"A HARMONIOUS NATIONAL MOSAIC"? THE MULTICULTURALISM DEBATE OF THE 1950S AND 1960S

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As we mark the 50th anniversary of Canada's multiculturalism policy, it is not surprising for us to ask: "Where did 'multiculturalism' come from?" What may surprise a non-specialist readership is that there has been a wealth of historical research in the last 15 years that attempts to answer that very question. A new generation of scholars has begun to both deepen our understanding of the typical 'answers' and create new frameworks for interpreting the rise of multiculturalism.

It is now well established in the historical literature that ideas about 'cultural pluralism' and 'the mosaic' could be found in Canada well before the 1960s.[1] Prior to World War II, some members of ethnic minority communities began to evolve an understanding of Canada that emphasized the positive value of ethnocultural diversity; they argued that Canada's identity was in the process of being built by the 'immigrant' communities, not just the English and French 'founding peoples.' They were aided in this by a handful of intellectuals, folk festival promoters, and public officials like Governor General Lord Tweedsmuir, who, in 1936, told a gathering of Ukrainian-Canadians that "You will all be better Canadians for being also good Ukrainians."[2] This discourse arose at a time in which a 'British' identity was still central

1 Peter Henshaw, "John Buchan and the British Imperial Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism," in *Canadas of the Mind: The Making and Unmaking of Canadian Nationalisms in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Norman Hillmer and Adam Chapnick (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 191-213; Donald Ipperciel, "Britannicité et multiculturalisme canadien," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 45-46 (2012): 277-306; Daniel R. Meister, "'Anglo-Canadian Futurities': Watson Kirkconnell, scientific racism, and cultural pluralism in interwar Canada," *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 2 (2020): 234-256; Chapter 2 of Aya Fujiwara, *Ethnic Elites and Canadian Identity: Japanese, Ukrainians, and Scots, 1919-1971* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012). Meister's forthcoming (2021) book promises to offer a welcome intervention and re-contextualization of this period.

2 Peter Henshaw, "John Buchan and the British Imperial Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism," 205. See also: Amy Shaw and Andrew Smith, "Lady Aberdeen and the British origins of multiculturalism in Canada." *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 1-2 (2019-20): 3-22.

to English-Canadian nationalist thought, and so it was never mainstream. However, new notions of 'Canadianism' gathered steam as 'Britishness' and English-Canadian nationalism began their slow decline.[3]

But the vast majority of the new literature on the history of multiculturalism examines the period from the 1940s to the 1960s, when public institutions and attitudes began to slowly shift toward a more inclusive understanding of who constituted a 'Canadian.' Franca Iacovetta makes the case that 'gatekeepers' in the federal Citizenship Branch and immigrant aid societies evolved an understanding of 'cultural pluralism' during the early Cold War period that was as much steeped in anti-communism and a desire to 'integrate' ethnocultural minorities into Canadian mainstream life as it was a celebration of their cultures. Iacovetta writes: "In the push to have the newcomers conform to "Canadian ways" – which usually reflected Anglo-Canadian middle-class ideals – the accent was on everything from food customs and child-rearing methods, or marriage and family dynamics, to participatory democracy and anti-communist activism."[4]

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When did Canadians first begin to use the word 'multiculturalism'? Though the word came into *popular* use during the hearings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-1970), there was a lively multiculturalist discourse that carried on between the early 1950s and early 1960s among a group of well-connected ethnocultural community leaders, journalists, and civil servants. In a series of articles published in the *Jewish Western Bulletin*, editor A.J. Arnold made the case that a new kind of cultural 'pattern' was emerging in Canada: "The idea of a cultural mosaic or a multicultural pattern is not just a lot of fine-sounding words strung together. It is perhaps the most enlightened theory of our day in the field of inter-cultural development."[5] Ukrainian-

3 Chris Dummitt suggests that "British Canadianism" and "inclusive civic nationalism" were viewed as compatible, at least in some intellectual circles; Chris Dummitt, "Je me souviens Too: Eugene Forsey and the Inclusiveness of the 1950s' British Canadianism," *Canadian Historical Review* 100, no. 3 (September 2019): 396. See especially: Phillip Buckner, ed. *Canada and the End of Empire* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005); José Igartua, *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010).

4 Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Postwar Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006), 11; Jatinder Mann, "The introduction of multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, 1960s-1970s," *Nations and Nationalism* 18, no. 3 (2012): 489. See also: Lee Blanding, "Rebranding Canada: The Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1945-1974" (PhD thesis, University of Victoria, 2013); John S. Jaworsky, "A Case Study of the Canadian Federal Government's Multiculturalism Policy" (MA thesis, Carleton University, 1979); Jatinder Mann, *The Search for a New National Identity: The Rise of Multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, 1890s-1970s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016).

