FROM A MULTICULTURAL TO A MULTIRACIAL SOCIETY? SOME TRENDS IN CURRENT RESEARCH

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Canadian research in social sciences and humanities continues to evolve in response to the debates that shape the contemporary world. In order to track its evolution in regard to the struggle against ethnic, racial, and cultural discrimination, this article presents an analysis of all grant applications submitted to SSHRC since 2006, whether funded or not.[1] From this vast collection, we have retained, as an initial approximation, only the key terms used to describe the submissions.[2] Our aim is to gain a better understanding of how the Canadian academic community has positioned itself over the past fifteen years in relation to what is, undeniably, one of the great challenges of living together.

1 It is clear that the applications submitted to SSHRC are by no means encompassing the realities of research performed in social sciences and humanities in Canada. This is just one indicator among others.

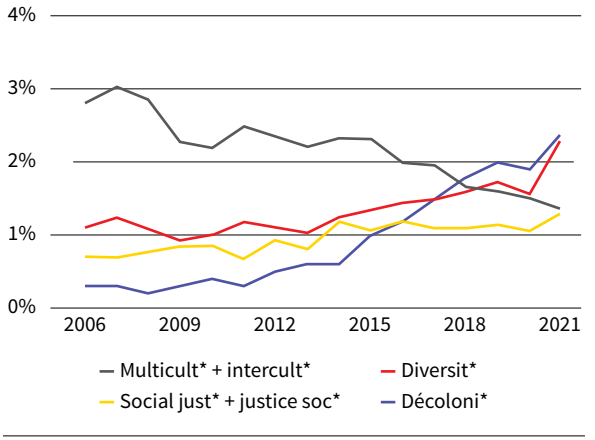
2 The body of projects is composed of the following funding programs: Master's and Doctoral Scholarships, Knowledge Development, Knowledge, Connection, Major Collaborative Research Initiatives, Partnership Engagement, Partnership Development, Partnership, Standard Research Grants.

THE DECLINE OF MULTICULTURALISM

The first trend that emerges from a review of our corpus is that, while Canadian public opinion remains generally attached to the ideal of a multicultural society,[3] researchers are witnessing a certain abandonment of the terms "multiculturalism" and "interculturalism" (and their derivatives)—the use of which has dropped by half since 2006 in applications submitted to SSHRC (Figure 1).

This decline may be partly related to a growing distrust of an intercultural or multicultural approach that is insufficiently critical. In Quebec, we know that interculturalism, regularly presented as the defense of a (historical) "us" against the (said "visible"[4]) "others", is very often reduced to what Jack Jedwab calls univocal or one-dimensional interculturalism, where precedence is given to the majority culture.[5] Yet, it seems that a similar criticism is increasingly being expressed regarding multiculturalism, which is increasingly portrayed as an attempt to reduce social exclusion to its mere cultural dimension, to produce a "post-racial" version of systemic racism and absolve it from any political burden.[6] For some time now, the vision advocated by multicultural policies has been strongly questioned by postcolonial theorists, who view it as a subtle way of perpetuating white domination.[7] As a Canadian researcher recently wrote: "At a more complex level, multiculturalism can be defined as a biopolitical form of governance that regulates the following triangulation: Canadian

FIGURE 1. EVOLUTION OF THE SHARE OF SSHRC PROJECTS FOCUSING ON MULTICULTURALISM, DIVERSITY, AND SOCIAL JUSTICE, 2006-2021.



3 Michael J. Donnelly (2021) Discrimination and Multiculturalism in Canada: Exceptional or Incoherent Public Attitudes?, *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 51:1, p. 166-188; Augie Fleras, 50 Years Of Canadian Multiculturalism: Accounting for its Durability, Theorizing the Crisis, Anticipating the Future, Canadian Ethnic Studies, *Canadian Ethnic Studies Association*, Volume 51, Number 2, 2019, pp. 9–59. For an excellent insight into the debates revolving around multiculturalism, read Multiculturalism@50 and the Promise of a Just Society, *Canadian Issues*, autumn-winter 2021.

4 Benessaieh, A. (2019). "Dix ans après Bouchard-Taylor: l'interculturalisme en question". *Recherches sociographiques*, 60(1), 11–34.

5 Jack Jedwab, "Il y a plus qu'une définition de l'interculturalisme", *Le Devoir*, 21 septembre 2016, p. A6.

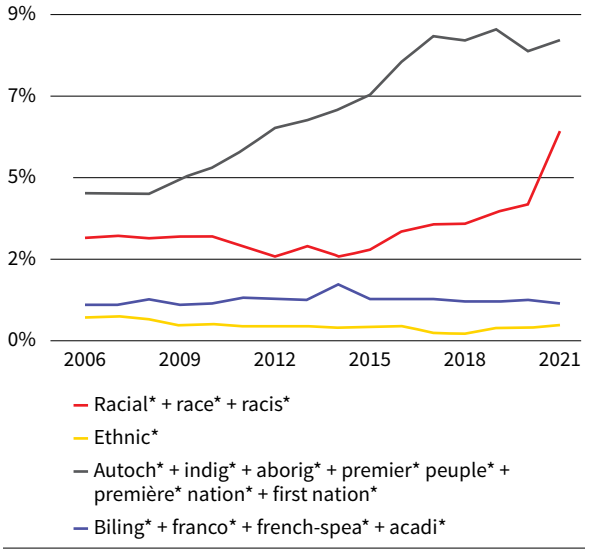
6 Alana Lentin (2014), "Post-race, post politics: the paradoxical rise of culture after multiculturalism", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 37:8, p. 1268-1285.

