Canadian Intercultural Communication and Public Dialogue: Policy, Practice, and Pluralism

Dr. Mosi Dorbayani

Adjunct Professor at University Canada West

Abstract:

Canada's multicultural ethos demands a nuanced understanding of intercultural communication and public dialogue. In this paper, I examine Canadian intercultural dynamics through my own (Dr. Mosi Dorbayani's) humanistic-dialogic framework, alongside Dr. Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions and the Seven Imperatives proposed by Dr. Marc Lustig and Dr. Jolene Koester. I also explore how arts and music foster inclusive dialogue and highlight what makes Canadian intercultural communication distinct. Drawing on peer-reviewed Canadian scholarship and my own interdisciplinary practice, I argue for a model of public engagement rooted in harmony, reflexivity, and cultural co-authorship.

Introduction:

Canada's identity as a multicultural democracy is not only enshrined in policy but enacted through public dialogue. Intercultural communication here is both a civic necessity and a cultural practice. As diverse communities engage in shaping public discourse, understanding the frameworks that guide these interactions becomes essential. In this paper, I analyze Canadian intercultural communication using my humanistic-dialogic model, Hofstede's comparative dimensions, and Lustig and Koester's imperatives, while also exploring the role of arts and music in fostering inclusive dialogue.

Harmony and Humanism:

My cultural framework is grounded in three interdependent principles—cultural harmony, human dignity, and dialogic empathy—which I regard as essential for meaningful intercultural engagement.

Cultural Harmony: By cultural harmony, I do not imply uniformity or the erasure of difference, but rather a dynamic equilibrium in which diverse cultural expressions coexist, interact, and enrich one another without coercion or assimilation (Dorbayani, 2025).

Human Dignity: This serves as the ethical cornerstone of this model, affirming the intrinsic worth of every individual and community, regardless of origin, belief, or status (Dorbayani, 2019). And finally, …

Dialogic Empathy: This refers to the emotional and ethical capacity to listen across difference—not merely to respond, but to be transformed by the encounter. It is through this triad that I envision intercultural communication not as a transactional exchange, but as a co-creative process of mutual recognition, shared meaning-making, and civic renewal (Dorbayani, 2024).

With reference to the above principles, I argue that public dialogue must transcend tolerance and foster mutual transformation through emotional intelligence and shared narratives. This aligns with Canada's multicultural policy, which promotes inclusion without erasure.

Mapping Canadian Cultural Tendencies:

Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer a comparative lens to understand Canadian communication styles. Canada scores:

- Low in power distance: indicating a preference for egalitarianism and horizontal dialogue.
- High in individualism: reflecting autonomy, personal expression, and self-determination.
- Moderate in uncertainty avoidance: suggesting openness to ambiguity and flexible norms.
- Balanced in masculinity vs. femininity: showing a mix of assertiveness and consensus-seeking.

These traits manifest in Canadian public discourse through indirectness, politeness, and inclusive turn-taking (Hofstede Insights, 2025). However, high individualism may also obscure collective responsibility, especially in dialogues around systemic inequality or reconciliation.

A Call to Competence:

Lustig and Koester (2013) propose seven imperatives for intercultural competence:

1. Technological: Navigating digital platforms for cross-cultural dialogue.
2. Demographic: Responding to countries like Canada's diverse and evolving population.
3. Economic: Engaging global markets and multicultural workforces.
4. Peace: Promoting understanding to prevent destructive conflict.
5. Self-awareness: Recognizing one's own cultural biases.
6. Ethical: Addressing systemic inequities and colonial legacies.
7. Interpersonal: Building meaningful relationships across cultures.

In Canada, the demographic and ethical imperatives are especially salient. The country's high immigration rates and Indigenous resurgence demand reflexive and inclusive communication. The self-awareness imperative challenges dominant cultural norms—such as Anglo-European politeness—that may unintentionally marginalize other voices. Perhaps, as Canada continues to navigate its multicultural future, intercultural competence would be cultivated not only as a skill but as a civic ethic.

Arts and Music as Dialogic Practice in Canada:

Canadian scholarship highlights the role of arts and music in fostering intercultural dialogue. For example:

- Guo and Wong (2015) argue that multiculturalism must move beyond tokenism to engage power dynamics. Community arts projects offer spaces for marginalized voices to shape public narratives.

- Dr. Jeremy Kislenko (2014) explores how musical collaborations between Indigenous and settler artists create "dialogic soundscapes" that challenge colonial histories.

- Bhabha et al. (2020) document how youth-led arts initiatives in Toronto use storytelling and performance to bridge cultural divides and promote civic engagement.

