Critical Multiculturalism and Nation-Building
Exploring Systemic Racism in Canada
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Introduction

In Plato's book "*The Republic*", he introduces the idea of a myth as a method of social control and the maintenance of status quo. He used the "myth of the metals" as a technique to maintain harmony in the Athenian polis. As such, notions of justice became predicated on one's willingness to maintain harmony with the city-state. Therefore, anything that challenged or went against the established order was considered a threat to the organic whole. The bureaucratic nature of such an apparatus thus "acts as [a] collective memory [that carries] forward [the] values, principles and traditions" of the polity (Tator 104). Similar to the myth of the metals, Canadian multiculturalism is also a myth - a "myth [that] attempts to explain, rationalize, and resolve insupportable contradictions and problems in [Canadian] society" (Tator 104). Canadian institutions are therefore inherently endowed with the responsibility to maintain the status quo; they do so through policies such as the *Multiculturalism Act of 1971* that feed the embedded discourses within the apparatus.

It is important to note that the foundation upon which the Canadian state stands is one that is built on highly racialized assumptions about particular races. These assumptions have been clearly articulated in the body politic when the Canadian government declared itself a "white nation" – a concept that gets developed in the latter stage of this essay. Widely accepted views about blacks, aboriginals, and other minority groups, help direct the law's hand towards common-sense justification of racialized differences (Kobayashi 40). This approach to justice inevitably leads to the production of new social constructions of racialized bodies. The law therefore becomes a tool that justifies and rationalizes systemic contradictions. This paper will argue that multiculturalism remains a powerful yet illusive ideal which clouds many economic, social and political disparities in Canada. This is because the Multiculturalism Act 1971 fails to address the structural inequalities that are inherited from Canada's colonial past. Thus, in addressing contemporary socio-economic and political problems, one should realize that the Canadian system demands reform.

The paper commences by first providing a brief overview of Canadian government racial intentions in its early nation-building methods. It will analyze the historical framework that led to the creation of the Multiculturalism Act, by using Donald Avery's article the "*Reluctant Host: European Immigration Workers and the Canadian Economy*". From there, the essay will provide a detailed outline of the intention of the Multiculturalism Act as ideology and it will do so by borrowing from the works of Kenneth McRoberts in his book *"Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity"*. Following that, the essay presents some of the mainstream criticisms against the Act. This will be followed by a critical analysis that looks at the case of Black Tickle as the reification of Canada's systemic racism. Lastly, a conclusion will be drawn reiterating the argument that systemic reform is needed in order to avoid the reproduction of racialized policies such as the Multiculturalism Act.

A White Imperialist Canada

Avery (year?) explores the intricate link between racism and economic development in Canada during the early 19th century (Avery 8). He argues that The Imperial vision was to construct a white nation, consisting of Northern British subjects. Agriculture was to be positioned as the backbone of the country's economic structure (Avery 12). However this vision conflicted with industrial developments that were occurring at the time in Britain, and thus, a majority of British citizens worked in factories and were relatively well paid (Avery 18). British citizens were therefore unwilling to do hard labour in Canada. As a result, British industrialists deferred Canada's vision as a white nation, creating a shift in its political trajectory (Avery 18).

In 1886, Canada was faced with the demands to build two new continental railways, and cheap labour was in great need (Avery 21). Between 1896 and 1901, Canada experienced a significant increase in its population due to the amount of immigrants coming to the New World – most immigrants came from "unwanted" nations such as Eastern Europe, and Japan (Avery 23). Nevertheless, the supply of labour eventually met the demand. However, black bodies were not encouraged into the new world since they were seen as "delinquents" and "incapable" of surviving Canada's harsh winters (Avery 20). Moreover, most workers were illegally smuggled by multinational corporations, as means of cheap labour. The country's population thus rose by 35% during that period (Avery 26).

Although the immigrants that were coming to Canada were not the desirable Northern British subject, a country was to be built. As Canada's original dream faded, leaders such as Clifford Sifton altered the *Immigration Act* to assert Canadian solidarity (Avery 30). His political objective was to deport the "unfit" – those who did not contribute to the economic expansion of the nation (Avery 30). Disabled citizens were therefore subject to deportation to their countries of origin. This racialized policy and others like it, signalled that Canada only needed those who could contribute to the economic expansion of the nation (Avery 33). It is therefore questionable whether the political culture of Sifton's time has been reproduced in contemporary multiculturalism policies as products of a deferred dream.

