

The Institute's Demise

Plagued by charges of irrelevance and facing the loss of critical funds, the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto closed its doors for good at the end of 1974. Since the federal government's adoption of multiculturalism as an official policy three years earlier, the Institute had struggled to stay afloat by downsizing staff and services and decentralizing operations, so that, by 1973, it consisted of a small network of four offices spread across the metropolitan area.¹

A volunteer agency, the Institute throughout its history relied primarily on community chest funds, though it also received occasional government and private charity support. Already by 1970, however, the United Community Fund began to criticize the Institute for "an erosion of services" due to ineffective management and the loss of leadership in the field.² In response, the Institute board commissioned a report by Wilson Head, the African American/Canadian sociologist, community planner, and civil rights activist who had been a co-author of the Ontario Human Rights Code in 1962. He now chaired the School of Social Work at Atkinson College, York University (est. 1966).³ Head's 1973 study along with a major UCF report prompted discussion about the need to develop a "new model" of operations. In this context, Head at one point advised the Institute staff to consider being "more political" in terms of lobbying governments as the tensions between the volunteer and state sectors could lead to "creative possibilities."⁴

Struggling to define a revised role for the embattled Institute, director Tine Stewart proposed developing more expertise in race relations and combatting racism, including, as she put it in reference to the bullying and streaming of Black immigrant students, "bigotry and bias in the schools." Others defended the Institute's record and suggested advocating, in particular, on behalf of poor, elderly, and chronically ill immigrants. A Portuguese counsellor who had recently escorted a client to a government office in order to interpret for him admitted to feeling "humiliated" by the worker who dismissively asked why an

Institute staffer was even there.⁵ The Institute's seventies-era correspondence confirms the sense that social agency leaders and funders increasingly viewed the Institute as having lost its leadership in the immigrant and settlement service field. The sentiment was perhaps reinforced by the fact that Stewart, the director since 1968, had been a long-time volunteer rather than a professional social worker.

The growth in the multiculturalism bureaucracy that followed the Liberal government's adoption of official multiculturalism also contributed to the Institute's demise.⁶ A number of pluralist-oriented initiatives at both the federal and provincial levels actually predated 1971, but the new infusion of funds expanded the scale of activity. A Multicultural Directorate was created in the Department of the Secretary of State in 1972 to assist in the development of multicultural policies and programs and, a year later, a new Ministry of Multiculturalism began overseeing their implementation within government departments. Civil servants, scholar-consultants, and community leaders deliberated over defining a mandate. Staff developed programs and conducted outreach. They drew up policy criteria for the awarding of public funds to non-governmental citizen and community actors in accordance with a multicultural policy that, at least initially, understood barriers to social adaptation and economic success mainly in cultural terms rather than in terms of economic, gender, or racial inequity. As part of the developments that occurred at the federal and Ontario level, the Toronto Institute was effectively displaced and absorbed by the state.⁷

A provincial initiative that directly threatened the Institute was the Ontario government's move in 1973 to provide settlement services directly to newcomers through its Welcome House. (Four years later, it passed a multicultural policy and, in 1982, created a Ministry of Citizenship and Culture.) Located at 8 York Street in the downtown core, the Welcome House had first focused on the Asian Ugandans expelled by Idi Amin, but later offered services to all newcomers.⁸ The Institute had organized some initial services for the Ugandan refugees before the project was passed on to the Ontario government. A model of centralizing reception and settlement services in a single place made sense, but the Institute board and staff feared being made redundant. The news that the English-language classes offered through the Ontario Citizenship Division would be relocated from the Institute to the Welcome House had set off alarm bells because the rental of classroom space had covered a major portion of the Institute's own building-rental costs.⁹

Then came the invitation to move into Welcome House. While accompanied by promises to respect the Institute's autonomy, Stewart articulated the shared fear that accepting the invitation would undermine the Institute's *raison d'être*. Noting that the Institute had long argued that "we are doing this particular kind of work – services to immigrants – because the Government is not doing it," she called the move risky. Others feared losing "our flexibility" to government

