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Has Multiculturalism Really Failed? A Canadian Muslim Perspective

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Abstract: In recent years, claims that multiculturalism has created segregated communities, encouraged terrorism, and failed to foster shared national identities in western nations have gained popularity. In this paper, we use young Canadian Muslims' lived experience of multiculturalism to reflect on this debate. Contrary to popular rhetoric, our interviews of 50 young Muslim adults show that many maintain a dual Canadian-Muslim identity by utilizing the ideology of multiculturalism, even though they are increasingly stigmatized for their religion. These findings lead us to problematize the discourse surrounding the 'failure' of multiculturalism and to highlight the contradictions within it.

Keywords: 'clash of civilizations'; multiculturalism; Canadian Muslims; 9/11; Canadian identity; race relations; Muslim identity

1. Introduction

On February 5, 2011, at the Annual Munich Security Conference, British Prime Minister David Cameron declared: 'State multiculturalism has failed' [1]. According to Cameron, multiculturalism creates segregated communities, encourages terrorism and fails to provide a shared sense of British identity. In his speech, he also warned of increased scrutiny of Muslim groups receiving public money but not tackling extremism [1]. Cameron's comments followed hard on the heels of similar warnings from German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy [2]. Their sentiments are reinforced by rapidly shifting multiculturalism policies and discourses worldwide. Some critics

note the return of assimilationist policies and a rejection of pluralism in such countries as the US, Germany and the Netherlands [3,4], while others see recent emergent political consensus in Western Europe as a recalibration rather a rejection of multiculturalism [5].

The recent disenchantment with multiculturalism in both Europe and North America has been fuelled by anxieties about Islam and fears about security following 9/11 [6]. The catastrophic events of 9/11 significantly altered how Muslim communities are seen worldwide [7,8]. Islam has long been subjected to orientalist depictions but following 9/11, Muslim communities were projected as a threat to the very existence of western civilizations [9] in ascending order please. In Canada, there was a 16-fold increase in hate crimes directed towards Muslims in the year following 9/11 [7]. Many western nations, including Canada, implemented anti-terrorist laws targeted at Muslims. Canada's Bill C36, introduced approximately two months after 9/11 [7,9,10], modified 22 existing laws, including the criminal code, and led to the creation of new criminal offenses such as facilitating and enticing terrorist acts [7,11]. The implementation of anti-terrorist legislation also coincided with fears that multiculturalism could foster terrorism. For instance, Robert Fulford ([12], A19), columnist for a major Canadian newspaper, *National Post*, asks 'How can multiculturalism which preaches tolerance above all else—be squared with a militant, intolerable creed that demonizes non-believers?'

Since Muslim communities are at the forefront of debates about multiculturalism, and Canada is often perceived as the world leader in multiculturalism (having been the first western nation to officially adopt a multicultural policy), it seems appropriate to scrutinize young Canadian Muslims to clarify the dynamics of multiculturalism. Because 9/11 was a critical turning point in world politics, resulting in a noticeable shift in the state's and society's attitudes towards and relationships to Muslim communities, the post 9/11 experiences of Canadians Muslims opens a window on multiculturalism and how it works both as an idea and as a practice. Furthermore, by focusing on Canadian Muslims, we can fill a gap in empirical data, as the treatment of Muslim communities in Canada post 9/11 has largely been ignored in academic literature.

In our in-depth interviews of 50 young Muslims, we found that young Canadian Muslims are increasingly stigmatized and marginalized for their religion. Their Muslim identity is often a target of discrimination and abuse in public spaces. Institutions such as the labor market and state security practices seem to have become more discriminatory towards Canadian Muslims. Interestingly, many young Canadian Muslims are using the ideology of multiculturalism to resist discrimination and pressures to assimilate, and proudly retain a dual Muslim and Canadian identity. This obvious contradiction between the reality of racial and ethnic discrimination and ideology of multiculturalism yields important insights into the ground level dynamics of multicultural negotiations. Our study suggests that in Canada, multiculturalism is not a given reality but an everyday micro-contestation; furthermore, the increased public scrutiny of Muslims after 9/11 has, instead of pushing youths towards radicalism, helped them articulate and embrace multiculturalism.

These findings lead us to problematize the discourse surrounding the 'failure' of multiculturalism, and to highlight its inherent tensions. Though multiculturalism is often understood as a means to ensure diversity and equality [13], many academics argue that its core objective is to assimilate minorities to the dominant culture [9,14–17], a sentiment supported by our findings. If this is the case, we argue that the 'failure' of multiculturalism might have more to do with Muslim resistance to assimilation than their ability to maintain loyalties to western nations. In the post 9/11 era, the

retention of Muslim identities in western nations may not be welcomed because of how Islam has been demonized, as illustrated by increasingly explicit government policies of zero tolerance of Muslim religious and cultural practices, along with popular public support of these policies. For example, the most recent debate of a ban on religious symbols in Quebec.

