

Multiculturalism at the Crossroads: Learning Beyond the West

Written by Marc Woons

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In the Western world — i.e., Western European states and those it established through settler colonialism like Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand^[1] — the standard claim is that we only need to go back about forty-five years to discover multiculturalism's founding moment (Wayland 1997; Wong & Guo 2011; Bevelander and Taras 2012). Facing the growing threat of secession on the part of the French-speaking population concentrated in Québec, Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau stood in Parliament to announce official multiculturalism on 8 October 1971. He said that 'the government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for us all' (Trudeau 1971: 8545–8546).

Today, multicultural policies exist in nearly every Western state. While Canada continues to lead the pack in terms of greater public recognition, tolerance, and support for religious and cultural diversity among immigrants, national minorities, and Indigenous peoples,^[2] only a few examples, like the treatment of immigrants and religious minorities in Denmark and Switzerland or national minorities in Greece, are considered non-multicultural.^[3] And while leaders like German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former British Prime Minister David Cameron have recently spoken of multiculturalism's failure (Malik 2015), multicultural policy experts argue that only a few states like the Netherlands have backtracked as others have changed little or even promoted greater multiculturalism despite the claims of various heads of government (Banting & Kymlicka 2012; Taras 2012). Populist rhetoric clearly receives more attention than the daily grind of policy development and implementation, though some signs do suggest that multiculturalist policies are not always delivering on their promises of peace, tolerance, and shared feelings of belonging. From the burning of holy sites in places like the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Sweden to popular gains being made by xenophobic political parties, conflict and intolerance by a growing minority persists regardless of whether one believes the solution is more multiculturalism (faulting the government or majority population) or less multiculturalism (faulting 'minorities') — or, as I will try to explore, a somewhat different multicultural approach that draws on the positive lessons that can be gained from experiences beyond the West understood as both a place and as an epistemic position (as others in this volume more explicitly discuss).

This is done with a focus on Azerbaijan, a highly diverse state with a rich, complex, and difficult history located — according to notable historian Tadeusz Świątochowski (1994) — at the 'crossroads' or (to use the predominant term found in this volume) in the borderland between Europe and Asia. In contrast to Europe's emerging scepticism, Azerbaijan is enthusiastically embracing multiculturalism and highlighting its support for religious and cultural diversity, directly and indirectly challenging Westerners to (re)consider its nature and importance. From the 2008 launch of the 'Baku Process' to declaring 2016 'The Year of Multiculturalism,' Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev regularly shares his belief that Azerbaijan is 'not only a geographic bridge between East and West, but also a cultural bridge. For centuries, representatives of religions, cultures lived in peace and dignity in Azerbaijan ... Religious tolerance, multiculturalism were always present here. There was no word multiculturalism, but the ideas were always present' (Aliyev 2016). Azerbaijan, he contends, is one of the world's great centres of multiculturalism.^[4]

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Despite having a generally negative image in the West, at least according to various Western-centric indices rating economic liberalism, corruption, democracy, and so on, Azerbaijan's foray into the wider conversation should be welcomed for two reasons, both hinted at by President Aliyev. The first is *historical*, and focuses on the ways in which a shared community's history, for better or worse, must inform a multicultural present and future. Though Western states are certainly not alone in this regard, their particularly troublesome history of imperialism and colonialism suggests they have had less than stellar records in terms of their treatment of religious-spiritual difference, national minorities, and Indigenous peoples, which goes some way in explaining why they selectively emphasize recent history as if it could be abstracted from the much longer timeline. It will be argued that failing to give history its due — i.e., recognizing even the tumultuous and divisive aspects of a collective past and taking the difficult yet crucial steps towards addressing it — explains many of Western multiculturalism's contemporary challenges. For President Aliyev's claim that 'there was no word multiculturalism, but the ideas were always present' to have meaning and force, history and the treatment of history must be closely examined for the lessons they might provide us today.

