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OMNES : The Journal of Multicultural Society

2020, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 81-113, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14431/omnes.2020.01.10.1.81>

Article

Challenging the Narrative of Canadian Multicultural Benevolence: A Feminist Anti-Racist Critique*

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Abstract

This article points at the limits of Canadian multicultural citizenship from a feminist anti-racist perspective. It aims to illustrate the racialization effects of Canadian multiculturalism as a biopolitical apparatus of state-diversity-management that depoliticizes civil society's decolonial and anti-racist struggles. This article reclaims the necessity of challenging Canada's narrative of benevolence towards immigrants and so-called visible minorities and proposes to flip the script from an unproblematic focus on the failures of multiculturalism such as tropes about the ghettoization and excessive religious demands of visible minorities towards a genuine engagement with the many contradictions of Canada's society. Given that multiculturalism can adopt a wide range of meanings, my argument is that multiculturalism should not simply be researched as an ideological position, but analyzed through the specific historical conditions that have led to its enshrinement in Canada; changes in policy and political party discourse; its power as an apparatus of racialization; and its potential to act both as a tool to protect migrants, racialized communities and minority groups and a vehicle to engage genuinely with Canadian society's contradictions and structural inequalities.

Keywords : Canadian multiculturalism, settler colonialism, racialized governmentality, feminist theory, critical race theory, alternative infrastructures of citizenship

* The project that gave rise to these results received the support of a fellowship from "la Caixa" Foundation (ID 100010434). The fellowship code is LCF/BQ/AA17/11610049.

Introduction

Canada is perceived by the general public as a tolerant and welcoming society. Furthermore, Canada has been lauded internationally for its pioneering commitment to multiculturalism (Thobani, 2018). Multiculturalism is supported in Canada at a policy level, legislatively by the *Multiculturalism Act*, and constitutionally by section 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (Beaman, 2017, p. 4). At a more complex level, however, multiculturalism can be defined as a biopolitical form of governance that regulates the following triangulation: Canadian settler society (English and French), Indigenous populations, and racialized immigrants (Thobani, 2018, p. 167; Winter, 2014, p. 132). Biopolitical governance is a Foucauldian concept that can be briefly defined as the exercise of power through the administration of life via population control (Preciado, 2013, p. 45). According to Goldberg (2006, p. 358), race is the biopolitical technology par excellence because it has the power to fashion the stranger who does not belong to the nation according to colonial understandings of Europeaness. Although it is beyond the scope of this article to consider Indigenous challenges to the legitimacy or sovereignty of Canada as a nation state (Simpson, 2014), it is absolutely crucial to remain critical of any multicultural rhetoric that conveniently includes First Nations and Indigenous people within Canada's "multicultural mosaic."

On one hand, Canadian critical race and feminist scholars such as Thobani (2007, 2018), Bannerji (1996) and Razack (2001, 2013) argue that Canada's multicultural policy originates from an unproblematized national narrative of benevolence that has never fully accounted for the state's foundation on settler colonialism and racialized hierarchies of citizenship. They denounce neoliberal multicultural discourses that merely celebrate certain forms of cultural diversity. A depoliticized celebration of diversity, these theorists contend, relegates the struggles of communities and individuals of color to the depoliticized realm of cultural identity, while obscuring institutionalized racism and other socio-economic

inequalities. On the other hand, it is important to note that multiculturalism has undergone a considerable decline in support, especially (but not exclusively) under ex-Prime Minister Stephen Harper's conservative government.

Furthermore, Québécois political powers have long distanced themselves from identifying with multiculturalism in favor of an intercultural model of integration (Bouchard, 2016)—as recently evidenced by Québec's ban on religious symbols. Anti-multiculturalism is not exclusively happening in Québec. In fact, the promotion for the preservation of different cultural, religious, racial and ethnic groups has become increasingly reversed by various governments across the political spectrum (Bilge, 2013; Winter, 2014; Selby, Barras, & Beaman, 2018). Both in Canada and beyond, the general rise of right-wing nationalism across Western liberal democracies is in many cases supported by rhetoric about the failures of multiculturalism, which is accused of having provided too much accommodation to foreign cultures and promoting racial ghettoization.

Multiculturalism has been subject to such levels of political polarization that any individual seeking to understand the post 9/11 War on Terror, the racialization of Muslims, the strengthening of national borders, and the general backlash against refugees, must be somehow familiar with the many paradoxes associated with multicultural models of governance. Philosophers and political theorists such as Tully (1996) and Kernerman (2005) have given up on the possibility of “a united Canadian home space” all together, and for those “on the receiving end of the power of Canada and its multiculturalism” (that is, racialized immigrants and visible minorities), any potential for multiculturalism to become an emancipatory anti-racist framework remains extremely limited as long as multiculturalism continues to create and manage cultural differences “from above” (Bannerji, 1996, p. 124; Cannon, 1995; Thobani, 2007). Given that multiculturalism can adopt a wide range of meanings, my argument is that multiculturalism should not simply be researched as an ideological position, but analyzed through the specific historical con-

ditions that have led to its enshrinement in Canada; changes in policy and political party discourse, its power as an apparatus of racialization; and its potential to act both as a tool to protect migrants, racialized communities and minority groups, and a vehicle to genuinely engage with Canadian society's contradictions and structural inequalities. As religious studies scholar Beaman (2017, p. 5) has noted, multiculturalism must always be critically evaluated to determine who is using it and for what purposes. In this article, I identify three major significations of multiculturalism.

The first one is multiculturalism as it is most commonly framed by official government and political party discourse: As a celebration of diversity, a gesture of tolerance and accommodation or, in other words, benevolence. Usually, conservative and xenophobic oppositions to multiculturalism tend to be based on this understanding of multiculturalism, with such oppositions contending that multicultural accommodations have gone too far and that stricter limits must be placed on Canadian tolerance. This is the employment of multiculturalism (whether supporting or opposing "diversity") mostly critiqued in this article.

