Multicultural Nationalism

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Multicultural Nationalism

Civilizing Difference, Constituting Community

Gerald Kernerman

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UBC Press
The University of British Columbia
2029 West Mall
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604-822-5959 / Fax: 604-822-6083
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For my parents

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Multicultural Nationalism

chapter one

The Bind That Ties

> *Between* things does not designate a localizable relation going from one thing to the other and back again, but ... a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle.
>
> – Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*

> Nationalism is rarely the nationalism of the nation, but rather represents the site where different views of the nation contest and negotiate with each other.
>
> – Prasenjit Duara, "De-Constructing the Chinese Nation"

Few topics have generated more debate in Canadian politics than the relationship between unity and diversity. Fewer still have produced more written output. Therefore I shall spare readers any pretence of exploring uncharted territory. This book probes the paths previously pursued, analyzing the debates themselves and the charts used to navigate them.

To suggest that Canadians have difficulty agreeing on the character of their political community is to risk being an apostle of the obvious. They disagree over how national unity is best achieved, what it should look like, and precisely what it is that needs to be unified. The Canadian political community is always in question and Canadians have no shortage of answers – answers that are painfully polarized. Canadians often talk as if they have discovered the answer to their national question, but their language has a predictable, almost scripted, quality. Having rehearsed their lines, assumed their positions, and located their opponents, Canadians are ready to perform. Some demand equal treatment of all citizens, regardless of their cultural, ethnic, racial, language, religious, gender, or other characteristics, saying Canadian

citizenship must be left undifferentiated, equal, and symmetrical. In contrast, other Canadians demand forms of differentiated citizenship, whereby their differences are not only recognized but incorporated into the rules, procedures, and symbols of the political system.

Scripts like these are performed on high-profile political stages from constitutional and Charter politics to federal-provincial negotiations and in numerous policy arenas. They shape debate over the recognition of Quebec, the parameters of Aboriginal self-government, the contours of federalism, the boundaries of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, the scope of minority rights, and the underrepresentation of women and minorities in electoral politics. The scripts change, of course, and their language varies, but the oppositions remain: equal versus differentiated citizenship, equal provinces versus asymmetrical federalism, citizens equal versus "citizens plus," individual rights versus collective rights, impartial versus group-based representation, and so on. The Canadian political community is produced through the performance of these constitutive oppositions – through the performance of the "Canadian conversation."[1]

Such oppositions are hardly unique to Canada. They are common in other liberal democratic societies debating questions of citizenship and diversity, for example, the American "culture wars."[2] Still, much can be learned from studying the dynamics of these oppositions in Canadian politics. In a remarkably self-conscious fashion, Canadians have made great efforts to incorporate an embrace of diversity into their national mythologies.[3] Indeed, they are widely perceived to be at the forefront of liberal democratic experimentation in this area.[4] So it is worth examining how Canadians are entangled in these familiar oppositions, and with what effects.

Dichotomies are not exactly in fashion these days, for good reason. They generate limitations in our thinking, exhaust our intellectual energies, and hinder us from pursuing more promising political paths. So it is easy enough to make the case for reorienting Canadian politics beyond the static options of equality or difference, individualism or collectivism, and so on. Who would doubt that Canadians would be better off if they could engage with one another in a less polarized manner? Canadians cannot get "beyond" these oppositions to achieve unity, however, despite their desire to do so. Indeed, this desire is a large part of the problem – or, depending on how one views it, the solution – because attempts to transcend the oppositional character of these debates tend to reinforce them. The unity question that drives the Canadian conversation makes it futile, lost in the very terms of the quest. But to the extent that the Canadian conversation continues, those that participate are at least united in their oppositions. This is the bind that ties.