directives or losing UCF support altogether, or felt the idea wrong-headed because immigrants were “not *fond* of government buildings.” Stewart proposed and then immediately dismissed the idea of trying to ensure the Institute’s autonomy by fundraising among the “ethnic groups” on the grounds that the “tremendous division – to the left or to the right – in so many ethnic groups” risked losing “our greatest strength, *neutrality*.”¹⁰ She and long-time staffer Margarete Streeruwitz may still have been smarting from the controversy over a fundraising project to make and sell ethnic commercial directories to social agencies. Some Czechoslovakian and other Eastern European groups had decried the inclusion of the Czechoslovakian embassy and consulate in the Czechoslovak directory. The explanation that social service personnel might need to contact these offices for “official matters” had drawn the angry reply that inviting Communist diplomats to interfere in the lives of any Czechoslovakian refugee was “absurd,” even possibly leading to their being pressured to return home, with tragic results.¹¹ Facing UCF pressure, the Institute board arrived at a compromise, and, as part of its decentralization plans, a tiny staff moved into Welcome House. The office offered multilingual counselling services, but little else. The other Institute offices provided a few additional services, such as interpretation, legal aid support, registration for some English classes being run by George Brown College, or modest recreational programs including outdoor excursions.

By this point, the Institute already had lost any edge it had as an organizer of popular folk festivals and spectacles to metropolitan-wide organizations like the Community Folk Art Council. But it did manage to deliver some social services to its clientele until the bitter end. The Christmas parties continued into 1973 as did the volunteer-led conversational English tutorials. There was a small but successful children’s “multicultural” summer camp program. In addition to carrying out her group work and counselling duties, Korean social worker Catherine Lee developed ties with some (South) Korean community organizations, including a United Church club, a Catholic club, and a seniors’ group.¹² Staff secured some new funds, including a modest Local Initiatives Program (LIP) grant in support of a Greek-language Free Interpreter Service located near the Institute’s east end office.¹³

The financial troubles undermined most initiatives, however, including those intended for the post-1967 immigrants. As Caribbean and South Asian staff, Royston C. Jones and Murali Nair juggled their responsibilities to the Institute and other community and social agencies in the face of scarce resources and a mounting racist backlash against Caribbean (particularly Jamaican) and South Asian (particularly Pakistani) immigrants. At the Institute’s Weston Branch, which was located in a government-subsidized apartment building that included a significant Black Caribbean population, the priority was “preventing alienation through isolation in impersonal high rises.”¹⁴ In addition to running the Institute’s Legal Aid Program and heading a committee calling for

better working conditions for migrant domestic workers from the Caribbean, Jones was involved in some west end branch projects, including a mothers and tots program, but programming suffered from insufficient funds.¹⁵ In a spring 1974 report that conveyed a sense of impending doom, Institute board member Katharine Symons referred to the establishment of a West Indian Centre in the area as another sign of “the eroding of the Institute’s role in the community.” Set up to serve Jamaican immigrants, and administered by Beverley Corke, a Jamaican-born social worker, the centre had received UCF and LIP funds.¹⁶ Meantime, Nair’s proposal for an “Asians in Transition” community project modelled on the Institute’s earlier projects among Southern European immigrants never got off the ground.¹⁷

Notwithstanding Stewart’s exhortation to turn “our sad outlook” into a “cheerful face” for the sake of the communities they served,¹⁸ the financial woes exacerbated tensions among the Institute staff. The few professional social workers complained about being underappreciated and the others of being overworked or harassed – and people left. Having earlier taken out a private loan to cover staff salaries, the board learned in spring 1974 that the UCF’s Allocations Committee would provide no further funds. On 31 December, the Institute ceased to exist.¹⁹

One can speak of an Institute legacy, a problematic and paradoxical one, to be sure, but one that deserves attention given the lack of knowledge of the historical role that women played in launching community pluralist experiments in Canada before official multiculturalism. An understanding of the longer and more bottom-up, if still heavily middle-class, roots of late-twentieth-century multiculturalism both challenges and offers greater insight into the ascendancy of a liberal ideology, and a form of nationalism, long understood as being of recent origin.²⁰

The movement of some Institute personnel into the multicultural/citizenship/immigration complex also suggests a more specific legacy. While some remained active in ethnic community politics, others joined a rising class of multicultural experts who landed jobs as consultants and public servants and as citizenship judges at the federal and provincial levels. A journalist, civil servant, and administrator as well as a Polish patriot, long-time Institute volunteer Irene Ungar, for example, became a Canadian citizenship judge. Relocated to Vancouver in the late sixties, volunteer Emily Ostapatch joined the Labour Relations Board of British Columbia with a personal mandate to protect working women from discrimination.²¹

If the state co-opted or absorbed Institute programs and practices, the Institute also helped to inform late twentieth-century multiculturalism in Canada. Toronto’s International Institute drew on a long, multifaceted, and blemished history of pluralist ideals, cultural spectacles, community projects, social work practices, and female volunteerism in both Canada and the United States.

