies of exclusion. The Multicultural Policy Index is a standardized method to compare multicultural policy measures across different national and regional contexts, which includes constitutional, legislative, and parliamentary affirmations, adoption in education curricula and institutions, representation and sensitivity mandates in the media, exemptions from dress codes as statutes,

dual citizenship, funding and supporting ethnic group organizations and/or cultural education/instruction, and affirmative action policies for immigrant groups (Kymlicka, 2012).

The celebratory understanding of multiculturalism has been criticized extensively for ignoring economic and political inequities, reducing the complexity of cultures to a few palatable practices, neglecting cultural adaptation and mixing, and at times reinforcing power inequalities, stereotypes, and restrictions of specific minority groups (Kymlicka, 2012). According to Chapra and Chatterjee (2009, p. 15), the failings of multiculturalism lie in its design as a 'tool to maintain difference, distance, and dominance while maintaining its language of diversity and inclusion.' Official discourses of multiculturalism are criticized for positioning the state and Whiteness as benevolent saviors (Bakali, 2015, p. 417). Other vehement critics of multiculturalism emphasize its tendency to conceal racist, discriminatory, and exclusionary attitudes/prejudices and sideline acts of racism, thereby limiting opportunities for anti-racist action within the myth of a tolerant nation (Abu-Laban & Gabriel, 2002; Masoumi, 2020; Thobani, 2018).

In the Canadian context, multiculturalism emphasizes differences between Indigenous and immigrant groups rather than their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens (Fleras, 2021). Nonetheless, multiculturalism is thought to bolster successful integration without asking immigrants to give up their cultural heritage (Banting et al., 2007; Bloemraad & Hamlin, 2020). As a policy, it constitutes the formal management of diversity through initiatives across different levels of government (Bannerji, 2000; Hyman et al., 2011; Pillay, 2015). Multiculturalism, despite its critique for remaining at a symbolic level and not challenging forms of structural racism and discrimination, has endured (Banting et al., 2022; Loh, 2022).

6.2.1   *Everyday Multiculturalism*

'Everyday multiculturalism' was conceived to acknowledge and emphasize the pragmatic aspects of how individuals and organizations, through their relations, navigate difference. It is the 'lived practice of cultural diversity' (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, p. 3). 'Everyday multiculturalism' is a perspective to understand how multiculturalism, as a master narrative, shapes individuals' lives. It is how cultural difference is constructed and contested through different activities and includes how the everyday and

mundane are experienced and mediated by larger economic, political, and social contexts (Colombo, 2010; Hardy, 2017; O'Connor, 2010; Uitermark et al., 2005; Wise, 2014; Wise & Velayutham, 2009). Everyday multiculturalism, therefore, includes a gamut of activities such as individual choices and actions that draw on or contribute to different ethnic cultures (cuisines, clothing, music, and other forms of cultural production) through restaurants, festivals, weddings, and other events, wearing cultural and religious attire in public spaces (e.g., headscarves or caps), cultural education, and targeted media programming, among others.

Everyday multiculturalism complements and enhances the understanding of multiculturalism as a master narrative through a more situated and lived account of the everyday dimensions of multiculturalism. It explores how cultural diversity and intercultural encounters are experienced in neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces. Overall, everyday multiculturalism captures how broader social, cultural, and political processes, institutions, and structures (the macro-environment) are filtered and negotiated through the individual level and the realm of everyday practices, exchanges, and meaning-making (Wise & Velayutham, 2009, p. 3).

6.3   Good Worker, Good Citizen

We have already discussed how educational attainments and employment figures of immigrants across generations are key indicators of successful integration. This is closely tied to viewing immigration as a critical tool and an essential strategy for receiving countries to correct mismatches in the demand and supply of the skills needed to promote and sustain industries and the national economy. Immigration regulations are shaped to construct and maintain an active search for talent. Immigrant-receiving countries compete for a specific mold of an international professional— highly skilled, innovative, adaptable, flexible, and independent.

The central assumption made by governments implementing a talent bias in immigration regulations is that highly educated and qualified foreign professionals can easily and quickly acquire country-specific knowledge at little or no cost to the receiving state, allowing them to adapt to the local labor markets rapidly. Many immigrant-receiving countries hold this assumption, resulting in a global race for talent (Shachar, 2013) that constructs economic immigrants as terms of trade, negotiated to gain comparative advantage in a global economy.