5 "The Governor General's medal," *Jewish Western Bulletin* 17 May 1957, 2. See also: A.J. Arnold, "What course for Jewish ideals and culture," *Jewish Western Bulletin*, 13 April 1956, 2; A.J. Arnold, "Jewish history is part of Canadian history," *Jewish Western Bulletin*, 29 June 1956, 2; A.J. Arnold, "For a wider Jewish Horizon in Canada," *Jewish Western Bulletin*, 10 October 1958, 5.

Canadian Senator William Wall told an audience in 1957 that "Canada is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural democratic state…which must be progressively blended and integrated into a harmonious national mosaic…."[6] In February of 1962, Violet King, who was the first Black woman to practise law in Canada, referred to Canada as "a multi-cultural society" in a speech in Barrie, Ontario, and a month later the Canada Ethnic Press Federation declared: "Canada is multicultural, a unity in variety, which will enrich our distinctive Canadian identity."[7]

This multiculturalist vision of Canada would be challenged by the Pearson government's appointment of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB) in 1963. Formed in response to the growing neo-nationalist movement in Quebec, the Commission was asked to:

> *…inquire into and report upon the existing state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada and to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races, taking into account the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution.*[8]

The reaction from the leadership of ethnic minority communities – chief among them Ukrainian-Canadians – was swift. During the Commission's preliminary hearings, many insisted that the Pearson government had fundamentally misunderstood the nature of the Canadian national project. They objected vigorously to the notions of 'two founding races', 'equal partnership', 'other ethnic groups', and 'biculturalism.' While many speakers acknowledged the important historical, sociological, and political position of French-Canadians (the 'French fact'), the idea that Canada was 'bicultural' was viewed as "…an unfit expression of the situation that exists or should exist in Canada. Multiculturalism is necessary."[9]

At its heart, this small (but vocal) movement was offering up a new story about Canada that was informed by the previous decade of discussion; the Royal Commission simply brought this narrative into the public spotlight. One of the clearest articulations of the multiculturalist position came from a spokesperson for the *Ukrainian Professional and Businessmen's Club*:

> *Canadian Ukrainian citizens feel that they are too a founding race […] Our ancestors did not move into a neatly ploughed prairie but opened up the backwoods. It is largely from their efforts and the efforts*

6 "Panel on Canadian heritage," *Jewish Western Bulletin*, 13 December 1957, 3. See also: "Vanier Given Scroll by Jewish Congress," *Globe and Mail*, 14 October 1959, 3.

7 "Canadians Lead 'Insulated Lives'," *The Barrie Examiner*, 23 February 1962, 3; LAC, Canada Ethnic Press Federation fonds, MG28 V95, vol. 1, Minutes of Conventions of the CEPF, 1962-1972, Abridged Minutes of the Biennial Convention of the Canada Ethnic Press Federation held at the Royal Alexandra Hotel in Winnipeg, March 30 and 31, 1962, 1.

8 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *A Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1966), 151.

9 "Semantic Jungles? 'Biculturalism' As Term Questioned," *The Gazette* (Montreal), 8 November 1963, 1.

of other Canadians that the Canadian wilderness was transformed into the Canadian bread basket of the world.[10]

While the RCBB acknowledged the ethnic diversity of Canada, it ultimately defended the biculturalist narrative of Canadian history and nationhood.[11] What the commissioners meant by 'biculturalism' was not visual art, cuisine, or dance, but the historically rooted sociological and political power of the two dominant societal cultures.[12] Though the multicultural movement kept up pressure on the Commission and the federal government throughout the 1960s, it was unable to change the biculturalist thrust of the Commission's final reports.

It was the Commission's recommendations regarding the 'other ethnic groups' that Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau responded to when he stood in the House of Commons on October 8, 1971, to proclaim his government's policy of 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework.' How did his government arrive at this moment? Trudeau was well aware of the multicultural movement and the insistence by some that ethnic minority communities needed more than recognition: they needed funding to maintain minority language schools and programs and to ensure cultural transmission to future generations. But this idea was anathema to Trudeau's understanding of Canada; his vision was of a French-English bilingual, but not binational country, coupled with individual rights and freedoms – something he called the 'Just Society'.[13]

> **"The result of these deliberations was a multiculturalism policy that blended the government's desire to foster national unity, combat the idea of 'biculturalism' so popular among Quebecois neo-nationalists, and respond to the demands of the multicultural movement."**