Multiculturalism did not achieve official status in the United States as it did in Canada. But in both countries, an array of social agencies, community centres, and grassroots organizations tapped government, community chest, and other funds in order to provide resources and social services to immigrant groups.²² The Toronto Institute, and the wider international institute movement to which it belonged, were part of a long history of North American conversations and networks that conceived of a white, settler-based model of multiculturalism that did not question the state's continuing colonial relations vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples. This history of colonialism, too, had shaped late-twentieth-century Canadian multiculturalism.

Standing Back

As a left feminist historian's intervention into the massive scholarship on multiculturalism in Canada, North America, and beyond, this study tells the largely neglected history of women's pluralist advocacy and activism in Canada before the advent of official multiculturalism through a case history of the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto (1952–74). The heavily female profile, multi-ethnic composition, and multifaceted mandate of the Toronto Institute makes in-depth research on its form of liberal multiculturalism a worthwhile exercise. The Institute's profile and the range of activities makes for a compelling case study. And the findings shed light on wider issues and debates.

In contrast to most organizations with a multicultural mandate or orientation, which, then as now, focus either on delivering services to newcomers or mounting cultural events, the Toronto Institute combined these sets of practices with a third focus on community-building and community-organizing projects. Unlike the Anglo-Canadian staff and male administrators who typically staffed the era's government departments and social agencies, the Institute had a multi-ethnic if mainly white and European staff, and women figured prominently among its supervisors and administrators. Indeed, women occupied every position at the Institute, from board member, director, and project or casework supervisor to front-line group and community worker, from counsellor, home visitor, and receptionist to folk culture advocate and festival organizer. Key funders and co-sponsors included women's organizations, and women were conspicuous in the Institute's wide-ranging networks. Its heavily multicultural and female profile also distinguished the Institute from most immigrant and ethno-Canadian organizations, which represented one or a small cluster of groups, and from immigrant reception agencies such as the Italian and Jewish immigrant aid societies.²³ A social centre, too, the Institute's social, recreational, and cultural activities gave rise to a multicultural if egalitarian community rooted mainly in cross-cultural but also some cross-racial and cross-class relationships.

In fleshing out the longer roots and cross-border networks that have informed late-twentieth-century multiculturalism in Canada, this Toronto study has debunked Canadian myths about the absence of a history of multiculturalism in the United States. Across two centuries, pluralism in both countries moved in varying fashion from a minority to a leading if contested creed. So, let us finally discard the old and hackneyed melting pot vs cultural mosaic trope. Not that multiculturalism in either society has offered a sufficient antidote to racism. As the exploitation of migrant workers and the police killings of Black and Indigenous people in North America during the COVID-19 pandemic tragically revealed, both of these historically self-described liberal and tolerant nations share a history and present of racism.

The Toronto Institute did try to extend its services and activities to the racialized immigrants who arrived after 1967, as evidenced by the hiring of Black Caribbean and Asian staff. Stewart's 1973 comments about possibly developing an anti-racist campaign suggests, too, an awareness of the need to strengthen the Institute's tepid record on promoting human rights and combatting racism. But its demise a year later means we will never know whether Institute personnel would have carried out the consultations and rethinking required to embrace a more inclusive and anti-racist mandate. In interpreting thousands of Institute case files, I demonstrated more by theoretically informed application than by detailed theoretical explication how to interpret case records in ways that avoid the pitfalls of either a strictly empiricist (they capture what actually happened) or postmodern (they are the file-maker's "fiction") stance.

Grim Realities, Possibilities, Radical Imaginaries?

Viewed against the idea of a radically transformative, racially and gender inclusive, anti-colonial, and egalitarian multiculturalism, the limitations of Toronto Institute pluralism are glaring. In light of present-day realities, however, making easy pronouncements about a flawed or failed experiment is simply not enough. Without abandoning a critical lens, my decision to highlight the possibilities and positive features of Institute-style liberal pluralism, as well as its limits and paradoxical nature, was guided by a basic question. Does a flawed multiculturalism still offer any redeeming qualities or useful lessons for our current grim times?

