A historian's long view on multiculturalism: The limits of liberal pluralism in early Cold War Canada

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Canadians are familiar with the images of multiculturalism: newspaper photos of parades with colourfully costumed performers in "ethnic dress"; the collage of diverse faces in the "Canadian family tree" adorning the covers of government publications; and the displays of ethnic and fusion dishes in magazine food features. Simultaneously, the contradictory forces of globalization, increased policing of borders against Third World migrants, and the "war on terror" have prompted certain critics to denounce humanitarian refugee programs and blame "home-grown terrorism" on multiculturalism's supposed failure to transform newcomers into "proper" Canadians. The often polarized debates between liberal defenders of multiculturalism and its critics have obscured the position of anti-racist leftists who criticize the liberal myths of Canada as an egalitarian nation and call for a radical restructuring of a society that is a racialized vertical mosaic.

LIBERAL PLURALISM AND THE COLD WAR AGENDA

All of this suggests the need for more careful histories of pluralism. Recently, some historians have pulled back the origins of multiculturalism and focused on ethnic groups who, in the past, inserted themselves into and disrupted national celebrations (such as the 1927 Diamond Jubilee festivities) that were meant to narrate a simple history of a white dominion's progress. Here, I highlight the liberal pluralism of the early post-war, Cold War era. As my book, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigration Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto, 2006) documented, the early post-1945 immigrant campaigns, aimed mostly at integrating white European newcomers, exhibited a contradictory mix: there were liberal discourses of tolerance, respect, and cultural pluralism that echoed the concept of a more inclusive Canadian citizenship embedded in the new *Canadian Citizenship Act* of 1947; but there were also intrusive tactics reflecting the rise of a "national insecurity state" fighting a domestic Cold War against the various perceived threats to mainstream society and its dominant bourgeois models. I offer a few examples of these competing dynamics.

First, federal citizenship officials portrayed themselves as enlightened liberal integrationists who, unlike earlier assimilationists, would guide, not dictate, the newcomers' adaptation to Canadian society. Yet their writings also revealed the ideological agenda of a ruling elite that encouraged new groups to "flourish" so long as they did not threaten the authority of the dominant groups. The booklets informing immigrants about the many freedoms enjoyed under Canadian democracy also stressed its reliance on a loyal and obedient citizenry; and both ordinary Canadians and newcomers were encouraged to spy on neighbours and help quash signs of dissent. In their efforts to integrate newcomers, citizenship officials were prepared to work with ethnic Canadian organizations—save for Communist ones—on the grounds that already Canadianized groups could ease the acculturation process by providing war-weary, frightened, and even emotionally damaged newcomers with critical support. Such efforts also helped to provide a defence against the anomie or group disorder that could endanger Canada's social fabric and/or entail huge health costs. All this activity concerning immigrants was in keeping with the state's national security agenda to contain domestic threats and ensure a contented and conformist citizenry.

CULTURAL PLURALISM OR CONTAINMENT?

Second, the "integrationists" sought to foster national unity by encouraging mutual understanding and exchange between old and new Canadians, but their acceptance of diversity was restricted to the comparatively safe cultural arena. In his many upbeat speeches,

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Vladimir Kaye, chief liaison officer of the Citizenship Branch, used colourful metaphors to convey the state's role in encouraging "unity-in-diversity," comparing newcomers to the musicians of a Canadian orchestra or to the tasty ingredients of a Canadian salad. Along with liberal food writers who featured ethnic recipes (with the most pungent spices removed or diluted) and told Canadian mothers to "spice" up family meals with (just) a touch of the "exotic," Kaye praised European ethnic foods for saving Canada from standardized blandness in eating regimes. But he and other reception workers also endorsed and implemented programs that sought to "modernize" immigrant women's food customs by encouraging them to abandon the outdoor ethnic markets, with their live pigeons and Old World haggling, for modern grocery stores with their clean aisles, well-stocked shelves, cellophane-wrapped meats, and nutritious "Canadian" items (enriched bread, milk, canola oil). Aware that a sense of belonging was necessary to inculcating patriotism, citizenship officers worked with cultural groups to organize immigrant exhibits, concerts, and folk fairs that showcased the newcomers' art, handicrafts, dance, and music for Canadian audiences. As they also well understood, such strategies for celebrating individual talents or mounting cultural performances did not challenge existing power structures or mainstream society.

GENDER AND FAMILY IDEOLOGIES

Third, familiar class and gender dynamics emerged as middle-class professionals encouraged newcomers to aspire to the bourgeois nuclear family model according to which breadwinner fathers, homemaker mothers, and well-adjusted children lived within "proper" single-family households and performed appropriate gender roles. The Citizenship Branch's promotional materials celebrated individual entrepreneurial, professional, or artistic achievements, while its teaching tools for women, including NFB films, featured consumer images of the

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ideal homemaker and the many modern conveniences—fridges, stoves, model kitchens—that defined the Canadian way of life. The huge gap between these images and the overcrowded (and often kitchen-less) flats or multiple-family houses in which many newcomers initially lived reflected the working-class realities of men and women who came from the Displaced Persons (DP) camps or peripheral European regions.