The second reason could be described as *geographical*. Though not simply tied to the more commonly associated notion of place, but drawing in some of the 'border thinking' elaborated upon by many of this volume's contributors, it suggests that much can be learned from recognizing that multiculturalism is not simply an idea from the West to be improved in the West and exported to the East; rather, we might be better served by, again echoing President Aliyev, building a 'bridge between East and West' or, to paraphrase Walter Mignolo, dwelling in the borderland between the two.

Both dimensions are important parts of any fulsome investigation covering the mutual lessons to be learned at 'the crossroads.' Though the two aspects cannot and should not be separated, this chapter's relatively short foray into the subject focuses more on the former aspect by comparing how Canada and Azerbaijan approach their histories related to their respective multicultural projects of today. The underlying aim is to challenge the perception that multiculturalism is a universal or singular set of ideas to be exported from West to East, as leading Western scholars over-emphasize.^[5] Instead, I explore the possibility that we should not simply try to promote and strengthen multiculturalism in the East or in the West, but between East and West by building bridges of tolerance and inclusion between places as well as ideas, values, cultures, and religions through learning rather than dismissive judgement.^[6] In this spirit, the conclusion focuses on what Canada can learn from Azerbaijan on the relationship between multiculturalism and history despite the popular view that Canada comes across as offering more to learn in this and other areas. Indeed, it seems to me that this possibility still exists *because of* this popular view and the blind spot it creates.

Canadian Multiculturalism: Rejections of the Past

Western multiculturalism — more commonly referred to in more neutral, universal, and even authoritative terms as 'liberal multiculturalism' or simply 'multiculturalism' — tends to entrench itself by making claims *against* the past. Like many political-philosophical creeds deeply associated with modernity and the Enlightenment, it strives to free modern (European) subjects from the imperialist and colonialist sins of their forefathers by demarcating clear historical and conceptual breaks between assimilation and tolerance; genocide and inclusion; tyranny and democracy; ignorance and reason. On such an understanding, multiculturalism represents one of the more recent developments that tries to close the curtains on the Middle Ages and realize ever-improving universal Enlightenment values of liberty, equality, and tolerance. At the same time, it also tries to cope with notable excesses of the Enlightenment that led to religious persecution to defend science, the murdering of Indigenous peoples in the name of racial superiority, and the assimilation of national minorities as part of building modern, unified nation-states. To the extent that Western multiculturalism has played a role in discrediting such acts, it should be praised as an improvement over the unprecedented bloodshed of the last two hundred years. On the other hand, all this bloodshed and its lasting legacies cannot now simply be swept under the rug as if it never happened, as if it does not have serious lingering impacts.

When Canada acts on a difficult past, it typically aims to bury it rather than express it. Consider the first of two official state apologies by Prime Minister Stephen Harper about a decade ago. In 2008, he apologized for atrocities committed in Indigenous residential schools run by the state typically in partnership with Christian organisations from the nineteenth century until the last one closed in 1996. Serious problems plagued the apology stemming from what

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Matt James (2013: 37) calls 'neoliberal heritage redress' whereby the state

seek[s] actively to construct popular understandings of injustice in ways congenial to the neoliberal project of remaking the public sphere devoid of critical dissent ... singular past government acts [are] abstracted from any deeper consideration of the long-term structural and attitudinal racism that tends to give rise to historical wrongs in the first place.

Through such abstraction — the disconnection between the unjust acts and the bulk of the long-lasting consequences — the state makes things worse by trying to establish a general perception that the matter has been resolved even when the opposite is closer to the truth, particularly from the perspective of those most affected.

With this in mind, it becomes easier to understand the general conclusion, reached within Indigenous and academic communities, that the apology falls far short of atoning for the ways residential schools irreversibly disrupted, harmed, and weakened Indigenous individuals, families, and communities by forcibly separating generations of children from their parents *and* subjecting them to inhumane conditions. According to Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2013: 12-13), the apology

occluded broader consideration of the long history of colonial genocide and its other constitutive components such as the establishment of reservations, the expropriation of land and resources, the deliberate suppression and distortion of Indigenous languages, beliefs, and cultural practices, and the disruption of kinship networks. Not to mention the present conditions of poverty, incarceration, and compromised health lived by many Aboriginal people.