In 2003, Himani Bannerji, one of Canada's leading critics of multiculturalism, raised such a question. The context in which she did so is critical. She was considering the backlash against racialized and non-Christian immigrants in English Canada and in Quebec against the global display of gruesome wars, ethnic genocides, forced migrations, and the "new racism" (or cultural racism) that uses a language of cultural incompatibility to declare

Muslim, Hindu, and other non-Christian im/migrants unfit for life in Western liberal democracies. Instead of excoriating Canadian multiculturalism, she suggested that a completely implemented pluralism-from-below in which “the multicultural others” genuinely attain greater equity and dignity would benefit all Canadians.²⁴

Since Bannerji offered what I take to be her proposal for a reassessment of Canadian multiculturalism in 2003 – that is, in an already post 9/11 world in which heightened Muslim-bashing, surveillance, and neo-liberalism also served to silence debate²⁵ – things have worsened. In 2010–11, state leaders Angela Merkel, Nicolas Sarkozy, and David Cameron declared multiculturalism a failure within their respective European nations. They and other leading figures demanded that the immigrants accept the core values of European societies, two of the most important of which were said to be individual freedom and sexual equality. Political leaders in the Netherlands and elsewhere followed with similar declarations. In the debates that raged within these countries, the gendered stereotypes of the Muslim fanatic/misogynist male and veiled/controlled Muslim female fuelled an anti-immigrant rhetoric that, in some cases, brought together right-wing xenophobes, neo-liberals, and some leftists and feminists.²⁶

Historical accounts of the multicultural backlash in Europe shed light on one of the themes of this study, namely that the varied meanings attached to this slippery term creates ambiguity and confusion. Rita Chin’s study of how, since the 1950s, political leaders and social agencies in several Western European nations have dealt with the growing presence of non-Western immigrants, shows that European multiculturalism has had little to do with the positive, if contested, connotations historically attached to the term in North America. Rather, it has been about managing the diversity of the (now multigenerational) foreign guest workers – and the family members who joined them and who have since been born on European soil – who did not return “home” as expected when the post-1945 economic boom collapsed in the early 1970s. In France, for example, initial efforts to encourage expressions of religious and cultural identity among these workers were meant to ensure an attachment to their homeland in Algeria and elsewhere, the better to treat them as a reserve army of labour, returning home without difficulty in bust periods and migrating to France when needed. By the time the economic slump occurred, however, permanent but segregated communities of racialized Muslim residents had taken root. In Britain, the management of an increasingly diverse population focused on post-colonials from the Caribbean and South Asia – the so-called empire that struck back – though some progressive advocates of multiculturalism also emerged. While the alarmism over immigrants reared its ugly head well before the more recent arrival of refugees from violence and wartorn places in the Middle East and Africa, their presence both in the United Kingdom and on the Continent has

intensified the moral panic over veiled women and Muslim terrorists fuelling the multiculturalism backlash.²⁷

While I was writing this book, the declarations of the failure of multiculturalism in Europe – which meant not the failure to create more welcoming societies but that Muslim culture was not compatible with European traditions²⁸ – continued unabated. They did so amid an on-going refugee crisis, seething xenophobia, the re-emergence of fascism, and the issuing of Muslim bans in the name of the war against terror. The pandemic of 2019–22 exposed and compounded the class, racial, and gender divides within and across nations, and exacerbated the unemployment, poverty, and marginalization of millions of refugees. Highly concentrated in jobs where physical distancing is either difficult or impossible, migrant workers in Canada and other OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) nations faced an infection risk at least twice as high as that of the “native-born.”²⁹

During the writing process I was, however, heartened by the Canadian response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Here, Chancellor Merkel’s leading role in confirming the European Union’s obligation towards refugees by opening Germany’s borders to more than a million Syrians in 2015 was an important precedent. Yet, as Chin notes, a “hesitant welcome” issued as a response to a “humanitarian crisis” emphasizes Western altruism without questioning the highly publicized shift towards an assimilationist model of integration.³⁰ In Canada, it took the photo of the death of a boy, Alan Kurdi, in 2017 to stir passions and prompt action, but the lauded, and largely community-based, Canadian response to the on-going Syrian refugee crisis arguably fits an Institute-style pluralism.³¹

The Institute’s demise before Toronto’s racialized immigrants had reached significant numbers means my material on the South Asian, Caribbean, and other immigrants of whom Bannerji spoke most directly in 2003 is frustratingly slim. Still, my assessments have benefited from feminist anti-racist, materialist, and discursive modes of analysis. Without exaggerating its bottom-up or community-based character or radical potential, scrutinizing Institute pluralism illuminates the fundamental tensions within liberal ideologies, including those informing pluralist social work and nation-building practices. On the one hand, there are the democratic ideals of informed and participatory citizenship and collective notions of belonging. On the other, the regulatory and intrusive features of social work and nationalism – both of which demand loyalty to or at least compliance with certain ideals – and the asymmetrical hierarchies of power and influence that shape social interactions and public discourse.