Based on this brief historic overview of Canada's nation-building process, we can see that the history of Canadian nation building is of a distinctly racialized and racist character. This is significant, because this provides the historical context into which the ideology of multiculturalism is ultimately born. This is because immigration policies and the organization of Canadian society were constructed and imagined with a particular race in mind – the white British subject (Avery 13). Thus, the legislative body was not created to promote and achieve equality and justice for all, especially in a multicultural society (Tator 88). Consequently, the legislation and the bureaucratic system "…can neither eliminate nor effectively control racism because the legacy of racism is…interwoven in the collective culture and the common-sense ideology" of the system itself (Tator 88). This in turn leads the state to create a system that justifies and rationalizes the embedded contradictory discourse surrounding freedom and equality. Canada therefore uses the Multiculturalism Act as a tool to mask the inherent contradictions within the political and institutional apparatus.

Examining Multiculturalism

The Multiculturalism Act was coined by Pierre Elliot Trudeau in 1971, in response to the political turbulence in Quebec following the Quiet Revolution, and the socio-political dissatisfaction regarding native treaty rights (McRoberts 123). The purpose of the Act can be stated as follows:

> The Act's central focus was grounded on freeing the individual
> from barriers to opportunity: Such a policy should help break
> down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National
> unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense,

> must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions (McRoberts 125-126).

The Act allows the federal government to act in four different areas regarding cultural identity. Firstly, it allows the government to assist all cultural groups that demonstrate a desire to be part of the collective whole (McRoberts 125). Secondly, it permits the government to offer assistance to all cultural groups in order to overcome barriers that prevent full participation in Canada (McRoberts 125). Thirdly, the Act allows the government to invest significant attention to the "creative encounters and interchange among all Canadian cultural groups in the interest of national unity" (McRoberts 125). Lastly, it encourages the government to assist immigrants in learning one of the official languages of Canada. Yet, despite the stated aim of creating a common base for equality and togetherness; remainder of this paper will show that the Act has ultimately become a plague to national unity and togetherness – those very things for which it advocates.

Views on Multiculturalism

One contested view of multiculturalism in Canada is that it challenges the contemporary way of how people imagine Canada. Those who have imagined Canada as a "white" nation, tend to cling to the old imagined community (Tator 93). Hence, those who disturb the established order of the old Canada are branded as *radicals*, since equality is presumed to exist (Bissoondath 98). People of colour who challenge Canada's legitimacy are therefore seen as a threat to the symbolic order and status hierarchy inherited from the British (Tator 94). This argument is structured on the idea that multiculturalism destroys the common premise upon which many identify themselves as "Canadians". As such, a common sense of Canadian identity becomes blurred through this lens (Tator 94).

Neoconservative critics see multiculturalism as a policy that leads to social divisiveness and "balkanization" (Tator 95). In other words, the policy leads to the creation of ethnic enclaves and racialized ghettos. These critics argue that because these are "closed communities", issues surrounding inclusion are bound to exist (Tator 95). This argument however diverges from systemic problems because it positions racism in the mindset and attitudes of different individual groups (Tator 95). As such, while racism exists, there is no reason to resort to public policies or

government interventions to offer solutions (Tator 95). However, such an argument cannot account for the fact that racial enclaves are also produced as a result of public policies and government intervention. Therefore racism that exists at the individual level in ethnic enclaves is intricately linked to state policies themselves: racism is both an individual and a social phenomenon. Any adequate critique of multiculturalism must therefore take into account both of these dimensions.

Moreover, in framing multiculturalism, the Canadian state gets positioned as the sovereign foundation upon which all cultures must adhere to and comply with. Thus, "…multiculturalism constructs a concept of a common dominant culture that all cultures are multicultural in relation [to] the dominant culture" (Tator 95). However this creates an environment in which different cultures are acceptable only once they operate within a normalizing framework established by the dominant order (Tator 95). In this perspective, the already established hierarchies in Canada are positioned as sovereign above other cultures. This assists the state in its inherent quest to maintain status quo. Consequently, it can be concluded that multiculturalism is a policy of social containment as opposed to political and institutional transformation (Tator 95). In essence, multiculturalism is a symbolic policy aimed at "…[neutralizing] the growing cultural, political, economic, and social demands of minorities for access and equality within all sectors of Canadian society" (Tator 96). As a policy, it also subjugates the voices of minority groups by projecting the appearance of tolerance and accommodation. In doing so, the Act takes an approach that creates the illusion of equality and justice for all (McRoberts 120). Moreover, because Canadian multiculturalism symbolic as opposed to political minority groups are likely to be trapped in the enclaves of their ethnic group; thus they will remain structurally alienated from the body politic of the Canadian state (Angel 27). This critique gave birth to a contemporary race-based analysis of multiculturalism: "critical multiculturalism".

> Critical multiculturalism challenges the traditional political and cultural hegemony of the dominant class or group. It calls for a profound restructuring and reconceptualization of power relations between different cultural and racial communities based on the premise that communities and societies do not exist autonomously but are interwoven together in a web of interrelationships (Tator 98).

