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ABSTRACT
This commentary shares some observations and insights on Jennifer Elrick's book *Making Middle-Class Multiculturalism*. In particular, it explores the book's contribution to theorizing policy-making in public administration, which shows how "street-level" processes of deliberation and decision-making became aggregated and institutionalized, profoundly shaping the direction of Canadian immigration policy. The commentary shares some insights comparing the Canadian case with that of the UK in the 1960s. It also reflects on Elrick's discussion on the role of background ideas or "cultural repertoires" in shaping policy-making. The commentary suggests that this analysis could usefully be developed through engaging with literature on organizational sociology, notably its insights into organizational culture, legitimation, institutional decoupling and isomorphism.

Jennifer's Elrick's book on *Making Middle-Class Multiculturalism* is a truly impressive achievement, which makes a novel contribution at a number of levels. Elrick's meticulous, archive-based analysis fills an important historiographic gap in research on Canadian post-war immigration, seen through the lens of the often overlooked officials who elaborated and implemented immigration policy. It advances an original and compelling argument about the shift from a race-based, white-settler approach to immigration selection, to Canada's famous multicultural model – showing how officials replaced group-level selection focusing on race with individual-level selection focusing "middle-class" traits. The book also does important work in its

theorizing of immigration policy more generally, developing a compelling "cultural sociology" of immigration policy. It is this latter theoretical contribution that I am going to focus on in my comments.

Elrick locates her approach in theories of immigration policy that ascribe agency to the state. States are neither neutral brokers seeking to reconcile rival interests asserted by business and third sector lobby groups (Freeman 1995); nor are they locked into immutable institutional structures, as emphasized in much of the historical institutionalist and neo-institutionalist literature (Hall 1993; Hansen 2000; Blyth and Mark 2002;). Rather, Elrick takes inspiration from the growing literature on discursive institutionalism (Schmidt 2008, 2011; Hay 2011), which shows how actors may exercise agency – act in a strategic way – in selecting and combining different "background ideas" or (as Elrick describes them) "cultural repertoires". We find ample evidence of such reflexivity in Elrick's analysis of deliberation in public administration: her immigration officials are constantly reflecting on, combining and reshaping the cultural repertoires available to them – to puzzle, deliberate and devise solutions to the problems they are seeking to tackle.

This recognition of the agency of government officials is not merely of interest to public administration buffs. As Elrick argues, the deliberations of these officials makes a real difference to crucial aspects of policy that shape admission criteria, and thus the composition and dynamics of Canadian society. Drawing on research on policy implementation and street-level bureaucrats, Elrick shows how the day-to-day, individual decisions of multiple officials cumulate to produce a patterned response, which then became institutionalized as Canadian policy. Moreover, in marshalling and combining cultural repertoires in new ways, the public administration effectively recalibrates the background ideas on which they are drawing – notably, "recasting" ideas about the racial, socio-economic and moral desirability of different groups of migrants. As recognized in discursive institutionalist literature, policy-makers do not just passively receive and re-articulate the background ideas available to them: through various mechanisms, they actively revise them (Boswell and Hampshire 2016). This implies attributing substantial agency and influence to these officials, fully justifying the chosen methodology of focusing on archives from public administration.

I am very sympathetic to these aspects of Jennifer's approach. Indeed the book prompted me to reflect further on the fascinating relationship between ideas and agency in immigration policy-making. My comments will focus on two main aspects of this relationship, weaving in some examples from similar archival research I recently carried out with Mike Slaven, focused on deliberation over immigration policy in the UK Home Office in the 1960s (Slaven and Boswell 2019; Slaven 2022).

Micro-level decision-making

One of the intriguing aspects of Elrick's empirical analysis is that it covers a juncture at which Canadian officials were genuinely uncertain about how to juggle the various pressures and considerations that needed to be weighted up in developing immigration policy. Government officials were developing "experimental responses to multiple macro- and meso-level pressures" (107). Indeed, literature on immigration policy has long observed that policy-makers are confronted with a range of conflicting considerations and pressures. There is what Elrick characterizes as the "macro-level" of geopolitical pressures and international relations. Alongside these diplomatic considerations, immigration policy literature often invokes international legal commitments related to free movement, human rights and asylum, as well as international economic and trade relations – often dubbed a form of "liberal constraint" (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1992; Hollifield 1992). Then there are the "meso-level" or domestic pressures that policy-makers need to contend with: public perceptions of immigration, its cultural and distributive effects, as well as effects on domestic labour markets. And at the "micro-level" officials need to factor in practical and operational considerations about how different policies may be interpreted and implemented by the range of actors involved in and affected by policy, and the potentially distorting and unintended effects of such policy measures. As has been argued, these conflicting considerations often lead to symbolic approaches to policy-making, where policy-makers meet (often domestic) pressures for restriction through harsh rhetoric and symbolic political gestures, while in practice tolerating extensive "decoupling" in practice – through introducing exceptions or loopholes to restrictive policy, or through turning a blind eye to extensive irregular entry, work and stay (Castles 2004).