Given my warts-and-all analysis, I might have simply concluded this study by saying that, ultimately, the Toronto Institute women, like Joan Scott’s French feminists, had “only paradoxes to offer.”³² However, as underscored by Scott’s own study on the politics of the veil in France – which documents how the

forces of racism, sexuality, individualism, secularism, and nationalism combined to raise the alarm over veiled Muslim girls and women – the resurgence in anti-im/migrant hate behooves us to consider what might be salvaged from faulty experiments in liberal multiculturalism. The exercise is worthwhile precisely because as critical race scholars such as Bannerji, Stuart Hall, and Rinaldo Walcott note, multiculturalism as an idea of (to quote Walcott) “multiple cultures co-existing” in a mobile but unequal world “is now a fixture of our current times.” The claims of white scholars and pundits who declare its demise or its incompatibility with liberal democracy and human rights without acknowledging, let alone engaging, more than thirty-five years of research and debate on the subject, Walcott adds, is “disgraceful.”³³ While informed by these and other relevant literatures, my much more modest aim here is to reflect on the value of a case study of Institute-style pluralism to ongoing debates and experimentation. I offer a few brief examples.

The first example relates to the Institute’s heavily newcomer, female, multilingual, and multicultural staff. The Institute did lose ground to the Inter-Agency Council of Ontario, created in spring 1970 as a coordinating agency of mostly non-governmental and community-based immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies. Ironically, it had helped to found the Council, which became a project of the Social Planning Council of Metropolitan Toronto, and Stewart had sat on its executive. (In 1978, OCASI, Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, assumed this role.)³⁴ Equally noteworthy, was the Institute’s pioneering role in applying such progressive pluralist principles as recruiting front-line workers from the immigrant communities being served. In that regard, the emergence of a grassroots immigrant women’s activism during the woman’s movement of the 1970s to 1990s offered a more fully realized implementation of this inclusive or bottom-up principle.

In contrast to the Institute’s heavily European, middle-class, and staunchly anti-Communist counsellors and fieldworkers, immigrant women activists in 1970s and 1980s Toronto – who included racialized and Latin American women – were feminists or social justice activists with a radical, anti-colonial, and even revolutionary worldview. In their capacity as reception and settlement service staff, their emphasis on providing both practical and culturally appropriate social services for their female clients recalls key aspects of the Institute’s social service practices. Whether specific to one group (such as Cleaners’ Action, which liaised with Portuguese office cleaners) or groups (such as the YWCA West Indian Women’s Program), or multi-community-based (such as the Working Women’s Community Centre), these later agencies offered a range of services, including English classes, interpretation and translation of documents, skills-training, counselling, and legal aid support. Here, too, the staff helped clients to meet or comply with the restrictive rules of accreditation regimes and employment legislation, the most notorious of

which were the government-created temporary worker schemes. But unlike the Institute's personnel, which always included a core group of bourgeois, Anglo-, and ethno-Canadian women and men who generally accepted the reality of the vertical mosaic, these grassroots agencies were founded and run by immigrant women whose activist and advocacy work was shaped by an egalitarian ethos and by the needs and interests of immigrant women like themselves.³⁵

Since its demise, the Institute's on-the-job training of what are now called paraprofessionals – immigrant agency staff who provide services in a client's language – has become more institutionalized in the form of certificate courses and programs. What persists, regrettably, are the funding constraints and the lower status within social work of the immigrant or settlement service field, where many staff are practitioners lacking formal credentials, not professionally trained social workers. The professionalization of these workers may go some way to addressing this second-class status. However, my evidence underscores (in a negative way) what umbrella organizations like OCASI (which today represents more than 200 community groups) well understand: the need to act as a collective force when lobbying for resources and when promoting the right of im/migrants and refugees in Canada.³⁶

A second set of observations concerns the value of casework studies. Social workers and other social scientists often treat analytical histories of their profession as so much background "story" rather than offering critical insight into their practices. Given the continuing reliance on practitioners (paraprofessionals) and volunteers in the immigrant settlement services field, my careful reading of thousands of confidential case files created by an earlier generation of immigrant practitioners offers contemporary staff and scholars alike rare access into those practices, both rhetorical and material.³⁷