Critical multiculturalism thus grasps the root cause of racism by soliciting for a transformation of the institutions that reify and reproduce racist thought, and in so doing, CM makes connections between individual and social dimensions of racism. Thus, CM is the form of critique best positioned to prevent the perpetuation of systemic racism in Canada.

Social Containment: Black Tickle

Black Tickle became a stationary community in the 1960s and this happened with the initiation of the local Catholic priest in alliance with the Provence of Newfoundland, to establish a shipping industry (Hanrahan 32). The project however required the Metis community to stop seasonal migration in order to support the new industry. This was made possible by building a school in order to restrict migration – the school acted as a distraction mechanism to create "stable" communities (in other words, it was to prevent the community from shifting locations) (Hanrahan 32). The Metis ways of life were seen as a threat to potential business opportunities, and as such, it needed to be controlled in order for the industry to grow. As the project developed and the community complied with the industry's demands, issues surrounding a lack of natural resources sparked tension in Black Tickle. Clean drinking water became the issue that ultimately led the Metis (I assume this is your meaning?) to file complaints against the Provincial government (Hanrahan 32). This provoked fear within the provincial government, forcing it to create a temporary water reservoir in 2001 (Hanrahan 33). However the reservoir's "temporary" status also provoked widespread negative responses from the Metis community. Reasons for this were threefold: first, the water in the reservoir was limited due to the "temporary" nature of the project; second, the water system was inaccessible to those who did not own an automobile as the reservoir was located about 1.5 kilometers away from the community; third, the resevoir fostered a sense of insecurity among the population because no one was certain how long the water supply would last (Hanrahan 33).

As the years progressed, the infrastructure in Black Tickle remained underdeveloped and the area was then branded by the provincial government as a "special" community (Hanrahan 33). The shipping industry therefore failed to facilitate economic growth and infrastructural development within the community. Even with the development of the shipping industry, the Metis people were not given the opportunity to improve their livelihood. Therefore, the

provincial government made social containment possible by building the school and the reservoir (Hanrahan 33).

It becomes difficult to sell the myth of multiculturalism to the people of Black Tickle because, it is clear that the Metis people are not treated the same as the broader Canadian subject. In fact, if multiculturalism "must be founded on the confidence in one's own individual identity" (McRoberts 125), then it becomes meaningless for the Metis individual since he/she is systemically separated from a part of his/her society that produces meaning and "confidence" at the individual level. This is a result of the provincial government sacrificing Metis culture as a means of economic development – the very premise upon which the Imperial fathers had intended to build Canada (Avery 26). Through this process, the native way of life is undermined for the sake of economics. Since the 1960s the provincial government of Newfoundland has taken notice of its attempt to desecrate Metis culture, and ever since, they have been trying to reconcile them. However, the technique of "temporary solutions" has failed miserably. A paradigm shift from "temporal" solutions needs to occur in order to resolve the difference between state interest on one hand, and Metis cultural identity on the other. Critical multiculturalism therefore offers a solution as it solicits for the reconceptualization, and restructuring of those structures that produce unequal and unjust social, economic and political development in contemporary Canada. In sum, the old paradigm is no longer applicable to the realities constructed by contemporary generations. Therefore, the Canadian system, as well as its oppressed citizenry cries for social and political reform.

Conclusion

This essay explored multiculturalism in the context of the history of racialized nation-building practices in Canada, while exploring the ways in which multiculturalism is used as a dialog for national unity. The essay presented the argument that the Canadian state has a built in *tendency* that causes its structure to produce racist policies such as the Multiculturalism Act. This is due to the fact that the country was constructed through a one dimensional perspective – its intention was to be an Imperial nation premised on a Northern European – British – identity. This essay also explored some of the ways this ideology has been challenged, thereby forcing Canada to adjust its political outlook. After readjustment, the state made economic growth its primary tool to maintain the status quo and racist binaries: Canada recruited migrants based on

their "capacity" to contribute to the economic health of the nation. The essay presented the *Immigration Act* to show how to the racialized discourses operate within the political mechanism. From there, the essay provided a detailed outline of the Multiculturalism Act, which was followed by some mainstream criticism of the Act's shortcomings. After doing so, the essay turned its attention to Black Tickle to present a contemporary example of systemic racism in Canada. It concluded that multiculturalism can mean nothing to the Metis Individual since the state removes the foundation for "meaningful" identity to grow: Metis traditional ways of life. As the case of Black Tickle gets analyzed, it becomes clear that the provincial government engaged in the social containment of Metis communities in the name of economic development. Multiculturalism was therefore seen as a paradigm leading to radical failure rather than unity and progress. Finally, the essay then reiterated the argument that the Canadian systems of governance request a realignment of the power relations that subjugates other cultures for the sake of maintaining the dominant status hierarchy that is British and racist in origin.

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