   But what is less rehearsed in the literature – and arguably more interesting – is where these conflicting considerations lead to phases of genuine "puzzling" (Heclo 1974; Winship 2007) – uncertainty over how to frame and respond to new policy issues. This can trigger a fascinating process of deliberation within public administration. This form of puzzling is most likely to occur in a relatively sequestered spaces, away from the cut and thrust of public political debate. Once immigration issues become the object of high profile political contestation, governments are likely to find it far more difficult to buffer themselves from political pressure and take the time and space to figure out what to do. In this sense, analyzing deliberations in public administration during the 1960s, an era in which immigration was less politicized, offers a wonderful opportunity to delve into these processes of puzzling – and even more so in a country like Canada that has managed to avoid the more heated and contentious politics of immigration experienced in the US, Australia and most European countries of immigration. So while

less obviously glamorous as a research topic than settings where immigration issues are politically contested, the more low-key, technocratic setting of Canada in the 1960s creates space for a really indepth exploration of deliberation in public administration.

As Elrick shows in her book, we can gain unique insight into these processes of puzzling through archives. This echoes our experience of analyzing archives in the UK, France and Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, as part of a recent project exploring how states have constructed irregular migration. The UK records were particularly enlightening in this respect, offering a rich range of intra- and cross-department memos, annotated draft briefings and documents, and even hand-written notes from senior officials and ministers, which brilliantly capture the range of considerations being mulled over. From Elrick's account, the Canadian records appear to contain a similarly rich and insightful source of data. Such sources enable vivid and immersive insight into the preoccupations of the time, allowing one to reconstruct the logics and beliefs animating decision-making in a way that would not be possible through interviews or other forms of content analysis.

Indeed, it was striking how may parallels there were between the issues guiding deliberation in the UK and Canadian settings over the same period. When Elrick listed the various foreign policy and domestic considerations guiding government thinking, I was struck how the categories mirrored those of the UK. Notably, officials in both countries displayed very similar beliefs about the risks of racial tensions, should there be a significant rise in "coloured" immigration, especially when concentrated in urban areas. In both cases, officials demonstrated a strikingly resigned – and paternalist – approach to their "publics", assuming that non-white or non-European immigration would trigger racist sentiments and discrimination. But they were convinced that such racism did not permeate their own views: they were simply being pragmatic in accepting the prevalence of such views against their (less enlightened) populations.

However, there are also some interesting differences in the considerations guiding bureaucrats in the two cases. The first of these that struck me was Canadian officials' reflexivity about the country's global standing. They were anxious to be perceived as progressive, liberal and enlightened, thus militating in favour of approaches that were not overtly discriminatory on racial grounds. And they were also keen to roll out a selective approach to labour immigration that would contribute to economic prosperity, thus locating Canada squarely in the group of wealthier, industrialized countries. Such concerns featured not just in the thinking of foreign service officials, but also immigration officials, suggesting their salience – and underlining Canada's early, very conscious effort to use immigration policy to enhance its global reputation. By contrast, British officials were squarely preoccupied with a narrower set of relations with Commonwealth countries, in the context of a

disintegrating empire. They were singularly unreflective about how their immigration policy might affect their wider international image (plus ca change!), with attention almost exclusively focused on potential fallout with former colonies.

A second interesting difference that emerges from the analysis is the confidence of Canadian officials in their "experimental" approach to immigration policy. Officials often appear to be trying out particular approaches to selection in an incremental, trial-and-error way, to see what types of approaches might work best to achieve their social and economic goals. One can read into this a confidence about their ability to track how well particular immigrant groups – or even individual families – are faring. This contrasts strongly to the UK case, where officials shared a rather fatalistic belief that they would not be able to monitor or control migrants once in the UK, or even to gather information on trends. This resigned attitude reflects the UK's dependence on entry checks, alongside an almost non-existent internal control capacity. Once immigrants had arrived in the UK, the Home Office had very little faith that it could find out where they were or what they were doing (Slaven and Boswell 2019; Boswell and Badenhoop 2021). It would be interesting to explore how far Canada's confidence in tracking the effects of its immigration policies was linked to its perceptions of its internal control infrastructure, or perhaps its faith in data collection and social research on immigrants and ethnic minority groups in Canada.

I have drawn out these similarities and contrasts partly because of their inherent historical interest; but also because they nicely illustrate the scope for fruitful comparative analysis that the book inspires. Doubtless readers with close knowledge of other immigration systems will find similar scope for fruitful comparison.