At the same time, the Trudeau government was keen to provide Canadians with new national symbols "to reinforce Canadian identity and unity."[14] In April of

10 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Transcripts of Hearings*, Preliminary Hearing, Ottawa, Nov. 7-8, 1963, 219-220. University of Manitoba history professor, Paul Yuzyk, became the most vocal proponent of multiculturalism during the height of the Royal Commission's work. Yuzyk's first speech in the Senate is often incorrectly cited as the first public articulation of multiculturalism, though he was already speaking on this topic in early 1963. In March of 1963, he told the Ukrainian Business and Professional Men's Club of Toronto that "Canada is not a bicultural country but a multicultural nation." See: "Yuzyk Queries Peace Record of Pearson," *Globe and Mail*, 21 March 1963, 9.

11 The most fulsome analysis of the language used by and during the Commission is found in Eve Haque, *Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012. For more on the intellectual history of the Commission, see: Valérie Lapointe-Gagnon, *Panser le Canada. Une histoire intellectuelle de la commission Laurendeau-Dunton* (Montréal: Les Éditions du Boréal, 2018); Robero Perin, "Un adversaire du bilinguisme officiel à la commission Laurendeau-Dunton," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 26, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 114-127.

12 Here I am borrowing from political philosopher Will Kymlicka.

13 For more on Trudeau's lack of personal interest in multiculturalism, see: Manoly Lupul, *The Politics of Multiculturalism: A Ukrainian-Canadian Memoir* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 2005), 53-54.

14 LAC, Privy Council Office fonds, RG 2, vol. 6365, file 440/70, Memorandum to the Cabinet, "Citizenship Policy and Legislation," 7 April 1970, n.p.

1970, the government launched a series of consultations with stakeholders, including organizations at the forefront of the multicultural movement like the Canada Ethnic Press Federation and the Ukrainian Canadian Committee. The result of these deliberations was a multiculturalism policy that blended the government's desire to foster national unity, combat the idea of 'biculturalism' so popular among Quebecois neo-nationalists, and respond to the demands of the multicultural movement.[15]

The influence of this movement on the spirit, if not the substance, of the final policy can be seen in the fact that Trudeau gave a speech to the Ukrainian Canadian Congress in Winnipeg a day after he announced the multiculturalism policy in the House of Commons.[16] He seemed to, at least publicly, embrace the multiculturalist narrative of Canadian history:

> *As I flew into Winnipeg this afternoon and looked down upon the golden fields and the colorful woodlots, I wished that those early settlers could have seen the panorama of this beautiful region from the air. And as we dropped lower and I could make out the carefully tended farms, the tidy outbuildings, the network of roads, railways and power- lines which link this vast land, I wished that those earliest settlers could return and see how their dreams have come true a thousandfold.*[17]

Fifty years later, many of the dreams of the multicultural movement have also come true. Activists continued to work at the provincial level – without support from the federal government – toward the establishment of a small Ukrainian-English bilingual education program in Alberta. Arguably, the major success is that 'multiculturalism' has become more than just a policy – it is now a *civil religion* in Canada.

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But we do not live in the age of 'multiculturalism'; we live in the age of 'Reconciliation.' Indigenous Peoples, aside from a handful of interventions, were largely absent from the multiculturalism debate of the 1960s and were initially left out of early policy discussions.[18] In 1970, they were told by the same

15 For more on these cabinet-level discussions, see Varun Uberoi, "Do Policies of Multiculturalism Change National Identities?" Political Quarterly 79, no. 3 (2008): 404-417; Jatinder Mann, *The Search for a New National Identity: The Rise of Multiculturalism in Canada and Australia, 1890s-1970s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2016), 106-108.

16 Garth Stevenson, *Building Nations from Diversity: Canadian and American Experience Compared* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 220.

17 LAC, The Rt. Hon. Pierre Elliott Trudeau fonds, Secret Series 1968-1984, MG 26 O 11, vol. 66, file 66-3, "Prime Minister's Speeches 9/10/1971 – Ukrainian Congress, Winnipeg, drafts and memos," "Notes for remarks by the Prime Minister of Canada to the 10th Ukrainian Canadian Congress Winnipeg October 9, 1971," appended note.

18 Lee Blanding, "Rebranding Canada: The Origins of Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1945-1974," 301-302.

government that introduced 'multiculturalism within a bilingual framework' that they should be 'Canadians' like everyone else. It remains to be seen if a policy forged in the crucible of the Quiet Revolution can be responsive to the demands of a country that has not embraced yet a third, very compelling, narrative: Canada as a colonial state.