A second understanding of multiculturalism can be derived from critical race and feminist perspectives, which bring attention to the fact that Canada's frequent claim to benevolence towards migrants (see Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's tweets, 2017) can be a tool of both settler colonialism and border violence in itself (Gross, 2017). Multicultural critics from this perspective are not arguing that multiculturalism has gone too far. Quite the opposite, even though they recognize multiculturalism's link to civil right movements, feminist critical race scholars reject the idea that multiculturalism has brought an end to racism in Canada (Thobani, 2007, p. 78). Furthermore, as I will elaborate in the second and third sections of this article, they contend that the policy of multiculturalism is a civilizing device of biopower that enforces Canadian citizenship "from above" via the politics of cultural recognition and conditional inclusion. In order to give evidence that, rather than an act of the Canadian state's benevolence given from "above," multicultural cit-

izenship usually has to be fought for and asserted by migrants, members from racialized communities, and other minorities “from below,” I will draw from appeals made to the Supreme Court by the Multani family in 2006 and Zunera Ishaq in 2015, as well as the formation of the Herongate Tenant Coalition in response to Timbercreek’s eviction of 150 town houses in Ottawa in October of 2018. In this sense, I agree that multiculturalism is worth defending only in so far as it retains a clear articulation of colonial, racist and heterosexist power dynamics still at play (that is, not part of an amended past) in Canadian society that have justified the need for legal protection of racialized minorities in the first place.

There is a third conception of multiculturalism, which is built upon the second one, that looks at alternative infrastructures of citizenship forged “from below” that reflect deeper networks of coexistence and critical understandings of national identity. In other words, instances of citizenship where individuals engage with the many contradictions of Canadian society (pervasive racism, heterosexism, the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people and a violent border regime) while navigating their diverse needs and negotiating their relationships with others beyond traditional state channels (Selby et al., 2018). As I will elaborate in the final section, these instances of citizenship do not necessarily need to be framed within the language of official multiculturalism, and they can be found in everyday life, in political actions of solidarity independent from the state, or in other artistic and cultural practices.

In order to denaturalize Canada’s narrative of multicultural benevolence (Kernerman, 2005), this paper will put a variety of texts in conversation, such as Canada’s racist immigration policies prior to multiculturalism, present cultural narratives of white supremacy, and contemporary methods of surveillance, criminalization and racialization that operate within a multicultural framework. I will borrow from Cacho (2012, p. 17) the notion that critical race and feminist critiques are methodologies of social value that contest erasure, reveal neglect, call out contradictions, claim injustice, and make hidden racialization processes

explicit. My research lies at the intersection of migration studies, critical race, postcolonial and feminist theory. It aims to offer an interdisciplinary theoretical framework through which to pursue interest in multicultural policy and citizenship, while pointing at the necessity of more research that can make visible coalitional politics and cultural practices that move beyond “liberal politics of rights and inclusion in the nation” (Wright, 2018, p. 114).

A Brief history of Canadian Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework

Historically, there are a number of acts that demonstrate Canada’s preference for immigrants of white, European descent, or what Thobani (2007) has called “the national commitment to Keep Canada White” (p. 90). The first Canadian immigration laws were primarily concerned with the twin-nation building goals of promoting settlement and managing undesirable would-be-settlers (Gross, 2017). The 1885 Chinese Immigration Act restricted the influx of Chinese migration to Canada on the grounds that they would bring immorality and threaten the pure character of the Aryan race. The subsequent 1923 Chinese Exclusion Act required those of Chinese descent, even if born in Canada, to register with the government to prove their compliance with the new restrictions. A wide array of measures was taken in order to prevent immigration before it happened. The Continuous Passage Requirement (1908) prohibited the landing of any immigrants who did not come to Canada by continuous journey from the country of which they were natives or citizens, thus preventing significant amounts of immigration from Asia that involved numerous stops. Furthermore, during the 1910s, Canadian immigration officials campaigned to dissuade Black American farmers from migrating north (Gross, 2017; Thobani, 2007).

Understandings of immigration remained assimilative during the high immigration period after the Second World War (Deb, 2002). The 1947 First Canadian Citizenship Act differentiated between natural born

citizens and naturalized immigrants. According to Thobani (2007, p. 89), this act created a racialized and hierarchical understanding of citizenship because it reinforced the state's right to denial and revocation of immigrants' citizenship on the basis of disloyalty and treason. Furthermore, it also introduced a deportation clause that did not apply to "natural" Canadian-born settler citizens. The Canadian Citizenship Act stipulated unequal eligibility criteria for naturalized citizenship on the basis of linguistic proficiency in English or French and required longer residency requirements for non-white immigrants. In a speech a month after the Act was passed, the Prime Minister Mackenzie King reiterated the state's rights in selecting persons regarded as desirable future citizens on the grounds that "the people of Canada do not wish, as a result of mass migration, to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population" (Thobani, 2007, p 90). In such a way, the desirable (white) Canadian settler was separated from the suspicious, policed, racialized immigrant "both at and within the border" (Gross, 2017).

During the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, Canada's administration had a handful of strategic reasons to enshrine multiculturalism. Among them was the need for an increased urban population growth and market labor force due to the displacement of indigenous and First Nations populations onto reserves. The influence from the civil rights movement also raised national awareness of the damaging effects of overt racial distinctions in state policy (Cannon, 1995; Thobani, 2007, p. 98). Paradoxically, Canada's growing need for self-definition as an emergent independent white settler state who welcomed migration (in contrast to the United States) co-existed with a North-American partnership to limit migrants' movements between the two nations (Gross, 2017, n.p.).

Indeed, these changes gave way to a period of citizenship reformation that eliminated racial classifications in immigration policies and increased previously excluded groups' access to Canadian citizenship. For example, along with the Immigration Regulations Act of 1962, which emphasized the need for an increased labor market force, a point system was introduced in 1967 to reward prospective immigrants depending on

their skill levels in the fields of language, education and profession—instead of focusing on their race or country of origin (Thobani, 2007, p. 97; Selby et al., 2018). When larger influxes of nonwhite immigrants moved to Canada, the patriotic national myth transitioned from that of a settler nation to that of a multicultural nation of immigrants (Caldwell, Leroux, & Leung, 2013).

Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework

There is a general consensus among scholars that multiculturalism was conceived in 1971 primarily to manage fragmentations between English Canada and Québec by equally recognizing both as the two founding [white settler colonial] nations (Bannerji, 1996; Bouchard, 2016; Caldwell et al., 2013; Kernerman, 2005; Thobani, 2007; Winter, 2014;). According to Deb (2002: 202), the 1867 British North American Act created a Confederation that united British North American colonies in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Eastern and Western Canada as a response to threats of American invasion and annexation in their territories. However, the Confederation did not reconcile historically rooted differences between English Canadians who viewed Québec as just another province, and Francophones who saw themselves as an equal “founding nation” (Deb, 2002: 233).

One of the most important sociocultural changes in Canada during the 1960’s and 1970’s was Québec’s Quiet Revolution, where the proliferation of separatist and nationalist movements substantially challenged the unity of the Canadian Confederation. The 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism recommended multiculturalism as a way of developing the Canadian Confederation on the basis of equal partnership between the “two [settler] founding races,” taking into account the contributions made by other ethnic groups (Cannon, 1995, p. 244). Furthermore, the 1969 Official Languages Act implemented a government bilingual policy as a “basis for survival of Canada as a country” (Bouchard, 2016, p. 92). According to Bouchard (2016), multiculturalism

emerged as an unsettled system because white separatist Québécois did not feel sufficiently recognized within the multicultural Canadian “mosaic” concept, which rejected a pluri-national concept of Canada in favour of the notion that there is “no majority culture.” Increased tensions between Québec and Anglo-Canada became even more evident when the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) kidnapped and murdered British diplomat James Cross. In response to the terrorist attack, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau re-asserted that Canada did not have “a single or double face but rather many,” arguably implying that any of “the many faces” could be superimposed on top of the white settler base and thus reinforcing a colonial narrative (Gross, 2017).

The policy of Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework (1971) could be alternatively interpreted as an electoral strategy seeking support from both the Québécois voter base (because it stressed that state funding for the cultural promotion of ethnic groups would be provided within the context of Canada’s two charter groups and two official languages) while also aiming for the “ethnic vote” that would elevate international perceptions of Canada as an open and tolerant multi-ethnic nation (Cannon, 1995, p. 244; Bannerji, 1996, p. 106; Kernerman, 2005, p. 94; Winter, 2014, p. 141). The problem with Canada’s marketing of multicultural benevolence, as I will further elaborate in the following sections, is that using multiculturalism as a tool to imagine “a coherent national identity” requires the conditional inclusions of “Other” ethnic groups into “a narrative that reiterates settler myths of origin” (Caldwell et al., 2013, p. 9). Multiculturalism thus arises as a biopolitical form of governance that regulates the internal differences of Canadian settler society (English and French) in relation to racialized immigrants and Canada’s Indigenous population—Canada’s racial triangulation (Mackey, 1998, p. 50 as cited in Thobani, 2007, p.145; 2018, p. 167; Winter, 2014, p. 132).

As Simpson (2016) puts it, Canada is a settler society whose multicultural, liberal and democratic structure and performance of governance seeks an ongoing settlement in Indigenous and First Nations land. In

the following sections, I will continue to elaborate feminist and anti-racist arguments that critique multiculturalism for justifying a cultural, political, and philosophical narrative of progress and individual freedom while performing what Lowe (2015) has termed “the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions” (p. 4): That Canada is built upon the racism of enslaved labor and the ongoing colonization of Indigenous and First Nations peoples.

In her work *Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lowe (2015) identifies a colonial strategy based on structures of affirmation and forgetting: “Affirmation of desire for political economic rights, forgetting conditions of collective enslavement” (p. 68). The 1997 Calgary Declaration, signed by all Canadian premiers and territorial leaders except, quite tellingly, Québec’s Lucien Bouchard, asserts that “Canada’s gift of diversity includes Aboriginal peoples and cultures, the vitality of the English and French languages and a multicultural citizenry drawn from all parts of the world” and adds that “one does not tolerate a gift, one celebrates it” (Kernerman, 2005, p. 17). Such a statement not only re-articulates the genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples as something of the past that has been amended and can now be simply “celebrated” as cultural richness and diversity, it also erases the histories of black and Asian immigrants whose labor and resources built the Canadian economy (in spite of harsh conditions of non-citizenship) by constructing them as “urban and recent” (McKrittick, 2006: 92) and therefore as outsiders to the Canadian collective imagination (Thobani, 2018, p. 169). Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 549) identify a trend of recurring to the “amnesia archive” in the United States that I think is quite relevant to the Canadian context, whereby moral panics about the minoritization of the white population are used in order to avoid more substantial discussions about the ongoing exploitation of racialized “Others.” Similarly, the erasure of Indigenous dispossession and black enslavement from Canadian history enables the structures of white supremacy to stay in place, operating to “install White settlers both as owners of the land and as dominant over all others” (Razack, 2013, p. 206). Indeed, distinctions between Anglo

and Franco Canada become relatively insignificant when they are both understood as part of the same settler colonial project (Bannerji, 1996, p. 107). However, the successes of multicultural marketing lie precisely in its ability to shift the national identity from that of a white settler state to a multicultural one, refiguring the image of Canada as a nation of diversity and tolerance (Gross, 2017; Thobani, 2018).

The Multicultural Apparatus of Racialization

In this section, I further explore the multiple and intertwined ways in which official multiculturalism actually constitutes and exacerbates difference. I will argue that the liberalization of immigration and citizenship legislation brought by official multicultural policies included non-whites in the formation of the Canadian “we” (Winter, 2014), but maintained their racialization by a) strengthening Canada’s border regime according to hierarchical principles of desirable (white) citizenship, and b) constructing both immigrants and people of color as permanent strangers via state-assigned categories such as “visible minority”—effectively extending the border within the nation’s very own boundaries.

