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Ethnicization and National Stories:
Managing Diversity in Canada

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Résumé

Les discours et la rhétorique des premiers ministres canadiens ont joué un rôle important dans la construction d'une identité nationale au Canada. Un élément important de leur rhétorique et de leurs discours est la reconnaissance de l'ethnicité, qu'ils décrivent comme un principe fondamental du Canada et nécessaire pour combler la diversité qui existe au Canada depuis le 18e siècle. Cette ethnicisation du Canada est devenue un élément important et durable de l'histoire nationale. L'article soutient que les premiers ministres canadiens ont utilisé leurs discours pour promouvoir le processus d'ethnicisation en tant qu'élément essentiel de l'histoire nationale et dans les récits nationaux comme moyen de réaliser l'unité nationale et la solidarité nationale. Cet article considère les processus d'ethnicisation et de solidarité principalement comme des concepts politiques et montre comment les premiers ministres ont utilisé la rhétorique et le discours pour renforcer la solidarité entre des communautés diverses et souvent divisées. Même si le Canada a marginalisé et souvent maltraité ses communautés et minorités ethniques, le récit national en a été un d'inclusion et d'acceptation. Les premiers ministres, par leurs discours et leur rhétorique, ont été des promoteurs enthousiastes de l'ethnicisation de la nation dans les histoires du Canada qu'ils ont bâties.

Abstract

The speeches and rhetoric of prime ministers have been important in the construction of a national identity in Canada. An important element in their rhetoric and speeches is the recognition of ethnicity, which they narrated as a fundamental principle of Canada and necessary to bridge the diversity that has existed in Canada since the 18th century. This ethnicization of Canada has become an important and enduring element in the national story. The article argues that Canadian prime ministers have used their speeches to promote the process of ethnicization as an essential element in the national story and in national narratives as a means of achieving national unity and national solidarity. This article views the process of ethnicization and solidarity primarily as political concepts and demonstrates how prime ministers have used rhetoric and discourse to build solidarity between diverse and often divided communities. Even as Canada marginalized and often mistreated its ethnic communities and minorities, the national narrative has been one of inclusion and acceptance. Prime ministers, through their speeches and rhetoric, have been enthusiastic promotors of the ethnicization of the nation in the stories of Canada they have built.

Introduction[1]

The process of ethnicization has often been described in two ways in scholarly literature. First, it is described as privileging a dominant ethnic group within a nation while singling out, excluding or subordinating minority communities socially, politically, economically, and culturally. Those minorities are often denied the full social and political rights associated with citizenship (Čiubrinskas 2022). According to this approach, ethnicization links a specific population to distinct cultural characteristics that elites and the dominant class use to construct ethnic boundaries that result in excluding certain ethnic groups from accessing, for instance, particular benefits from a state's social security system. Ethnicization then becomes a means of creating (even othering) identity through ethnic identification (Faist 1994). When that process takes hold, ethnicization becomes a conscious political strategy by the dominant group to assert its privilege for perceived and real advantages. Such modes of imagining and preserving the nation results in the isolation of ethnic minorities as they are perceived as a threat to the survival and integrity of the nation and against whom the dominant group must mobilize. The nation is, as a consequence, defined in terms of possession of certain racial, linguistic, religious or other cultural characteristics with the majority group enjoying rights and privileges denied minority communities (Rao 2021). Second, ethnicization is presented as a cultural process that finds expression in moments of national celebration and in the commemoration of historical figures (McDonnell 2013). There are many examples in North America of such occurrences, including Italian-American and, more recently, Hispanic celebrations around Columbus Day in the United States, and French and Métis gatherings on special commemorative holidays at statues such as Samuel de Champlain's or Louis Riel's in Canada. This process of ethnicization, led by minority ethno-national, racial and religious groups, represent a strategy by diverse groups to either demand their rightful place in their adopted homes or confront their continued marginalization.

By flipping the traditional lens through which the process of ethnicization has been understood as exclusionary and creating an in-group and out-group, this article situates ethnicization within the broader literature of diversity, accommodation and inclusion, statecraft and the archival environment on which the research for this article is based. It describes ethnicization as a phenomenon used by the dominant political class, not to exclude or subordinate an ethnic minority but rather as a process to incorporate minority ethnic communities into national narratives and national stories to create a sense of inclusion and solidarity in multi-ethnic nations, even if those same ethnic communities have been victims of public policy more than its beneficiaries. This approach to ethnicization is not to openly exclude or 'other' ethnic minority communities but rather to mobilize them to break down ethnic boundaries and bring

them into the modern state (Urciuoli 1996). In this approach, ethnicization functions as part of the political discourse that enables elites to build national narratives and tell national stories that accentuate the importance to the nation of ethnicity and minority communities. Through such a strategy, political elites attempt to foster loyalty to the nation and encourage all to see it as a shared community where everyone can commit to the nation and to their fellow citizens. In a nation where diverse ethnic communities are the reality, creating a notion of the state as a common possession, regardless of ethnicity, generates the solidarity necessary for national stability and national well-being.