In the next section, we review European discourses that suggest a growing endorsement of assimilationist policies. These are interesting because of their distinct focus on ethnic and religious immigrants, and more precisely, Muslims, differentiating them from the race and class dominated multiculturalism and immigration discourses in Canada and the US. In the third section, we provide an overview of the Canadian literature on multiculturalism including its critiques. The fourth section explains our research methods, and in the fifth, we show how multiculturalism plays out in the daily lives of young Canadian Muslims. Here we show how young Muslims face pressures to assimilate as they navigate through public spaces and institutions, but use multiculturalism to resist discrimination by asserting both their Muslim and Canadian identities. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of what these experiences tell us about current debates surrounding multiculturalism and its inherent contradictions. We suggest that the discourse surrounding the ‘failure’ of multiculturalism is not neutral but racialized, highly influenced by the post 9/11 social and political context.

2. Discourses of Multiculturalism in Europe

European multicultural debates are particularly relevant for this study because of their focus on Muslim ethnicity and religion. They provide an important contrast to debates on multiculturalism in Canada and offer valuable insights into how race, ethnicity, and religion intersect in multicultural discourses about Muslims.

In contrast to the growing support for multiculturalism in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s and 2000s saw a multiculturalism backlash [18]. In many European countries, a growing belief in the failure of multiculturalism led to policy retreat [3,18,19], with multiculturalism being blamed for ethnic segregation, social isolation of immigrants, and weakened national identity [4]. Some even argue that the combination of multicultural policies promoting cultural diversity and access to generous welfare support for immigrants have, instead of facilitating immigrant integration and social citizenship, led to increased welfare dependence and social and economic marginalization [20].

In the Netherlands, until recently one of the most pro-multicultural countries in the EU, for example, the government began to balk on its *Minderhedennota* policy (minority policy) in the 1990s, as media and political discourses took an anti-immigration and anti-multicultural turn. The minority policy gave resident immigrants a wide range of citizenship rights, including access to civil services and local voting rights and support for cultural associations. The policy also developed an institutional framework for immigrants to access political and policy decision-making, such as the creation of consultative immigrants’ councils, and introduced education and employment programs and policies against racial discrimination [21]. These policies and programs, however, met with growing criticism in the 1990s, from both the political right and left, for being ineffective and for promoting social segregation. Critics argued that despite the multicultural policy, the immigrant unemployment rate remained high, and immigrants appeared to have made little progress integrating into Dutch society. In ‘Multicultural Drama’, vocal critic Paul Scheffer called the multicultural experiment bankrupt and

argued for the need to rethink immigrant integration in Dutch society [5,22]. In response to these criticisms, the Dutch government shifted its policy focus from celebrating cultural and language diversities to labor market integration. Such programs as obligatory Dutch language and social orientation for newcomers were introduced in an effort to better assimilate immigrants into Dutch society [19,23]. Troubled by high unemployment rate among visible minority immigrants, and by high profile incidents such the assassinations of Pim Fortyn in 2002 and Theo van Gough in 2004¹, successive governments introduced increasingly strict citizenship tests to educate and normalize immigrants to Dutch culture, society, and values. For example, the 2003 Naturalization Test was replaced by the Integration Test in 2006, a compulsory citizenship test for immigrants applying for temporary residence permit. The test stresses, in addition to the knowledge of Dutch language, understanding of Dutch culture and its liberal secular values, including the ideas of gender equality, individual freedom and autonomy, and the right to self-determination [22].

Vesta [19] argues that the Dutch government's shift to integrationist approach to immigrants was a part of welfare state restructuring that put more emphasis on individual self-sufficiency. Others, however, perceive this as part of a much larger and pervasive European-wide political and cultural shift: an attempt to recalibrate "multicultural ontology" [5], or what Jeffery C. Alexander calls Fortress Europe's attempt to redefine and reconstruct European civil sphere in the face of the rising threat of a global multicultural tsunami [24].

Indeed, similar shifts in multicultural policies can be observed in other EU countries, including France, Germany and Denmark. In France, public debate on the headscarf began in the early 1990s; after 2002, the debate took on a noticeably more political tone as mainstream political parties such as PRP and UMP began to actively campaign for a ban on headscarves in public space. Joan W. Scott maintains that the passing of the 2004 French law banning the headscarf and other religious symbols was as much a response by President Jacques Chirac's UMP party to the threat of the growing electoral strength of the far-right nationalist anti-immigrant party *Front National*, as it was a response to growing public anxiety about Muslims in the post-9/11 French society [25]. In Germany, public debates of 'ghettorization' and 'parallel societies' burgeoned in the early 2000s [26]. As in France, the shift in public debate led to the introduction of a ban on the headscarf in 2003 [27]. In Denmark, increasing anti-immigrant public sentiments led to the abolishment of some key NGOs supporting immigrants, including the Danish Centre for Human Rights, the Board of Ethnic Equality, and the Documentation and Advocacy Centre on Racial Discrimination ([28], p. 217). Muslim protests of the infamous Muhammad cartoons met with the anti-dialogue and 'zero tolerance' policy of the Danish government [28].²

These changes in public and political debates of multiculturalism in Europe highlight a particular form of multicultural rejection. Unlike the issues of racism and social economic inequalities between visible minorities and the white (Anglo) majority that continue to dominate North American multicultural debates, European debates focus on resident Muslims and Muslim immigrants, and the

¹ Pim Fortuyn was a populist right-wing politician who campaigned on an anti-immigration ticket. He was killed during the national election campaign in 2002. Documentary filmmaker Theo Van Gough was murdered in 2004 after he made a controversial film about the treatment of women in Islam.

