THE 'TERMS' OF MULTICULTURALISM

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When it was first introduced in 1971, perhaps the biggest challenge encountered by advocates of multiculturalism was to explain to Canadians what it meant beyond a celebration of the country's evolving diversity. That year, Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau observed that Canadians came from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, and that all cultures have intrinsic value. He thus concluded that while Canada had two official languages there could not be two official cultures, and this called for a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. Translating this idea into policies and programs has presented some important challenges over the 50 ensuing years of multiculturalism.

Over this period, the term multiculturalism has been employed in various ways. It is perhaps most widely used to describe our basic demographic reality by referring to the ethnic diversity of the Canadian population. Policy-makers, academics and civil society tend to reflect on the evolving policies and programs arising from multiculturalism. While it is politicians, academics and journalists that often talk about the message and/or ideology of multiculturalism which has been the object of much conversation and varying interpretations.

A quick look back at the origins of the term multiculturalism reveals that it gained traction in the 1960s with the deliberations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB). The mandate of the RCBB was to inquire into, and report upon, the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada, and to recommend ensuing steps towards developing the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between those of English and French descent. Given growing concerns about the country's historical record of assimilation of French Canadians, and the historic animosities to which this had given rise, it was felt that a new paradigm was needed to counter pro-assimilationist sentiment. Meanwhile, Canadian policy-makers and thought leaders' hope to offer an alternative to America's support for cultural assimilation was embodied in the concept of the melting pot. For some time, the term multiculturalism was an extension of the idea that Canada was a mosaic of cultures.

Some worried that the idea of the mosaic would further contribute to the country's persistent ethnic group inequities. In his seminal work, The Vertical Mosaic, eminent Canadian sociologist John Porter argued that income inequality in Canada was connected to protracted rates of cultural retention on the part of ethnic groups. His work was a precursor to some of the emerging criticisms of multiculturalism. However, despite all the empirical data presented in *The Vertical Mosaic*, it offers

no causal evidence in support of the idea that cultural retention prevented economic mobility (Porter. 1965).

But Porter's work serves as a good example of the type of criticism that Canadian multiculturalism has regularly faced. It is the contention that multiculturalism is the solution to a wide range of social, cultural and economic challenges such as economic inequality, minority empowerment and racism. This exaggerates the individual impact of multiculturalism to resolve these complex issues. Any serious look at the relatively minimal resources invested by the federal government in multiculturalism policies and programs over the past five decades throws such assertions into question.

There is a fairly wide spectrum of opinion expressed about multiculturalism. On one end, a group of thought leaders are convinced that the message/ideology is inherently positive and encourages its strongest adherents to be open to diverse cultural expression, to promote equality and to combat prejudice and discrimination. On the other end of the spectrum are the most vehement critics of multiculturalism who tend to insist that the promotion of difference is an ominous threat to social cohesion, discourages a shared sense of values and belonging, and undermines relations between majority and minority groups (an argument that is more commonly evoked by Quebec thought leaders). In the middle of this spectrum of opinion one finds a number of thought leaders that offer conditional support to multiculturalism, and/or critics that are cautious in their condemnation of it.

A somewhat less nuanced way of framing the debate pits advocates of multiculturalism against supporters of a French republican vision. Republicans criticize multiculturalism as undermining national identity by not affirming that it is the singular dominant marker of identity to which all others must be subordinate. However, not doing this promotes the ethnic and cultural differences that are presumably the source of discrimination. In the view of French republicans everyone is first and foremost a citizen of their country. Republicans worry about strong communal identities which they say lead to "communitarianism" – a buzzword that is frequently used to attack the formation of communities to which multiculturalism purportedly gives rise. As French scholar Michel Wieviorka (1996) has pointed out, "*pour éviter les écueils d'une société fragmentée, voire même le spectre du multiculturalisme où chaque communauté vivrait repliée sur elle-même et où il n'existerait pas de culture commune.*"

Wieviorka has suggested a more nuanced way of considering the debate, arguing that "*…cette opposition extrême entre deux modèles exclusifs pourrait être mortifère pour la démocratie. Car elle ne laisse le choix qu'entre deux options inacceptables : ou bien l'universalisme abstrait de la République… ou bien un multiculturalisme sans frontière, facteur de tribalisme et de déstructuration politique, et négation, à terme, de toute autonomie individuelle.*"

THE FAILURE OF MULTICULTURALISM: WHERE'S THE EVIDENCE?