Eva Mackey (2013: 54) adds, in a piece appropriately called 'The Apologizers' Apology,' that the state's apology completely overlooked 'Canada's calculated expropriation of resources and the use of cultural genocide practices as a means to hold on to those resources.' Even more shocking, Prime Minister Harper proclaimed, less than a year later at a G20 meeting in 2009, that Canada has 'no history of colonialism' (Wherry 2009). For the apology to achieve meaningful reconciliation and healing it would have to address the concerns raised by Henderson, Wakeham, and Mackey; above all it would require recognizing important aspects like Indigenous sovereignty over traditional lands. This does not necessarily or even primarily entail territorial independence, but equal partnerships among, in this case, nations sharing sovereignty over territories they inextricably co-exist upon. Unfortunately, all signs suggest that the act of apology has been used to promote not meaningful and lasting redress, but duplicity; remembering *and forgetting*, action *and inaction*. It should therefore come as no surprise that the apology has not mended the rift between Indigenous peoples and the state (see, e.g., Gray 2008). The apology has instead exposed multiculturalism's paradoxical nature in that its noble claims of unity only strive to mask or simply avoid powerful societal divisions. By refusing to accept apologies that deny aspects of historical and ongoing suffering, Indigenous peoples can only but fight to keep the possibility for meaningful redress alive against a resistant state that wants to believe that it has settled the matter once and for all.

The second example is one of partial success though it highlights similar challenges. Two years earlier, in 2006, Prime Minister Harper apologized for the discriminatory Chinese immigration head tax instituted from 1885 to 1923, which exclusively kept Chinese families from reuniting and forced many into poor working and living conditions given burdensome debts. Despite the apology, many Chinese-Canadians feel that the state resists their 'long-standing struggle to keep alive a recognition of the problematic and deeply uneasy nature of Canadian citizenship ... [that must return] again and again to difficulties in its foundations' (Cho 2013: 96). In Lili Cho's account, the apology and symbolic financial compensation, while achieving some measure of redress, are not currency to be traded for closure and moving on. The apology is instead the *beginning* of ensuring such issues remain ever-present with their full implications yet to be revealed as part of ever-changing ideas concerning shared and inclusive citizenship. As both examples show, the multicultural state instead tries to mark an *ending*⁷ without recognizing that redress as rupture between the past and the present cannot occur without jeopardizing the inclusivity gained by the apology in the first place.⁸ To abandon the idea of returning 'again and again,' as counterintuitive as it might seem, risks reopening wounds that have only begun healing, at least from the perspective of the wounded. To follow the analogy, returning to the trauma in an educational, respectful, and compassionate way is like continuously applying a healing balm (even if it cannot help but leave a scar), whereas doing nothing is like providing no medicine and only allows the

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wound to worsen.

A multicultural state that allows itself to even partially forget or intentionally misremember its racist, ethnocentric, and generally exclusive past therefore maintains or risks repeating the associated problems, i.e., leaving unchallenged the structures and perspectives that necessitated redress in the first place. Though the two apologies are not easily compared given the different circumstances and stakes involved, in large part explaining their varying (lack of) impact, both highlight the fact that victimized groups disproportionately carry the burden of fighting for inclusivity and understanding against a state that prefers to apologize, push history aside, and then quickly move on while fundamentally changing very little. Advocating what he calls ‘critical’ or radical’ multiculturalism, Richard Day (2000: 222) seems to agree, worrying that Canadians *must* be reminded that ‘Canada is in fact an Empire formed through violent conquest — though this has been kept very quiet, supported first by a fantasy of voluntary ‘confederation,’ and now by one of voluntary ‘multiculturalism.’’ Yet, he does not reject the idea or term of multiculturalism outright, suggesting that allowing for greater diversity — particularly in line with an openness to new and different (re)interpretations of ‘those aspects of this history that have been most vigorously excluded and repressed’ — will work if Canada actively ‘allow[s] itself to discover that the history of Canadian diversity in fact *does* contain what is necessary for its own overcoming’ (Day 2000: 223, emphasis in original). Although promoting historical sensitivity and inclusivity can be time-consuming, even perhaps risking short-term instability and uncertainty (or perhaps not), it can also promote longer-term feelings of trust, stability, and inclusion. Anything else simply sacrifices multiculturalism to meet other demands as Canada has arguably done to ensure its own nation-state-building agenda continues with minimal interference from deeper, more ‘radical’ multicultural claims. In this sense, one could argue that even though Canadian multiculturalism has many strengths, it is not multicultural to the extent that it rejects history, or at least the contested view of history, and the possible implications this would have on promoting greater inclusion and the sharing of power within society.