The presence at the Institute of male as well as female immigrant and refugee counsellors permitted some meaningful comparisons based on gender. Female counsellors shared much in common with their male counterparts, including an urban, educated, middle-class background, a refugee or immigrant status, a sense of class superiority towards their poor clients, and varying degrees of social work training. They, too, could be judgmental or impatient with a "difficult" client. Overall, however, female counsellors and project fieldworkers understood better than their male counterparts the struggles of their immigrant female clients, both single and married, even if they sometimes underestimated their capabilities or pitied them. Having visited women in their crowded homes or spartan flats, escorted them or their children to clinics, accompanied them to the hospital or welfare office, and witnessed their angry husbands belittle them in Family Court, these female workers understood better than their male colleagues the "domestic side" of marginalization, poverty, and patriarchy.³⁸ Like the male social workers studied by Mark Peel, the Institute's male

counsellors were more likely to emphasize the loss of men's homeland status and male privilege as both a symptom and cause of their economic and emotional ill-adjustment, or abusive behaviour, and consider "the creation of an appropriately resolute manhood as the goal of social work."³⁹

That most of the Toronto Institute's professionally trained counsellors were men surely explains why their case records were far more likely than the female-created ones to emphasize, even exaggerate, their insight into a client's problems and the efficacy of their interventions. Among the richest case files were those in which both counsellor and client were women, in part because female practitioners were more likely than their professional male counterparts to detail and describe in vernacular prose what was said and done. These files offered revealing glimpses of the difficult conversations that took place, and the meaningful relationships or alliances that women counsellors occasionally forged with a female client, however unequal or short-term the relationships may have been.

The evidence suggests that a shared ethnocultural or newcomer background with a client could help a counsellor or project fieldworker establish a degree of trust with a client, but also that a capacity to build rapport and to persuade mattered. The specific issue at hand also mattered. Many clients invited intervention, but on terms that made sense to them, though, of course, they did not always get what they wanted. As refugees and immigrants who had also suffered displacement, war, loss, and downward mobility, the counsellors were not entirely surprised by a lot of what they heard, but the female workers were more likely than the men to "really listen" to a female client suffering from enormous anguish. While the era under review predated the finding of "compassion fatigue" among "helping" professionals, my admittedly slim evidence of worried, harried, and harassed female counsellors underscores the value of viewing social work as a form of caring labour that can take an emotional toll on female workers.⁴⁰

A third set of observations concerns the Toronto Institute's noteworthy efforts to combine a popular cultural mandate with a social change, or reform, agenda. Perhaps the most common criticism that scholars and popular pundits have launched against "multiculturalism," official or otherwise, is that it promotes a colourful and boisterous but banal tourist version of for-profit folk festival-spectacle tourism – or "McMulticulturalism."⁴¹ By delivering a feel-good, therapeutic, or Disney World⁴² version of diversity, it denies or erases the structural inequities and systemic racism and sexism that perpetuate an ever-more racialized vertical mosaic. Certainly, as feminist anti-racist critics correctly observe, an exclusive focus on display and consumption of the "exotic" can serve to deny or obfuscate the official and popular "forgetting" of everyday racism and the state's role in creating and perpetuating the obfuscation.⁴³

Thinking with and beyond the Institute example, however, suggests at least a modest revision of this position. For one thing, there is evidence that points

to the fact that celebrations of food, song, and dance can bring people together and even foster meaningful cross-ethnic and cross-racial experience. Furthermore, as the examples supplied by radical groups such as the Wobblies (Industrial Workers of the World), socialist unions like the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, and founders of the Winnipeg Folk Festival (e.g., Trotskyist Mitch Podolack) and the Caribbean-themed Notting Hill Carnival (e.g., Communist, feminist, and Black nationalist Claudia Jones), multicultural exchanges of folk storytelling, music, dance, and food can help to create a sense of community or solidarity, including in hostile contexts.⁴⁴ In this respect, it is the social and political context, and the uses to which folk culture is put, that largely determine the radical or conservative role it performs.