Much of the policy and academic discussion of multiculturalism suffers from a relative lack of empirical evidence to support affirmations on either end of the spectrum. Critics often insist that multiculturalism represents a challenge to social cohesion and/or to shared values, to immigrant integration, to the preservation of the French language, to secularism, etc. Rarely if ever do they offer any empirical evidence to support such claims. One simply can't make the claim that racism is persistent that multiculturalism, as causal evidence would be required to validate such a claim.

Furthermore, much of the work on this topic is couched in discourse and terminology that is rarely defined by the authors. By consequence, supporters and detractors alike have often made affirmations that essentially require us to simply take them at their word. Quebec columnist Mathieu Bock-Côté (2021) engages in regular diatribe about multiculturalism and writes about the "*délires et dérives du multiculturalisme*". Regrettably, some critics like to make the unacceptable connection between multiculturalism and such things as honour crimes, thus depicting multiculturalism as an attack on what they characterize as "our values" (We'll leave aside the worrisome stereotyping that underlies this type of criticism).

The inadequate evidence to demonstrate that multiculturalism threatens social cohesion and/or shared values is symptomatic of a lack of intellectual rigour that has characterized the debate over several decades. Even from a conceptual standpoint there are sound reasons to question these oft-repeated statements. Will Kymlicka (2000) has correctly described social cohesion as "…a catch-all term for a wide range of often unconnected phenomena. In its maximal form, social cohesion means something like a 'harmonious' society, in which people cherish each other's identities and differences, and in which there are no conflicts or misunderstandings or fears related to ethnic diversity. The multiculturalism policy in Canada has certainly not produced such a society, but in my view, this sort of 'harmony' is not only unrealistic, but inappropriate as a goal of public policy. There always will be tensions and disagreements over how best to accommodate diversity… So, accepting multiculturalism entails rejecting the fantasy of "harmony", which can only be achieved by suppressing our real diversity.

For his part Joseph Heath (2003) explains, '…there is no reason that politicians on the campaign trail should not appeal to "shared values" among Canadians. But we should not let this kind of talk mislead us into thinking that citizens of Canada – or any other liberal democratic society – actually have shared values. Such an assumption is at odds not only with everything that we know about the pluralistic character of our country, it is also in tension with some of the basic principles that govern our public institutions, not the least of which is the commitment to respect the rights of individuals'.

Several Quebec policy-makers and thought leaders asserting that the population rejects "federal" multiculturalism (something they never substantiate with polling data) insist on the presumed alternative of interculturalism. They endlessly repeat variations on the idea that multiculturalism encourages bonding between ethnic groups while Quebec interculturalism encourages bridging, notably between minorities and the ethnolinguistic French majority. That argument from a look at the federal multicultural policy which explicitly states that "...the government will promote creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity" (House of Commons, 1971). Paradoxically, similar cross-cultural programs are not provided by the Quebec government despite this occasional postulating about interculturalism.

But perhaps the best test of Quebec's intercultural approach is the extent to which minorities, and the majority, say they interact with persons outside of their group. In this regard, surveys reveal that Quebecers are markedly behind the rest of Canada when it comes to "intercultural contact". Unsurprisingly, some Quebec officials would probably blame that on "federal" multiculturalism.

According to Tariq Modood "statements of and advocacy for interculturalism always seem to begin with a critique of multiculturalism and aspire to offer a new and alternative paradigm of diversity and citizenship." (Modood, 2017) He suggests that the critique targets popular misperceptions about multiculturalism. He concludes that interculturalists fail to appreciate the limitations of their critique and of their claim to novelty. It is best understood as a version of multiculturalism rather than as an alternative paradigm. While there may be some merits to that argument, the reality remains that interculturalism has enjoyed little uptake outside of the academy and some policy circles, as evidenced in Table 1, a scan of citations in mainstream media from January 1, 2021, to September 30, 2021.

The numbers are indicative of the relative absence of any meaningful public discussion of the term intercultural, either in policy or in practice (see Table 1).