Fourth, the adoption of pluralist approaches did not entirely eliminate older assimilationist expectations that the newcomer undergo a profound change in cultural values and social behaviour; nor did it displace the experts' presumption that they were authorized to intervene in the lives of newcomers who seriously transgressed Canadian norms. Often ignoring the patriarchal character of Canadian families, family and child experts invoked stereotypes of domineering European fathers and submissive mothers as explanations for ill-adjusted children and delinquency. Liberal programs, such as inner-city school lunch programs or settlement house nursery schools and mothers' clubs, also sought to reduce immigrant parents' Old World influences over their children. Public health workers, introducing immigrant mothers to social services to help them deal with sick or disabled children, frequently dismissed these women's customary healing rituals as dangerously backward, and they dismissed their suspicion towards them as a manifestation of outmoded values that had to be broken down. Settlement house workers

tried to Canadianize immigrant children and youth through organized recreation programs—such as summer camps, boys' sports leagues, girls' crafts classes, and teen dances—that contained youthful energy and sexuality while simultaneously instilling principles of participatory democracy. These programs reproduced gender stereotypes and hierarchies, as in crafts and charm school for immigrant girls, and sports for boys, though some girls joined competitive sports. In an era marked by alarmist declarations of escalating immorality, including a supposed epidemic in female promiscuity, it is not surprising that such programs often involved a heightened concern about protecting the sexual virtues of immigrant girls. This societal concern with girls' vulnerability to sexual deviance also reflected racial-ethnic hierarchies that, at a time before the post-1967 immigrant waves of women of colour from the Caribbean and elsewhere, considered certain "non-preferred" newcomers—southern Europeans, such as the "well-developed" Italian girls disposed to "hanging out with boys," or Eastern European refugee victims of war-time rape, viewed as "damaged goods"—to be more susceptible to promiscuity than were Canadian girls.

MULTICULTURALISM FOR EUROPEANS

The Europeans were not simply passive pawns in the processes described, however. And for all of the heavy-handedness and hypocrisy involved in these campaigns, white European newcomers were not subjected to the ruthless assimilation policies applied to Aboriginals. Many found ways to resist or, more commonly, modify external pressures to adopt Canadian ways. Many exercised some choice and agency over the pace and degree of acculturation, and this process of adaptation led to various hybrid patterns, whether in parenting styles, children's play, or family relations. In the long term, the postwar Europeans helped change Canadian society and, later, multiculturalism, even as their own

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distressing is that across this country black people have consistently organized and contested educational practices as one way to make their citizenship felt in this land. However, those efforts are often not seen as contributing to the larger society. And in the academic realm, black people have let universities off the hook by not demanding adequate representation in them as they have in the area of public education.

CONTINUED ABSENCE OF BLACK HISTORIES

Recently, one of Ontario's deans of education was much excited by the ways in which the recent *Roots of Violence Report*, authored by Roy McMurtry and Alvin Curling, looked into youth violence—a matter in which black and Aboriginal youth are a significant factor—and made, as they should, mental health issues a major aspect of their recommendations. What was most interesting is that the dean was interested in mental health issues almost to the exclusion of the other issues and recommendations raised by the report. This troubling highlighting of mental health by the dean at the expense of other issues—issues in which a school education ought to play a major role—was not surprising to me.

The *Roots of Violence Report* is also critical of the ways in which public school education still silences black histories, and also of the ways in which black histories remain absent from the broader Canadian national imagina-

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tion—all issues that a faculty of education could and should lead on. But instead the dean was more interested, I suspect, in seizing on the mental health issues and the recommendation raised as a way to have access to the sizable dollars at Canadian Institutes of Health Research. The sizable grants from CIHR would make any dean swoon, given university budgets. It is in such a fashion that I make the claim above that the Canadian academy is racist and only interested in black people insofar as such an interest furthers the agendas and priorities of those who are already there.

BACK TO THE 1960s: RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF BLACK STUDIES

I believe that multiculturalism exists in a variety of forms—official multiculturalism, popular or everyday multiculturalism, and commoditized multiculturalism—and that struggles over its meaning and how it might translate into everyday life are crucial and necessary. However, if we look at how multiculturalism has played itself out in Canada's universities and in

academic culture, it appears, both as an aspiration and a policy, to have been a dismal failure.

In my view, the only way to begin to fix this failure is to return to the 1960s. By this I mean that the establishment of Black Studies programs now would do much to aid the absence of black life in our academy. As I suggested above, in the initial establishment of area studies program like Caribbean Studies and African Studies and even in newer programs like diaspora studies and transnational studies programs, black life still often goes missing.

The challenge for genuine multiculturalism on our campuses calls for administrators with vision, faculty who can see beyond reproducing themselves, and a general commitment to producing campuses that reflect our demographics and the communities within which they are located, as well as a curriculum that is also representative of those communities. Such a vision would move us closer to a practice of multiculturalism that is in line with the everyday realities of our multicultural lives in the close urban spaces we currently inhabit. ❧

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customs were being modified. While differing from each other in their capacity to re-establish themselves—we should not discount significant class distinctions between them—European immigrants rebuilt meaningful lives, families, and communities that also made a mark on the Canadian landscape. Ethnic foodways helped transform the culinary landscapes of cities like Toronto and Montreal. Similarly, the

newcomers' anti-Communism helped shape a pro-capitalist democratic discourse and helped the Canadian state to meet its long-standing objective of destroying the left-wing ethnic press, though international events also mattered in this regard. A more decidedly multicultural but still largely white and still non-egalitarian society emerged out of the many interactions, conflicts, and accommodations just described. In

short, early post-war liberal pluralism contained the complex, sometimes contradictory, and racially exclusionary elements that would inform official multiculturalism of the 1970s. ❧

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