Azerbaijani Multiculturalism: Reflections of the Past?

So what can Canada and other Western states possibly learn by looking into President Aliyev’s assertion that Azerbaijan indeed does positively link its multicultural present to the past? And how well does this promote multiculturalism in Azerbaijan? Azerbaijan’s history can be divided into four general periods: pre-Tsarist rule (pre-1828), the Tsarist period (1828–1920), the Soviet period (1920–1991), and independence (post-1991). Also noteworthy, the short-lived independent Azerbaijan Democratic Republic from 1918 to 1920 came to represent the culmination of Azerbaijani multiculturalism’s deeper historical linkages as developed particularly during the second half of the Tsarist period. Given that this chapter is neither explicitly historical nor comprehensive in nature, but examines the role of history in promoting contemporary multiculturalism, the investigation only goes back to the nineteenth century. It is during this period that most experts believe the region’s identities formed largely in relation to Iran (Persia), Russia (Soviet Union), Turkey (Ottoman Empire), and increasingly the West (see Souleimanov 2012; Ismayilov 2015). Going farther back, while useful and important, is not entirely necessary for understanding history’s role as the historical identities and tensions in the region — such as, but certainly not only, the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Armenia^[9] — tend to reflect rather than defy this much longer history. Of greater interest is how each state in the region, and Azerbaijan in particular, deals with such conflicting ideas and identity claims. This section will suggest that Azerbaijan does particularly well *in light of* the unique and challenging circumstances it faces in terms of not just honouring its past history of inclusion, tolerance, and peace, but also in the face of difficult contemporary challenges beyond multiculturalism that certainly make matters more difficult. This allows for a more meaningful reflection in the conclusion on how this relates to the Canadian experience and what lessons can or cannot be drawn from the Azerbaijani experience. To put it more plainly, the idea is not to measure performance, especially against some set of general or universal standards however considered they may be, but to emphasize context for the purposes of social learning rather than abstract comparison.

After a century of repeatedly trying to annex Transcaucasia, Tsarist Russia finally secured control over the region in 1828 with the Treaty of Turkmenchay demarcating the Aras River as the border with the Persian Empire — a legacy still reflected along part of Azerbaijan’s southern border with Iran. With Russian imperialism came relative peace between Azerbaijan and its neighbours as many of them similarly fell under Moscow’s central authority. New ideas began entering the country as Russian settlers moved to the region and economic ties with Europe increased as

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Azerbaijan became an early global leader in oil production during the late-nineteenth century (Najafizadeh 2012). Despite the strong presence of both Shia and Sunni Muslim populations in the country, some of whom would have preferred their political vision of Islam to prevail, Azerbaijani intellectuals (drawing in part on new ideas coming from Europe) promoted a vision for the nation-state that was more 'modernist' and secular (Özcelik 2013).