Multicultural Nationalism

Although Canadians do not agree on issues of unity and diversity, the Canadian conversation is driven by a common set of nationalist preoccupations and anxieties. Rather than attempt to resolve the differences between the opposing positions, this book analyzes the nationalist logic cultivating their opposition. While visions of Canada resting on equal citizens and equal provinces are (or at least appear) incompatible with visions pursuing a dialectic of unity-in-difference, they share an urge to constitute the Canadian political community. Each of the competing positions presents a vision of a unified whole. Yet each vision of the whole centres on a particular array of identity and nation-based categories, recognizing one configuration while misrecognizing others. Should Canada be understood in terms of one, two, three, ten, dozens, or millions of categories of identity and belonging? How should these categories relate to one another and to the whole?

As forms of political contestation, nationalisms are inherently relational; one nationalism invokes and provokes another. The site of Canadian nationalist contestations – the site I call multicultural nationalism – is the focus of this book. I realize that, to many readers, the notion of a multicultural nationalism will immediately seem counterintuitive. After all, multiculturalism (as an embrace of diversity)[5] and nationalism (as a quest for unity and identity) are often depicted as contradictory ideas, reflecting such age-old oppositions as the one and the many, unity and diversity, particularism and universalism. I approach it as a space of contestation, but not in terms of "multiculturalism/nationalism." By my reading, those taking part in the Canadian conversation are all multiculturalists, nationalists, and, not least, liberals. Certainly, they are unlikely to understand themselves (or their various opponents) in these terms: multicultural nationalism confounds the categories of the debate and the philosophical frameworks employed to make sense of them.

Multicultural nationalism is an ambiguous zone. Despite this ambiguity, or perhaps because of it, those taking part in the Canadian conversation are driven by dreams of clarity. The competing nationalisms are concerned in one way or another with the Canadian political community as a whole, and with defining its parts. In what follows, I am not especially concerned to delineate or characterize the various "nations," because doing so tends to reify them in ways that are difficult to distinguish from the nationalist contestation itself. As such, this is not a study of the Québécois, pan-Canadian, Aboriginal, or other "nations," but instead an examination of the nationalisms that invoke and provoke these nation categories. This is a study of nationalist contestation over how these and other nation categories should be defined,

how they should relate to one another, and how the Canadian political community should be understood as a result.

Multicultural nationalism is a site of polarization, driven by mutually exclusive understandings of which units of identity – which group(s), nation(s), or people(s) – should predominate in the collective understanding of the Canadian political community. These nationalisms have some conception of the parts and the whole, and so they operate according to a logic of identity. Here, diversity is conceived of as an assortment of different identities, and difference is understood superficially to mean difference *among* the various identity categories. An identity is, in effect, a unit of difference. The logic of identity is grounded in a refusal of alterity, a denial of complexity, in favour of reified and simplified identity categories.

My emphasis on this logic of identity may seem surprising, given the shift away from understanding identities as static and stable, toward more complex notions that emphasize the contingency and fluidity of identity construction. The clichéd charge of essentialism has had its effect, and the now-ubiquitous embrace of hybridity has apparently replaced the identity politics of the 1990s. Rather than viewing identities as unified and coherent, Canadians are now more likely to speak in terms of the interwoven and overlapping play of identities and differences. This understanding is now reflected in the newest "new Canada," the identities of which, Canadians are told, are fluid, heterogeneous, and intertwined.[6] (As if it were ever otherwise.) The issue, however, is not whether identities are static or fluid, but rather the manner in which the Canadian conversation, in its pursuit of unity, breeds identitarian contestation.

The Canadian School and Its Debating Partners

In analyzing the sites of multicultural nationalism, I aim to connect with the growing bodies of scholarship that explore the dynamics, limits, and contradictions of liberal and nationalist ideologies in Canada. A number of important books are part of this literature, including those by Ian Angus, Joel Bakan, Himani Bannerji, Richard Day, Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel, Eva Mackey, and Sherene Razack.[7] While I focus on the Canadian conversation, there are many other conversations in Canada – sometimes parallel or overlapping with one another and the Canadian conversation – among, about, or in relation to Aboriginal peoples, gays and lesbians, Québécois, women, and others.[8]

