CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY – A 50-YEAR RELATIONSHIP

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As the Canadian policy of multiculturalism has existed for 50 years, many might ask, 'what has it achieved?' I argue that it is likely to have been effective at encouraging national identity, but why is this an achievement? To understand why, we need to know what national identity is, why governments should encourage it and why doing so is difficult; thus, I begin by briefly explaining these points. I then discuss the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, why it is likely to have been effective at encouraging national identity, and what the implications of this are.

I-NATIONAL IDENTITY

We think and talk about national identity in two related ways. First, we refer to a person's national identity.[1] This denotes part of what they are, just as their sexual or religious identity does; thus, a person with a Canadian identity might also say that they are Canadian. In doing so, they are saying that they are part of a political community that influences what they are as, for example, its legal and political institutions regulate their behaviour and influence their ideas of what is acceptable and normal. But a person may neglect their national identity altogether until they work abroad and realize, for example, how Canadian they are; or they may think they have more than one national identity and feel both Quebecois and Canadian, as Quebec also socializes them using its own legal, political and educational institutions.

Second, we refer to a political community's identity

1 V. Uberoi, 'National Identity-A Multiculturalist Approach', *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 21:1, 2018.

and to Canada's identity. This denotes what a political community is and thus the features that we use to think of its individual members as a group, such as the territory they share, a religion or tendencies in thought and behaviour that are common among them, traditions of thought that they use to regulate their collective affairs, and so on. Such features are part of vague but recognizable conceptions of a political community's identity that intellectuals clarify, and school syllabi promote. People also develop such conceptions over time and these in turn affect their national identity. Thus, a racial minority in the 1980s Britain may have thought of Britain as a place that excludes people like them, and not felt British. The two ways in which we think and talk about national identity are thus related. But why should governments encourage either of them?

Some say national identity aids the redistribution of wealth, but, as many now admit, the evidence to support this empirical claim is inconclusive;[2] rather, note the following two reasons. First, citizens of a political community must exhibit unity, which is usually only the ability to assume they are a unit or a group when conceptualizing collective goals and collective challenges. In difficult times, such as war, citizens may need not only to assume that they are a group, but to explicitly think of themselves as one, and be loyal to one another. Hence, as with unity among family members or friends, unity among citizens often becomes more visible with need. And those who, for example, 'feel American' often think of themselves as a group just like those who share a religious identity, and are 'Muslim', or a sexual identity, and are 'gay' do. They also often feel proud of one another's achievements as they assume that they are a group.

Equally, if people's conceptions of their political-community include cultural minorities as normal and equal members of it, these conceptions help a culturally diverse citizenry to visualize themselves as a group. But those with such inclusive conceptions are also less likely to exclude and discriminate against minorities as minority cultural differences are not seen as something to fear or to avoid. National identity thus (I) *helps* to foster the unity that political life requires and, if inclusive, (II) can discourage an all-too-common fear of cultural differences among citizens. But there nonetheless remain the following obvious problems.

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2 Will Kymlicka and David Miller offer the most compelling arguments about national identity and redistribution, yet even they accept the evidence is inconclusive. See W. Kymlicka, 'Solidarity in diverse societies: Beyond neoliberal multiculturalism and welfare chauvinism'. *Comparative Migration Studies*, 3:17, 2015, pp. 8-9; D. Miller, *Strangers in Our Midst*, Harvard University Press, 2016, p. 28; D. Miller and S. Ali, 'Testing the national identity argument', *European Political Science Review*, 6:02, 2014, p. 254. See also K. Banting et al., 'Beyond National Identity: Liberal Nationalism, Shared Membership and Solidarity', in G. Gustavvson and D. Miller, *Liberal Nationalism and Its Critics*, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 218.

People's conceptions of their political community often focus solely on a dominant majority who, for example, might seem more 'truly British'. This makes minorities seem like outsiders, thus exacerbating their exclusion and making them potentially unwilling to be part of a group that mistreats them. Thus, we saw how minorities don't necessarily feel part of their political community, but also saw how some can neglect their national identity altogether.

No government can compel its citizens to feel Canadian, or to have an inclusive conception of their political community without unacceptable levels of coercion, and perhaps not even then. But it can encourage both practices despite the following sorts of difficulties: a government may have few powers to encourage, for example, British identity in Scotland and risks antagonising those who feel more Scottish than British. It must also decide which inclusive conceptions of the political community will resonate with its citizens and how to promote them while assuaging majorities who are no longer the sole focus of such conceptions. It must also decide how the education system will be used to encourage national identity without indoctrinating children and while teaching them to think critically.[3] These sorts of issues are difficult and the Canadian policy of multiculturalism addressed some of them.