To this end, receiving governments develop a sorting logic to determine individual professional success to select and admit global talent to increase the country's global competitive advantage. Parent and Worswick (2004) review and compare post-World War II immigration strategies in Canada, the United States, and Australia and identify the importance of language skills and education. Similarly, Belot and Hatton (2012) confirm what they call the 'skills premium' by drawing on immigrant stock data for 70 source countries and 21 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) destination countries. To give a specific example of how this sorting logic functions, we draw on the Canadian case.

Canada uses its immigration policies strategically to fill specific labor shortages to support national economic growth by turning the 'immigration tap' on and off. Canada first began to move in this direction with the introduction of the Points System in 1967 to assess immigration applicants' admissibility objectively. Points were awarded to individuals based on their education, age, language proficiency, and targeted characteristics such as pre-arranged employment and whether they intended to enter occupations facing perceived shortages. Generally, the Points System favored highly skilled newcomers and relied on self-selection or existing familial, kinship, and ethnic networks.

6.3.1   Why Make a Skilled Distinction?

The preference for skilled immigrants is built on the assumption that a primary indicator of admissibility and employability is human capital—the economic value of a worker's experience and skills, including education, training, intelligence, age, health, etc. QIs are recruited for their talent—their unique and valuable human capital. Skill level and type are often used as proxies for measuring human capital. There is no universal or uniform definition of 'skills.' In most immigrant-receiving countries, 'skills' are defined in terms of educational attainment levels, occupational skills and type, and work experience.

In Canada, the selection of economic immigrants uses skill as one of the most decisive indicators of immigration candidates' long-standing ability of successful economic integration (Boucher, 2020; Chand & Tung, 2019). In 1997, Canadian legislators articulated a blueprint for selecting self-supporting individuals, which became the foundation for the economic class or economic immigration stream (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 1997). 'Skill' in Canada is

defined and operationalized using the National Occupational Classification (NOC). NOC is a standard taxonomy and framework to categorize occupational information using skill type (type of work performed for education and field of study) and skill level (education and level of training). It establishes standardized language to describe work performed by Canadians and uses it to define and collect statistics, manage information databases, analyze labor market trends, and extrapolate information for career planning.

The basic principle of classification of the NOC is the kind of work performed, which is used to identify and group occupations. NOC defines occupation as a collection of jobs performed in a sufficiently similar manner. A job includes all tasks that a worker carries out to complete their duties. Job titles are grouped based on work performed (i.e., tasks, duties, employment requirements, and responsibilities associated with each occupation). At present, the NOC is comprised of about 30,000 job titles organized into 500-unit groups, categorized according to four skill levels and ten broad occupational categories. Prospective immigration candidates are organized by distinguishing their skill level and type and assigned a NOC category. The NOC also forms the basis of a bifurcated system of immigration whereby skilled workers or QIs have a greater advantage in accessing employment opportunities and pathways to permanent residence and citizenship.

As discussed in earlier chapters, despite being recruited for what governments project as vacancies, skilled immigrants encounter significant and unfair barriers to labor market entry. Governments, employers, professional regulatory bodies, and employment agencies inadvertently perpetuate a hierarchy of eligibility (Cameron et al., 2019; Kaushik & Walsh, 2018; Walton-Roberts, 2021). This hierarchy has been attributed to the non-recognition of education and work experience acquired outside Canada (Banerjee et al., 2021; Damelang et al., 2020), perceived linguistic abilities, loss of previous social memberships and networks, and in some instances, it has also proven to be the result of racial and gender prejudices (Ellermann, 2020; Esses, 2021; Man & Chou, 2020). Yet, the idea that QIs should integrate professionally is ingrained in master narratives.

6.3.2 Desirable Immigrants

As discussed already, master narratives function as cultural scripts that influence discourses on who is worthy of integration and thereby mark QIs for inclusion or exclusion. QIs can contribute to the receiving country with their skills and talent if they enter workplaces successfully. Professional attainment, therefore, is a key marker of inclusion in receiving countries and this master narrative shapes QIs' experiences of work integration upon arrival and after, as well as their individual sensemaking and actions.

In a previous study of immigrant narratives (Moffitt et al., 2020), we describe how, in Canada, a master narrative portraying desirable immigrants as productive workers who contribute to the economy was reflected in immigrants' personal narratives. Participants constructed accounts of their experiences in Canada, creating a coherent life story while engaging with societal expectations of professional attainment. Professional attainment, therefore, was a master narrative maintained by immigrants themselves.