By questioning the unity question, and by problematizing the "diversity problem," this book critically engages with scholars of the "Canadian School," defined in particular by the liberal theories of differentiated citizenship of Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka as well as others such as Joseph Carens,

Simone Chambers, Michael Ignatieff, James Tully, and Jeremy Webber.[9] Taylor's writings have generated widespread attention in a range of scholarly circles, and a growing body of secondary literature exists on his work.[10] He has written with great insight, and considerable influence, about some of Canada's most intransigent political problems. Similarly, Kymlicka has received international attention for his liberal theory of multicultural citizenship. The Canadian School's rejection of the equality script and its insistence on the coexistence of unity and diversity within a framework of differentiated citizenship has captivated a multitude of scholars, students, politicians, bureaucrats, and activists in Canada and beyond. And it has been a focal point of international theorizing on liberalism and difference, such as in recent work by Brian Barry, Seyla Benhabib, Amy Gutmann, and Bhiku Parekh.[11]

I take a relational approach to understanding the scholars of the Canadian School, which means analyzing their debating partners as well, especially Pierre Trudeau and his followers.[12] Intellectually and politically, the Canadian School and the Trudeauites presuppose one another. There is a danger in judging the work of the Canadian School, or appropriating their concepts, without proper attention to their positioning within the Canadian case, and therefore I concentrate on the way their contentions and ideas engage with, and are taken up in, the Canadian conversation. I am especially interested in the philosophical character of the Canadian conversation, that is, its tendency to polarize around abstract concepts. Many scholars and public commentators who take part in the Canadian conversation can be placed on opposing "equality" and "difference" sides. Of course, there is much variation in the positions taken, as well as the justifications provided, with some scholars defending differential (or equal) treatment for certain groups in certain contexts but not others. Still, the differences among those within each group are often submerged by their common opposition.[13]

With the national question on the line, it is tempting to wade into the Canadian conversation and join the debate, but my approach is to probe this temptation instead. This book does not depart from the traditional preoccupations of Canadian unity politics. Instead, its purpose is to understand the dynamics and effects of these preoccupations and, in doing so, to disrupt them. Rather than answering – or even asking – the national question, it examines the urge to do so. And it analyzes the effects of this question, the political paralysis it produces, the exclusions that it generates, and the intellectual blind spots that they encourage.

Constitutive Oppositions

In addition to the scholarship of the Canadian School, I analyze government documents, constitutional agreements, public speeches, newspaper articles,

and television transcripts.[14] Instead of focusing on a single case study, this book examines a number of prominent debates of the last several decades. Despite the range of cases and texts examined, the analyses that follow do not aim to be comprehensive. Since hundreds of books and articles are already written on these cases, simply generating more information on them is unlikely to improve our understanding.

In Chapter 2, I elaborate on the central problematic of the book, the polarizing logic of the Canadian conversation. This logic is paradoxical. While Canadians attempt to grapple with diversity in order to guard against fragmentation, they must do this not by suppressing diversity but by giving sustenance to it. While they reject aggressive and assimilative national identities, this very rejection cultivates nationalist anxieties, increasing the urge to constitute the Canadian political community. This urge explains the continuation of deliberations, constitutional and otherwise, aimed at reaching some form of agreement on what it means to speak in terms of "We" Canadians. Efforts to achieve unity in the face of diversity leave Canadians less united. Despite this, some scholars of the Canadian School, such as Simone Chambers, argue that the deliberations themselves – because of their continuation, their inclusivity, and their openness to diversity – serve to constitute a Canadian political community. Indeed, for Chambers, the Canadian conversation is a model for the "new constitutionalism." The paradox, I contend, is that the polarizing character of the conversation serves to constitute not unity but disunities – national disunities. To illustrate the difficulties involved in displacing this dynamic, I draw insight from the "equality versus difference" debates among contemporary feminist theorists.