II-THE CANADIAN POLICY OF MULTICULTURALISM

This policy was justified to Cabinet in 1971 as serving a number of Citizenship Objectives, one of which was developing 'Canadian identity'.[4] It was intended to promote a multicultural conception of Canada; thus, in Cabinet, ministers noted 'the importance … of the policy as a new concept of the presentation of Canadianism'.[5] Cultural agencies were subsequently funded to promote a multicultural conception of Canada. 'Intercultural exchanges' and funding minority civil society cultural groups were part of the policy and implicitly conveyed such a conception, as they suggest that Canada is culturally diverse. This conception of Canada was promoted to stimulate people's Canadian identities, and designers of the policy discussed creating a 'meaningful Canadian consciousness' and considered people becoming conscious of how they were a part of Canada.[6] This continued in the 1988 Multiculturalism Act that enshrined the policy in law.

Clause 31b of this Act calls multiculturalism a 'fundamental characteristic' of Canada, and cabinet documents show how it was intended, *inter alia*, 'to convey a strong sense of legitimacy to those individuals and communities who feel and/or understand that either their culture or their race has limited their role and acceptance in Canadian

3 I address some of these questions in V. Uberoi, 'National Identity – A Multiculturalist Approach'. But see D. Miller's seminal *On Nationality*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

4 V. Uberoi, 'Do Policies of Multiculturalism Change National Identities', *Political Quarterly*, 79:3, 2008, p. 411.

5 V. Uberoi, 'Multiculturalism and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms', *Political Studies*, 57:4, 2009, p. 809.

6 V. Uberoi, 'Multiculturalism and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms', p. 808; L. Blanding, 'Rebranding Canada: The Origins of the Canadian Multiculturalism Policy, 1945-74', PhD Thesis, University of Victoria, 2013, pp. 238, 257.

> **"Inclusion in the 'institutional life of the nation' was thought to strengthen the 'sense' among minorities of 'being integral' to the 'Canadian nation' while exclusion from these institutions was thought to do the opposite."**

society'.[7] The policy in the Act also helps to ensure that all Canadians, including minorities, can gain employment in federal departments and agencies so as to aid not only employment equity, but 'nation-building'. This is because inclusion in the 'institutional life of the nation' was thought to strengthen the 'sense' among minorities of 'being integral' to the 'Canadian nation' while exclusion from these institutions was thought to do the opposite.[8] Those drafting the Act thought that federal institutions are part of how Canada is often understood by Canadians, and minorities were more likely to feel part of how Canada is often understood if these institutions included them.[9] The policy of multiculturalism that still exists in the Act was designed to promote a conception of Canada and to stimulate people's national identities, but has it been effective in doing so?

The efficacy of this policy, like many others, is difficult to prove definitively. But it would be counter-intuitive to claim that the federal government and cultural agencies promoting such a conception of Canada for 50 years has had no effect. The likely nature of this effect can be discerned after we note that despite the absence of relevant survey data for the 1950s and 1960s, historical evidence indicates that in this period a multicultural conception of Canada was popular only among some minority civil society groups.[10] Today surveys have repeatedly shown for some time that multiculturalism is a national symbol for a majority of Canadians and an important feature of how they conceive of Canada.[11] This conception of Canada is held widely but not universally: 30% may oppose it. Nor is it deeply held by all its advocates as it does not alter some of their views about certain groups, such as Muslims, and many such advocates still believe that immigrants should 'blend in'.[12] Yet if conceptions of the country that excluded minorities were more

7 V. Uberoi, 'Legislating Multiculturalism and Nationhood', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 49:2, 2016 p. 277.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 V. Uberoi, 'Multiculturalism and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms', p. 808; L. Blanding, 'Rebranding Canada', pp. 107, 162.

11 See W. Kymlicka's excellent 'The Precarious Resilience on Multiculturalism in Canada', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 51:1, 2021, p. 124 as he notes the following survey data: Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2015, 'Canadian Public Opinion about Immigration and Multiculturalism', Environics Institute – Focus Canada Spring 2015 Survey on Immigration-Multiculturalism – FINAL REPORT – June 30-2015, p. 2; Environics Institute for Survey Research, 2018, 'Canada's World Survey 2018 Final Report', April 2018, pp. 31, 38. For older evidence from the International Social Survey Programme see V. Uberoi, 'Do Policies of Multiculturalism Change National Identities', footnote 30, p. 416.

