MULTICULTURALISM AND ITS ADJECTIVES: SITUATING NEOCONSERVATIVE MULTICULTURALISM

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After 50 years, the adjectives used to characterize multiculturalism have come to define its substance and meaning. The aim of this article is to contextualize and grasp its twenty-first century neoconservative iteration.

As is well known, multiculturalism as a state policy and a vision of Canada was proclaimed during a period that also witnessed an end to obvious state discrimination in immigration policy. But as a popular ideology and state practice placed within a larger context it has in many ways been complicit with, rather than an alternative to, settler colonialism and social inequality. As Himani Bannerji has remarked in *The Dark Side of the Nation*, what is true for many racialized immigrants, "We demanded some genuine reforms – some of us even demanded the end of racist capitalism – and instead we got 'multiculturalism'" (Bannerji 2000, 89).

A substantive example of this, – of ever greater importance given the vast expansion of Canada's migrant worker programs – occurred not long after the official declaration of multiculturalism and the institution of the point system in immigration policy. The Canadian government entrenched migrant worker programs through the 1973 Non-Immigrant Employment Authorization Program (NIEP), "legalizing the resubordination of many non-Whites entering Canada by recategorizing them as temporary and foreign workers" (Sharma 2006, 22). Multiculturalism also arose concurrently to the government's assimilationist 1969 White Paper on "Indian Policy." For obscuring and failing to address such realities, many Indigenous scholars and others have rejected what Coulthard refers to as the "colonial politics of recognition" (Coulthard 2014; St. Denis 2011; also see Dhamoon in his volume).

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Notwithstanding these observations, as Abu-Laban discusses elsewhere in this issue, progressive *anti-racist* incarnations from below have at times been evident. However, a backlash to multiculturalism and the country's changing demographics,

1 X University is used here in solidarity with Indigenous students, faculty and others who demanded our university's name be changed given Egerton Ryerson's role in establishing the Residential School System for Indigenous children in Canada (Indigenous Students from X University 2021). On August 26, 2021 the university announced that it would accept the Standing Strong (Mash Koh Wee Kah Pooh Win) taskforce's recommendation that it be re-named (Friesen 2021)

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Over the course of the 1990s and early 2000s, under Progressive Conservative and Liberal governments, a centrist multiculturalism that had arisen alongside the welfare state would be further hollowed out and devolved to its lowest common denominator, namely neoliberal "selling diversity form" (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Winter 2014). This dominant form has left considerable room for selective appropriation of multiculturalism, at relatively low cost, by the neoconservative right.

Neoliberal multiculturalism rose as the new, no longer progressive, Conservative Party and its Reform and Canadian Alliance predecessors were learning political pragmatism, the first characteristic of a new *neoconservative* multiculturalism in a country whose changing demographics required outreach beyond the party's white settler colonial base of support. That pragmatism, in addition to Liberal government scandals, helped the new Conservative Party win and occupy national office from 2006 to 2015.

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Neoconservative pragmatism has meant that party platforms needed to be cleansed of anti-diversity and anti-multiculturalism statements, and its list of "outsiders" rhetorically narrowed (Kirkham 1998; Carlaw 2021b). Thus, common sense ideas of multiculturalism and political pluralism may be evoked by the Conservatives in leaders' debates, on Multiculturalism Day, and in "ethnic outreach" efforts (Siddiqui 2011; Flecker 2008). While in power, a multiculturalism sub-ministry could continue to exist regardless of whether the party effectively eliminated it by absorbing it into the larger Citizenship and Immigration Ministry and purging programming of anti-racist content (Griffith 2013, 100, 26-30). Such gestures were necessary as the party's brand required improvement to overcome negative perceptions of it being the party of "Anglo-Saxon Protestants" and "social extremists," "hostile to the concerns of immigrants" (Marland and Flanagan 2013, 965).