This article considers the speeches and rhetoric of prime ministers to explore how political elites in Canada have attempted to build ethnicization into the national story and the national narrative to create national solidarity and stability. Stories and narratives are a form of statecraft, and they are particularly useful in diverse settler communities such as Canada that have struggled to maintain unity among peoples of different ethnic backgrounds (Al-Rodhan 2022). They help to hold a nation together, as Canadian cultural icon Margaret Atwood reminded Ezra Klein of the *New York Times* on 25 March 2022, giving members of a group, "a kind of unifying imaginary thing that they can believe in" (Atwood 2022). Stories are a common medium for analyzing everyday life and, when used by political elites, they are an invitation to citizens to see the nation in particular ways (Walley 2015). Scholars have long recognized the importance of imagination in promoting national cohesion. Perhaps the most noteworthy is Benedict Anderson. His *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* describes how individuals, through a variety of sociocultural forces, imagine themselves as members of a nation, the vast majority of which will never meet or encounter each other. Yet, they imagine themselves as part of the same community (Anderson 1991, 5–6). National narratives and stories contribute to this process, and as Kenneth H. McRoberts postulates, nations are "the work of nationalist leaderships who try to invest social conditions with 'national' meaning, combining them to form a national ideal" (2001, 684). Only if the nation is defined in ways credible to the general populace, capturing some of their lived experiences, aspirations, and hopes, will the national idea spread beyond its erstwhile promoters to the presumed nation as a whole (Hammer 2010). National ideals and national identities are, after all, imagined, socially constructed, and fluid but necessary for holding a nation together and providing citizens with a means of self-identification (Malone 2017).

Rogers M. Smith, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, explains how nations are formed with the help of persuasive stories and narratives that "prompt people to embrace the valorized identities, play stirring roles and have fulfilling experiences that political leaders strive to evoke for them, through arguments, rhetoric, symbols and stories" (2003, 32). All nations construct national identities and national narratives and tell national stories that are important to citizens. Contingent and relational, never stable, narratives and stories are influenced by the time and circumstances in which they are constructed, reconstructed, and articulated; they also cor-

respond to national needs and national conditions as being experienced at the time they are articulated. As Walker F. Connor, an American political scientist who has written widely on the subject of nationalism and national identity, points out: "It was not chronological or factual history that is the key to the survival and well-being of a nation, but sentiment or felt history […] an intuitive conviction of the group's separate origins and evolution" (1994, 202). In other words, national identity is "first and foremost a state of mind", to quote Hans Kohn (1944, 10–11), or indeed, an "imagined community" in Anderson's famous phrase (Anderson 1991, 5–6). Quite possibly the leading scholar on nationalism and national identity, the sociologist Anthony D. Smith defines national identity as

> the continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations, and the identifications of individuals with that pattern and heritage and with its cultural elements. (2001, 18)

This can be achieved through stories and narratives. They have such enormous importance in nation building because storytelling is one of the most elementary forms of human expression. Stories have a universal quality. Used everywhere, they can work as affirmations of shared experiences and values, as well as highlighting historical events important to the people of a nation. National stories are constructed to reflect how people envision and imagine their national community. Often inspiring, positive, even familiar, national stories help citizens see what they do not always see or what they may take for granted, show people they are part of a unique community and help them connect to a diverse citizenry, fostering imaginative forms of collaboration and collective action.

Prime Minister as Story-Teller

Historians are only beginning to think systematically about the relationship between stories and identity (McKay/Bates 2010). Here, I explore how prime ministers, through their speeches and rhetoric, strategically emphasize shared norms and values and disregard or omit contradictory ones in pursuit of national unity. National storytelling is examined as part of the process of ethnicization to illustrate how Canada's prime ministers constructed a national narrative to give meaning to the nation, reminding citizens whence the nation came, where it is today, the nature of its values and characteristics, and suggesting what it well might become in the future.[2] In Canada's parliamentary democracy the prime minister is the most powerful and influential politician. Prime ministers are fully aware they are building or reframing the na-

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2   These ideas and those that follow in this section come from the ideas raised by E. Malone, et al. (2017); S.R. Shenhav (2015); M. Somers (1994); T. Sheafer, S.R. Shenhav, and K. Goldstein (2022); and R. Brubaker (2004).

tional story and inviting citizens to see situations in a certain light (Finlayson/Martin 2008). Stories are a work of art, and they are a form of statecraft even if assembled by a speech writer. They are also elements of what Antonio Gramsci referred to as a purely political moment – a point of connection between political institutions, politicians, and citizens (Henderson 1988). Political leaders make an impact through performative speech because a public utterance functions as an action. In other words, to say something is to do something. The speeches of prime ministers, whether delivered in person, via the radio and television, or disseminated through press coverage, they are a form of political action. Many of their speeches delivered in Canada's Parliament, for instance, were widely circulated. As James Humes, a speech writer for several U.S. presidents has noted, a speech writer is an image maker, not an idea maker (Humes 1997).[3] Political speeches, then, are an interesting and significant place from which to analyse the process of ethnicization and Canadian national identity more broadly (Curran 2004).

Michael Billig (1995, 82) maintains that contemporary life is infused with nationalist assumptions and symbols which often pass unnoticed, but through discursive psychology he argues, speech is a social action and a means to achieve goals in a socially meaningful world. Through the use of what he calls argumentative rhetoric, the content of a speech is more important than the stylistic forms. This article is based on meticulous and thorough analysis of the speeches of prime ministers, most of which are found at Library and Archives Canada, which holds most prime ministerial papers. It analyzes a corpus of major speeches by prime ministers on the question of national identity, including those given in the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne at openings of Parliament, their speeches in the Budget Debate, Leaders' Day speeches, and speeches around key legislative initiatives. Set-piece occasions such as the prime minister's speech to party conventions were consulted as were semi-regular appearances of prime ministers at conferences of professional and trade associations, Dominion Day/Canada Day speeches, and speeches to the UN General Assembly. This article attempts to uncover ways in which prime ministers constructed stories, for whom and for what purpose. As such, my approach reflects the research on hegemonic narratives, "those overpowering, dominant stories that encounter little opposition throughout the nation" and "establish themselves as dominant, constituting for many an unquestioned 'common sense' and marginalizing alternative understandings" (Krebs/Lobasz 2007, 412–13). Narratives and stories provide a usable past for political elites to justify the present (Wertsch 2002).