12 See Kymlicka 'The Precarious Resilience on Multiculturalism in Canada', p. 125; R. Besco and E. Tolley, 'Does Everyone Cheer? The Politics of Immigration and Multiculturalism in Canada', *Federalism and the Welfare State in a Multicultural World*, in E. Goodyear-Grant et al., McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019, p. 303; Triadafilos Triadafilopoulos, 'The Foundations, Limits, and Consequences of Immigration Exceptionalism in Canada', *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 51:1, 2021, p. 13.

widespread, such beliefs and discrimination would presumably be too. Thus, this widely yet not always deeply held inclusive conception of Canada still seems 'consequential'.[13] Furthermore, the multiculturalism policy is likely to have been effective in helping to generate this widely held conception over 50 years in something like the following way.

> **"Today surveys have repeatedly shown for some time that multiculturalism is a national symbol for a majority of Canadians and an important feature of how they conceive of Canada."**

Any conception of Canada that this policy promoted would seem artificial if inconsistent with popular understandings of Canada's history, people's recurring experiences and other features of Canada, such as high levels of immigration. But people ignore such features when they cling to older conceptions of their country, or to conceptions of it that focus on other features, as occurs in other culturally diverse countries.[14] Yet when governments promote a multicultural conception of the country for 50 years, this conception becomes difficult to ignore and encourages people to take account of it. Canadian history and experiences, increasing immigration and so on, do not inevitably lead people to acquire a multicultural conception of Canada, but they make the multicultural conceptions of Canada that successive governments promote seem plausible; thus, many Canadians, we saw, now accept them. In this way, the policy of multiculturalism is likely to have been effective at encouraging national identity.

Crude claims about this policy undermining national identity therefore seem mistaken,[15] as it is instead likely to have been effective at encouraging such identity. But what about subtler and more general claims in which policies of multiculturalism are said to uphold minority rights but should be accompanied by nation-building policies that foster unity and a national culture?[16] This claim assumes that, unlike nation-building policies, policies of multiculturalism are divisive; yet the Canadian policy of multiculturalism seemed to foster unity by encouraging national identity. It also assumes that policies of multiculturalism focus on minorities. However the Canadian policy of multiculturalism fostered national identity for all citizens. Knowing what the Canadian policy of multiculturalism is likely to have achieved disturbs our assumptions about such policies and their differences from nation-building policies, especially once we note how a policy of multiculturalism promoted national identity in Australia too.[17]

13 Kymlicka 'The Precarious Resilience on Multiculturalism in Canada', p. 125.

14 P. Norris and R. Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 182, 200.

15 Scholars who make this claim are discussed in K. McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada*, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 131.

16 K. Banting and W. Kymlicka, 'Do Policies of Multiculturalism Erode the Welfare State? In *Cultural Diversity Versus Economic Solidarity*, ed. P. Van Parjis, Doebeck, University Press, 2004, pp. 251-252; D. Miller, 'Immigrants, Nations and Citizenship', *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 16:4, 2012, p. 380.

17 G. Levey, *Political Theory and Australian Multiculturalism*, Berghahn Books, 2008, pp. 266-267.

Recall also that after 50 years, a multicultural conception of Canada is widely but not deeply held by all its advocates, while others reject it. Those who operate this policy of multiculturalism thus still have work to do to encourage a widely held, inclusive conception of Canada to become more universally and deeply held by all Canadians. Equally, those outside Canada who want inclusive conceptions of their own country to become widespread[18] should note how long this can take, and how it is aided by a policy of multiculturalism. Such policies may seem inconceivable elsewhere, but Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka have shown how the measures of such a policy have increased in different countries despite criticism of them.[19] Such policies continue to proliferate, and the Canadian policy of multiculturalism suggests they can endure and be effective at encouraging inclusive forms of national identity.

18 V. Uberoi and T. Modood, 'Inclusive Britishness- A Multiculturalist Advance', *Political Studies*, 61:1, 2013.

19 Keith Banting and Will Kymlicka, 'Is There Really a Retreat From Multiculturalism Policies? New Evidence from the Multiculturalism Policy Index', *Comparative European Politics*, 11:5, 2013.