Ahmed Hussen, the current Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, considers “the luck of geography” (that is, being surrounded by oceans on three sides and by the United States on the border) a significant factor contributing to the widespread support for immigration and multiculturalism, simply because it grants Canada greater power to select who and who does not immigrate to the country (Gross, 2017, n.p.). The Multiple Borders Strategy (MBS) is a broad strategy in partnership with the United States that re-charts Canada’s borders in order to enhance migration regulation. The MBS’s (2003) stated goal is to “push the border out” of Canada’s geographic perimeter in order to “keep refugees and other so-called undesirable travelers away from Canada’s territorial frontiers and block them from seeking asylum” (Arbel, 2016, pp. 826–827). It reconfigures the border not as a geo-political line but rather a continuum of checkpoints where a migrant’s journey can be interrogated

and interrupted before she reaches the border (Gross, 2017). Raymond Williams (1977 as cited in Lowe, 2015, p. 19) identifies those elements of the past that continue to haunt the present (Gordon, 1997), but are rendered invisible within contemporary social formations, as “the residual.” For example, while “the explicitly racist measures” of past immigration policies “necessitated a public disavowal of racist border violence that attended the shift to the race blind points system,” residual strategies of border enforcement have remained continuous, albeit from a geographical distance, within Canada’s lauded commitment to multiculturalism (Gross, 2017, n.p.). In such a way, the Safe Third Country Agreement (2004) resembles the 1908 Continuous Passage Requirement (mentioned in the first section of this article) by requiring asylum seekers to claim refugee status in whichever country they first arrive in denying them any agency to choose their destiny and, indeed, preventing immigration before it happens.

Racialized Governmentality

Mills (2008, p. 1394 as cited in Bilge, 2013, p. 161) argues that the same modernity that brought liberalism into existence as a supposedly general set of political norms, also brought race into existence as a set of restrictions and entitlements governing the application of those norms. Similarly, Canada’s embracement of liberal values of multicultural freedom from discrimination regardless of culture, ethnicity and race, coexists with new—and not so new—forms of racializing surveillance which Simone Browne (2015, p. 8) defines as “enactments of surveillance [that] reify boundaries along racial lines, thereby reifying race, and where the outcome of this is often discriminatory.” Governmentality is a Foucauldian concept referring not just to forms of regulation associated with the state, but to broader forms of conducting and limiting the actions of others (Foucault, 1982, 2001, p. 341 as cited in Bilge, 2013, p.162). Foucault understood governmentality as the passage from the conduct of territories to the conduct of populations with disciplinary power, which

required surveillance mechanisms of control. Modern governmentality, in contrast, would not need to impose discipline through surveillance, but by “conducting subjects’ agency” (Salvanou, 2013, p. 10; Kernerman, 2005, p. 101). However, as mentioned in the introduction of this article, governmentality is highly racialized and has the power to classify immigrants and other minorities as undesirable citizens. In that sense, sovereign and disciplinary formulations work together, especially when it comes to conducting black and non-white bodies (Browne, 2015, p. 38).

The contradictions of liberal racialized governmentality (Bilge, 2013) become even more apparent when imperial nations such as Canada and the United States encourage the rise of a global migration system while they increasingly restrict the kinds of people allowed to move within their borders (Lowe, 2015). Exporting border violence outside of Canada’s perimeter arguably allows the managed order of its immigration system to appear as “organically produced,” constructing all immigrants “as the recipients of Canadian fairness and benevolence” (Gross, 2017, n.p.). In the following paragraphs, I will explain how, within a context of transnational migration, once immigrants have already entered the bounded national territory from outside, the border continues to follow them from within (Bosniak, 2008). Additionally, I will further elaborate on critical race and feminist critiques of the policy of multiculturalism as a civilizing device of biopower that enforces Canadian citizenship “from above” via the politics of cultural recognition and conditional inclusion.

The liberalization of immigration and citizenship legislation brought by official multicultural policies included non-whites in the formation of the Canadian “Us” but maintained their racialization and constructed them as permanent strangers via assigning them the category “immigrant communities” (even if they are second or third generation Canadian born citizens), “new Canadians,” and/or “visible minorities” (Thobani, 2007, p. 145). The category “visible minorities” is especially significant here as a device for biopolitical state identification, because assigned visibility not only indicates difference and inferiority from the invisible—and

therefore un-problematized—norm, it also signifies a preamble to special treatment and tolerated existence from the nation’s (white) cultural core (Bannerji, 1996, p. 121).

Minorities are defined as minorities only in hierarchical structures of power. They are produced by an ideology of differentiated citizenship and not just by demographic numbers (Asad, 2003, p. 175). The power of the multicultural state to assign visibility is ideological in so far as it “communalizes”: It constitutes communities as discrete racial, ethnic, and cultural groups existing within its territorial borders, yet outside the symbolic bounds of the nation (Thobani, 2007, p. 149). Canada’s un-problematized white majority symbolically understands itself as an open society composed of individuals. Minority categories, in contrast, are constructed as different (they are not the point of reference for national identity), and are generally characterized by an idea of a closed, holistic community, where the individual is always subdued to the bounded collective (Winter, 2014: 135). In this way, non-white people are cornered into a discursive space where they can be represented as communities “in need of being taught the virtues of tolerance and cosmopolitanism under white supervision” (Thobani, 2007: 148).

The specificity of Canada’s Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework as a site with the potential to harbor white supremacist narratives (Thobani, 2007, p. 146) resides in that minority groups are supposedly encouraged to practice their “authentic traditions” except where they are regarded as illiberal or where they contradict the basic principles of a supposedly liberal democratic society (Kernerman, 2005, p. 96). Those who are racialized are thus subjected to social punishment and regulation on the grounds that they cannot govern themselves according to liberal principles (Cacho, 2012). Muslims in particular have been a main target of what Razack (2001) terms “the culturalization of race,” or what others have named “new racism” (Gilroy, 2012). While traditional forms of racism rest on the notion of a biologically based inferiority, “the culturalization of racism” could be defined as a more covert practice of domination encoded in the assumption of cultural or acquired in-

feriority that, according to Razack (2001), “thrives in a social climate that is officially pluralist” (p. 60). A main characteristic of new racisms and specifically Islamophobia is that culture—not race—becomes the means through which the internal “Other” is marked via a compatibility rhetoric focusing on supposedly core cultural values, wherein racial tropes abound “masquerading as cultural, linguistic, religious, geographic or temporal attributes” (Bilge, 2013, p. 160).

