CATEGORIZATION "THEM AND US", MULTIPLE IDENTITY AND DISCRIMINATION IN CANADA

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Social psychology uses four concepts to study harmonious or conflictual intergroup relations in multi-ethnic societies, such as Canada: categorization, multiple identities, prejudice, and discrimination (Bourhis, 2021). Let's approach the theme of categorization with a quote from Albert Einstein, the scientist who proposed the theory of relativity on the eve of the Second World War. Here is his observation in 1936 on the categories prescribed to him and the prejudices he suffered from.

> "If my theory of relativity is proven successful, Germany will claim me as a German, Switzerland will say that I am a Swiss citizen and France will

> state that I am a great scientist. Should my theory prove untrue, France will say that I am a Swiss, the Swiss will say I am German and the Germans will declare that I am a Jew."

Beyond the great scientist Einstein, there is Einstein the German, Einstein the Jew, and Einstein the resident of France and the United States. There is Einstein, a person who belongs to several distinct social categories, but also an individual who belongs to the largest of tribes, that of humans. These affiliations are as real as they are arbitrary. Belonging to one social category rather than another means you may or may not be the target of prejudice and discrimination. If the theory of relativity had been wrong, Einstein could have been only a foreigner or an asylum seeker, and not any usual kind. Fortunately for Einstein, the scientist, the theory of relativity proved to be correct. But above all, regardless of his genius and scientific contributions, it was thanks to his political acumen that he was able to leave Nazi Germany just in time to avoid the genocide extermination against the Jews– his most vulnerable categorical affiliation. Thus, belonging to one social category rather than another may or may not make us the target of prejudice, discrimination, or genocide.

Social categorization is a cognitive tool that helps us partition and classify our physical from our social environment. Categorization is a fundamental, normal, efficient, and necessary process in human beings. But social categorization also has its dark side, as it has been the case since the dawn of time.

We are likely to say "us" when referring to our in-group – individuals whom we categorize as members of our own group to which we belong and with whom we tend to identify. On the other hand, we define an out-group as people whom we categorize as members belonging to a group *other than our own*, and with whom we do not identify. Thus, we tend to refer to an out-group as "them".

In social psychology, there is a lot of interest in intergroup phenomena that are related to imposed social categories, which are linked to gender, age, ethnic origin, religious, linguistic, cultural background, as well as physical or mental disability. In many of these cases, we did not choose to be affiliated with valued or undervalued groups at birth. Individuals encompassed by these categories can hardly deny that they are members of these groups, and they cannot easily change their affiliation, even if the impenetrability of these categories and their social status vary according to cultural, political, and historical contexts. In Quebec, for example, a Haitian woman of a certain age who is afflicted by racism, sexism, and ageism cannot easily extricate herself from her devalued affiliation to escape the prejudice and discrimination she may experience on a daily basis.

We are all part of a multitude of social groups and categories. Our self-categorization bridges the gap between our unique personal self and our belonging to multiple categories. At what point does the "personal self" become the "collective us"? Social context and our beliefs and emotions have a lot to do with it. Our "personal self" is most prominent in our emotional relationships with our parents, siblings, friends, and life partners. The "collective we" becomes important when our personal fate becomes dependent on our collective destiny as a member of our social categories, such as gender, ethnicity, religion, or language.

Here's an example of belonging to multiple categories. I quote from an interview with the Montreal athlete Bruny Surin, who had just won the 100 meters at the British Athletics Grand Prix on August 5, 2000.

The journalist asks: "Is there anything you'd like to say, without any questions being asked?"

Bruny Surin: "Yes... I don't like to talk politics. You may be aware that I belong to several communities. Yes, I'm proud to be Haitian. Yes, I'm proud to be a Quebecer, and yes, I will proudly wear Canada's colors at the Sydney Olympics. But my personal choice would be to wear a jersey bearing the colors of Haiti, Quebec, and Canada at the same time. And above all, to be the first to cross the finish line in the 100-meter final at the Sydney Games." *La Presse*, August 13, 2000, "The personality of the week".

The athlete, Bruny Surin, demonstrates the possibility of representing multiple belongings and how his positive identities have enriched his personal athletic achievements. In 2022, Bruni Surin received the Order of Canada's medal for his commitment to facilitating sports activities for young people from all cultural backgrounds in Montreal's underprivileged neighborhoods for over twenty years.