Ethnicization has long been important to the national narrative and national stories. It did not begin with the introduction of an official state policy of multiculturalism in 1971. Throughout its history since the 1760s, ethnicization and the recognition of ethnicity and diversity have been constructed as fundamental tenants in the na-

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3   On the role of speech writers, see Peter Bull (2003). See also Louis Imbeau (2009); and Vanessa B. Beasley (2004).

tional narrative as a way to bridge the diversity that existed as Canada became a na-
tion-state in 1867. For this reason, a brief historical perspective on the formation of
ethnicization in Canada is necessary to explain its persistency. From Canada's early
beginnings, at least three distinct cultural and racial groups, Indigenous, French and
English, were present, even if for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the
erasure of Indigenous cultures was an objective of the state. Beginning in the 1840s,
Canada became increasingly diverse with the arrival of new immigrants that were
neither French nor English, an influx that gained momentum after 1867.

In the Canadian story, the nation began as two ethnic and racial communities – one
French-speaking and Catholic and, the other, English-speaking and largely Protestant
– who were engaged in a long and bitter rivalry for North America. They overcame
their difference to build a nation together. This was a powerful and rhetorically con-
vincing story. Racial and ethnic uniformity, they agreed, was never part of Canada's
founding myth. From its very beginnings, diversity and ethnicization – the process of
becoming or making ethnic – was a driving rhetorical force. Ethnic diversity became
a virtue of the community even if the lived reality did not match that ideal. Political
leaders believed that promoting the story of diversity would help establish Canada
as stable, unified society. That story can be traced to the 1760s, when France surren-
dered Canada to the British, and especially to the 1840s, when, a full generation be-
fore Canada's formation, French-speaking and English-speaking politicians came to-
gether in the pursuit of self-rule from Great Britain. That founding story of unity in
diversity was established in 1867 and the politicians of the Confederation era turned
the process of ethnicization into a national virtue. In the speeches and rhetoric of the
politicians who created Canada – George-Étienne Cartier, John A. Macdonald, D'Arcy
McGee, Hector Langevin, and others – they championed the notion of diversity as the
nation's founding creed, the essential building block of Canada's national identity and
its binding national narrative. As Georges-Etienne Cartier, a prominent member of
the French-speaking Catholic minority and Macdonald's trusted partner, put it at the
time, within Canada, different races would not be warring one against the other, but
would work collaboratively for the collective good. In his words,

> the idea of unity of races was utopian – it was impossible. Distinction of
> this kind would always appear […]. In our own federation we should have
> Catholics and Protestant, French, English, Irish and Scotch, and each by
> his efforts and his success would increase the prosperity and glory of the
> new confederacy. (Moore 1997, 233)

The notion of race and ethnicity was different then from what it is today as Irish,
Welsh, and Scots, for example, were considered as distinct ethnic and racial groups.

To Cartier and his contemporaries, Canada was a political nationality and, then, as
now, Canadians were told their nation was premised on welcoming ethnic diversity
and on justice for its minorities. In 1867 Canada's plan for justice was not proclaimed

in the abstract but was based on the idea of just relations between existing and diverse peoples and their political communities. The constitutional design made no dominant claim to be uniting Canadians around a single national loyalty but only to be uniting an array of diverse ethnic communities, the members of which would become Canadian who might possibly meld into a single, united people under a national government (Vipond 1991, 4). For much of Canada's history, diversity has been narrated as foundational to the nation's founding and it has long been an important element in the national story, used constantly by leaders of the Liberals and the Conservatives, the two major political parties in Canada. That narrative was, at best, only rhetorically true in the first decades after 1867, as there was little to no justice for Indigenous peoples, for French-speaking Canadians outside of Quebec, and for other minorities, including Asians. Nor was there justice for women excluded from so many aspects of life in Canada, and for many newcomers who the state sought to assimilate and integrate into the dominant white, British and French settler societies as quickly as possible. Yet, those politicians in the 1860s – and many since – insisted continually, in their speeches, that greatness for the new nation would come only with the acceptance of ethnic difference and with the creation of a just society for all, regardless of the racial and ethnic heritage of any person. That was the narrative of the architects of Canada, and prime ministers have accepted ethnicization as part of the national story.

In the maelstrom of change and conflict since 1867, the historical legacy of ethnicization has been broadened to meet new challenges and new contingencies. Ethnicization has also been a constant for both minority and majority communities in the making and re-making of the national narrative and the story of Canada. It might be useful to recall, briefly, that political and social elites have realized the psychological power of ethnic identity and how identity can be activated and constructed to foster a sense of attachment to the nation. Political leaders, especially, have actively courted, promoted, and politicized ethnic identity formation as a nation-building strategy. In their story of Canada, ethnicity and diversity can be maintained and celebrated, and the process of ethnicization becomes, not a weakness, but a virtue in the national narrative. Access to citizenship and its accompanying benefits rest on residence rather than on filiation (though, again, this did not apply to Indigenous Peoples who could not, for instance, vote until 1961 although they had been in Canada since time immemorial). Cultural and ethnographic pluralism had been a major political project of European settlement for most of Canada's colonial history. The actual history of any nation and its narrative themes and national stories, however, are rarely the same thing. The national narrative represents a choice about which history should be allowed to form the defining and normative story (Cameron 2007). And, of course, Canada, like most nations, does not have a single agreed upon history. Its past is contested and there are starkly contrasting stories that might be drawn upon to create a version of the nation's history. The rhetoric and the national narrative created by prime ministers, especially around ethnicization, rarely reflects the lived experiences

of many ethnic Canadians nor the actual history of the nation. Yet, the political leit-motif – the recurrent theme expressed in their national story – has been inter-societal and cultural reconciliation around differences, not overt conflict or the vanquishing of minority communities. Cultural and ethnographic pluralism has been one major theme for most of Canada's history, even if segments of the population, such as Indigenous communities and non-white immigrant groups, have been marginalized (Whyte 2008).