Zunera Ishaq: National Character and the Co-optation of Feminism in Multicultural Discourse

In the case against the Minister of Citizenship, Zunera Ishaq (2015), a Pakistani permanent resident in Canada who passed her citizenship test in 2013, expressed feeling under threat that she would be forced to remove her niqab at the Canadian citizenship oath ceremony under section 13.2 of the CIC’S Citizenship Ceremonies Manual. To this, the then Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism [emphasis mine], Jason Kenney, replied: “You’re standing up in front of your fellow citizens making a solemn commitment to respect Canada’s laws ... and I just think it’s not possible to do that with your face covered” (Ishaq, 2015, para. 49). In a similar fashion to Mackenzie King in 1947, Kenney invoked the notion of citizenship as a privilege and not a right (Ishaq, 2015, para. 39). According to him, if the applicant hypothetically chose not to remove her niqab and was denied citizenship, she would nonetheless retain the status of permanent resident, so “any impact on her religious freedom” would be minimal (para. 39). Such discourse reinforces the entitlement of the sovereign (white) Canadian multicultural state to exercise racialized governmentality, or to decide who counts as a Canadian citizen and who is destined to remain outside of the nation’s boundaries from within.

To violently question the desirability of other’s citizenship from a position of hegemonic whiteness is deemed legitimate against the threat of illegitimate violence from others who, even after having been benev-

olently included in the nation (in the case of Ishaq, as a permanent resident), dare to disturb “the national character” (recall Mackenzie King’s speech in 1947). Writing from an Australian context, Sara Ahmed (2000) notes that encounters with [those labeled as] strangers serve two functions: Firstly, they demarcate national space as a place of belonging in which “some bodies are recognized as out of place” (pp. 97–98). Secondly, the construction of the nation space takes place alongside the production of the national character as instances in which the nation can take the shape of the body of an individual, or an individual can claim to embody a nation – in the case of Australia, but also of Canada due to its similar settler state structure, the national character has a white and hegemonically western masculine core (p. 99). National characteristics, which are embodied in whiteness, are treated as moral indicators of civilization, freedom, and modernity. The true Canadian subjects – the conductors of multicultural governance – are tolerant and have a cosmopolitan sensibility, while people of color and their tightly bounded cultural communities, are easily associated with intolerance, authoritarianism, and essentialism (Thobani, 2007, p. 155).

Berlant and Warner (1998, p. 549) define “national heterosexuality” as the mechanism by which a core national culture can be imagined as a sanitized space of sentimental feeling and immaculate behavior, a space of pure citizenship. Colonial designations of “Europeanness” and “whiteness,” together with the hegemony of Christian values and cultural heritage, tend to be depicted as the legitimate bearers of modernity, gender equality, individualism, and human rights (Butler, 2008; Bilge, 2013). In order to protect these freedoms from “the putative orthodoxies associated with new immigrant communities” (Butler, 2008, p. 2), the state apparatus must produce narratives that deem freedom, other religions that are not Christianity, namely Islam, and modernity as mutually exclusive. In the context of Canadian multiculturalism, sexuality and gendered norms are increasingly being mobilized to strengthen borders (both geographically and ideologically) and to distinguish good citizens from “undesired” ones (Richardson, 2018, p. 1257). For example, the 2015

Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, which included denial of admission to Canada to permanent and temporary residents who are polygamous, clearly overstated the presence of forced marriage and honor killings among minorities as an imminent threat to Canada's haven for gender equality. In such a way, the Act is ideologically framed within Berlant and Warner's (1998, p. 549) concept of national heterosexuality, and it constitutes a clear example of border demarcation between desirable and undesirable citizens on the basis of gender equality.

Thobani (2018, p. 168) associates racializing tropes based on the basis of gender equality to a neoliberal project that aims to combine the privatization of public services with biopolitics on the one hand and the surveillance of racialized communities domestically with external foreign policies of intervention on the other. Thobani's (2018) theory of neoliberal multiculturalism is very much exemplified in the fact that the Conservative party, which opposed same sex marriage until 2016, celebrated "Canada as a safe haven for Iranian gays" in an attempt to conscript Canadian queers into supporting the War on Terror in Iran (Wright, 2008: 110). Critical race feminists are not arguing that, in order to achieve some notion of racial equality, feminists should abandon any critique of sexism and homophobia among Canada's non-white population (Rajiva, 2014). However, they advocate critiquing and challenging the ways in which feminism has become "an empty signifier of the good which can and will be invoked to legitimate a variety of different scenarios, not all of which promote gender justice" (Fraser, 2009, p. 114). Jason Kenney's speech regarding Zunera Ishaq's undesirable citizenship is a clear example of why multiculturalism must be studied as a sociological phenomenon that will be subjected to and appropriated by competing discourses. Whether multiculturalism is enshrined as the primary political site to produce and manage minoritarian differences, or whether political concerns are framed in direct opposition to multiculturalism and the rights of social minorities, both positions ultimately view racial and ethnic minorities as "objects" requiring state control—and feminism is being co-opted to justify such regulations (Thobani, 2007, p. 154). Therefore,

it is the duty of critical scholars to keep questioning and analyzing what is left unproblematized and privatized (structural racism), and what becomes available for public regulation (the bodies of Muslim women).

Ultimately, the Court declared the new oath policy unlawful and Zunera Ishaq was later able to attain her citizenship status. However, Ishaq fought a year-long battle through the courts to assert her right to wear the niqab while taking the citizenship oath (Beaman, 2017, p. 10). Ishaq (2015, para. 63) invoked the *Multiculturalism Act* in her aid, pointing to the sections that require federal officials to “(c) promote policies, programs and practices that enhance the understanding of and respect for the diversity of the members of Canadian society; (f) generally, carry on their activities in a manner that is sensitive and responsive to the multicultural reality of Canada.” Perhaps the obvious needs to be stated, but if it were not because Zunera Ishaq rejected previous accommodations offered to her (which forced to either abandon her religious practice or becoming a citizen) and appealed to the federal Court under her right to religious freedom and the *Multiculturalism Act*, the Court would have not declared the new citizenship oath taking policy unlawful and inconsistent with Canadian legislation. Ishaq’s (2005) case evidences that multicultural citizenship is not benevolently given “from above.” It has to be fought for and asserted by migrants, members from racialized communities, and other minorities “from below.”