The real evidence of the power of these new ideas and how they combined with old ones came when chaos in Russia during the 1917 October Revolution provided the people of Azerbaijan with the opportunity to achieve independence (Rasizade 2011). In 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) became the first secular democracy in the Muslim world (Alieva 2006), embodying the culmination of growing support for the 'Azerbaijani Enlightenment Movement' (Najafizadeh 2012: 83) among secular nationalists and the 'Jadid Movement' among Muslims who 'believed that the Muslim faith must respond to the cataclysmic changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution' (Karagiannis 2010: 48). The risk of violence along the Sunni-Shia divide was therefore mitigated as shared values of tolerance bound the Azerbaijani people along ethnic lines. All of this led the people of Azerbaijan to pursue numerous fundamental political decisions that promoted peace, tolerance, and inclusion not just among the ethnic Azerbaijani or Muslim majority, but many other minorities. The short-lived ADR gave voting rights to women, another first in the Muslim world and notably earlier than most Western countries (Cornell 2011; Najafizadeh 2012); promoted socio-economic equality through a market economy with a strong middle class (Alieva 2006); and, introduced a multi-party system led by the Musavat ('Equality') party with coalitions through proportional representation (Karagiannis 2010). Foreshadowing Western multiculturalism even more, the ADR ensured prominent ethno-cultural and religious groups would have guaranteed representation by providing them with parliamentary seats. Of the 120 total seats, twenty-one were allocated to Armenians, ten to Russians, and one each for ethnic Germans and Jewish populations (Cornell 2011).[10] Most notable here in terms of reflecting a history of intermingling is that the majority saw fit to give a significant number of seats to the Armenians and Russians, groups with whom they share a difficult past. Thus, we can say that Azerbaijani multiculturalism took official shape at least as far back as 1918 using ideas that likely would have risen to the surface decades earlier had it not been for Russian imperialism. Moreover, the ADR did not simply import Western ideas, but represented a unique multicultural balance between 'democratic liberal knowledge and modernity on one hand and Islam and traditionalism on the other in the country's cultural profile' (Ismayilov 2015: 12). Unfortunately for (proto-)multiculturalists, the ADR came to an end in 1920 as the Red Army marched on Baku, assuring that Azerbaijan would again experience external domination albeit this time within the Soviet Union as the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR).

While I skim over the ensuing Soviet period, it is important to note that it shared some traits with the ADR and departed from it in other ways. The Soviets shared a desire to keep the peace between Sunnis and Shias by promoting state secularism, which was very much in line with the wider Soviet ideology. Yet, the Soviets did this by cracking down on religion, closing almost all mosques (Keller 2001). Unlike in the ADR, the Soviets discouraged minority languages, even promoting Russian over Azerbaijani, which formally persisted until 1978 when the ASSR constitution was amended to give Azerbaijani official status (Garibova 2009). Though Azerbaijan managed to gain more control as time went on, particularly as the Soviet Union's demise seemed inevitable, multicultural policies were not a significant priority for the Soviets, nor could the people of Azerbaijan do more than make incremental victories in an effort to painstakingly bring back aspects of the ADR.

The Soviet Union's collapse allowed Azerbaijan to reestablish its independence in 1991. Leila Alieva (2006: 148) puts it best when she writes that 'the [ADR's] national idea ... was powerful enough to live on as an inspiration for many despite more than seven decades of brutal Soviet tyranny.' In the same spirit as the ADR, the new Constitution, in article 1, states that 'the Republic of Azerbaijan proclaims itself a democratic, secular, legal and social state whose highest values are an individual, his life, rights and freedoms.' This is no small commitment in a society made up of tremendous internal diversity with different Turkic, Iranian, Caucasian, Semitic, and Slavic groups speaking many different languages and following at least three major world religions (not to mention prominent denominational differences and secular beliefs). Moreover, there is an increased need for stability against external claims to Azerbaijan's state sovereignty, notably from Armenia. Today, Azerbaijan, like Canada and many other states, maintains a delicate balance between the need to promote stability with developing an open society that promotes diversity. This seems to be working. For the most part, Azerbaijani identity has found a way to express itself as an inclusive civic identity that unites diverse peoples by both offering public support to different groups where needed

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and taking a hands-off approach where possible to allow historical communities to flourish unimpeded (see Ismayilov 2015). Azerbaijan's promotion of peaceful relations amid incredible diversity by organically respecting more than forcibly supplanting historical differences is most evident in three areas: (1) religious diversity, (2) linguistic diversity, and (3) ethno-cultural diversity with a focus on Armenians generally and Nagorno-Karabakh specifically. As will be shown, in some cases tolerance and respect for difference is even extended to those with whom Azerbaijanis have (had) strained relationships with like ethnic Armenians and Russians.