² Here, 'zero tolerance' is meant zero tolerance towards Muslim threats against cartoonist Kurt Westergaad.

fear of European social disintegration resulting from the ‘multicultural indulgence’ of earlier decades [5,24]. Jeffrey C. Alexander [24] points out:

Inside history’s most radical experiment in supra-national and anti-ethnic democracy, the European Union (EU), there has emerged a molting fear that, particularly vis-à-vis Muslim immigration, the independent status of the European civil sphere has become vulnerable indeed. From this sense of endangerment has followed newly restrictive legal, administrative and political measures; the rise to popularity of extremist political parties; and episodes not merely of random violence against Muslims but organized murderous attacks against outspoken supporters of the multicultural expansion of European civil societies (p. 533).

3. Multiculturalism in Canada

Canada is routinely cited as a world leader in multiculturalism, representing the peaceful coexistence of multiple ethnicities and regions [29]. Canadian multiculturalism is frequently understood in terms of three different yet related notions: a specific government policy of pluralism, a social reality of a culturally and demographically diverse society, and a political ideology advocating cultural pluralism [29,30]. Additionally, Augie Fleras [31] argues that multiculturalism functions through an ideology and as a set of practices. As an ideology, multiculturalism proffers an image of how Canadians should live and interact within a pluralistic society, valuing diversity and being tolerant, respectful and non-discriminatory. As a set of practices, Canadian multiculturalism claims to embody fairness and equity whether by individuals, groups or institutions [13].

We see a serious contradiction between what multiculturalism promises and what it actually delivers, and argue that this contradiction can be best understood by conceptualizing it as a lived experience. Kymlicka [13] has argued that to understand the meaning of multiculturalism, we need to look at what it does in practice, not just what it says. That is, how does it impact intergroup relations and access to important social institutions? Similarly, Wood and Gilbert [29] contend that cultural identities are often negotiated in public spaces, institutions and everyday interactions. Therefore, simply examining particular multicultural policies misses an important point about what multiculturalism means for individuals and how it functions as a social ideology and in daily reality. In this study, we consider how Canadian multiculturalism is practiced in different social locations to reflect on its dynamics.

3.1. Critiques of Canadian Multiculturalism

Will Kymlicka argues for the enduring success of multiculturalism in Canada [13,18]. He contends that immigrant groups in Canada integrate more quickly today than before the adoption of multiculturalism policy, and they integrate more effectively than in countries without such a policy [13]. For example, naturalization rates have increased since the adoption of multiculturalism. Compared to other western democracies, Canadian immigrants are more likely to become citizens and to participate in the political process [32]. Moreover, children of immigrants and minorities have better educational outcomes in Canada than in any other western democracy [13]. Similarly, Dib *et al.* [33] point out the lack of extreme isolation often seen in American ghettos, the

rise of mixed marriages, and the mixed socioeconomic conditions of concentrated immigrant areas as indicators of the success of Canadian multiculturalism [33].

However, many believe that multiculturalism impedes immigrants' ability to integrate into mainstream society. For example, citing a growing number of ethnic enclaves in Canada, Jimenez [34] argues that multiculturalism results in ethnic segregation and separatism. Taking the idea of ethnic communities to the extreme, Fulford [12] declares that Canada has become a land of ghettos because of multiculturalism.

These arguments are by no means new. In the mid-1960s, John Porter feared a strong emphasis on ethnic differentiation might lead to the emergence of multiple and divergent identities that would impede the development of a singular Canadian civic culture and identity [35]. In 1994, Neil Bissoondath [36] popularized this argument, saying that multiculturalism had undermined Canadian identity and values, created divided loyalties, fostered ethnic separatism and prevented the integration of newcomers. In addition, Reitz and Bannerji [37] found that second-generation minorities express lower levels of belonging to Canada than their immigrant parents. Multiculturalism has come under fire recently for fostering the development of socially harmful and politically dangerous transnational ties. Canadian historian Granatstein [38] believes multiculturalism promotes unhealthy forms of politically orientated transnationalism that undermine Canadian unity, identity, and foreign policy. He maintains multiculturalism encourages immigrants to engage in issues of the motherland, develop dual political loyalties, and import 'old world' conflicts, thus compromising opportunities to develop a strong Canadian identity and a sense of allegiance to Canada. This type of argument has snowballed since 9/11.