7 Sneja Gunew. *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism.* London: Routledge, 2004; Ghassan Hage. *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society*. Annandale: Pluto Press, 1998; Gerald Kernerman. *Multicultural Nationalism: Civilizing Difference, Constituting Community*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005.

settler society (English and French), Indigenous populations, and racialized immigrants."[8]

Seemingly taking note of such criticisms, funding applications submitted to SSHRC have increasingly opted to address the challenges of social integration and mobility using terms related to "social justice" (rising from 0.7% to 1.3% between 2006 and 2021), "diversity" (rising from 1.1% to 2.3% between 2006 and 2021) or "decolonization" (rising from 0.3% to 2.4% between 2006 and 2021) (Figure 1). Over the past twenty years, a similar trend has been observed in Australia, where certain forms of critical fatigue of the term equity (known as "equity fatigue") has led to the adoption of a new vocabulary centered around the notion of diversity.[9] The enthusiasm for the concept of diversity is such, in Canada,[10] as elsewhere in the world, that it has become a "buzzword" that can refer to a "myriad of realities and definitions"[11], which, paradoxically, added to its appeal.

FIGURE 2. CHANGES IN THE SHARE OF SSHRC PROJECTS FOCUSING ON RACE, ETHNICITY, INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND FRANCOPHONES, 2006–2021.



THE RISE IN THE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS AND RACIALIZED GROUPS

The decline of multicultural or intercultural themes is accompanied by a new interest in the study of racialized and indigenous groups in SSHRC grant applications. In analyzing the contents of the *Canadian Review of Sociology*, Howard Ramos has established that, from 1964 to 2010, "[e]thnicity is overtaken by race as time goes on.[12]" "Generally, the in-text mention of the terms ethnicity and ethnic far outnumbered race over the last half century of the CRS, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. [...]

8 Marina Gomá, "Challenging the Narrative of Canadian Multicultural Benevolence: A Feminist Anti-Racist Critique", *OMNES : The Journal of Multicultural Society*, 2020, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 81-113,

9 Sara Ahmed, "Doing Diversity Work in Higher Education in Australia", *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 38 no 6, Dec 2006, p. 745–768.

10 Jean-Philippe Warren, "L'usage du concept de diversité en histoire Québécoise", *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, Volume 27, numéro 3, été 2019, p. 180–194.

11 Sophia Labadi, "Introduction: investing in cultural diversity", *International social science journal*, LXI(61), 2010, p. 2–13; Dirk Jacobs, "Diversity. Polyphony of the concept", *Contested Concepts in Migration Studies*, Routledge, 2021, p. 95–110.

12 Howard Ramos, "From Ethnicity to Race in the Canadian Review of Sociology, 1964 to 2010", *Canadian Review of Sociology/Revue canadienne de sociologie*, 50(3), p. 337-356.

Interestingly, however, their prominence shifted over time with race being mentioned in a greater proportion of publications in the 2000s.[13]"

As far as our corpus is concerned, it can be said that the surge in applications submitted to SSHRC involving indigenous nations was noted in 2006, as a result of the surge of claims that followed the submission of the report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (the Erasmus-Dussault Commission) a decade earlier. As for applications pertaining to racialized groups, they have mainly emerged in the last ten years, alongside the rise of prominent social movements, such as the establishment of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2013, and perhaps even more notably with the protests that followed the murder of George Floyd in 2020.

The SSHRC has not remained indifferent to the evolution of debates on these issues. In 2003, for example, the federal agency issued several recommendations in a report entitled "*Les possibilités de la recherche autochtone*." One of the report's objectives was to encourage research "by and with" Canada's indigenous researchers and communities on a range of issues of concern to them. In 2021, SSHRC's Advisory Committee on Addressing Black Racism in Research and Research Training Programs identified several promising avenues for strengthening equity, diversity, and inclusion in higher education institutions.

Prompted by SSHRC initiatives, as well as by researchers who denounced the slow progress of equity issues in Canada's predominantly liberal[14] universities, there has been a noticeable increase in researchers' preoccupation with issues affecting indigenous and racialized groups over the past fifteen years (Chart 2). By 2021, nearly one in eight (13.3%) of SSHRC project submissions used one or more keywords derived from the terms race or indigenous compared with around 1 in 15 in 2006 (6.7%).

CONCLUSION

Relying merely on the number of applications submitted to SSHRC (which obviously offers an incomplete view of the situation, and would benefit from further refinement, particularly with regard to the age and language of applicants), Canadian researchers increasingly perceive Canada as a ("settler-colonial") and racialized society. The prism of multiculturalism seems to have been abandoned in favor of a more critical perspective, in which issues of colonization and racialization take precedence. In the United States, the dissemination of Critical Race Theory has provoked considerable controversy and even led to ideological censorship measures, especially in Florida at the instigation of conservative Governor DeSantis.[15] So far, in Canada, the similar shift in research themes has been much less controversial, partly because it is based on an already fragmented conception of Canada as a mosaic. Researchers have, therefore, been able to replace the study of ethnic groups,

13 Ibid., p. 342.

14 Frances Henry, Enakshi Dua, Carl E. James, Audrey Kobayashi, Peter Li, Howard Ramos, and Malinda S. Smith. *The Equity Myth. Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007.

15 Victor Ray. *On Critical Race Theory: Why It Matters & Why You Should Care*. New York: Random House, 2022.

in part, with a focus on colonized and racialized groups, in line with the quest for social justice that has always inspired multicultural policies. Such a trend may lead us to believe that we are witnessing the replacement, within humanities and social science research projects, at least partially, of an image of Canada as a multicultural society by that of Canada as a multiracial society.