Starting with religious diversity, consider first their relationship to the Jewish population. Jewish people have been able to preserve their unique identity in Azerbaijan, living in places like Krasnaya Sloboda (near Quba) since the thirteenth century in what is believed to be the only all-Jewish city outside Israel. Many Jews are now returning from Israel to take advantage of economic opportunities and the general peace secured by the Azerbaijani government (Cornell 2011). Within the Muslim majority, and despite some who fear that political Islam is challenging national secularism, there are many more who previously identified with minority Muslim ethnic groups — like the Lezgins, Talysh, and Kurds — now voluntarily sharing in the wider Azerbaijani identity (ibid.). While the state tolerates all religions, it only supports those that are compatible with the state's wider secular ideology of tolerance (Grant 2011; De Cordier 2014).^[11] Azerbaijan has effectively, to paraphrase Hikmet Hajizade (2011: 11–12), made all religions minorities by honouring them to the extent that they promote peaceful co-operation.

In the area of language, the state has found a delicate balance between actively promoting second languages alongside Azerbaijani and allowing different linguistic communities to decide for themselves how best to sustain them, with smaller languages doing much better than in many places around the world (Garibova 2009). Even Russian — the former occupier's language — receives significant respect and attention as something of 'a first among minority languages' (Fierman 2009: 92). The overall effect is widespread multilingualism, even to the point of keeping alive many languages that would otherwise be at (greater) risk (Clifton 2009; Garibova & Zuercher 2009; Mammadov 2009). Finally, drawing on the challenging Armenian example to highlight ethno-national differences, and even if not entirely for altruistic reasons, Azerbaijan has pursued a plan of peace, tolerance, and acceptance despite the real possibility that military conflict could work given the internationally recognized illegal occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh. Such tolerance and a desire for peace even exists despite the fact that some believe Azerbaijan has gained the military and economic upper hand over Armenia and could return its control over its whole territory should it wish to do so unilaterally.^[12] Azerbaijan even seems willing to grant the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh significant autonomy within a fully restored Azerbaijan should such an eventually arise (Rasizade 2011). Although the conflict has reached an impasse, it is not for a lack of trying on the part of an Azerbaijani state that has turned towards its multicultural roots for answers on how to live together. Many aspects are of course beyond any one state's control, but the ideas and values being espoused by Azerbaijan certainly promote solutions based in large measure on tolerance and recognition of the peoples involved.

Conclusion: Multicultural Lessons at the Crossroads

It seems that all too often and all too quickly Westerners find reasons to not engage with multiculturalism beyond the West, arguing that what they see is not multiculturalism at all. Yet, the people of Azerbaijan could similarly look at Canada and argue that nothing can be learned from a country that steals land from Indigenous peoples, commits barbaric acts of genocide, and refuses to make amends. But this is not a way to start a conversation, but to stop one before it even begins. Nor is such an approach in line with multicultural values, as in most cases we are not dealing with unreasonable tyrants, but more often than not 'Others' who simply live differently than us and grapple with unique challenges given complex local factors as well as global political dynamics linked to power differentials.

What might Canada and the West learn from Azerbaijan's experience with multiculturalism and its understanding of history? By now, it should come as no surprise that I believe much can be learned from Azerbaijan — a state that promotes multiculturalism *despite* many unique external and internal challenges respectively related to hostile neighbours and an emerging economy. In a sense, Azerbaijan is arguably doing much more to exceed expectations than Canada, where more can and should be done especially given the fact that Canadians enjoy tremendous stability and economic security while still allowing serious injustices to persist. With this in mind, two lessons from Azerbaijan that stand out are briefly considered.