3.2. Pluralism vs. Power Politics

Multiculturalism in Canada has been attacked by scholars for not adequately addressing issues of social justice that impact on immigrants groups. Bannerji notes that the very foundation of multiculturalism is problematic: 'the core community synthesized into a national "we", is still a colonial European identity slightly reworked into a Canadian identity, which decides on the terms of multiculturalism the degree to which multicultural others should be tolerated or accommodated' ([14], p. 42). Arat-Koc [39] adds that multiculturalism is based on a fundamental inequality between those who 'tolerate' and those who are 'tolerated'. Similarly, Hage [16] stresses that both racists and multiculturalists believe they govern the nation and it is up to them who stays in or out of the nation. Razack [9] and Thobani [10] note that multicultural policies celebrate white tolerance of racialized others by erasing colonial white settlement, the historical displacement of First Nations communities and the mistreatment of early immigrant groups. Others point out that multiculturalism shifts attention away from social justice and racism by focusing exclusively on ethnic identity and cultural diversity [14,40,41] Not surprisingly, Haque [17] concludes that multiculturalism is not a plurality in which all cultures are equally valued but premised on the privilege of western liberal cultures to which all other cultures are subordinated.

By grounding our analysis in the lived experience of multiculturalism, we show how Canadian Muslims' experiences reflect the various debates. Does multiculturalism ensure equality and the respect for diversity, as advocated by Kymlica? Has multiculturalism prohibited Canadian Muslims

from developing a strong sense of national identity, as claimed by academics such as Bissoondath and Granastein? Or does multiculturalism leave Canadian Muslims vulnerable to discrimination by placing them in a subordinate position, as often suggested by those that study power politics?

4. Research Methods

We conducted in-depth interviews with 24 Muslim men and 26 Muslim women between the ages of 18 and 31. In-depth interviews are useful for studying the perspectives and thoughts of marginalized groups, as they allow the discussion and dissemination of their stories [42]. The interviews took place between 2005 and 2008, allowing us to learn about the experiences of Muslims in the four to seven years following 9/11.³ The interview participants were guaranteed anonymity and given pseudonyms. The interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed, coded thematically, and analyzed using the N-VIVO qualitative analysis software program, which allows ideas and themes to be linked.

All participants identified themselves as Muslims. With the exception of one, who converted to Islam, all were born into Muslim families. The vast majority are second-generation Canadians. Eighty-two percent (41/50) are Canadian citizens; 40 percent (20/50) were born in Canada, 42 percent (21/50) were naturalized, and the rest were not Canadian citizens at the time of the interview and had lived in Canada for less than five years. While 30 participants were born outside of Canada, the majority had lived in Canada for many years. Interviews were conducted in Vancouver and Toronto, two metropolitan areas hosting 70 percent of the Muslim population in Canada [43].

We relied on personal networks to find interview participants. We directly approached some young Canadian Muslims. We initially contacted Muslim student organizations at the University of Toronto and at Simon Fraser University. To avoid over-sampling Muslim student organizations, we contacted other university organizations as well. At the end of each interview, we relied on snowball sampling and asked the participants if they knew of anyone else we could interview. However, we restricted the number of referrals from each interviewee to avoid over-sampling from a specific group.

During young adulthood, people explore a range of choices and begin to make commitments to interpersonal relationships, work, career, and ideology [44]. Therefore, we focused on Muslims in their young adulthood as they are in an important stage of identity formation and may have been more impacted by multiculturalism. We also focused on young Canadian Muslims because of the concern about second-generation visible minorities having lower sense of attachment to Canadian society as suggested by Reitz and Bannerji's [37] study. We wanted to see whether this also applies to Canadian Muslims.

All participants are well educated. At the time of the study, all had completed a post-secondary degree or were pursuing one. This is representative of young Muslim population in Canada, as the vast majority have some post-secondary education [45]. The sample also reflects the diversity of Islam. The participants come from India, Pakistan, Fiji, the West Indies, Libya, Bangladesh, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and East Africa, they belong to Ismaili, Shia and Sunni, and they speak different languages. Even though many do not wear religious symbols, 12 women wear the hijab. With the exception of one who is half German and half Pakistani, all are visibly non-white. Diversity in the sample is important;

³ Comments may well have been different before 9/11. A before and after comparison would be interesting, perhaps with an older study group.

findings are less likely to focus on experiences specific to a certain Muslim religious tradition or a particular ethnic or linguistic group.

This study does not claim to represent all young Muslims in Canada. Since this is not a randomly chosen sample, it cannot be generalized to the wider population with any degree of statistical confidence. Rather, it is designed to take an in-depth look at the experiences and interpretations of as wide a range of young Canadian Muslims as possible. Since our goal is not to evaluate the honesty and accuracy of their responses, we take the accounts at face value. That said, we look for contradictions in their stories and for explanations of what they say to avoid inaccuracies.