Multani Singh: From Tolerance to Accommodation

While initial conceptions of multicultural policy stressed the need to end discrimination based on culture and ethnicity, programs designed to perpetuate minorities’ traditions were gradually abandoned from the 1990s onwards (Bouchard, 2016; Thobani, 2018; Winter, 2014). In the 1997 Brighton Report and its subsequent Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism Program Review, ethnocultural associations were no longer invited by the federal government, indicating that multiculturalism was increasingly defined in individualized (neo)liberal terms, whereby

any demands for communitarian recognition became distanced from multiculturalism (Winter, 2014, p. 142). These changes can be associated with an international trend blaming multicultural policies for exercising a form of “passive tolerance” that has allowed ethnic minorities to segregate, live separate lives, and radicalize, and hence ultimately demonstrate a failure to integrate in ways that pose “an internal threat to the security ... of Western nations” (Lentin, 2015, p. 6; Gilroy, 2012; Kyriakides et al., 2009, p. 330).

In Canada, the Citizenship Action Plan (2009) and the Inter-Action Program (2010) promoted a culturally circumscribed meaning of “Canadianness” that emphasized integration with the foundational cultural majority, “reasonable accommodation” (see Bilge, 2013) and the embracement of Canadian basic values as enshrined in the *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms* (Bouchard, 2016, p. 79; Winter, 2014, p. 143). The Multani (2006) case, in which the Supreme Court held that a Gurbaj Singh Multani, a Sikh schoolboy, had the right to wear his kirpan (an article of Sikh faith that resembles a small dagger) to school in Québec, was a catalyst for the Taylor-Bouchard Commission on reasonable accommodation (Beaman, 2017, p. 5). Because Singh’s school board ultimately prohibited Gurbaj from wearing the kirpan on the basis that it was “essentially a dagger” and therefore unsafe, the Multani family turned to the Supreme Court to fight for Gurbaj’s right both to attend public school and practice his religion. The judges in the Multani case (2006) confronted the school board for being “disrespectful to believers in the Sikh religion” and not taking into account “Canadian values based on multiculturalism” (p. 259). The Court argued that it should be the school’s obligation to educate their students in religious tolerance as “the very foundation of our democracy.” Remarkably, the Court also stated that banning the kirpan sends students the message that “some religious practices do not merit the same protection as others” (Multani, 2006, p. 259).

However, Gurbaj would be allowed to wear a kirpan only under certain conditions: It had to be worn under clothes, be carried in a sheath made of wood, or not metal, wrapped and sewn securely, and that the

school personnel be authorized to verify these conditions in a “reasonable” fashion (p. 268). By framing the decision within the framework of accommodation and tolerance, the Court ultimately asserted a form of racialized governmentality, because in order to “accommodate” one must be in the position of power to decide what counts as “reasonable.” The lack of engagement with how reasonableness is socially and culturally constructed within a very specific Western liberal frame hints at the often-obscured fact that civil states are not neutral and constantly intervene in biased ways in cultural life (Bouchard, 2016, p. 79).

Nevertheless, Gurbaj Singh accepted these conditions because he was both committed to his religious belief and to attending public Québécois school. The Court (2006) also pointed to the fact that the Multani family engaged in negotiations with different local actors before turning to law. Indeed, the Court was able to draw from multicultural legislation in order to defend the Multani family, but it was the latter who demonstrated a commitment for deep civic engagement in spite of the school’s board decision. Ultimately, both the Court and the school board reified their position to govern (whether to “accommodate” Multani’s needs, or to reject them all together), while the Multani family engaged with the many contradictions of Canadian society (including rhetoric about “too much accommodation”) while navigating their diverse needs and negotiating their relationships with others beyond traditional state channels (Selby et al., 2018).

Herongate Tenant Coalition: Some are more Welcome than Others, or Socio-ethnic Leveraging

Socio-ethnic leveraging is the process of constructing certain minority groups as socially, culturally, or more or less deviant from the dominant Canadian norm in comparison to other “more liberal” minorities (Winter, 2014, p. 144). An implicit form of socio-ethnic leveraging could be extracted from Trudeau’s 2017 tweet on the 28th of January of 2017 in response to Donald Trump’s travel ban: “to those fleeing persecution,

terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada.” However, facts indicate that, according to multicultural governance, some refugees are more welcome than others: Middle class, lighter skinned and so-called moderate Muslim Syrian refugees are deemed more compatible with the Canadian liberal ethos than, let’s say, black Somali refugees who are not considered equally worthy of state protection, as exemplified by the eviction of 150 townhouses in an area largely populated by Somali refugees in Ottawa’s suburbs, Herongate, in October of 2018. According to McKrittick (2006, p. 96), between the 1960s and the 1970s, many predominantly black neighborhoods and communities in Canada, such as Africville in Halifax and Hogan’s Alley in Vancouver, were demolished as part of urban renewal plans. Herongate was evicted to make way for redevelopment, with no real affordable housing made available to them (CBC, 2018). In Canada, not only is the history of black enslavement erased, but blackness is visibly recognized as being “out of place” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 97).

The Herongate Tenant Coalition was “formed to build power, strength and solidarity among working class people in the Herongate neighborhood of south Ottawa” (HTC, 2020, n.p.). In Issue 2 of the Herongate Tenant Coalition newsletter, they state:

The Herongate area is statistically the most diverse neighborhood in the city, a quintessential global neighborhood, where the smell of varying dishes from cultures all over the world can be experienced as well as banter in a plethora of languages can be heard. It is where many members of racialized communities don’t feel like the “other,” where they don’t have to live in a constant state of apprehension about being told to “go back to your country.” This is one place where we truly feel at ease. As this is the only neighborhood this diverse in the city, the demolition of such a racialized community sends a larger implicit message: we do not want you here. (n.p.)