Immigrants in this study tended not to push against this expectation, thereby allowing it to remain invisible while simultaneously reinforcing it. For instance, Maha's narrative presented above highlights her accomplishments and success as a photographer. In this study, immigrants aligning with the master narrative, like Maha, were also professionally successful, suggesting they felt positive about their immigration experience. In addition, because they conformed to societal expectations, they were more likely to feel included in society and enjoy better mental and physical health (McLean & Syed, 2015).

When individual narratives misalign with the master narrative, it may prompt the crafting of an alternative narrative. These alternative narratives may strengthen the master narrative through its nature of oppositional referencing (McLean et al., 2017). Peter recounts his settlement experiences and professional challenges on his journey toward integration. Even though he was unsuccessful in attaining satisfactory employment, his narrative suggests that it is still a desirable goal. He highlights other ways in which he contributes to Canadian society by creating self-help groups and discusses his efforts toward integration by networking and gaining experience. His narrative is an alternative to the master narrative of professional attainment, yet it reinforces the notion that professional attainment is a key marker of inclusion.

I've been in Canada for just over three years, but I have had so many nice experiences that it feels like I have been here for many more. The best part about Canada is the people you meet. People from all over the world united together with one mission: to make the country and the world a better place to live. Times have been hard. Job searching has been painstakingly difficult and slow. Rejection is faced over and over again. The recession has not made this any easier. But with hard work, patience, and persistence, I have learned to survive and come out strong. I have started several self-help groups, one for soon-to-be immigrants and one for job seekers in Canada. Over the past few months, each of these groups has grown to over several hundred members. Volunteering has allowed me to meet and intermingle with lots of people and to get Canadian experience. Networking groups for new Canadians are another support system I've found. Canada is a great country, there is so much to see and do. As the months and years pass, I hope to be able to give and to receive back from this country.

Peter and Maha's narratives demonstrate the persistence of the master narrative of professional attainment as a key marker of inclusion and advance the cultural script that good workers make good citizens, which is internalized by QIs.

Multiculturalism and professional attainment are viewed as clear pathways to inclusion and become powerful master narratives that structure QIs' expectations of what is socially acceptable and desirable in the receiving country. Just as the principles of master narratives identified by McLean and Syed (2015) suggest, multiculturalism and the 'good worker, good citizen' narratives are ubiquitous and invisible; they are shared by a wide range of individuals and are often de-personified, abstracted, and taken for granted. These principles also make these master narratives slow to change and difficult to dismantle (rigid). This rigidity is evident in Peter's attempts to find an alternative narrative that still fits within and reinforces the master narrative of professional attainment as key to inclusion in Canadian society. Finally, Maha's perception of Toronto as a city of opportunities and her success in navigating and succeeding in its 'art and photography' scene are shaped by collective notions of QIs' contributions and appropriate and normative behaviors (compulsory).

6.4   Immigration and Colonialism

In a chapter on the macro-environment of immigration, it is essential to consider the relationship between immigration and colonialism in settler nations. Again, we focus on the case of Canada, where understandings of nationhood, citizenship, and belonging are marked by Indigenous peoples' experiences of British and French colonization and waves of immigration, initially from Europe and later from the Global South (Abu-Laban, 2014). A prevalent narrative that establishes immigration is a defining feature of Canada as a modern state is built on a foundation of complex social relations of power and reflects Anglo-conformity and British origin as the ideal and norm against which other groups are measured (Abu-Laban & Nath, 2020).

The common element in current debates on the relationship between immigration and settler colonialism is the recognition that rigid categories of immigrant, Indigenous, and settler can miss the constitutive links between struggles against racialized precarity, White supremacist capitalism, and the project of settlement (Chatterjee, 2019; Walia, 2013). Stasiulis (2020) demonstrates how the settler-colonial project distinguishes between 'legitimate' Canadian settler-citizens and undesirable racialized populations residing in Canada, often for a long time. Thus, the Canadian narrative of a nation of immigrants, Perzyna and Bauder (2022) argues, 'denies Canada's colonial roots and expunges the violence of settler colonialism, racist immigration policies and the continuing discriminatory neoliberal bias toward economic migrants and government-approved refugees' (p. 1). They stress how irregular asylum seekers and Indigenous land defenders 'are constructed as threats to Canadian sovereignty, perpetuating and reproducing settler-colonial structures' (p. 2).