5. Canadian Muslim Experiences

Thirty out of our 50 interviewees (60 percent) claimed to have experienced overt forms of discrimination related to being Muslim since 9/11. Forty-one (82 percent) also have families or friends who have faced such discrimination. The discrimination directed at these young Muslims varied from everyday encounters with individual white Canadians where they were verbally and physically harassed to more systematic cases of racism such as employment discrimination and racial profiling at airports and borders.

5.1. Discrimination by Bystanders

Many of our interviewees told us that they were stigmatized because of their religious choices. For example, Haleema, a 19-year-old woman who immigrated to Canada at the age of eight from Jamaica, says she often gets racist and patronizing comments because she wears the hijab:

Sometimes people make comments: 'You don't have to go around hiding your beauty' or 'you don't have to go around trying to be so modest'. People say, 'Oh by the way you guys are very beautiful. You don't have to wear the hijab, and you don't have to be hiding your looks. You know this is Canada. You're free to do whatever you please. You don't have to wear that'.

Though mundane, these interactions signify pervasive inequalities and highlight the sense of entitlement felt by some white Canadians to question Muslim Canadians' religious practices and to pressure them to assimilate. The hijab is increasingly associated with militancy extremism, oppression of women, and anti-western sentiment post 9/11 [46], all of which feed into intolerance and/or patronizing attitudes towards Muslim practices. Many of our participants also recall being insulted or yelled at, and a few have had things thrown at them. Aatifa, a hijab-wearing, 24-year-old woman born in Saudia Arabia who immigrated to Canada at the age of 13, was spat upon:

Once I was on the subway and this white lady spit on me. First she just started screaming obscenities and saying how 'it was my people who did this', 'I was a terrorist' and 'that I need to get out of her country.' And then she spit at me. But I just kept quiet the entire time. I thought if I said something, I might provoke that person. And I wanted to show that we are not all the violent type.

Perry [47] notes hate crimes are often 'message crimes' that emit a distinct warning to all members of the victim's community: step out of line, cross invisible lines, and you too could be lying on the ground, beaten and bloodied ([47], p. 125). Since racialized violence is a way of asserting power, the

racial violence directed at Muslim Canadians signifies deep inequalities. These actions thus inform Muslim communities that Islamic practises are not welcome.

As Wood and Gilbert remind us, ‘public space is a space of presence, recognition, participation, and citizenship—it is the means by which difference is negotiated, affirmed or contested’ ([29], p. 686). Public spaces, especially public transit, test the relationships between members of society and reveal the gaps between every day practises and the rhetoric of multiculturalism. The subway is a site of real public cultural contestation for Haleema:

One day I was leaving Islington subway station and there was a guy walking by us and I could have sworn he mumbled terrorist. And I was like ‘Did you just call us Terrorists?’ I asked him because I was taken aback and I wanted to know if he had said it because he had mumbled it. And he goes ‘yeah you are a terrorist’. I was like this sounds crazy so I just walked away.

To avoid facing harassment some, like Amineh, a Canadian-born, hijab-wearing, 23-year-old woman of Libyan descent, simply stopped using public transit:

I stopped taking public transit because I started getting harassed a lot...People would just do things to me. Like on the sky train I had these girls, teenage girls, blow condoms and start hitting me with them. There was such a huge group of them that I was worried about my safety. So I got off at the next stop and switched trains. And no one else on that sky train said anything or did anything. After that I stopped taking the public transportation because I do not feel safe or secure on public transit.

Amineh’s experience illustrates the extent of the post 9/11 humiliation of Muslims. In this case, the silence of others during acts of discrimination works to condone the harassment. Others have found little support from authorities such as the police. A 31-year-old Egyptian man who came to Canada a year ago as an international student, claims that when his wife was verbally harassed and pushed on the street by a stranger in Toronto, the police did not show up for hours. Hate motivated violence commonly thrives in an enabling environment [11]. Perry writes that ‘racial violence is explicitly condoned when police fail to investigate or lay charges when victims report assaults motivated by racial violence’ ([47], p. 129). In effect, law enforcement agents validate those who commit the crimes and reinforce discrimination by failing to respond seriously or in a timely manner.

The discrimination directed at Muslim Canadians not only involves verbal and physical abuse but can take the form of insensitive comments. For instance, Leela, a non-hijab wearing, 20-year-old woman born in Toronto to an East African family and Salim, a 25-year-old man, who came to Canada 11 years ago from Saudi Arabia, mention the following:

Leela: Sometimes when I meet someone new and they start asking you ‘Oh where are you from? And what’s your religion?’ I get a bad reaction when I say ‘I am Muslim’. Sometimes people will be like ‘Oh, so that means you are a terrorist’. And I’d be like, ‘What’s wrong with you? No that does not make me a terrorist.’

