INTRODUCTION

50 YEARS OF MULTICULTURALISM: PROMOTING PROGRESSIVE CHANGE, LEGITIMIZING INJUSTICE, OR BOTH?

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For many years after multiculturalism policy was introduced in Canada in 1971, right-wing critics argued that it was a misguided experiment that was generating unstable and unsustainable social dynamics, and was therefore doomed to collapse.[1] Today, commentators are likely to rather emphasize the stability, even banality, of multiculturalism. After fifty years, multiculturalism in Canada is no longer an "experiment", but rather has become a sedimented and normalized feature of social life, part of everyday understandings of Canadian identity, and embedded in a wide range of institutional norms and practices.[2] Indeed, for many left-wing critics, the problem with multiculturalism is not its instability, but precisely its stability and immobility. Multiculturalism has become so fixed in the Canadian policy landscape and political imagination that many Canadians are unable or unwilling to recognize the need for genuinely new and transformative approaches to the way we think about diversity, citizenship and rights.

The need for such transformative change is noted by all the contributors to this special issue. However, they differ both about what they see as the main inadequacy with actually existing multiculturalism, and about whether these inadequacies can be addressed within a renewed multiculturalism, or whether they require replacing multiculturalism with some post-multicultural alternative.

The authors review a long list of inadequacies within actually existing multiculturalism, including:

- the failure to address the requirements of decolonization and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples (e.g., Eisenberg);

1 Phil Ryan's *Multicultiphobia* (2009) documents how widespread and enduring this argument was on the right in Canada predicting the imminent collapse of multiculturalism.

2 Billig famously argued that social scientists pay too much attention to "hot" nationalism – the political moments when nationalism is explicitly and emotionally appealed to – and not enough attention to "banal" nationalism – the moments when it is quietly but pervasively in the background (Billig 1995). In Kymlicka (2021), I argue that a similar analysis applies to multiculturalism. For most Canadians, most of the time, multiculturalism is banal, in part because it is now absorbed into Canada's version of banal nationalism.

- the failure to address systemic anti-Black racism (e.g., Dhamoon);

- the failure to address growing social inequality due to neoliberal capitalism (rendered particularly visible during COVID) (e.g., Abu-Laban; Carlaw; Winter);

- the failure to acknowledge the realities of global mobilities and ties, and hence the need for a more transnational or cosmopolitan perspective (e.g., Ghosh; Fleras); and

- the failure to acknowledge the specificity of the Quebec experience (e.g., White).

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While these inadequacies can be listed separately, they are connected in practice. European ideologies of racial supremacy underpin both anti-Black racism and the colonization of Indigenous peoples, and the growth of inequality under neoliberalism has racial (and gender) dimensions. Several of the authors discuss these interconnections, and the need to situate all of these issues of injustice in a broader historical and global frame.

They disagree, however, about whether multiculturalism can be reformed to address these challenges. To oversimplify, we might say there are three broad positions on this question:

- For some commentators, multiculturalism has at its core a progressive impulse, challenging inherited hierarchies and demanding a more inclusive conception of belonging and citizenship. This progressive impulse is all too often unrealized and blunted, not only due to concerted opposition from powerful actors whose privileges are challenged by multiculturalism's progressive impulse, but also from complacency amongst the public, and from 'policy drift' amongst bureaucrats.[3] But this progressive impulse endures beneath the surface, and is available for activists and advocates who want to push multiculturalism in a more transformative direction to address the challenges we currently face.

- For other commentators, multiculturalism initially had a progressive impulse in 1971, but it is no longer adequate. The challenges we face today simply cannot be addressed using the conceptual or legislative tools of 'multiculturalism'. Multiculturalism arose as a challenge to the ideology of "Anglo-conformity", and in particular challenged the expectation that immigrants should culturally assimilate as a requirement for good citizenship. Against this unjust pressure for cultural assimilation, multiculturalism (legitimately and appropriately) defended the value of ethnic and religious diversity, and more specifically defended the idea that there were many different ways of being a good Canadian. But today's problems are not solely or primarily about making space for cultural diversity. Rather, we face issues of settler colonialism, structural racism, growing social inequalities, and the development of transnational ties and globalized political challenges, and none of these can be solved in the register of "respect for cultural diversity". Indeed, addressing these issues through the lens of multiculturalism is likely to lead us astray.