Identity formation and the process of ethnicization involves both an awareness and acknowledgement of difference and this has long been evident in Canada, especially during national celebrations. Canada never legislated a national day until 1879, a decade after its founding. Yet, when Canadians of different ethnic backgrounds met in public celebrations to mark the national days of their former homes, or to commemorate religious feasts, the process of ethnicization was clearly at work. The major urban centres in Canada were diverse places where a variety of different ethnic and religious groups lived together. When they gathered in the public square to celebrate, they sought to celebrate their own cultures while also demonstrating that they were participating in and shaping a common civic culture. In Montreal, for instance, English, Irish, Scots, Germans and French-Canadians publicly celebrated national days from their countries of origins and religious holidays, but they also demonstrated on those occasions their commitment to a common civic community. Their own ethnic distinctiveness was celebrated but they did so as members of a wider community that George-Etienne Cartier (as noted above) narrated as a political nationality. Canada's largest minority community, French-speaking Catholics, for instance, in nineteenth-century Montreal, used parades and other public celebrations to assert their right to participation in the public sphere while demonstrating common civic values with other groups (Leitch 2016). That became the national story even if it hid the animosities and conflicts between various religious and cultural groups, including those between French and English-speaking Canadians, and between other minorities and the state. As just one example, the English-speaking Protestant majority in the province of Manitoba eliminated French language and Catholic instruction in the schools even though both were protected by the 1867 Constitution.

Given the importance of ethnicity and diversity in Canada's national narrative, it is not surprising that many ethnic groups sought to play a public role in the early celebrations to mark Dominion Day, Canada's national day commemorating the nation's founding. Ethnic groups across the nation participated in celebrating the national holiday that was renamed Canada Day in 1982. Many of those early celebrations were supported by financial contributions from the community. In one community in the westernmost province of British Columbia, for which records exist in the 1880s, 160 individuals and businesses raised $1300 to support the festivities. What is particularly interesting about those subscribers is that 10 percent had Chinese names. Dominion Day was a moment of community-building, and people of a variety of classes and ethnic backgrounds came together to show patriotism (Pass 2016, 198–99).

Parades and sporting events were an important element in those national celebra-
tions. Parades included dignitaries, allegorical floats, merchants' displays but also par-
ticipation by different ethnic groups and First Nations (who have never been re-
garded as an ethnic group). Indigenous people, marginalized in so many ways, were
always present. Contingents of Indigenous people in traditional clothing were com-
mon in most parades. Often a major highlight of the Dominion Day pageantry was a
lacrosse match between a team of white Canadians and a visiting team from a nearby
First Nation. Indigenous groups observed settler holidays and participated in them,
to remind the dominant majority of their special relations with the Crown in Canada.
When the Canadian government in 1894 (until 1951) banned potlatches, an im-
portant ceremonial event for Indigenous peoples, First Nations continued to hold
potlatches on Dominion Day. Those ceremonies, which primarily functioned to redis-
tribute wealth, confer status and rank upon individuals, kin groups and clans, and to
establish claims to names, powers and rights to hunting and fishing territories, were
regarded by the Canadian government as anti-Christian, reckless and wasteful of per-
sonal property. They failed to understand the potlatch's symbolic importance to In-
digenous communities as well as its communal economic exchange value. Holding a
potlatch on Dominion Day was an act of defiance but Indigenous participation in the
national festivities, including with Indigenous marching bands, was also an act of loy-
alty and inclusion. Indigenous participation also allowed white leaders to
acknowledge both the success of the process of ethnicization and of assimilation, but
for Indigenous peoples their participation in national day celebrations demonstrated
they still mattered and had considerable agency (Pass 2016, 202–3).

Many of the early Dominion Day celebrations combined the regional, the national
and the global, and invested the nation with progressive and multicultural meanings.
On those occasions, Chinese and Japanese participation was commonplace and a
way for those communities to seek recognition from other Canadians. They were mo-
ments whereby immigrant communities negotiated their identity and inclusion. By
the late 1920s, Asian Canadians used their participation in Dominion Day festivities
to protest their exclusion from mainstream Canadian society and to assert their
claims to citizenship. The Chinese in Canada subverted Dominion Day with their own
Chinese Humiliation Day on the First of July each year, to protest Canada's racist im-
migration policy, which between 1885 and 1947 controlled or restricted Chinese im-
migrants from Canada. Chinese Humiliation Day was competitively coordinated with
Dominion Day and allowed those Chinese who celebrated on that date to promote
both their Chinese and Canadian identities as they sought national acceptance, an
end to discrimination, and recognition as a group within the national community
(Zhu/Baycroft 2016). Such participation was often a part of an orchestrated program
and contributed to the elite story of diversity. While civic leaders often opposed Asian
immigration to Canada, those same politicians worked with Asian communities to
have them participate in national days, obviously to show the ethnic diversity of their
communities and the nation.

Ethnicization and Changing Notions of Canada as Part of the British World

Despite the rhetoric of Canada as a nation of diversity at the time of Confederation, Canada was still widely regarded as part of the British world and its identity largely rooted in British traditions by the time of the Second World War. However, the war prompted political leaders to begin the task of refurbishing the national narrative to imagine a new Canadian nation, separate from its British past. The story of Canada as the conjoining of two founding nations, one French and one English, joined by peoples from all over the world would remain sacrosanct, but prime ministers continued to make ethnicization an important element in the national story as notions of identity, ethnicity and race changed considerably after the war. William Lyon Mackenzie King, the prime minister for much of the period from 1921 to 1948, played an important role in the process. Although King never used the word ethnicization or even ethnicity, he spoke to Canadians of a national story that was inclusive, one that recognized its ethnic diversity.