In summary, it is important to understand that settler colonialism, discrimination against Indigenous peoples, and immigrant integration are intertwined and influenced by historical and contemporary social and political practices (Chatterjee, 2019). As discussed above, the Canadian narrative of multiculturalism differentiates Indigenous and immigrant groups rather than emphasizing their shared rights or identities as Canadian citizens (Fleras, 2021). Further, some argue (Dhamoon, 2015) that the Canadian state uses immigrants of color to perpetuate a myth of multiculturalism, which ensures the continued 'domination of Indigenous

peoples' (p. 25). These practices and discourses are a fundamental part of the macro-environment surrounding QIs' work integration.

6.5   Practical Insights

Supporting QIs to achieve work integration is a societal project that requires not only adjustment to regulatory environments that create the infrastructure for integration but also narratives that provide individuals—Indigenous, immigrant, and settler—with the resources to make sense of their experiences. The construction of a more inclusive society requires the inclusion of multiple voices to challenge and change rigid and compulsory master narratives that may be exclusionary. The inclusion of multiple (even if contradictory) voices and points of view may aid in breaking down barriers of who gets to be 'one of us.' In constructing alternative narratives, we should remain vigilant to not inadvertently reinforce the master narrative, further excluding those unable to meet social requirements for inclusion (seen clearly in Peter's narrative). In the case of QIs, those unable to attain commensurate employment may be perceived as less deserving of inclusion (Moffitt et al., 2020), maintaining the notion that immigrants are economic terms of trade rather than individuals and families with aspirations beyond the value of their labor.

6.6   The Road Ahead

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, it is near impossible to capture fully the symbolic reality and institutional frameworks (master narratives) that constitute the macro-environment in which QIs operate. We discussed two vital cultural scripts that inform QIs' work integration in a receiving country: (1) multiculturalism as central to integration; and (2) professional attainment as a key marker of inclusion. As an institutional framework, multiculturalism informs individual, interactional, and organizational levels of sensemaking through everyday multiculturalism, which is the situated and lived reality of cultural difference. QIs understand professional attainment as a marker of inclusion in response to a global race for talent and the importance of skills as a guarantor for successful integration. The brief and targeted discussion of multiculturalism and the 'good worker, good citizen' master narratives provide a glimpse of the macro-environment in which QIs, local agents, and organizations operate to guide who belongs and is worthy. These shared cultural scripts outline

the way things should be and inform salient challenges for immigrants. We also reflected upon colonial narratives that differentiate immigrants and indigenous peoples, reinforcing the settlement project and influencing QIs' integration.

In the next and concluding chapter, we identify two important developments that influence the structuring of the multiple levels of sensemaking (individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional): (1) transnationalism as an ontological framework and (2) the COVID-19 pandemic as an ongoing and endemic global issue. We discuss how these developments will inevitably transform individual, interactional, organizational, and institutional logics, culture, and practices.

6.7   Key Points

- The macro-environment, through master narratives, provides individuals with important cues for individual, interactional, and organizational sensemaking.
- Master narratives are shared cultural scripts that underpin behavior and shape individuals' narratives.
- Multiculturalism—the legal, political, social, and cultural accommodation of different ethnic groups—is a master narrative shaping individuals' lives in several immigrant-receiving countries, including the UK, Australia, and Canada.
- Migration policies favor skilled immigrants based on the assumption that they are better suited and more desirable for successful integration; however, several barriers remain. Nonetheless, the notion of 'good worker, good citizen' is internalized by QIs and influences how they make sense of their experiences.
- QIs' integration is entangled with settler-colonial practices and positioned within narratives that differentiate immigrants and indigenous peoples, reinforcing the settlement project.
- Master narratives guiding who belongs and is desirable can only change with the systematic and sincere inclusion of multiple voices—Indigenous, immigrant, and settler—to break down barriers of who gets to be 'one of us.'

Note

1. This story was collected from Passages Canada in the fall of 2016. Passages Canada is an initiative of Historica Canada, an organization dedicated to documenting the history and heritage of Canadians. The complete explanation of how we collected and interpreted this data can be found in our original study (Moffitt et al., 2020).

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