- For yet other commentators, multiculturalism never had a progressive impulse: it was always intended to distract citizens from structural injustice, and hence to block or subvert mobilization for more transformative change. Carlaw cites Himani Bannerji's famous version of this view: "We demanded some genuine reforms – some of us even demanded the end of racist capitalism – and instead we got 'multiculturalism'" (Bannerji 2000, 89). Far from being a good-faith attempt to address the claims of those excluded by Anglo-conformity conceptions of Canadian citizenship, multiculturalism was instead an attempt to preempt those claims. Genuine reforms are only possible if we reject the state's efforts to conscript Canadians into a narrative of multiculturalism.

I think we can see these three positions defended in the various articles in this collection, although I also suspect that some authors feel torn between them.

> "Emancipation and control are intertwined in evolving and complex ways, with the balance between them varying over time, and depending on the issue and group."

This debate is tied to a long-standing dispute about the relation between the "emancipatory" and the "control" elements of multiculturalism. Is multiculturalism a "a tool of civic voice for historically excluded and oppressed people" to challenge inherited hierarchies, as Matt James (2013) puts it, or is it "a broad technology of state control of difference" and a "tool

3 On the importance of policy drift in relation to multiculturalism policies, see Banting and Kymlicka 2013.

of domestication", as Katharyne Mitchell (2004) proposes? This remains a lively source of discussion in the literature, although I think there is an increasing consensus that it is both. Emancipation and control are intertwined in evolving and complex ways, with the balance between them varying over time, and depending on the issue and group.[4] Fleras captures this dynamic when he says we should reject "either/or" formulations, and instead recognize that multiculturalism has the "capacity to generate positive social changes, yet simultaneously reproduce the original conditions that necessitated the change in the first place".[5]

Acknowledging this complex interweaving of emancipation and control is an important step towards a more adequate diagnosis of the first fifty years of multiculturalism in Canada. But it leaves unanswered the question about the future of multiculturalism. Can actually existing multiculturalism be renewed in a way that helps address the challenges we face in 2021, or does transformative change require leaving multiculturalism behind? Put another way, can multiculturalism be renewed in a way that significantly expands its emancipatory dimension while reducing its element of control? For example, can we combine a renewed multiculturalism with a more robust commitment to advancing Indigenous decolonization and to addressing systemic racism in policing?

There is no legal or conceptual obstacle to such a transformative renewal: there is nothing in the Multiculturalism Act that precludes a robust commitment to anti-racism or Indigenous self-government. The real issue, it seems, is one of political will. Does the presence of multiculturalism help to build political support for transformative change, or does it weaken and distract mobilization for transformative change?

It is not obvious how we might resolve this question, but Jedwab's article provides some helpful hints. The survey data he discusses shows quite clearly that those who embrace multiculturalism are more likely – not less – to view issues of anti-racism and Indigenous reconciliation as priorities. There's no evidence that embracing multiculturalism blinds people to the realities of discrimination or colonialism: on the contrary, it is those who disavow multiculturalism who are more likely to also disavow the need for transformative change.

This suggests that there may yet be room to combine a renewed multiculturalism with the sort of transformative change Canada requires. Actually existing multiculturalism may at times seem like at best a zombie legacy, having outlived its original purpose, and at worst, an instrument of state control to discipline minorities. But multiculturalism may also nurture hopes for a more just world, and a recognition of how far we are from it. And if so, multiculturalism may yet have a constructive role to play in the next 50 years.

"There may yet be room to combine a renewed multiculturalism with the sort of transformative change Canada requires."

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4 For example, the "control" dimension of multiculturalism was particularly strong in relation to Muslims in the post-9/11 era, when multiculturalism was heavily "securitized", and reoriented to serve state security agendas (Dhamoon 2012).

5 Of course, the same can be said about virtually all social policies in contemporary democracies, including public education, public health, labour law, or family law. They all contain emancipatory impulses while simultaneously reproducing some of the structures that create the need for emancipation in the first place. It would be surprising if multiculturalism did not fit this pattern.