One of the elements of King's ethnicization process was a Citizenship Act to create a category of Canadian nationality distinct from British subjecthood which applied to Canada since 1763 (Chapnick 2011). At the inaugural citizenship ceremony, in January 1947, when Canada's Citizenship Act took effect, King reminded listeners in a national broadcast on the CBC radio network that Canada was built by two racial groups who had overcome their differences to welcome newcomers from around the world and, he added, they all had become Canadian. Canada was not founded on a "superiority of a single race or a single language", he said, but "only on the faith that two of the proudest races in the world, [who] despite barriers of tongue and creed, could work together, in mutual tolerance and mutual respect, to develop a common nationality" (ibid.). Those Canadians then "admitted thousands who were born of other racial stock, and who speak other tongues", and they, too, found in Canada "not domination and slavery, but equality and freedom" (ibid.). The new Citizenship Act was to "bridge the gaps created by geography and racial descent". Canadians, King said, were bound by a common citizenship that would bring unity to a nation of ethnically diverse peoples (ibid.).

King's ethnicization of Canada confronted, albeit gingerly, Canada's immigration policy that has been unambiguously racist since 1867 (Kelley and Trebilcock 2000). He addressed the contradiction between Canada's liberal democratic principles and its promotion of international human rights, on the one hand, and an exclusionary immigration policy, on the other. King told Canadians their discriminatory immigration policies were impossible to defend. Canada had to stop talking about the right stock of immigrant. He then repealed the 1923 Chinese Immigration Act, prohibiting the entry of Chinese, citing it as a "mistake". "There should be no exclusion of any particular race", King said (*Debates*, 12 July 1943). He wanted Canadians to recognize their own racial prejudice, as he narrated Canada as consisting of "many races, of many

creeds, with origins in many lands" (*Debates*, 1 May 1947).[4] In August 1946, speaking at Dieppe, to commemorate the failed 1942 Allied amphibious attack on the German-occupied French port, King praised Canada as a model nation: the descendants of George-Etienne Cartier and Samuel de Champlain joined with their British rivals to create Canada and give the world, a "beacon of light" (King Papers, 19 August 1946). Canada shows, he concluded, that "enmities bred of racial distrust and international strife, can, indeed, be overcome" (ibid.). Such rhetoric allowed Canadians – then and since – to claim that they were a virtuous people for their embrace of diversity, even if a number of racial groups, including Indigenous peoples, remained marginalized. It was an attempt by Mackenzie King to keep ethnicization at the centre of the story of Canada.

Other prime ministers that followed King built on that narrative. Louis St-Laurent, Canada's second French-speaking prime minster who followed in 1948, said in his first Dominion Day radio address that Canada was a nation sustained not merely by political and personal freedoms, but "by that cultural freedom which recognizes and respects the historic rights of minorities" (St-Laurent, 1 July 1949). While St-Laurent certainly recognized French and English as "les deux éléments principaux" (St-Laurent, 18 July 1953b) of Canada, he narrated the nation ethnically. Although he did not use the word multicultural or ethnicization to describe Canada, he certainly captured in his speeches the essence of what would later become a policy of official multiculturalism in 1971. Immediately after the end of the Second World War, when nearly a million immigrants came to Canada, most of whom were neither French nor English, and made a real contribution to the national life, Prime Minister St-Laurent said: "Without them we would be the poorer economically, culturally, and spiritually" (St-Laurent, 18 July 1953b). Those diverse ethnic communities were an essential part of what he called the "national family". He promoted a national story where it was possible for all ethnic groups "to develop a genuine attachment to this country" (St-Laurent, 19 November 1954). From its beginning, declared St-Laurent, Canada was never created to fit people into a common mould. Canadians were never required "to forget [their] racial origins and […] ancestral traditions" (St-Laurent, 1 July 1953a). That common nationality and that "special experience of the Canadian nation bred tolerance and respect for others into our very bones" (St-Laurent, 20 May 1950), St-Laurent told an audience in Peterborough, Ontario.

It was at this time – the late 1950s – that the government for the first time organized regular celebrations of Dominion Day as part of a national re-examination of identity that began after the end of the Second World War. The national day celebrations were a part of the government's search for a workable identity, a shared culture and a national narrative that would unify the national community. The showcase of the state-organized celebrations was held in Ottawa, the nation's capital, for the first time in 1958, after the election of John Diefenbaker, the first prime minister of neither a

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4   For a discussion of some of those points, see Robert F. Harney 1988.

French or English heritage. He was of German descent, and championed a Canada of diverse communities that he believed could become one, unified nation. Those celebrations included performances from English, French, Italian, Ukrainian, Indigenous and other communities, and were broadcast nationally on the state-owned television network. At the same time, prime ministers continued to narrate the diversity and inclusiveness of Canada. On Dominion Day 1958, Diefenbaker told Canadians – embracing the rhetoric of George-Etienne Cartier from the 1860s – Canadian citizenship meant men and women of different races and ethnicities had created a unified nation out of their diversity (Diefenbaker, 1 July 1958). Diefenbaker's construction of a new national narrative embraced the process of ethnicization, even as he pointed out the darker side of Canada's history and told Canadians there was a "need of non-discrimination" (Diefenbaker, 31 October 1959b) in the nation. He invited Canadians to recognize the barriers of discrimination that existed. While it was not quite a recognition of the perniciousness of colonization and the terrible treatment of racialized minorities that would come later, it was an acknowledgement to Canadians, especially to its minority communities, that what many saw as normative behaviour of discriminating against non-white, non-English citizens was simply unacceptable. Diefenbaker enacted new rules around immigration and, for the first time, citizens of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean were fully eligible to enter Canada, without restriction, as long as they satisfied aspects of the Immigration Act (Corbett 1963, 168–70). More than any other prime minister to that point in history, Diefenbaker sought to bring Indigenous peoples into the national narrative. He extended the vote to Indigenous peoples who had been denied the franchise, claiming such changes would "make Canadianism stronger, more effective and more in keeping with our traditions" (*Debates* 1960). In his ethnicization efforts, he called upon Canadians to embrace all races and religions with pride (Diefenbaker, 4 October 1959a).