As for liberal aims, mega-festivals like Metro Caravan did help to legitimize public displays of difference, as evidenced by those middle-class Anglo-Torontonians whose participation in that festival first brought home and then reinforced the fact that their city had indeed changed. It did so largely by drawing them to pavilions located in unfamiliar immigrant and ethnic enclaves of the metropolitan area. In an era before the intensified yuppification of ethnic foods, Metro Caravan is where young and middle-aged Anglo-Torontonians ate their first perogy or samosa and took in their first live performance of a European, Caribbean, or Asian folk performance. Yes, the festive context rendered other cultures non-threatening, but it sometimes also facilitated further cultural experimentation.

For another thing, however analytically useful the concept of liberal or nostalgic anti-modernism is, the assumption that the performers and craftspeople decked out in ethnic regalia allow themselves to be turned into simple quaint folk contains a degree of class condescension. Applying the insights of anthropologist Michael Ashkenazi (who studied the "polysemic" quality of Japanese festivals) and French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu (who noted that commentators' snobbish dismissals of folk or popular culture serves to bolster their own prestige), Paul Bramadat has criticized Canada's educated elites for assuming they know better how ethnic minorities should express their collective identities.⁴⁵ My research on the Institute suggests, too, that the costumed performers, craftspeople, and even "pretty attendants," and not only the ethnic elites and cultural impresarios, were involved in their own complex process of negotiating Old and New World cultures. That folk performances exhibited conventional gender norms speaks to the cross-cultural character of gender hierarchies, but they did not necessarily dictate completely the performers' off-stage lives. Like Susan Borsi, the Hungarian Week attendant who combined her traditional costume with a modern beehive hairdo, these young women and men were involved in their own dance of accommodation and resistance to both homeland and hostland cultures.⁴⁶

Then, too, while the Toronto Institute's popular festivals and cultural spectacles certainly contained elements of the "Disneyfication" of cultural diversity,

it would be inaccurate, even unfair, to treat them in isolation from the Institute's simultaneous efforts to promote social reforms and improve the material lives of their many clients. Even putting aside the counselling geared towards orientation (housing and first jobs), the Institute women and their colleagues devoted more staff time and resources to the community and pilot projects and the counselling aimed at improving the occupational profile, job opportunities, and wages of low-skilled clients than to the cultural spectacles. In the latter case, the participating ethnocultural groups played a critical role.

As Head quickly learned during his 1973 investigation of the Institute, its personnel did not organize public demonstrations or lobbies to remove or reform restrictive employment and other regulations. However, the immigrant counsellors and fieldworkers who carried out the health and vocational training projects, and their allies (most notably COSTI), successfully convinced a number of medical, school, and employment personnel and officials to expand existing resources or to improve immigrant access to them. The fieldworkers also showed considerable patience and tact in recruiting candidates and getting them to remain in a program. While these efforts privileged the male breadwinner, the fact that serious attention also was paid to women reflected Edith Ferguson's correct prediction that many of the rural Southern European women would become life-long workers.

To be sure, these projects had limited objectives – a modest improvement in workers' skills and wages – and produced mixed and even poor results, though the benefits accrued by the successful candidates could be significant. The point, however, is that Institute-fashioned multiculturalism from the start included a reform and labour agenda, and, like the more radical multicultural campaigns that occurred in the United States, it points to the possibility of envisioning and implementing a more radical multiculturalism-from-below.⁴⁷ Other multiracial multicultural alliances might yet envision what Canadian geographers Kanishka Goonewardena and Stefan Kipfer have described as more radical urban agendas.⁴⁸ In addition, immigration scholars, myself included, have shown considerable respect for immigrant parents and their transplanted survival strategies, but the Institute counsellors deserve credit for their albeit mostly unsuccessful efforts to keep in school the teenagers of parents willing to forgo their children's high school education in order to realize dreams of home ownership.

Historical Contingencies

Of course, radical imaginaries cannot be implemented in a historical vacuum, and here, too, but in a negative sense, the Toronto Institute case is illustrative. It was not only the contradictions within liberalism that imposed class, gender, racial, and other limits on Institute-style pluralism. Certainly, a key paradox

was the assumption that host societies can integrate immigrants into the mainstream – a process that inevitably involves a degree of homogenization to dominant norms – while preserving and promoting “authentic” immigrant cultures understood and utilized primarily as folk cultures. Nevertheless, a convergence of several factors influenced the shape that pluralism took in Toronto. Returning to the cultural mandate, I highlight two related factors. The Cold War and the prominence of the Eastern European groups in the Institute’s cultural programs ensured that there would be no leap into a radical multicultural reimagining.