The next three chapters focus on Quebec/English Canada relations, analyzing the manner in which the Canadian conversation polarizes over rights, federalism, and multinationalism. In Chapter 3, I examine how scholars have interpreted Canadian politics and history as reflecting a struggle between individualistic and collectivist political orientations. Since the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, versions of this interpretation have grown in prominence, put forward increasingly in terms of a clash between individual and collective rights. I explore this interpretation, especially as expressed by Charles Taylor. Rather than "reconciling the solitudes," Taylor reconstitutes them, and their opposition, in liberal terms by constructing English Canada and its Charter as individualistic. This way, he is able to construct Quebec as different, but liberal in its own communitarian way.

Taylor proposes a way in which the thusly reconstituted "solitudes" may be reconciled, in terms of what he calls "deep diversity." In Chapter 4, I analyze this proposal, exploring competing demands for provincial equality and

asymmetrical federalism in recent constitutional debates. The 1997 Calgary Declaration reinforced the opposition. Instead of recognizing Quebec as a distinct society, it embraces the "uniqueness" of all the provinces and insists that each have an *equal* ability to preserve and develop its uniqueness. This position is, of course, unacceptable to Quebec. Each side pursues recognition in terms that preclude the conception of community and belonging sought by the opposing side. The problem with deep diversity, I argue, is that in rejecting the attempt to impose symmetry on all of the provinces, including Quebec, the asymmetrical alternative forces a symmetry on English Canada itself.

The dilemma, for those taking part in the Canadian conversation, is that the competing nationalist conceptions overlap, with many English Canadians insisting on a pan-Canadian nation that includes Quebec as one of ten provinces. This generates recognition claims rooted in mutually exclusive understandings of which units of national identity should be recognized as defining the Canadian political community. In response to this problem, Will Kymlicka proposes an English Canadian nationalism within a multinational Canada, alongside other nations such as Quebec and Aboriginal peoples.[15] As I discuss in Chapter 5, the rationale for this proposal is that it would obviate any movement on the part of English Canadians to suppress or contain Quebec or Aboriginal peoples with demands for equal citizens and provinces, because the three entities would no longer exist within the same national community. English Canadians can (or must) have their nation too. The problem with this proposal, I argue, is that it reproduces the logic of identity already central to the Canadian conversation. The desire to disentangle the competing nationalisms, to provide clarity in the Canadian conversation, is understandable. However, since nationalisms are relational, nationalist contestations cannot be resolved simply by shuffling the deck of categories and configurations.

The next three chapters analyze the grafting of other sites of contestation to the polarizing logic of the Canadian conversation. Chapter 6 explores Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relations, especially their framing in the terms of a citizenship arithmetic concerned with minuses, equals, and pluses. Here I analyze two major documents of the 1960s, the 1966 Hawthorn Report and the 1969 White Paper on "Indian policy."[16] The strategy of the Hawthorn Report involves supplementing equal citizenship with a limited form of Aboriginal differentiation, which it calls "citizens plus." In contrast, the White Paper, driven by a fear that Aboriginal expressions of difference might fragment the Canadian political community, opts for an alternative strategy of forcing Aboriginal people to develop their cultures within a framework

defined by equal citizenship. Aboriginal groups mobilized quite famously against the White Paper, adopting the Hawthorn Report's "citizens plus" terminology.[17] Despite the remarkable changes that have taken place since then, with the Charter and the emergence of Aboriginal self-government, the debate continues. I argue that framing the debate as "citizens equal versus citizens plus" draws Aboriginal people into a set of false dilemmas over questions of belonging and their relation to the Canadian political community, and away from issues of justice and self-governance. As a result, struggles for justice, equality, and democratic governance are turned into problems of the "ties that bind" Canadians together.