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The first lesson that comes through seems to be the way Azerbaijan gives linguistic, cultural, and religious minorities the physical, political, and/or social space to self-govern without always resorting to some sort of government mechanism or presence. In this way, historical communities can carry on as they see fit with minimal external interference. We saw this in the way linguistic communities are simply left to promote their languages in an organic way alongside those of the larger community. While some languages are under threat, this seems less dramatic than in Canada where languages have already been dying off *because of* past state wrongs such as residential schools, and with the state doing too little to ensure their public survival and resurgence stemming from such wrongs. Other examples exist for religious or ethnic communities as we saw with the Jewish people and even Armenians now illegally occupying territories. While it is true that in Canada ethnic minorities receive self-government and other minority rights, they are always determined by the state in a very explicit way that acts like a cage, arguably with little flexibility when it comes to Indigenous peoples (see, e.g., Kanji in this volume) or the people of Quebec (see, e.g., Laforest 2014). Moreover, many self-government agreements fail to provide enough to ensure that organic development in line with history can occur, particularly in the face of the overwhelming presence of the state. While it is true that Indigenous nations in Canada are much smaller than most communities in Azerbaijan, we should, once again, expect more from Canada given its wealth and stability. Instead, we see Azerbaijan doing as well, if not better in a number of crucial areas.

While this first lesson should be given its due, the second lesson seems to be the more important one. Azerbaijan may offer lessons on why it is important to emphasize those elements of a shared past that promote multicultural values. Despite years of occupation and ongoing conflicts, many people in Azerbaijan seem to be making a conscious decision to focus on those values that have brought them peace and happiness, rejecting those who might want to impose their own ideas or intolerant views according to some religious, ethnic, or cultural difference. The 1995 Constitution is a testament to the durability of multicultural ideas that can be traced back at least seven decades to the ADR, sustained and even developed in the face of Tsarist and Soviet rulers. Independence did not simply result in a replication of the same system of domination with different masters, but a rejection of many aspects of the model itself. This is no small feat. Azerbaijanis had a constitutional moment and looked to the past — both good and bad — and chose to promote its multicultural legacy. Canadians, on the other hand, do not always make such a choice, and often feel little can be learned from heeding Richard Day's words that the tools for a multicultural future can be — indeed, must be — found by also looking to the past. This is exactly what some leading scholars in Canada have argued, pointing to early treaty relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples (and even between early Anglophone and Francophone communities), suggesting that we restore the civic virtues of peace, tolerance, respect, and shared sovereignty that informed such nation-to-nation agreements (see, e.g., Tully 1995; Asch 2014). Instead, the Canadian government has turned its back on the early treaty relationship, attempting to mask its domination over Indigenous peoples and claiming that peace prevails when in fact most Indigenous peoples continue to suffer in relatively poor conditions and with little power to change their predicament.

All of this is not to deny that both Azerbaijan and Canada are global multicultural centres. Though necessarily very different in their approaches, given that they must each tackle different circumstances, both countries seem committed to pursuing multiculturalism in one way or another, with unique challenges internal and external to the process of doing so. While I have emphasized — and perhaps sometimes overemphasized — some of the differences between the two countries, there is a lot of ground that can be built upon to benefit the diverse peoples of both countries and firmly establish learnings between East and West — even blur the distinction between East and West given an increasingly complex interconnected world. The more general lesson that I hope readers take away is that we learn more *not* by comparing approaches to knock others down, but by putting such judgements aside if only to find ways to build one another up. It is not important to win the competition of who is more multicultural or who has better multicultural policies, as if some externally applied set of criteria could easily be applied to the complexity of each case. Rather, the goal is to improve on peace, tolerance, and respect across differences whether small or great no matter where one begins and where one might be going.