Ideas and organizational culture

This brings me to the question of the ideas and beliefs shaping the decisions of Canadian officials. Elrick convincingly shows how these Canadian officials are not operating in an ideational vacuum, but drawing on wider cultural repertoires. What are these repertoires? For a start, they comprise public philosophies, paradigms or world-views that shape beliefs about national identity, membership and belonging (Brubaker 1992), race and ethnicity, as well as norms on socio-economic distribution, the role of the state, and inter-group relations and internal order (Favell 2001). There is ample literature fleshing out and critiquing how stable, homogenous fragmented or contested such public philosophies are, and how they shape public beliefs and policy on immigration and citizenship (for an excellent critique, see Bertossi 2011).

What discursive institutionalists have brought to this literature is a clearer articulation of how such background ideas might be deployed and adjusted through political deliberation. On Vivien Schmidt's account, actors are not just constrained by background ideas, but have "foreground discursive abilities" that enable them to be reflexive and strategic in how they marshal ideas (Schmidt 2008, 316). Political actors can select, combine, reinterpret and adjust ideas through strategic deployment, in turn modifying those ideas. This possibility of adjustment is well illustrated in the book's discussion of the "recasting" of ideas on the desirability of different racial and socio-economic traits associated with immigrant groups. Through mobilizing, combining and applying background beliefs about such characteristics in policy-making on admissions, Canadian officials recalibrated ideas about multiculturalism.

But just as important are the second-order, more practical ideas that shaped the deliberations of Canadian officials. In the tradition of Kitty Calavita's classic analysis of immigration policy-making in the US administration, Elrick shines a light on the more mundane, day-to-day operational and practical considerations influencing policy-making (Calavita 2010). These considerations can be understood as what Schmidt refers to as "programmatic ideas": more applied assumptions about the nature of policy problems, and the effects of different types of intervention on addressing these (Schmidt 2008). Such programmatic ideas may be strongly shaped by cultural repertoires, such as assumptions about the characteristics or behavior of different types of migrants and host populations, or beliefs about the social and economic impacts of immigration. But in bureaucratic settings, programmatic ideas are likely to become quite technical and specialized, often reflecting organizational "learning" and tacit knowledge about how different types of policy intervention influence immigration dynamics and outcomes.

Such programmatic ideas often build in strong assumptions about the feasibility of different policies. They can operate as a kind of check or break on the types of proposals often emanating from political debate or the media. We certainly found that this kind of "feasibility check" strongly influenced deliberations in the Home Office over this period. For example, a number of policy options were ruled out because they were not viable given the limitations to internal control infrastructures.

One of the reasons I have highlighted the importance of programmatic ideas is that they demonstrate the importance of organizations in shaping and mediating ideas. Indeed, programmatic ideas are strongly influenced by organizational cultures: the set of values, beliefs and expectations that provide members of organizations with a shared framework for determining which problems are relevant to the organization, and how they are to be prioritized and handled in decision-making. Organizations are entities with especially strong shared cultures, given the intense networks of

communication and decision-making that characterize the interactions of members. Organizational beliefs are strongly influenced by collective knowledge and memory within the organization about previous relevant interventions: how different policies or programmes worked, how they affected target populations, and so on. Often this type of organizational knowledge may be based on more or less rigorous sources: it may be inferred from interaction with target populations (for example through immigration case processing); or feedback from other actors engaged in implementing policy (such as law enforcement agencies, welfare agencies, or community groups). It will also be informed by administrative data and internal or otherwise trusted analysis. Of course, in many cases, such organizational beliefs may be blinkered and poorly grounded, as in the case of the UK Home Office's entrenched belief in deterrence as a means of reducing the "pull factor" for migrants and refugees (Mayblin 2019).

These organizational frameworks act as filters through which members of the organization interpret and make sense of signals from their environment. This includes how the organization interprets and mediates pressures from other parts of government and from politics – whether the types of foreign policy considerations mentioned above, or political pressure from ministers to accommodate public opinion.

What this implies is that organizational beliefs may diverge from broader cultural repertoires in significant ways. This is most obviously the case with more applied programmatic ideas, which will be firmly shaped by organizational beliefs. But even more general "public philosophies" may be strongly mediated by organizational culture, with particular beliefs and norms selected, interpreted and deployed through the filter of the organization's shared framework. Organizational cultures will also influence how officials juggle and reconcile the various competing pressures outlined earlier – including political and operational considerations that act as a feasibility check. For these reasons, we need to understand officials as not straightforwardly absorbing and processing cultural repertoires from wider society. Rather, such repertoires are refracted through the shared norms, beliefs and goals that shape the organization's culture.