In this statement, the Herongate Tenant Coalition (HTC) summarizes the three major significations of multiculturalism around which this article is structured. Here, the HTC are engaging with official multicultural discourse about the celebration of diversity, while explicitly stating the pervasiveness of racism in Ottawa. Furthermore, they reclaim an alternative space of citizenship that they had built for themselves, where they can “feel at ease” and relate to one another. The Herongate Tenant Coalition articulates a different reality to the narrative of Canadian benevolence, embodying class solidarity, denouncing structural racism, and recruiting allies to donate to their legal case against Timbercreek Management.

The Multicultural Effect of Neutralizing Anti-Racist Struggles

Gerald Kernerman (2005, p. 93) defines forms of liberal governmentality directed at managing Canada’s diverse population as “multicultural panopticism.” According to him, multicultural panopticism may take an ironic tone of celebrating diversity while being hypersensitive to danger. Premised on the potential of the Other to move beyond the limits of Canadian benevolence, “it can shift quickly into policing mode as certain groups begin to get ‘unruly’” (Kernerman, 2005, p. 102). In this section, I will argue that Canadian multiculturalism has depoliticizing and civilizing effects, because it entraps racialized communities into seeking to correct distorted representations of themselves by placing their liberalism on display.

Multicultural critics argue that conveying difference into “diversity” is a way of mitigating power relations. In *Heteropatriarchy and the Three Pillars of White Supremacy*, Smith (2006, pp. 67–68) eloquently synthesizes that white supremacy is constituted by separated and distinct, but still interrelated logics: Slavery/capitalism, genocide/colonialism, and Orientalism/war. Canadian official multicultural discourse and its rhetoric of celebrating diversity does not sufficiently problematize any of the pillars aforementioned. Instead, multiculturalism-as-diversity-management governs “cultural difference” according to the principles of liberal

tolerance. It is important to note that such difference is not articulated as the consequence of social processes constructed through race, class, gender, and other power relations (Ahmed, 2000, p. 97; Bannerji, 1996, p. 113). Rather, the immigrant or the visible minority's difference is fetishized and cut off from its histories of determination (Ahmed, 2000). An example of fetishization is the kind of orientalist discourse, which Zunera Ishaq was undoubtedly subjected to, that dictates the incompatibility between Islam and Enlightenment definitions of progress and modernity and homogenizes Muslims into a tightly bound monolithic bloc (Said, 2002; Cooke, 2000; Mernissi, 2011). Historically, Muslim gendered veiling practices have been fetishized as a symbol of hyper-visible cultural difference that signifies the inherently patriarchal and therefore illiberal "nature" of Islam (Mohanty, 1988, 63; Hoodfar, 1993).

Fetishization implies that the main factors excluding visible minorities from full participation in society are different forms of cultural barriers (such as a lack of English and French language skills), thereby placing the onus for racial inequalities experienced by people of color onto their culture's inadequacies and individual lack of capital (Thobani, 2007, p. 156). Therefore, official multicultural discourse could be argued to reinforce, once again, "a colonial division of humanity through structures of affirmation and forgetting" (Lowe, 2015, p. 68): On one hand, it promotes the making of so-called cultural demands and provides opportunities to access citizenship rights as an act of benevolence. On the other, it conveniently forgets the conditions created by a history of colonization, enslavement, and indentured labor that have led to the socio-economic inequalities that many immigrants and so-called visible minorities face in Canada (McKrittick, 2006).

The fetishization of difference that allows multiculturalism to "celebrate diversity" depoliticizes and mitigates the power relations underlying difference (Bannerji, 1996, p. 111). In a similar fashion to homonormativity, which only celebrates gay subjects as long as they are contained within privatized and depoliticized gay cultures anchored in domes-

ticity and consumption (Duggan, 2003, p. 179, as cited in Wright, 2018, p. 108; Puar, 2007, p. 7), official multicultural discourse fuels market-driven diversity governmentality and socio-ethnic leveraging (Winter, 2014), while leaving intact the root causes of structural inequalities and global capitalism sustained by interlocking systems of racist and heterosexist oppression (Bilge, 2013, p. 162).

In order to make demands on the basis of the state's multicultural responsibilities, those defined as cultural outsiders have to accept and reproduce their own classification in culturalist terms (Kernerman, 2005). Therefore, anti-racist multicultural critics denounce the policy's disciplinary and civilizing power to entrap marginalized actors into justifying their presence and demonstrating that their citizenship practices strengthen (both Zunera Ishaq and Gurbaj Singh are examples of this), rather than challenge, the political community by placing their liberalism on display (Kernerman, 2005, p. 90). As Chow (2002) puts it:

It was a racism that had turned race and culture into class distinctions so that, in order to head toward the upper echelons of society, one would, even (and especially) if one was a member of the colonized race, have no choice but to collaborate with the racist strategies that were already built into the stratification informing the distribution and consumption of knowledge as well as its compensation. (p. 12)

In her literary analysis of the “noble savage” trope in Aphra Behn's *Oroonko* (1688), Lowe (2015, p. 52) identifies a new logic of coloniality in new world colonial encounters, whereby nobility would be granted to racialized subjects through comparison to European whiteness. Similarly, Homi Bhabba (1980, as cited in Asad, 2002, p. 178) notes that racialized communities must now face the responsibilities of cultural translation. Cultural translation means that in order to maintain and perpetuate themselves as a group in a multicultural setting, racialized communities must use the avenue of “speaking culture to power” (Thobani,

2007, p. 159; Kernerman, 2005, p. 93). In other words, Canadian official multiculturalism neutralizes anti-racist struggles by requiring migrants and so-called visible minorities to recode race and socioeconomic inequality into the politics of cultural diversity (Thobani, 2018, p. 170).

Multicultural Citizenship “from Below”

Himani Bannerji (1996) cites her reasons for not being entirely on board with the multicultural project: “Concentration and labor camps, Japanese internment, the Indian Act and reserves, apartheid and ethnic ‘homelands’ extend their long shadows over the project of my triumphal march into the federal utopia of a multiculturally differentiated citizenship” (p. 114). There is general consensus among a variety of scholars (Ahmed, 2000; Bannerji, 1996; Bilge, 2013; Kernerman, 2005; Thobani, 2007; Winter, 2014) that multiculturalism as a form of diversity management completely fails to combat systemic racism. Therefore, multicultural policy will remain disconnected from the reality of prejudice, racism, and criminalization of visible minorities “unless it is clearly articulated in combination with a policy of antiracism” (Beaman, 2017; Bilge, 2013; Cannon, 1995, p. 249).