Salim: When I was living in residence in university, I would have other students come up to me and make the stupidest comments. People would make comments around me like, ‘How can Muslims do that’ or ‘How can Islam be a religion that allows something like that’. I even had a student actually come up to me and say ‘What are you planning?’ It took me awhile to respond to that and my response was ‘I have nothing to do with any of this. I don’t support it. I have nothing to be planning for.’

Clearly, being Muslim is often considered synonymous with being a terrorist. Muslims are seen as a homogenous group and are held accountable for the action of a few; as a result, they face comments that stigmatize their religious identities and rob them of their individuality.

5.2. Discrimination in the Labor Market and at Border Crossings

Many of our participants discussed difficulties finding work because of employer discrimination against Muslim. This is especially a concern for Muslim women who wear the hijab, as Aisha says:

I think it was in 2002 when I was looking for a summer job and I had no luck. I did not know if it was because of me wearing the hijab or me being a Muslim or is just not me being lucky. I applied to several supermarkets and retail stores and that kind of places. And I remember the situation, my sister does not wear the hijab and there was a job opening at a store. I went there with my application and I asked where I could drop off and they said they had already hired someone. My sister knew someone that worked there and knew that they still had an opening. So my sister that does not wear the hijab went there and they actually took the application from her.

Hostility directed at the hijab can have serious economic consequences for Muslim women; not only does it compromise their religious freedom as discussed previously, but it limits their opportunities to find work, jeopardizing their livelihood and career prospects.

However, men also worry about finding work. Dawoud, a 25-year-old who was born in Saudi Arabia and came to Canada as a young child, recalls having difficulty finding a co-op work term, but suddenly ‘began getting more interviews and job offers’ after he deleted information about his involvement with Muslim organizations from his resume. Some potential employers pressure Canadian Muslims to abandon their religious customs. For example Umar, a 22-year-old Indian-Canadian with a long beard mentions that once at a job interview he was told by a potential employer to shave his beard if he wanted to work for their company. According to our interviewees, the labor market is a racialized space where they face blocked access and pressures to assimilate.

Canadian Muslims also have problems at airports and border crossings. While travelling abroad is a major headache, the extensive searching they experience within Canada is perhaps even more troubling. Several participants note problems associated with re-entering Canada. Zaahir, a 22-year-old Saudi-Canadian male, says:

Coming back to Canada has always been a problem. People would see that I am born in Saudi Arabia, that I am a Muslim, my family is all Muslim, so based on that they spend a lot of time going through our belongings or doing security checks. The reason why I see it as unfair is that we have been Canadians for 18 years without a blemish or any bad records.

Many of our participants feel that state surveillance practices at borders target them as potential threats to Canada—not as citizens. Although they have legal citizenship in Canada, they fear their rights can be revoked, especially when they are treated as if they do not belong in Canada.

What do these experiences tell us about multiculturalism in Canada? It is often claimed that the intent of multiculturalism is to ensure that minorities are treated equally by and within the larger society [13]. The experiences of the Canadian Muslims in our study do not reflect this claim; instead, they support the assertion that the multicultural model in Canada does not equally value all

groups [9,14,15,17,40]. Instead of showing respect for diversity, in Canada (and other western nations), Muslim cultural practices are considered inferior and inappropriate. Cultural racism, wherein mainstream society is considered culturally appropriate and racialized groups are imagined to be culturally incompatible [48], prevails in Canada. Furthermore, because multiculturalism posits Anglo-Canadian culture as the core culture [14], white Canadians often feel entitled to question the practices of Canadian Muslims or to banish them from public spaces. Finally, the discrimination Muslim Canadians face in social institutions such as the labor market reveals that multiculturalism does not ensure a meaningful redistribution of power, resources, and opportunity.

6. Maintaining a Dual Canadian and Muslim Identity

Although most of the Canadian Muslim youths we interviewed frequently experience harassment and discrimination because of their Muslim identities, we also found that many continue to assert a strong Canadian identity, often using the rubric and ideology of multiculturalism.

Although few participants (13 out of 50) recall feeling less attachment to their Canadian identity after 9/11, the majority do not. In fact, 27 claim they have a strong Canadian identity, while 10 have developed an even stronger sense of being Canadian, despite discrimination. For example, Aneesha, a hijab-wearing, Pakistan-born 20-year-old woman who came to Canada as a young child, claims that 9/11 affirmed both her Canadian and Muslim identities:

The aftermath of 9/11 did not change how I saw myself as a Canadian. I think it changed how I saw myself as a Muslim [by affirming my Muslim identity], but not as Canadian. I've always seen myself as a Canadian. Like, I've been to the Canadian public school system since I was in kindergarten...Like, I don't like to keep myself within a certain area. I like to help out in different ways. I'm Canadian.

Other interviewees agree with Aneesha. These findings correspond to results from the 2002 Ethnic Diversity Survey [49], which found that many racial minorities continue to express warmth towards Canada despite economic inequities.