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Notes

[1] Lorenzo Veracini (2011) explains the differences between standard colonialism as it took place primarily in Africa and southeast Asia and *settler* colonialism as it took place primarily in the Americas, Australia, and New Zealand.

[2] This view of Western multiculturalism mirrors the more prominent Western definition as found, for example, in works by Will Kymlicka (1995) and Tariq Modood (2007).

[3] For a detailed overview of how various Western states score in terms of their multicultural policies, at least according to prominent Western understandings, see Will Kymlicka's Multicultural Policy Index at <http://www.queensu.ca/mcp/> (last accessed 30 August 2016).

[4] I realize that many, particularly from the West, will argue that little should or could be learned from countries like Azerbaijan that have developed a strong reputation for corruption, control of the media, etc. Without getting mired in this difficult quandary, my simple response to this, which I later repeat to some extent, is two-fold: 1) these are Western standards and not universal standards so we should not be surprised that Western states/nations score dramatically higher. Second, adopting such an attitude will cause blind spots in terms of any good work that is happening in areas like multiculturalism *despite* the unique circumstances and challenges being faced by such states/nations owing to contingent factors like global history and geography.

[5] One need not look much further than Will Kymlicka's work since he developed his prominent and widely-accepted theory of liberal multiculturalism (Kymlicka 1989; 1995). For instance, he has co-edited numerous books on promoting Western multiculturalism in Eastern Europe (Kymlicka & Opalski 2001), Asia (Kymlicka & He 2005), and the Middle East (Kymlicka & Pfössl 2014). This is not to suggest that Kymlicka is unaware of the challenges this presents, writing that 'Western models ... may not suit the specific historical, cultural, demographic, and geopolitical circumstances of the region. Moreover, many Asian societies have their own traditions of peaceful coexistence amongst linguistic and religious groups, often dating to precolonial times' (Kymlicka & He 2005: 1) It is, however, one

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thing to recognize these facts and another to give them normative weight in the wider conversations and power struggles between multicultural models.

[6] Though I lack the space to delve into this here, I would be concerned that Western multiculturalists are not as open to non-Western ideas and models as they could and perhaps should be, choosing instead to invest their energies in supporting *liberal* multicultural models rather than promoting greater tolerance of the sort being proposed here and by others. For more on Kymlicka's limited ambivalence on this, see Ivison, Patton, and Sanders (2000: 11) who flag the danger of 'assumptions elaborated within various western anthropological, political or legal doctrines.' At some pains to distinguish himself from Kymlicka, Tariq Modood (2007: 7) highlights well the opening I wish to highlight here when he says that while 'multiculturalism presupposes the matrix of principles, institutions and political norms that are central to contemporary liberal democracies ... [it is] also a challenge to some of these norms, institutions and principles. In my view, multiculturalism could not get off the ground if one totally repudiated liberalism; but neither could it do so if liberalism marked the limits of one's politics.'

[7] In 2013, Jason Kenney, who was at that time the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration, and Multiculturalism, said that redress efforts 'don't go on in perpetuity, they have an end date' (Friesen 2013).

[8] In more concrete terms, the children of head tax victims have not received any formal recognition or compensation because they did not pay the tax themselves. This fails to recognize the fact that the tax had tremendous inter-generational impacts as many families could not easily reunify due to the hardship imposed on the immigrating parent.

[9] For a concise account of the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict's historical roots and how they relate to today, see Rasizade (2011).

[10] This is not to say there are no examples in the West. For instance, a small number of guaranteed Māori seats have existed in New Zealand's Parliament since 1867.

[11] On the success of such efforts, Bruce Grant (2011: 655) writes that 'As with shrines across the region, one could often find Sunni and Shi'i or even Muslim and Christian under a single roof, united in the belief that belief itself could evoke other worlds.'

[12] Of course, the external involvement of the international community arguably plays an even bigger role, though this should not overshadow Azerbaijan's support for peaceful solutions in line with respecting the people of the region and international law.

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