Beyond mere pragmatism, neoconservative multiculturalism is also a *creative* and *disciplinary* authoritarian populist project and approach (Carlaw 2017; Hall 1980). Under the Conservative government, it could include acknowledging historic wrongs committed against racialized minorities, while simultaneously disciplining many recipients of funding from such communities to focus their energies away from drawing connections to contemporary instances of racism and discrimination (James 2013; 2015). The party could also reach back to claim an abandoned Red Tory legacy – an abandonment seen in cuts to a health care program for refugees introduced during John Diefenbaker's time in office – while invoking Diefenbaker appointee and Progressive Conservative Senator Paul Yuzyk as *the* "key pioneer" of multiculturalism, despite a Liberal government enacting it (Voices-Voix 2014; Government of Canada 2012; Kenney 2011).

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Thus, perhaps in contrast to a popular neoliberal version that claims to include and respect the rights of all, neoconservative multiculturalism simultaneously practices politics of *xenophilia* and *xenophobia* (Honig 2001). Resulting in a xenophilic invitation for those willing to accept neoliberal and neoconservative subjectivities of self-reliance, "law and order" approaches and militarism (Carlaw 2015). Some semblance of belonging is allowed to those who would embrace or acquiesce to the asserted positive legacy of a "liberal British imperialism," and neoconservative foreign policy preferences, and would never fall for the invented straw men of "cultural Marxist" or overly permissive and "cultural relativist" iterations of multiculturalism (Bolen 2012; Press Progress 2015).

Often, Muslims and refugee claimants have faced xenophobic treatment. Neither have been considered proper members of the "Canadian family" in Conservative political communications for reasons of challenges to foreign policy, an insistence on their ability to follow their own interpretation of their faith during the citizenship oath, or for daring to exert their agency by coming to Canada to make a refugee claim.

Consequently, pragmatism along with a more sophisticated mix of xenophilia and xenophobia have been part of what former Reform and Conservative campaign lead Tom Flanagan has referred to as the project of achieving a "minimum winning coalition" of voters that would benefit insiders and exclude outsiders (Flanagan 2011). Substantively, it would also see more difficult and expensive pathways to permanent residence and citizenship, and an explosion in the size of migrant worker programs, largely offering precarity and exploitation rather than the security of permanent immigration status (Carlaw 2021a). In part due to the contradictions and excesses of neoconservative multiculturalism, the Conservatives and their discourses of "barbaric cultural practices" were defeated in the 2015 federal election.

While trying to be politically competitive since then, the party

has continually struggled with its instinctive behaviour and organic links to exclusionary, right-wing civil society elements such as Rebel Media. Perhaps nowhere has this been more evident than concerning Islamophobia, where it took yet another deadly attack on Muslims in June of this year in London, Ontario for the Conservative Party and its leader to finally recognize its existence, though the party's role in fostering it through its discourses, obfuscations and citizenship politics remain largely unacknowledged (Zhou 2021).

Now, under leader Erin O'Toole, and previously under Andrew Scheer, the attempt to present a palatable neoconservative multiculturalism means offers for immigrants and ethnicized and racialized Canadians to take "a new look" at the party, including declarations that there is "no room for racists" in the Conservative Party, despite their alarmist approach to asylum seekers, for example (Scheer 2019; Erin O'Toole 2021). However, the vehicle of a potential new minimum winning coalition frequently offers similar xenophobic and xenophilic appeals and social hierarchies, notably featuring the reflexive defence of controversial historical figures and residential school architects from "cancel culture" and a more inclusive symbolic order (Boswell 2021). Despite the invitation of a "new look," disciplinary neoconservative multiculturalism must not call into question the origins and intentions of the settler colonial state (Breakenridge 2020).

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Fifty years on – activists, civil society organizations, and the electorate, face neoliberal and neoconservative versions of settler colonial multiculturalism to either manoeuvre within or attempt to move beyond (Ross 2019). It remains to be seen whether more, or less emancipatory societal projects of belonging or adjectives of multiculturalism will define the country's next half-century.

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