Political and international policies can affect the way Muslims relate to Canadian society. Several participants claimed to have developed a stronger sense of being Canadians after 9/11 because of Canada's global image as a peacekeeping nation and because of the perception that Canada is more tolerant of Muslim communities than other western countries. Asima, a Canadian-born 23-year-old woman of Indian-East African background, is one of these:

I think I became the happiest person in the world to be a Canadian. I mean we did not enter the war in Iraq. We did not support America. We are a country of peace, and to be associated with a country like that it is amazing. The kind of treatment you get by having Canadian citizenship is amazing. Just the whole thing Canada stands for I was proud of. I was extremely proud to be Canadian and was proud of the way we handled the whole situation.

The discrepancy between the young Canadian Muslims' experiences of discrimination and their strong sense of Canadian identity may be attributed to the ideology of multiculturalism. It appears that for many of these young Canadian Muslims, multicultural policies provide what Breton [50] refers to as 'symbolic statements' that help them carve out a space within Canadian society. Our study suggests that the ideology of multiculturalism plays a huge role in how young Canadian Muslims place

themselves in Canadian society. They describe a Canadian as someone who is ‘tolerant’, ‘open to living in a multicultural society’, ‘welcoming’ and having ‘respect and appreciation for other cultures’. Thus, they envision being Canadian to mean being a part of a society that is inclusive of many cultures and groups, a sentiment officially advocated by multicultural policies since the 1970s. For instance, Sanya a 25-year-old woman born in Canada to an Indian-East African family, says the following:

I’m very happy to be Canadian. I think it’s really a great society that it’s multicultural; a lot of people from different backgrounds live here and are tolerant of each other. I know its cliché, but I’m proud to be Canadian because I just think that, you know, this country is more culturally tolerant than any other country in the world. Even though you’re part of a visible minority group, you’re still Canadian. You’re still embraced into the Canadian culture. So you feel like everybody can be Canadian. I feel like it’s sort of very welcoming, and that we try to respect and appreciate all cultures.

For our interviewees, multiculturalism is a crucial component of Canadian identity, inspiring them to hold onto to their Canadian identity despite living in a hostile environment. They believe that multiculturalism helps reduce racism by promoting cultural diversity and tolerance. Umar, a 22-year-old man, who was born in India and came to Canada four years ago, says: ‘Multiculturalism encourages dialogue across cultures and ethnicities so it helps to deal with racial issues’. Moreover, many feel that multiculturalism has directly benefited Muslim communities in Canada. Yaman, a 25-year-old man, who was born in Canada and comes from an Indian background, mentions:

I think multiculturalism has helped a lot of communities in Canada, Muslim communities and others. I think it has helped me because without Toronto pushing for that in a lot different areas, I think it is possible that I would have been discriminated against more so. Yes, I think it has helped a lot.

Relying on the ideology of multiculturalism, young Canadian Muslims define the discrimination they encounter as being as anti-Canadian. Umar, a 25-year-old man who was born in Canada and who comes from an Indian background says:

They pushed me and called me ‘terrorist’ and told me to ‘go home’, so I got a little upset about that because I am in a university that teaches tolerance, acceptance, living in a multicultural Canadian society and the behavior they had towards me was the opposite of what that the university and society teaches.

Similarly, Zeba, a hijab-wearing 22-year-old female born in Canada but with an Indian background, resists discrimination by asserting her Canadian identity:

I don’t like it. I mean I am Canadian. I’m born here and raised here. Just because I’m not a certain skin color does not necessarily mean I’m not Canadian. When people say ‘I am not Canadian,’ I become all rigid and tight inside. I’m member of society as anybody else.

Canada’s national identity has historically been defined as ‘white’ [9,10,14], and as a result, Muslim Canadians fight to be recognized as Canadian despite holding Canadian citizenship. Through this resistance, they challenge the assertion that they do not belong in Canada.

However, as noted above, our participants retain a dual identity: they may be proud Canadians but they are also proud Muslims. Zeba says:

They ask me, ‘So do you feel you’re Muslim or do you feel you’re more Canadian?’ I’ve had people ask me this, and they think you can’t be both, that somehow you have to pick one. And I think that’s ridiculous, especially in a multicultural society to be asking something like that. I don’t think there is a tension between the two. I think outsiders feel there’s a tension, but I don’t personally feel that there is a tension.

Our participants insist on maintaining their Canadian identities but they strongly assert their religious identities in the post 9/11 era. Fifteen participants indicate that their Muslim identity was a focal part of their identity before 9/11 and has remained so. Thirty-four say they have come to identify themselves more strongly as Muslims and feel a deeper connection to their faith in reaction to public reactions towards Muslims after 9/11. A total of 49 out of 50 participants maintain a strong Muslim identity or have affirmed their Muslim identity since 9/11. Radi, a 25-year-old Canadian-born man with a Pakistani background, comments:

After 9/11, I was more proud to be recognized as a Muslim than before. When I would be with Muslim sisters who would wear the headscarf, I would want to be recognized as a Muslim compared to anything else. I wanted people to know that I was not going to be drawn away from the faith. I wanted people to know that the true Islam is not what happened with 9/11.