   That was an idea that continued into the 1960s and beyond even as tensions grew between French and English-speaking Canadians as the province of Quebec sought greater autonomy, even independence. Prime ministers, such as Lester B. Pearson and Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who followed Diefenbaker, narrated a Canada where there were no "grades of citizenship" (Diefenbaker 1964) even if all Canadians were to embrace one of the two languages, French or English. Newcomers brought their own customs and cultures, and once in Canada they adopted either the French or English language, thus contributing to the development of a bilingual and multicultural nation. Within that bilingual framework, Canada became a nation, Pearson maintained, where newcomers "retain their special feeling for their own particular racial and cultural background" (Diefenbaker 1964). It was the duty, moreover, of the two founding races to welcome newcomers and accept the heritage they brought with them into Canadian society to enable them to contribute to making Canada a better place (Diefenbaker 1966). Like Diefenbaker, Pearson, and Trudeau noted the historical injustices perpetrated against minority communities throughout Canada's history, noting in particular the treatment of citizens of Japanese origins during the Second World War, who

were relocated from the West Coast and had their property confiscated. "We have no reason to be proud of this episode, nor are we", Pearson said (*Globe and Mail* 1964). Rather, it is the "Canadian way", he explained, to preserve the heritage, culture, and traditions of newcomers while they adjusted themselves to the original French-English strains of Canadian society (Diefenbaker 1966). Pearson's idea of Canada as a thriving multi-ethnic nation within a two-language paradigm, with two nations and many cultures becoming one – was an ideal that harkened back to the 1840s and to Confederation in 1867. For Pearson, such rhetoric and stories were a way of incorporating ethnicization into the reconstruction of the nation and promoting a national ideal that might prove enduring.

Trudeau, elected prime minister in 1968, was one of Canada's longest serving. He often said it was his responsibility "to make real the Canada of which our forefathers dreamed" and to create "a society which believes in the dignity of every single individual [...] [and one which] permits each citizen to contribute his skills and talents" to the betterment of all (*Star Phoenix* 1982). He reminded Canadians that no other nation had better demonstrated how peoples of two great linguistic communities, strengthened by the millions of others who had brought their own rich traditions with them to Canada, could live together, prosper, and enrich each other (Trudeau, 13 May 1968). Canada had always been guided by principles of tolerance and understanding, he insisted, even as he was fully aware of the poor treatment of many minority communities historically. Even so, his story of Canada was one "devoted to a common ideal – to build a new society that would create richness and strength out of diversity" (Trudeau, 1 July 1972a). Such commitment to ethnicization was the basis of Canada, and his Canadian narrative was of "the equality of people without distinction of sex or language or racial origin or religious origin or colour or creed" (Trudeau, 1 July 1972b). It was the only nation, he insisted, that saw virtue in preserving ethnic differences, and Canadians had come to believe they were an example to the world of how diverse communities could live together and prosper (Trudeau, 14 February 1974a). Canadians had "escaped the wretched and needless consequences of racial or religious or linguistic turmoil which have reduced men and women in many places to bestial levels of hatred and vengeance even as it exposes their children to misery and broken-hearted distress" (ibid.). Any assimilative policies threatened that identity, Trudeau proclaimed: "In Canada there is room for every individual" (*Debates*, 18 February 1972). In Trudeau's national narrative the story of Canada could only be one of multiculturalism, and in 1971 he had Canada adopt a policy of official multiculturalism. "There cannot be one cultural policy for Canadians of British and French origin, another for the original peoples, and yet a third for all others" (Trudeau, 24 March 1974b). There could, indeed, be two official languages, but "there would be no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other" (ibid.). If freedom of choice in terms of culture were stymied for any ethnic group, it would be an assault on the freedom on all Canadians. Only when citizens were confident of their own individual identity "in a deeply personal sense" (*Debates*, 8 October 1971) could Canada truly achieve national unity, because only then could there be

respect for the other and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes, and assumptions. Multiculturalism accepts the notion that individuals value community affiliations, including membership in a political community, and that the majority accepts the identity of each member of the community. Canadians, Trudeau insisted, had built a nation based on the values of diversity and inclusion, and they had to hold fast the original dream of the Fathers of Confederation from 1867, who had championed diversity as a new way of building a nation able to transcend and even embrace differences. For him, one of the markers of a strong national identity and true national cohesion was cultural pluralism, which he described as "the beauty of Canada" (*Regina Leader-Post*, 3 July 1972).