That interculturalism has not succeeded in engaging Canadians, whether in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada, is further corroborated by a September 2021 Leger poll for the Association for Canadian Studies which reveals that only 3% of Canadians prefer to use the term interculturalism when thinking about the different identities in our society (7% amongst the country's francophones). If any term is competing with multiculturalism as an important part of public discourse it is *diversity*, which the survey reveals surpasses multiculturalism with the 18–34 cohort and with francophones. Indeed, with the increased attention directed at multiple and intersecting identities, multiculturalism may increasingly be seen as an aspect of the broader societal representation of diversity (a conceptual conversation that merits more attention than it has received to date (see Table 2).

TABLE 1: MEDIA SEARCH ON TERMS CONNECTED TO MULTICULTURALISM (JAN-SEPT 2021)

Meltwater search, Jan. 1 to Sept. 30, 2021	English media	French media	Total Citations
Multiculturalism/Multiculturalisme	6020	731	6751
Interculturalism/Interculturalisme	8	14	22
Pluralism/Pluralism	1,710	234	1934

TABLE 2: RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, 'WHEN SPEAKING ABOUT THE DIFFERENT IDENTITIES IN OUR SOCIETY, WHICH OF THE TERMS BELOW DO YOU PREFER TO USE?

	Total	18–34	35–54	55+	French	English	Others
Multiculturalism	37%	32%	41%	37%	32%	36%	47%
Interculturalism	3%	5%	2%	2%	7%	2%	2%
Pluralism	2%	2%	1%	2%	1%	1%	4%
Diversity	33%	39%	31%	32%	37%	32%	31%
None of the above	10%	7%	9%	12%	8%	11%	7%
I don't know	16%	16%	17%	15%	15%	17%	10%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 24–26, 2021

THE EVIDENCE: WHAT DO CANADIANS THINK ABOUT MULTICULTURALISM?

Observers and pundits insisting that most Canadians think that multiculturalism policies have been a failure are incorrect. The September 2021 Leger-ACS poll reveals that the majority of Canadians believe that multiculturalism policies have been a success. Given that many Canadians are not aware of what the policies actually entail, the poll is rather indicative of whether they feel multiculturalism as a message has been successful or not (see Table 3).

To further test opinion in this regard, we examined the extent to which Canadians endorse some of the typical criticisms of multiculturalism. We purposely loaded the statements in positive terms and yet, as seen in Table 4, a majority or a plurality of Canadians refuted nearly all of the criticisms. A majority rejects the idea that multiculturalism is an obstacle to immigrant integration, one in two say they do not see it as an obstacle to reconciliation, and most do not see it as an obstacle to fighting prejudice and discrimination.

The only statement that seemed to resonate with a segment of the population somewhat more was the notion among Quebecers that multiculturalism was an obstacle to the protection of the French language in Quebec. Strangely, they did not feel it was as much an obstacle to the protection of the French language outside of Quebec where it is undoubtedly more vulnerable (see Table 4).

Despite the anti-assimilation message inherent to multiculturalism, there remains considerable ambiguity amongst Canadians when it comes to immigrants maintaining their customs and traditions. That ambiguity is perhaps best reflected in the survey results in Table 5 which demonstrates that while nine in ten Canadians agree that it is important to transmit our customs and traditions to our children just under half of Canadians think that immigrants should give up their customs and traditions and become more like us. Indeed, that view is endorsed by a narrow majority of Quebecers.

One of the areas where the anti-assimilation message of multiculturalism has not been fully understood is surrounding the above dichotomy. Many Canadians likely feel that the process of newcomer adjustment sees retention of customs and traditions evolve alongside immigrants adopting generic or shared societal customs and traditions. That said, it's worth noting that those people who think that multiculturalism is very successful are far less likely (44%) than those who think

TABLE 3: WHEN THINKING ABOUT CANADA'S MULTICULTURAL POLICIES WOULD YOU DESCRIBE THEM AS A TOTAL SUCCESS (PERCENTAGE VERY AND SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL COMBINED) OR A TOTAL FAILURE (PERCENTAGE SOMEWHAT AND A BIG FAILURE COMBINED)

