Y. Abu-Laban, “Diversity in Canadian Politics,” in J. Bickerton and A.G. Gagnon, eds., *Canadian Politics 5th Ed.* (Toronto UTP, 2009)

**Overview**

Chapter focuses primarily on cultural, ethnic and racial diversity and its relevance, both historically and currently, in Canadian politics. Abu-Laban argues that diversity is significant of political analyses both for the Cdn state and in the Cdn political science tradition because of its relevance to power, a central disciplinary concern. Inequalities between identifiable groups are important to political scientists because such inequalities may impact the extent to which all groups feel their voices are heard and their interests expressed in Cdn institutions.

**Background**

* Canada’s hx is that of a settle colony, characterized by pre-existing and distinct Aboriginal societies, European settler colonization, and repeated waves of immigration.
* It is, however, Canada’s foundation as a so-called white settler colony of Britain that fostered a legacy of group-based inequalities that forms the basis of many grievances and ongoing political struggles.
  + Assimilationist policies in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (of Aboriginal peoples – though it did acknowledge Aboriginal tribes and land title rights) and the 1774 Quebec Act (which allowed Quebecers the freedom to practice the Catholic faith, retain French civil law traditions, and the seigneurial landholding systems)
* Canada’s federal system, and its by-product mythology as British and French as Canada’s “two founding peoples” helped legitimize the federal govt’s assumption of jurisdiction over Aboriginal affairs and lands reserved for Aboriginal peoples, paving the way for the seizure of Aboriginal lands by provinces both with and without the use of treaties
* 1967 saw new immigration policy explicitly ban discrimination on basis of race or ethnicity, and introduce the points system of immigrant selection
* Multiculturalism policy introduced by Trudeau in 1971 – the word “multiculturalism” was introduced as a way for the “third force” (i.e. non-French, non-British, and non-Aboriginal immigrants and their descendants) to be recognized by the Cdn state
* Over the past few decades, Cdn political scientists have developed distinct approaches to understanding and studying diversity – largely focuses on themes of “culture”
  + What is largely lost, however, is a focus on either “race” or “colonialism”
  + The emphasis on culture as the basis for rights and difference has generated a particular criticism for opponents of multiculturalism working within the liberal paradigm: the official recognition of group rights on the basis of cultural identity might allow grounds to violate the rights of the individual, and in this respect it is an affront to liberalism
* Changing the lens: Race
  + The sociological tradition emphasizes the socially constructed character of ethnic groups, racial groups, and other identity groups, and their contextual and historical variability
  + Race should not be treated as a “thing” – rather should be understood experiences of racism and/or the processes of racialization. Racialization is understood to be a socially created and historically specific process whereby members (or perceived members) of certain groups are viewed by the majority as inferior by reason of their supposed biology
  + Cdn mythology ignores Canada’s own hx with slavery, instead focusing on narratives of Cdns “rescuing” enslaved African-Americans
* Changing the lens: Colonialism
  + Aboriginal scholars have recently begun to adopt this lens – for T. Alfred (1999, 2005) Canada remains a colonial state exerting power over the lives of Aboriginal peoples in ways that are obvious (the Indian Act) and less obvious (from self-govt arrangements to what food is consumed)

**Conclusions**

* Culture has been a dominant frame of reference for both the Cdn state and for Cdn analysts. While culture is important for helping identify existing inequalities, analysts should spend more time on racism, processes of racialization, and anti-racism as a means of resistance. Colonialism also should be used as a means for understanding the relationship between hx and present