Trudeau's ideals of diversity and ethnicization were embodied in a new constitution forged in the early 1980s. Ratified in 1982, it embodied the Canadian ideal, Trudeau boasted:

> A Canada where men and women of aboriginal ancestry, of French and British heritage, of the diverse cultures of the world, demonstrate the will to share this land in peace, in justice, and with mutual respect [...]. A country where every person is free to fulfill himself or herself to the utmost, unhindered by the arbitrary actions of government. (Trudeau, 17 April 1982)

Canada, as he said repeatedly, recognizes our multicultural character, and the new Constitution promoted the equality of all citizens, regardless of race and ethnicity. His Canada story was one where there was no single or dual ethnicity, but only citizens bound together by their collective belief in the equality of all through a set of shared values and rights. New and old Canadians had to think of themselves, first and foremost, as rights-bearers, not as French, English, or Aboriginal citizens of a national community (Ignatieff 1993, 6). The rights philosophy created a new form of identity and attachment to the nation state. Trudeau explained to Canadians that diversity was not a problem to be managed: like George Étienne Cartier, he believed it was a strength to be celebrated (Trudeau, 1 July 1972b). When, for example, the Portuguese community celebrated Portugal's national day in Toronto during this period, they celebrated not only as members of a transnational community but also as members of a multicultural Canadian society. The Portugal Day parade was not only an event that celebrated a sense of transnational attachment, but also an occasion for the affirmation of the Portuguese Canadians as an ethnic group that could participate in the civic and political life in Canada. It was a celebration and exhibition of Portuguese Canadian ethnicity and an important opportunity to transform social capital in the Portuguese ethnic sphere into political capital – and acceptance – in the Canadian public sphere (Leal, 2014).

Ethnicization and Historic Wrongs

In the last three decades, Canadian prime ministers have officially recognized the past brutality of the Canadian state towards its minority communities and that, too, has been an important part of the process of ethnicization. Brian Mulroney, prime minister from 1984 to 1993, was the first to publicly recant, apologize, and accept responsibility for past injustices minorities had suffered at the hands of the state. This was a new element in the ethnicization of the national narrative and one that has since proven both enduring, powerful and important. Seeking redemption for historical wrongs against minority communities has been narrated as a Canadian virtue as prime ministers apologized first to Japanese Canadians interned during the Second World War and for the confiscation of their property, and then to a number of other minority communities, including Canadians of Italian origins, who were also interned during the Second World War, and others treated unfairly, such as those of Ukrainian and Chinese ancestry, and Jewish refugees denied entry to Canada in the 1930s (*Debates*, 22 September 1988). Mulroney understood that the state had similarly failed Indigenous peoples in too many instances, and although there was no apology at the time, he was the first of Canada's prime ministers to speak of Canada, not of two founding peoples, British and French, but of three, British, French and Indigenous.

Apologies for historical wrongs have since become part of the story of Canada and a part of the process of ethnicization. Apologizing showed Canada's capability for repentance and reform and showcased it not only as a progressive and modern nation, ready to confront the darker periods of its own history, but also one that could learn from its past and commit to a national project of careful decolonization (*Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 23 May 2019). This can be seen in the official apology by Stephen Harper, Prime Minister from 2006 to 2015, when he apologized in 2006 on behalf of the Canadian government to Chinese Canadians for the notorious Head Tax, imposed from 1885 to 1923, which, in effect, banned immigration from China. He made the apology in a nationally televised address from Parliament. It was a "shameful" policy (Government of Canada 2006), Harper said, and his approach was an important moment of ethnicization. He described Chinese immigrants as pioneers who had contributed to the building of the nation – initiating a new imagining of Canada's pioneers, traditionally narrated as European and white. He recounted how 15,000 young men had left their families in China in the late 19th century to come to Canada to participate in the most important nation-building enterprise in its history – the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway from the Atlantic to the Pacific. As with other pioneers, Harper praised those early Chinese for "their backbreaking work" and for "persevering" in a hostile and difficult environment "to ensure the future of this country" (Government of Canada 2006). They should be "celebrated for their contributions to the making of Canada", he said, but when the railway was completed, Canada turned its back on them. In the decades that followed, it "imposed punitive measures to keep most Chinese immigrants out. Those were 'unconscionable' acts", Harper lamented and de-

clared the Head Tax "an act for which Canadians are deeply sorry" (Government of Canada 2006). Harper's apology was part of "the process of expunging guilt" (Government of Canada 2006) from these historical injustices and furthering the process of reconciliation and inclusion with the broader Chinese-Canadian community (Edwards/Calhoun 2011). It was also part of the process of ethnicization led by political elites.

Among Canada's greatest failings was its relations with its Indigenous peoples although First Nations were not regarded as part of multicultural Canada. They were a founding people. On 11 June 2008, Prime Minister Harper stood in Parliament and on behalf of all Canadians apologized for the Indian Residential Schools System. For the first time, a prime minister officially took responsibility for attempting to assimilate First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children by placing them in government-sponsored residential schools, where many were victims of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Harper acknowledged that, over many decades, the Government of Canada had contributed to what is now considered cultural genocide, with the destruction and removal of the culture, language, and life skills of Indigenous communities. Rather than weakening Canada, Harper believed that repentance and the admission of guilt, and taking steps towards reconciliation were critical to the national narrative he was formulating, as such action demonstrates Canadians truly are good and just. The apology to Indigenous peoples was not only about remembering a dreadful chapter in the nation's past but also about beginning a healing process with a community that had for too long been marginalized and expunged from the Canadian story. The apology and the hope for reconciliation were part of building a better future where boundaries of race and identity would never be removed in the continuing process of ethnicization (Government of Canada 2008). Part of the new story was the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that reported in 2015 with 94 Calls to Action to further reconciliation.