The immigrant-gifts ideology that informed Institute cultural pluralism, and the collaborations and extravaganzas that left their imprint on Toronto and environs, harnessed mainly European folk cultures to an urban, modernist nation-building project that simultaneously sidelined Indigenous and racialized people, even when they were included as performers. The folk festivals were also sites of conflict and contestation, however, and the final pageantry the result of negotiations between the Institute folks and the male elites and cultural impresarios and performers who used the gifts platform to assert their presence, both symbolically and politically, in the city, province, and nation. The ability particularly of the Eastern European groups to impose their narratives on the Institute and the city’s wider agenda played a role in the Institute’s shift from a more narrowly British to a more pluralistic but still Eurocentric vision of Canada.

The affiliated ethnic groups on which the Institute relied increasingly articulated the terms of their participation in Institute events and wider collaborations in the language of the ethnic lobby that challenged the two founding nations narrative of Canada that had shaped the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Those who portray the lobby as a popular ethno-political movement emphasize the role played by Ukrainian Canadian leaders such as Paul Yuzyk – the University of Manitoba historian, nationalist Ukrainian Canadian, and Conservative senator whose maiden speech in the senate in 1964 offered the first treatise on multiculturalism in Parliament – who first resisted and then renegotiated the B&B commission’s dual narrative so that it acknowledged the “other” (mostly European) ethnic groups as the “third element” of Canadian society.⁴⁹

When Yuzyk introduced “multiculturalism” into Canadian political debate, he credited the term to an American sociologist who had been active in southern California’s pluralist networks before moving to Alberta.⁵⁰ Analyses now abound of how Yuzyk and his confrères manipulated the historical myths and symbols of both (a Soviet-oppressed) homeland and hostland for greater political ends: to ensure ethnic-boundary maintenance (as in securing the persistence and revival of distinct ethnic-group identities)⁵¹ and to promote group-based linguistic and cultural rights.⁵² Yuzyk et al. advanced a white, conservative, and

colonial ideology of nation-building – one that celebrated the Ukrainian “pioneers” who purportedly brought white-settler civilization to the prairies and their successful and assimilated descendants – that could appeal to mainstream English Canadian elites.⁵³ Racism against the early racialized immigrants who arrived under the points system helped further the white-ethnic cause because, viewed alongside Black and Asian newcomers, the Euro-Canadian groups looked decidedly white and acceptable.⁵⁴ The era’s white-ethnic consciousness, with its focus on group rights, also helps to account for the Institute’s weak record on human rights (despite its commitment to liberal internationalism) and on race relations and anti-racist work.

The benefits that European immigrants accrued from multiculturalism in the years since the Institute’s demise, including increasing respectability and even a full-fledged whiteness bolstered by class mobility, were linked as well to the growing racialization of immigration to Canada. The continued privileging of a Eurocentric pluralism despite significant changes in the populations at the city, province, and national level, along with systemic racism and growing racial inequities, help to account for the situation that contemporary feminist and critical race scholars have decried. Notwithstanding the efforts of racialized immigrants and Canadians to reshape a cultural policy into a tool for redressing racial and other inequities, multiculturalism policies, note scholars such as Sunera Thobani, Enakshi Dua, and others, serve to contain racialized immigrants by transforming them into culturally bound others with primitive ethnic traditions while depicting white settlers as modern, superior, progressive, and tolerant of these others.⁵⁵ Insofar as it failed to develop a more egalitarian, or consultative, relationship with the racialized Canadian and immigrant groups whose participation it also sought, the Institute ultimately bears responsibility for perpetuating a Eurocentric pluralism.

In comparison to its counterparts in the United States, where a number of individual International Institutes are still in operation today in certain cities,⁵⁶ Toronto’s International Institute had a short-lived history. But while its demise brought an end to the city’s explicit involvement in a twentieth-century US-led movement of pluralist social agencies, its roots extend further back to late-nineteenth and turn-of-the-twentieth-century debates and experiments on both sides of the border.

As the primary agents of an important but flawed Canadian experiment in promoting a liberal multiculturalism as a means by which to reimagine the nation, build community, and ensure the integration of immigrants, the Institute women and their colleagues left behind a mixed and uneven legacy. By recovering the largely neglected history of women’s pluralist activism in Canada before the advent of a now half-century-old official multiculturalism, and by assessing their accomplishments and limitations, it is my hope that this study contributes to and invigorates the ongoing research and debate concerning a leading if contested and beleaguered component of Canadian national identity.

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