	On October 8, 2021, Canada will mark the 50th anniversary of multiculturalism. In thinking about Canada's multicultural policies would you describe them as:						
	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Total – Success	54%	60%	45%	58%	48%	56%	58%
Total – Failure	26%	17%	30%	23%	28%	29%	26%
I don't know	20%	23%	25%	19%	24%	15%	16%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 24–26, 2021

TABLE 4: SELECTED STATEMENTS THAT CANADIANS REGARD AS TRUE OR FALSE... DO YOU BELIEVE, "MULTICULTURALISM IS AN OBSTACLE TO THE FOLLOWING:

Do you believe the following statements to be true or false... Multiculturalism is an obstacle to the:	Canada		
	True	False	I don't know
Integration of immigrants	19%	55%	26%
Reconciliation with indigenous peoples	23%	50%	28%
...promotion of laïcité/secularism	18%	35%	47%
...fighting discrimination and prejudice	29%	46%	25%
...protection of the French language outside of Quebec	21%	47%	32%
...protection of the French language in Quebec	24%	45%	31%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 24–26, 2021

TABLE 5: VIEWS HELD BY CANADIANS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

Agree that:	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
It is important to transmit our customs and traditions to our children	92%	89%	95%	92%	95%	91%	87%
Immigrants should give up their customs and traditions and become more like us	43%	40%	51%	41%	46%	41%	41%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 24–26, 2021

that it's a big failure (67%) to agree that immigrants should give up their customs and traditions.

WHY I WANT MY CHILDREN TO SUPPORT MULTICULTURALISM

Table 6 illustrates what I consider strong evidence of the success of the message of multiculturalism as its strongest adherents (which I refer to as "convinced multiculturalists") are by far more open to religious minorities, indigenous peoples and selected visible minorities, while respondents that have a very negative view of multiculturalism (which I call "multicultural rejectionists") are far more likely to express negative views of those same groups.

The proposition that multiculturalism supports openness and acceptance of differences is further supported by data that reveals that those who think multiculturalism has been very successful are by far more likely to acknowledge such things as systemic racism (78%) compared to those who think that multiculturalism is a big failure, of whom 38% are willing to acknowledge systemic racism. And in regards to indigenous concerns, those who believe multiculturalism has been successful are most likely to support the idea of marking a day for Truth and Reconciliation (90%) in contrast with the 42% support for such recognition amongst those who regard multiculturalism as a failure.

While acknowledging continued criticisms of multiculturalism, Kymlicka (2021) points out that fifty years after its adoption multiculturalism remains popular in Canada. For those insisting that multiculturalism has operated to uphold and exalt the white secular liberal English-speaking settler middle-class, it would be important to explain why members of the most vulnerable minorities tend to widely endorse multiculturalism. Kymlicka suggest that there are "many examples where critical social scientists in Canada have gone looking for those who are said to be excluded or banished from multiculturalism, only to discover that members of these groups often express genuine appreciation, even gratitude, for multiculturalism." This is evidenced in a 2021 Leger-ACS survey suggesting that multiculturalism is more popular amongst visible minorities/racialized groups than it is amongst

TABLE 6: CANADIANS WITH VERY OR SOMEWHAT POSITIVE VIEWS OF MULTICULTURALISM AND SOMEWHAT OR VERY NEGATIVE AND HOW "POSITIVELY" THEY RESPECTIVELY VIEW RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS AND SELECTED VISIBLE MINORITY GROUPS

Total Positive view of the following groups	Multiculturalism – Do you have a very positive, somewhat positive, somewhat negative or very negative view of the following?			
	Very positive (Convinced Multiculturalists)	Somewhat positive (soft Multicultural supporters)	Somewhat negative (soft multicultural opponents)	Very negative (Multicultural rejectionists)
Muslims	93.9%	80.4%	32.4%	22.2%
Jews	94.9%	88.2%	60.5%	58.9%
Indigenous	96.7%	89%	70.8%	53.3%
Chinese	96.6%	91.5%	68%	55%
Black	98.1%	93.9%	76.4%	58.9%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies between June 18 and 20, 2021

persons identifying as white. As revealed in Table 7, a majority of Canadians identifying as visible minorities hold a very positive view of multiculturalism.