In Chapter 7, I examine the debates over gender representation that took place during the 1992 Charlottetown referendum campaign, when the Canadian conversation was at its most inclusive. In addition to the participation of Aboriginal leaders in the negotiation process, the campaign itself included a relatively wide diversity of voices in comparison to previous discussions. Women's organizations, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), were especially prominent, and they succeeded in challenging the basic norms of Canadian political representation. In doing so, these groups faced a number of what Martha Minow calls "dilemmas of difference."[18] Struggles over representation in liberal democratic societies typically operate according to an impartial/partial opposition. To challenge the traditional liberal premise of the universal impartial representative (who can speak on behalf of all citizens regardless of his or her gender, race, ethnicity, etc.), those who struggle to achieve more equitable representation often emphasize the inevitable partiality of political representatives. Members of equality-seeking groups, differentiated not by choice but by exclusion, are further stigmatized once they gain inclusion because they are denied the use of an impartial voice that allows them to speak on behalf of the people they represent. Their resulting "partiality," despite being imposed, is constructed as a threat to civic unity. This was a problem NAC faced in the Charlottetown campaign.

The mythology of a diverse and inclusive Canada with "no official culture," despite its obvious excesses, has considerable force because it places real limitations on how minorities may be constructed in relation to the Canadian conversation's pursuit of a Canadian "We." Such limitations are interesting since dominant models of liberal citizenship have long been criticized for constructing minorities as prone, if given the chance, to behaving illiberally, thereby conflating difference with illiberalism. At the same time, even the scholars of the Canadian School, well-known for their support for multicultural citizenship, are careful to add a caution to their defense: differentiated citizenship has its limits. It does not mean that "anything goes." In

Chapter 8, I analyze the dynamics of this liberal discourse of the limit, its relationship to the politics of recognition, and its governance of intercultural citizenship interactions. Drawing from Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality, I explore the manner in which Canadians are conditioned to express their cultural and political freedom as multicultural citizens. I situate this multicultural governance alongside Taylor's influential discussion of the politics of recognition. The dilemma, I argue, is that misrecognized groups, in pursuing recognition, must put their identities on display, to demonstrate their "civilized" behaviours. To illustrate, I develop the notion of multicultural panopticism; here, in contrast to the surveillance of Bentham's panopticon, there is "coveillance," where multicultural citizens are encouraged to take part in the mutual study and display of their identities.

"Civilizing" Difference

In this book, I examine debates in the arenas of federalism, rights, citizenship, and representation, concerning Quebec, Aboriginal peoples, ethnic and racial minorities, and women. While not addressed here, similar debates take place over public school curricula, Mountie uniforms, affirmative action, same-sex marriage, employment equity, and so on. The Canadian conversation has a proliferating dynamic.

By pointing to this dynamic, I may appear to be assimilating into opposing scripts struggles rooted in very different histories and political contexts and directed against different forms of power, domination, and exploitation. I may seem to be conflating discussions of legal rights and duties, political representation, and forms of belonging to a national community, each involving different types of citizenship: legal, political, and psychological.[19] I may not appear to be differentiating between struggles aimed at the inclusion of certain groups in Canada and different struggles directed toward achieving greater autonomy for others, such as Quebec and Aboriginal peoples.[20] That the multiplicity and political fluidity of these struggles can be characterized in terms of oppositions such as equality/difference reveals the normalizing power of the Canadian conversation as a model of deliberation. Far from attempting to force these diverse struggles into a single framework, I ask how it is that such a wide range of policies and practices – driven by concerns with justice, equality, and democracy – end up polarizing as they get tangled in unity considerations.

As long as the Canadian conversation continues, Canadians remain united in their oppositions. Through their very participation in these polarized debates – be they focused on rights, representation, federalism, or citizenship – minority groups are "civilized" by the unity-driven space of multicultural nationalism. When political debate operates within this logic, Canadians find

their political categories recognized in certain ways. But, in the very process of the quest for unity, they risk routing their identities into static categories – categories that close, rather than open, transformative political spaces.

When struggles for justice and equality operate within the terms of such oppositions as equality/difference, political choices are structured in problematic ways. The most difficult and pressing questions remain unaddressed, especially where the development of emancipatory political practices and institutions is concerned. The challenge, then, is to pursue struggles for equality, rights, and justice without getting entangled in these depoliticizing oppositions. Rather than attempting to join with either the equality *or* difference positions, those seeking justice and equality are better off refusing the questions that create these oppositions in the first place.