Despite seeing their religion associated with terrorism and under pressure to abandon their religious customs, these young Canadian Muslims fight back. They feel that they have every right to follow their religion and to assert their Muslim identity.

Overall, our study shows that many young Canadian Muslims continue to hold a strong dual identity despite facing discrimination in Canadian society. They do so by adopting and exploiting the ideology of multiculturalism. Our findings show that despite the many problems of multiculturalism, racialized groups may use its ideology as a resource to resist discrimination and to ground their identities. Our findings are similar to Matt James [51] who asserts that multiculturalism has historically served as a tool for excluded and oppressed people to form a civic voice. Of course, our interviewees are well educated and therefore more knowledgeable about their rights and better able to articulate those rights than those who do not have higher education.

7. Conclusions

In recent years, multiculturalism has been declared a failure on the world stage. It has been criticized for fostering ethnic separatism and failing to provide a common sense of national identity in western nations. Many even fear that multiculturalism may encourage terrorism in western nations. Our study, however, shows little evidence of such multicultural dissention in Canada—at least among our sample of young Muslims. Rather, it appears that many retain a strong sense of Canadian identity in the face of discrimination by exploiting the ideology of multiculturalism.

In light of these findings, how are we to make sense of the discourse surrounding the ‘failure’ of multiculturalism, which often uses Muslims as the prime case in point? Our findings lead us to argue that this discourse is, in fact, a racialized one. Since 9/11, the idea that Islam is innately and historically at odds with western values and principles has gained momentum. This sentiment has been popularized by authors such as Huntington [52] through the idea of the ‘clash of civilizations’, and Caldwell [53]. In his more recent work, Huntington [54] continues to label Muslims as an indigestible

minority in the western world and casts Muslims outside the realm of western civilization. In a similar tone, Caldwell disparages the possibility of Muslims truly assimilating into European societies, pointing out that '[i]t is deeply held beliefs, not skin color, that present the main challenge. Europe's predicament involves population decline, aging, immigration, and the steady implantation of a foreign religion and culture in city after city' (p. 327). Since 9/11, this narrative of cultural clash has gained legitimacy among politicians, policy advisors and academics, and has taken center stage in debates of multiculturalism. In the recent cultural clash narrative, religion takes the place of race as the chief hindrance to modern society. Accordingly, whereas racism has been diminished by modernity and globalization, it is assumed that the inflexible nature of certain religions makes multicultural coexistence difficult.

Our research on Canadian Muslims illustrates that being Canadian and Muslim is not mutually exclusive, thereby challenging the 'clash of civilizations' framework. Other studies on British Muslims and American Muslims have reached similar conclusions. For example, Kibria [55] finds that despite the popular rhetoric that young Muslims in Britain reject their 'Britishness', many consider being 'British' as one of the most important aspects of their identities, one that coexists with their Muslim identities. Sirin and Fine [56] find that American Muslims value both their American and Muslim identities and utilize them simultaneously. These studies, along with ours, refute the idea that Muslim identities and western identities are irreconcilable.

The experiences of Canadian Muslims also reveal the inherent tensions and contradictions within multiculturalism. To be sure, many young Canadian Muslims live daily with contradictions of a national rhetoric that expounds of the multicultural citizenship rights on the one hand, and the reality of racial and ethnic discriminations at workplace, institutions, and public spaces on the other. The intensity of harassment and discriminations experienced by these Canadian Muslims should suggest that multiculturalism in Canada is failing them. However, what does it really mean for multiculturalism to 'fail'? If multiculturalism is to allow groups to maintain their cultural or religious identities while simultaneously adopting a western one, the Canadian Muslim case shows that it is not 'failing'; on the contrary, our interviewees maintain a dual Muslim and Canadian identity. Moreover, they maintain their dual Canadian Muslim identity by exploiting the ideology of multiculturalism in the face of discrimination. However, if the ultimate goal of multiculturalism is assimilation to the dominant culture, then perhaps it is 'failing', as Canadian Muslims do resist pressures of assimilation and instead work hard to retain their Muslim identities.

Mackey [15] reminds us that multiculturalism in Canada has been based on the management and controlling of difference—multicultures are fine as long as they are properly managed and remain loyal to the western project of nation building. Similarly, Ahmed [57] conveys that multiculturalism is often a contradictory process which distinguishes between those differences that it is willing to tolerate and those considered dangerous to even the most heterogeneous nations. In the post 9/11 era, Islam is seen as the biggest threat to western nations, and Muslim cultures and practices are no longer welcomed. The experiences of our interviewees make this abundantly clear. If any affiliation with Islam is perceived as a sign of disloyalty to the western world, then the refusal of Muslims to assimilate is most certainly seen as a 'failure' of multiculturalism.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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