VIEWS OF MULTICULTURALISM

TABLE 7: VERY POSITIVE, SOMEWHAT POSITIVE, SOMEWHAT NEGATIVE OR VERY NEGATIVE VIEWS OF MULTICULTURALISM ON THE PART OF CANADIANS IDENTIFYING AS VISIBLE OR NON-VISIBLE MINORITY

	Visible Minority	Not a Visible Minority
Very positive	52.5%	38.3%
Somewhat positive	37.3%	44.3%
Somewhat negative	6.8%	11.4%
Very negative	3.4%	6.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies between June 18 and 20, 2021

When asked whether they regard multicultural policies as a success of failure, the September 2021 Leger-ACS results reveal that nearly two in three Canadians identifying as a visible minority regard the policies as a success which is greater than the 53% of those persons identifying as white that consider the policies to be successful.

Critics of multiculturalism have sometimes challenged the formulation of polling questions about multiculturalism that yield positive results, suggesting that it is necessary to provide additional information about the topic (i.e., reflecting their own bias or issues with it) prior to eliciting the opinion of Canadians. At present there is little if any evidence to support those who insist that Black and Indigenous persons in Canada regard multiculturalism as an obstacle to equality. Rather, as observed in Table 9, the Canadians identifying as white are less likely to describe multiculturalism as a source of pride than are respondents that identify as either Black or Indigenous.

CONCLUSION

Fifty years after his father introduced Canada's Multicultural Policy, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stated (2021) that:

> "This year, we mark an important anniversary. Fifty years ago this fall, Canada became the first country in the world to adopt a policy of multiculturalism, which was later enshrined in law through the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*. While since then there has been important progress toward a more inclusive and equitable society, there remains much work to be done. Every day, far too many racialized Canadians, Indigenous peoples, and religious minorities continue to face systemic racism, discrimination, and a lack of resources and opportunity."[1]

It's an important point. There indeed remains much to be done to combat racism and prejudice. The message(s) to Canadians in this regard is crucial, as the evidence suggests that multiculturalism does make a positive contribution. It's a message that surveys suggest has been embraced and modified to better connect with Canadians from the country's rapidly growing

TABLE 8: ARE CANADA'S MULTICULTURAL POLICIES SEEN AS VERY SUCCESSFUL, SOMEWHAT SUCCESSFUL, SOMEWHAT OF A FAILURE OR A BIG FAILURE ON THE PART OF CANADIANS IDENTIFYING AS VISIBLE OR NON-VISIBLE MINORITY

On October 8, 2021, Canada will mark the 50th anniversary of multiculturalism. In thinking about Canada's multicultural policies would you describe them as:	Visible Minority	Not Visible Minority
TOTAL SUCCESS	66%	53%
Very successful	12%	7%
Somewhat successful	54%	45%
TOTAL FAILURE	23%	27%
Somewhat of a failure	14%	17%
A big failure	8%	9%
I don't know	12%	21%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, September 24–26, 2021

1 https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/statement-by-the-prime-minister-on-canadian-multiculturalism-day-883908094.html

TABLE 9: HOW IMPORTANT IS MULTICULTURALISM AND DIVERSITY IN MAKING YOU MOST PROUD TO BE CANADIAN AMONGST THOSE CANADIANS IDENTIFYING AS WHITE, INDIGENOUS AND BLACK

	Multiculturalism & ethnic diversity... how important in terms of making you most proud to be a Canadian						
	Extremely important	Very important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not at all important	I don't know	Total
White	30.5%	30.1%	23.0%	8.1%	6.0%	2.3%	100%
Indigenous	36.9%	29.1%	21.4%	6.8%	3.9%	1.9%	100%
Black	64.9%	27.0%	5.4%	1.4%		1.4%	100%
Total	34.8%	29.1%	21.3%	7.3%	5.0%	2.4%	100%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies between June 18 and 20, 2021

visible minority population. But multiculturalism is only part of the solution and it needs to be reinforced with multiple civic, institutional and legislative initiatives that include employment equity laws, cross-cultural dialogue, respect for rights and freedoms, and hate crimes legislation to name a few. Any evaluation of the success or failure of multiculturalism must be considered in conjunction with the successes or failures of these other initiatives.

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