According to Lowe (2015, p. 13), liberal arguments were much less important to the passage of the Slavery Abolition Act (1834) than the revolts and the everyday resistance practices of enslaved peoples themselves. It is important not to forget that multiculturalism was, to a certain degree, not an ahistorical given “from above”—but a response to the continual demands and struggles of racialized people in Canada (Bannerji, 1996, p. 125). Even when (mis)named as ethnic communities and reshaped by multiculturalism’s communalizing biopower, “the political potential of the civil society” should not be neglected (Bannerji, 1996, p. 125). Gerald Kernerman (2005, p. 27) believes that a transformative politics should refuse the invitation to participate in “the endless quest for a Canadian home space” and focus on pursuing a “creative” politics instead. Such a politics might mean “leaving behind political imaginary

offering migrants the gift of the nation” (Wright, 2018, p. 117) in order to delegitimize the hegemonic narrative of Canadian multicultural benevolence.

There is a third conception of multiculturalism, which is built upon critical race and feminist critiques, that looks at alternative infrastructures of citizenship forged “from below” that reflect deeper networks of coexistence and critical understandings of national identity. In other words, instances of citizenship where individuals engage with the many contradictions of Canadian society (pervasive racism, heterosexism, the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous people and a violent border regime) while navigating their diverse needs and negotiating their relationships with others beyond traditional state channels (Selby et al., 2018). As I will elaborate in the next section, these instances of citizenship do not necessarily need to be framed within the language of official multiculturalism, and they can be found in everyday life, in political actions of solidarity independent from the state, or in artistic and cultural practices.

Alternative Infrastructures of Citizenship

Alternative infrastructures of citizenship can be found in forms of collective organization that build “new affective ties” and foster conscious, critical work that challenges bordering practices, racialized governmentality, colonial and capitalist social relations, racisms and nationalisms (Wright, 2018, p. 115). Alternative infrastructures of citizenship re-organize “the political” beyond rights-based citizenship and calls for equality and inclusion (Lowe, 2008; Wright, 2018). They might also be found in sites of “heterotopy” (Lefebvre, 2003 as cited in Kotronaki, 2018, p. 915) or “spaces of difference” interwoven with the urban space that arise “out of what people do, feel, sense, and come to articulate together as they seek meaning in their daily lives” (p. 914). According to Kotronaki (2018), heterotopies set in motion three intertwined processes:

Changing forms of urban interactions and therefore introducing new patterns of citizenship; shaping and/or extending collective identities and the boundaries of local collective action; and mobilizing new cultural frames of solidarity and meanings of struggle at the transnational level. (p. 915)

Examples of “heterotopy” where migrants, racialized communities and so-called visible minorities extend collective identities and mobilize new cultural frames of solidarity can be found in Ottawa’s Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) comedy and arts collective SPICE. SPICE centers the voices of Queer Trans Black Indigenous People of Color (QTBIPOC), “womxn” (including trans women) and disabled “folx.” At their events, official multicultural narratives of Canadian benevolence are actively challenged by performances that break ethnic community stereotypes, visibilize queer cultures, and parody Canadian heteronormative forms of whiteness.

Apart from looking at potential sites of “heterotopy” and other alternative citizenship infrastructures, it is important to flip the script in dominant narratives about “the failures of multiculturalism” (dissatisfaction from the un-problematized white majority, conflict, excessive religious demands from minorities, ghettoization, etc.) and pay attention to the everyday moments where racialized and non-racialized Canadians informally navigate and negotiate “differences” with mutual respect (Selby et al., 2018, p. 83). These sites of daily experience, cultural production, and political organization beyond the state are worthy of equal consideration by researchers who are seeking to understand multiculturalism as a sociological phenomenon in all of its dimensions.

Conclusion

In this article, I have argued that because multiculturalism was invoked to bridge Anglo/Franco-Canadian ruptures and strengthen a common sense of the Canadian “Us” through the conditional inclusion of

“Others” within a bilingual framework (Winter, 2014), Canada was able to re-articulate its national identity as culturally tolerant in ways that ultimately reinforced white supremacist narratives in less overtly racist terms than previous immigration policies. I have argued that strategies of border enforcement and racialization remain in coexistence with narratives of benevolence, since the liberal limits of tolerance need to be continuously reasserted through violent racialized governmentalities that treat racial and ethnic minorities as governable objects of state control (Bilge, 2013; Thobani, 2007). Furthermore, I considered Zunera Ishaq’s (2015) and Gurbaj Singh’s (2006) legal cases as examples of “the racially governed” employing the official multicultural apparatus in order to assert their right to full Canadian citizenship. In this sense, multiculturalism is an apparatus worth defending, but it ought to be clearly articulated with anti-racist policies and not just rhetoric about the celebration of diversity. Additionally, I interpreted the Herongate evictions in Ottawa as an example of the effects of official multicultural socio-ethnic leveraging (Winter, 2014). Most importantly, I demonstrated how racialized communities such as the Herongate Tenant Coalition are able to engage with the three major significations of multiculturalism (official rhetoric of benevolence, critical race feminist critique, and political organization “from below”) in order to tackle Canadian society’s pervasive racism, colonialism, and heterosexism and envision alternative infrastructures of citizenship. Ultimately, multiculturalism must be studied as a sociological phenomenon that happens in a network of relations between individuals, communities, and organizations that will appropriate a different definition of multiculturalism depending on their political objectives. Therefore, researchers interested in multicultural policy must consider sites of everyday life, cultural production, and political organization beyond the state (even if not always framed within the language of multiculturalism) as equally valuable sources for understanding Canadian multiculturalism in all of its dimensions.

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Date of submission of the article: October 26, 2019

Date of the peer-review: December 31, 2019

Date of the confirmation of the publication: January 5, 2020