- A compelling example is my message song[1] ***"Hopes in Chain"***, performed by American award-winning singer Yaya Diamond. The song raised public awareness on social justice issues, particularly Black Lives Matter, and catalyzed dialogue across social media platforms (The Los Angeles Tribune, 2021) (Apx. 1). With over one million streams on SoundCloud in its first week, and FM/AM/Digital Radio broadcasts reaching more than 1,298,000,000 listeners globally, it exemplifies how music can *serve as a transnational medium for civic engagement and emotional resonance* (University of Salford, 2021)

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[1] Mosi Dorbayani is credited with coining the concept of the "Message Song." He formalized it as a genre focused on delivering socially conscious and powerful messages through music and lyrics (2018). https://a.co/d/9T3Scle https://billboardworldmusic.com/canadian-songwriter-extraordinaire/ Mosi Dorbayani: The Knight Of Songwriting - Muzique Magazine

My other in arts-based advocacy is the message song **"To Whom It May Concern"**, which I wrote to promote global justice, human dignity and understanding. Performed by Canadian award-winning artist Kate Todd, the song was released in support of the United Nations' World Day of Social Justice and Equality (The Los Angeles Tribune, 2021). With orchestration by Amarita and production by Peter Linseman, this piece blends poetic lyricism with emotive vocal delivery to underscore the human cost of war, conflict, and the universal longing for peace (Apx. 2). Within three months of its release, the song garnered over 700,000 streams on SoundCloud and was broadcast internationally, including by ATV in Los Angeles and VOA TV in Washington, D.C. Its reach extended to over 900,000,000 listeners worldwide, and it has since been incorporated into humanities and arts curricula in the UK, Switzerland, Brazil, and Canada (University of Salford, 2021). I consider this collaboration a testament to how music can transcend borders, activate public consciousness, and serve as a medium for *intercultural empathy and civic reflection*.

These practices embody my emphasis on emotional intelligence and Lustig and Koester's interpersonal imperative. They demonstrate that intercultural dialogue is not only verbal but also aesthetic and embodied—capable of transcending borders and activating public consciousness.

What Makes Canadian Intercultural Communication Unique:
In my view, several features distinguish Canadian intercultural communication (but not limited to):
❖   **Policy-backed pluralism:** Canada's Multiculturalism Act and Charter of Rights and Freedoms institutionalize cultural inclusion.
❖   **Indigenous resurgence:** Public dialogue increasingly includes Indigenous epistemologies and protocols.
❖   **Politeness and indirectness:** While often seen as respectful, these traits can obscure conflict or silence dissent.
❖   **Cultural co-authorship:** Canadian dialogue often involves collaborative meaning-making rather than top-down messaging.

Although these traits reveal an ongoing tension between liberal individualism and collective responsibility, Canadian intercultural communication stands out for its distinctive blend of the three Ps: *Policy, Practice, and Pluralism*. Yet this model remains a work in progress—continually evolving to confront systemic inequalities and cultivate authentic transformation. Considering that, now, let us briefly look at each in turn.

Policy: Institutionalizing Inclusion
Canada's multicultural policy, formalized in 1971, affirms the right of individuals to preserve their cultural heritage while participating fully in society (Berry, 2013). In my advisory work, I advocate for cultural diplomacy as a domestic and international tool to build trust, reduce conflict, and promote equality. I emphasize that public policy must go beyond compliance and actively foster dialogic empathy—a concept I define as the emotional and ethical capacity to engage across differences (Dorbayani, 2025).

Practice: Embodied Dialogue and Civic Engagement
Policy alone is insufficient without practice. In Canada, intercultural communication is enacted through community forums, educational curricula, workplace diversity programs, and artistic collaborations. My interest-based diplomacy approach favors informal, flexible dialogue over rigid treaties. Through arts-based initiatives, such as socially conscious message songs, I demonstrate how creative media can activate public awareness and foster transnational dialogue.

Pluralism: Celebrating Diversity as Civic Strength
Pluralism in Canada is not just demographic—it is philosophical. It recognizes that multiple truths, traditions, and identities coexist and contribute to the national narrative. My framework supports pluralism by rejecting assimilationist models and promoting cultural synergy. I argue that societies must move from tolerance to mutual transformation, where all participants are co-authors of civic meaning. As a Canadian, my interdisciplinary background—spanning law, economics, psychology, and cultural diplomacy—

embodies this ethos. (The Ritz Herald, 2025).

Conclusion:

Canadian intercultural communication is a dynamic interplay of frameworks, practices, and cultural expressions. One may find my humanistic-dialogic model, Hofstede's dimensions, and Lustig and Koester's imperatives valuable to further understand culture and enhance public dialogue. To that end, cultural artifacts, especially music provide powerful cultural platforms for inclusive engagement, while Canadian uniqueness lies in its commitment to pluralism and co-authorship. This ethos invites a reimagining of communication not merely as exchange, but as co-creation—where diverse narratives are not only heard but harmonized. In this light, message songs and other expressive forms become dialogic bridges, amplifying underrepresented voices and fostering a shared sense of belonging.

Appendix 1:
Watch or listen to:
Hopes in Chain:
On Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/2yAUNdH923w4LwX4s3cJZ6?si=f64f116869e44338
On YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g98gpZWynwQ

Appendix 2:
To Whom It May Concern:
On Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/track/0ajMhDesWZ0LuTrOgn1UKf?si=1204345fe4404ec8
On YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EO__R9PdkXo

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