Multiple positive identities can be additive and contribute to a more integrated and harmonious personal self. The idea of a free, plural, and democratic society, such as Canada, is to enable all individuals to express and live their multiple identities without forcing them to identify with a single national, ethnic, religious, or gender category. Social cohesion is developed by enabling individuals to express a multitude of identities without being accused of treachery, being punished, or being repudiated by the group to which they belong or by the dominant majority. Alas, in polarized societies, social groups often force individuals to prove their loyalty by choosing a single identity affiliation. Whether in the name of a majority or a minority, individuals are forced to take sides: "Are you part of the problem or part of the solution?", "Are you with us or against us?"

Sometimes, "critical events" force individuals to choose a single category, often marginalized by the majority. Let's take the example of September 11, 2001, the day of the deadliest terrorist attack in US history. These attacks were carried out in New York and Washington by 19 suicide bombers, including 15 from Saudi Arabia, led by Osama Bin Laden, who was based in Afghanistan at the time. The attacks were followed in real-time by millions of television viewers around the world, who watched in horror as the planes hit the World Trade Center. The official death toll was 2,977, with 6,291 injured.

Ten years later, in 2021, Rima Elkouri, a journalist working at *La Presse* in Montreal, examined the before and after September 11, 2001 regarding the Muslims who make up 3% of Quebec's population. Coming from a variety of backgrounds, including Syrian, Rima Elkouri notes the way that the Western majority stigmatizes Muslim minorities as being guilty by association, and, thus, contributes to the construction of the "suspicious Arab Muslim" stereotype. Rima Elkouri describes the impact September 11th tragedy on her self-perception, and how it has affected her multiple identities. Published in *La Presse* on September 7, 2021, Rima Elkouri describes her experience in this way:

> "I didn't change on the night of September 10th to 11th 2001. What changed was the way people looked at me. For me, as for thousands of other citizens with Arab roots, there was a 'before' and an 'after', with very personal implications. The day before, we may have been a thousand different things–Christians, Muslims, atheists, born in Montreal, Aleppo, Chicoutimi, Beirut, or Algiers, but on the morning of September 11, we were just one single thing: Arabs, and as such, suspects. We may have had a thousand faces, a thousand professions, a thousand backgrounds with hyphenated identities that didn't fit into any little box – Quebecer-Syrian-Armenian-Senegalese-French-Lebanese in my case – but the hyphens were put away. There were only two boxes left, as suggested by George W. Bush: 'Us' and 'Them'. Do not choose sides. We have done it for you... In the face of horror, our puffy eyes were filled with fear, our hearts were broken for the American victims; nonetheless, we unwillingly drifted into the 'Them' camp. Those who, while mourning 3,000 innocent deaths, were designated guilty by association. Those who must be watched and distrusted. Those who are constantly asked to prove their innocence, to explain that no, Arab is not being synonymous with Islamist or terrorist, no, we have no sympathy for al-Qaeda fanatics, no, violent extremism is not 'in our culture'...".

The Montreal journalist's personal experience reflects what many Arabs who live in the West have experienced since the events of September 11, 2001: their nuanced identities are reduced to a single category: suspicious minority. This is the collateral damage of the "us-them" polarization, which followed a tragic event that claimed so many victims in the United States. These factors bring us to the psychology of prejudice and discrimination.

Prejudice is a negative attitude towards members of an out-group, based on false and fixed generalizations. Prejudice is expressed primarily at the affective and emotional levels. Feelings associated with prejudice can range from a simple discomfort in the presence of an out-group member to distrust, fear, disgust, and hostility.

Discrimination depends on both social categorization as "us-them" and prejudice. When people take action, when behavioral reactions can be observed, it becomes a question of discrimination. On the one hand, discrimination can manifest itself in verbal and non-verbal behaviors by expressing antipathy towards an out-group. Discrimination involves behaviors that favor the in-group, but can also reject people because they belong to an out-group. Research reveals that discrimination based on in-group bias is a universal attitude that consists in treating members of our own group more favorably than members of out-groups. A consequence of consciously or unconsciously providing preferential treatment to candidates from our own group when it comes to hiring in companies or public administrations, which is valuable for the advancement of our in-group, is that it ends up disadvantaging out-groups that are excluded from these institutions. Public health research reveals that, in the long run, discrimination undermines the mental and physical health of its victims (Bourhis, 2020).

Both Individual and systemic discrimination are often consciously or implicitly legitimized by underlying ideologies such as sexism, racism, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia. As John Berry notes,

discrimination remains a global phenomenon that has corrosive consequences for its victims and is ultimately dehumanizing for those who perpetrate it. It is in the interest of all citizens to support efforts to fight against individual and systemic discrimination in Canada and around the world.

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