Historical injustices towards fellow citizens and minorities were wrong, Harper said. Canada was a nation of immigrants and diverse peoples, who had found a "common purpose" that came from "shared values of tolerance, compassion, community service, and a devotion to pluralism", which he declared "the essential elements for harmony in a modern, interconnected world" (Prime Minister's Office 2010). Even as he recognized the terrible deeds of the past, Prime Minister Harper narrated Canada from its earliest days, as having a political identity that recognized and promoted the acceptance of diversity and difference. Canada as a multicultural nation had a long history, he insisted, noting it was a concept that harkened to the 1860s, perhaps even earlier. As other prime ministers had, so Harper, too, invoked the memory of George Étienne Cartier and John A. Macdonald to show how diversity was embedded in Canada's very founding (Prime Minister's Office 2014).

Since 2015, Justin Trudeau has been prime minister of Canada. He, too, has fashioned a national story, attempting to 'brand' Canada as a nation of diversity,

an enlightened and progressive nation amid a world of rising populism of the right that often rallies against minorities. Diversity, he insists continually, is Canada's greatest strength, a foundational Canadian value and the core of the collective Canadian identity. Like other prime ministers, Trudeau has said that Canada is a country strong, not in spite of its differences, but because of them. His first major speech, given in London, England, just days after taking office in 2015, was titled "Diversity is Canada's Strength" (Trudeau 2015). Trudeau later told the *New York Times* that Canada is becoming a new kind of country, not defined by our history or European national origins, but by a "pan-cultural heritage". In Canada, he said, "[t]here is no core identity, no mainstream": Canada is "the first post-national state". Even the *New York Times* called the suggestion "radical" (*New York Times Magazine* 2015). In Trudeau's imagination Canada represents the possibility of a post-ethnicization world, a post-national cosmopolitanism or a multicultural nationalism. "Diversity is no longer something we work towards, it has arrived. It is the new reality; notions of identity are passé" (*National Post* 2016). In fact, Trudeau has said, "Canada can export the ideas and institutions that make diversity work so well at home. We know how to govern in a way that is inclusive, transparent, respectful and effective. We can share that expertise with other countries and their citizens" (Trudeau 2015).

While Canadians have celebrated the process of ethnicization that has been a fixture of Canada's national narratives since 1867, many in Canada were awakened to their own realities and persistence of racial discord in the aftermath of the murder of African-American George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020. Black Canadians – and others, too – soon established their own Black Lives Matter networks, to show solidarity with Americans but also to rally Canadians against police brutality and the prevalence of systemic racism in Canada. Black Canadians have mobilized and forced the Canadian state and its majority community to take notice. Even the much-vaulted policy of official multiculturalism, which was established in Canada in 1971, is now described as providing "a tacit basis for discrimination and racial violence" in Canada. Multiculturalism, some argue, allows Canadians "to ignore the harsh lived reality of many minorities [while allowing Canadians] to refute the claim that racism is alive and well in Canada" (Wu 2021). Black employees in the Government of Canada filed in the Federal Court of Canada earlier in 2022 a class action suit alleging systemic racism in the Public Service of Canada towards self-identifying Black individuals in the past 50 years. At the end of September 2022, the Black Class Action Secretariat filed a complaint with the UN Commission for Human Rights Special Rapporteur on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, claiming their civil rights have been violated. Canada's Employment Equity Act aims, the group asserted, to "correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities" (Thurton 2022). Black employees say that grouping all visible minorities together makes the unique forms of discrimination Black employees face "invisible" (Thurton 2022).

Conclusion

Political leaders seek to anchor national unity and well-being for the nation's citizens, including those well-established and those recently arrived. That is often done by building national narratives and through story-telling. Perhaps narratives and stories have such importance in nation-building because they are constructed to reflect how people often envision and imagine their nation. Stories provide affirmations of shared experiences and values, as well as highlighting historical events important to nations. They are also ways of fostering imaginative forms of collaboration and collective action. In Canada, the process of ethnicization has been an essential element in building the national narrative and telling the national story. Prime ministers have built stories and narratives that show Canada's animating political narrative is one of protecting diversity and welcoming ethnic communities where everyone can thrive.[5] By understanding Canada's narratives and the stories that have been built by prime ministers, we can better explain state policy choices. While Canada has not always protected minorities from the brutality of the state, narratives and stories promoting diversity and the acceptance of ethnic minority communities have helped Canada become one of the most ethnically diverse nations in the world. Diversity and inclusion of minority communities have become a part of the national identity.

This research in the speeches and rhetoric of prime ministers has shown that those leaders were engaged in the process of ethnicization, not to create boundaries between the different ethnic communities in Canada but to be inclusive and accommodating of all citizens regardless of ethnicity. It was a narrative consciously constructed in the 1860s to embrace the diversity that its leaders saw at the time of Confederation. It has also been a narrative retold and refurbished in the decades since to bring unity and cohesion to a nation that has become increasingly more ethnically diverse in the decades since 1867. Those national narratives and national stories were told by prime ministers to build a shared feeling of inclusion and to encourage citizens to accept the nation's diversity. Such notions have become hegemonic and have been successfully embraced by all prime ministers, regardless of political party. At their most basic level, the dominant national narratives offered by prime ministers painted Canada as an ethnically diverse nation. Narratives are social constructs, constructed and deconstructed all the time by multiple social agents, but prime ministers recognized the challenge of national unity and committed to a process of ethnicization and built stories to show the boundaries of what was possible and desirable, even if their narratives and stories were not always true or real. Prime ministers are political actors in Canada's unfolding story and their stories serve a specific political purpose. Narratives can define what political action is imaginable and possible, and since 1867, Canada's prime ministers have mostly embraced the principle of diversity and inclusion and committed to a policy of ethnicization not to create boundaries and division but to bring all ethnic communities within the arc of national unity. Narratives and stories telling and retelling of Canada's diversity and inclusion are now part of a hegemonic discourse that has become the ordering principle of political life in Canada.

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5   Some of those ideas are discussed further in Raymond B. Blake/John D. Whyte 2021.

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