If we accept that officials are exercising agency in shaping policy recasting cultural repertoires in the ways Elrick suggests in the book, it becomes important to understand the organizational cultures that shape the takeup and evolution of these ideas. Elrick's analysis displays a nuanced understanding of organizational culture in her reconstruction of deliberation in the Canadian Department of Citizenship and Immigration – but this dimension is not developed explicitly in her theoretical discussion. This is understandable, given there is plenty of other theory-building going on in the book. But I want to end my comments by briefly flagging two sets of concepts from organizational sociology that might provide fruitful avenues for further developing

her cultural sociology of immigration policy-making. These suggestions are inspired by the institutionalist organizational literature, much of which emerged from the late 1970s onwards in the works of scholars such as Feldman and March (1981), March and Olsen (1983), DiMaggio and Powell (1991), Scott (1995), Meyer, and Nils Brunsson (2002).

First is theoretical claims about how organizations derive legitimacy. Following classic work of James March on the logic of appropriateness (1994), scholars of organizations have shown how organizations are preoccupied with securing external legitimacy, through meeting expectations from their environment about appropriate norms, goals and action (Scott and Meyer 1991). Here, scholars have distinguished between two modes of deriving legitimacy: through action, and through rhetoric and symbolic decisions. Organizations whose outputs are reliably observed and appraised by key actors in their environment are likely to derive legitimacy from their actions, i.e. what they actually do or produce – for example, organizations that produce goods or services whose quality is tested through consumer takeup (Brunsson 2002). Some (parts of) organizations in public administration may also have features of action organizations, such as those responsible for very visible and attributable outputs such as waste disposal, transport or urban planning. But many organizations in government produce outputs whose impacts are much more difficult to observe and attribute. Immigration ministries, for example, are responsible for policies on integration whose effects are diffuse and long-term, and difficult to disentangle from other social and economic dynamics. In these cases, organizations may well fall back on rhetoric and symbolic decisions to derive legitimacy.

While this may seem like a rather abstract insight, I believe it is a fruitful distinction for further exploring aspects of Elrick's case. Let us take, for example, the earlier Canada/UK comparison about internal control. Elrick's analysis suggests that Canadian officials were relatively confident about their ability to monitor the effects of incremental policy changes or "experiments" on the dynamics of immigrant integration. By contrast, Home Office officials were more likely to see such dynamics as a black box. This may well have affected how they anticipated their interventions would be appraised in public political debate. If interventions are not traceable or attributable, then it becomes very tempting to prioritize symbolic policy. This type of consideration could help explain the markedly symbolic bent of UK policies on immigration control over the past decades – in contrast to Canada's apparently more "output-oriented" approach. Clearly, this distinction is closely related to organizational cultures in the two ministries: in this case, shared beliefs about how policy interventions are likely to be perceived and appraised by different audiences.

The second insight I want to introduce is the concept if institutional isomorphism: the tendency of organizations to seek legitimacy through

adopting characteristics of relevantly similar organizations that are perceived as progressive, efficient or otherwise effective (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). This often takes the form of formal adjustments to rhetoric and communications, or formal structural changes (creating a new unit or role) than changes to informal practice (Edelman 1992). This can lead to organizational decoupling, whereby an organization adopts the trappings of what it perceives to be legitimate or credible norms and structures – whilst continuing to operate largely as before, in terms of on-the-ground beliefs and practices. In other words, top-down, symbolic shifts may not be accompanied by corresponding adjustments to organizational beliefs and practices on the ground.

This notion is clearly relevant to insights about "symbolic" policy in immigration (and has indeed influenced literature in this area). It also seems to be particularly relevant to Elrick's discussion about the Canadian government's attempt to carve out a reputation on the international stage. Indeed, John Meyer's work on "world society", which is squarely in the organizational institutionalist tradition, brilliantly charts how governments seek to build an international image as modern, industrialized, or enlightened (Meyer 2010). Meyer's work focuses on how such adjustments are decoupled from "behind-the-scenes" structures and practices that may not share these features. But of even more interest is how such (initially symbolic) adjustments actually generate real change over time in informal structures. Similar to Elrick's mechanisms of institutionalization, and her insights about the "recasting" of elements of cultural repertoires, there might be scope to bring out more strongly how the attempt to establish a progressive international image in turn shaped Canadian ideas and practices on multiculturalism.

In conclusion, this is a really sophisticated, insightful and original piece of work, which opens many interesting avenues for comparative research and theory-building. I have focused in particular on the potential for further exploring the case through deploying concepts from organizational sociology. This is not to imply any omission in this already theoretically rich contribution. Rather, it is testament to the book's ability to animate new ideas, provoke debate, and inspire new programmes of research.

Disclosure statement

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