Meshed Frameworks: Liberal Democracy, Multiculturalism, and Settler-Colonial Reconciliation

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“The concept [of reconciliation] is virtually absent from the liberal tradition of Hobbes, Locke, Kant, Mill, Dewey, and Rawls, the tradition that poses individual liberty, civil and political rights, equality of citizenship, democratic elections, distributive justice, and punishment for criminals as central values, even despite its proponents’ differing philosophical foundations: natural law, natural rights, utilitarianism, and pragmatism. Is this tradition now ready to receive reconciliation?” —Daniel Philpott, 2006

The above quote by Philpott introduces a common approach to dealing with political reconciliation within a liberal democracy. Many scholars wonder how reconciliation can be configured so as to fit within the parameters of a liberal democratic society. The result of this, in other colonial societies who have undergone similar reconciliation processes, has not always been favourable to Indigenous peoples. What this essay will seek to do is reverse this logic. I argue that liberal democracy is standing between Canada’s current political reality and the objectives of reconciliation, and that the onus of change should be placed upon Canadian liberal democracy rather than the project of reconciliation. Much in the same way that the burden of proof falls on Indigenous peoples throughout the legal land claims process, Canadians risk putting Indigenous peoples and the project of reconciliation in a similarly precarious position.

This paper will begin by outlining the evolution of liberalism and liberal democracy in Canada in order to create a working definition of liberal democracy in the Canadian context. The essay will then examine the difficulties posed by a major aspect of Canadian political society—multiculturalism—to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in settler Canada.

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Ultimately, this essay aims to establish that while reconciliation and multiculturalism are not diametrically opposed to one another, significant points of tension are stressed when reconciliation is pursued within a multicultural framework, to the point where the project of reconciliation itself may be jeopardized.

In coming to a definition of liberal democracy, I will utilize and examine previously conceived definitions of the term, identify foundational concepts, and explore the peculiarities of liberal democracy in the Canadian context. It is important to note, as Philpott does,\(^3\) that there are arguments against reconciliation which stem from political liberalism. Though given the seeming acceptance of the reconciliation project by Canada’s governing party, and the lack of critiques voiced by opposition parties, those arguments will not be explored in this essay.

**Defining Liberal Democracy: Historical Roots and Canadian Peculiarities**

Liberalism as a political theory, and democracy as a method of governance, are far from synonymous, despite the frequency in which they work in concert with one another. The nature of liberal democracy has led to it being defined by a multitude of authors in different ways, often in widely varying lengths and complexities. Bollen and Paxton, for example, define it simply as “the degree to which a political system allows democratic rule and political liberties.”\(^4\) Zakaria provides a further description, defining it as a “political system marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of basic liberties of speech, assembly, religion, and property.”\(^5\) More recently, Ben-Porat and Feniger defined liberal democracy as being characterized “not only by formal procedures for electing representatives, but also by a private sphere free of state interference, the protection of individual liberties, a commitment to human equality, and the protection of the rights of minority groups.”\(^6\) In a precursory article to his book, Morlino also tackled this issue. A good democracy, he argues, must be liberal—jettisoning other types of democracies, such as exclusive democracy, domain democracy, illiberal democracy, and delegative democracy. Aside from this, a

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democracy must meet certain minimal thresholds such that it contains: "universal, adult suffrage; recurring, free, competitive, and fair elections; more than one political party; and more than one source of information." 7 Evident in all of these definitions is the fact that liberal democracy is multidimensional. It is not just the use of elections to select leaders, nor is it solely the protection of individual (among other) rights, but it is at the conjuncture of these two political thoughts that liberal democracy is found.

This multidimensional aspect points towards difficulties in assessing the degree to which a state is liberally democratic. Tilly outlined this when discussing the theoretical and practical consequences that come from not having a clear definition of democracy, 8 and Diamond and Morlino encountered this issue when attempting to assess the quality of democracy. 9 The multidimensionality of liberal democracy, however, also presents unique challenges to this type of political structure. Plattner refers to one of these challenges, a seemingly paradoxical situation, as "the dual nature of liberal democracy," which describes the contrast between majority rule and individual rights, two underpinning aspects of a liberal democracy. 10 These two aspects often pull in different directions; majoritarian rule is tempered by the protection of individual rights which extend to those in minority situations. In relying on Madison, Plattner further shows how the first aspect—majoritarian rule—can be achieved rather simply through a regular vote, and that the real challenge lies in not only successfully "[protecting] the public good and private rights against majority factions . . . [but] to do so without departing from the ‘spirit and form of popular government.’” 11 Madison, as well as Hamilton and Jay—the other writers of The Federalist Papers—highlighted three possible solutions to this dilemma. The first was to eliminate the liberty that allowed these differences to form, and the second was to ensure uniformity among the public’s thoughts, beliefs, and opinions—both of which are unreasonable under the liberal democratic state they were hoping would form. As such, they thought a better remedy to the issue would be economic diversification, which would not impede individual rights, but would allow for individuals in minority situations to gain power. The logic behind discarding the first two potential ‘solutions’ fits well with the views of another major political theorist: John Rawls.

8 Tilly, The Struggles of Indigenous Peoples, 38.
Though not an economic theorist, the reasons why the *Federalist* thinkers rejected the second possible solution mentioned above is logically synonymous with Rawls and his notion of reasonable pluralism. This idea, developed in his later work, *Political Liberalism*, outlines the “fact” that within a liberal democracy, “a plurality of conflicting reasonable comprehensive doctrines, [whether] religious, philosophical, [or] moral” is to be expected. This is simply the inevitable result of the political culture which arises from a society that embraces liberal principles such as individual liberty and freedom of association. It is important to note that Rawls suggests that it is possible, or even likely, for these views to not only clash, but to be irreconcilable with one another, while at the same time being mutually reasonable ideas or opinions for one to hold. There are two main propositions that are drawn from this. The first is that it is possible for completely divergent opinions on a matter to be deemed reasonable within the same political society. The second is that it is the place of a liberal democratic state to safeguard citizens from harm from others, while simultaneously protecting those citizens’ rights to have deeply held beliefs which may be profoundly and irreconcilably divergent.

To deal with this, Rawls turns to his idea of an overlapping consensus, outlined in *A Theory of Justice* and thoroughly expanded upon in *Justice as Fairness*. Rawls, in his seminal work, explains the overlapping consensus as follows:

> There exists what we may refer to as overlapping rather than strict consensus. In general, the overlapping of professed conceptions of justice suffices for civil disobedience to be a reasonable and prudent form of political dissent. Of course, this overlapping consensus need not be perfect; it is enough that a condition of reciprocity is satisfied. Both sides must believe that however much their conceptions of justice differ, their views support the same judgment in the situation at hand, and would do so even should their respective positions be interchanged.\(^{13}\)

It is important to remember that much of Rawls’ work is predicated upon his original position as a foundation. The original position is a hypothetical thought-experiment where participants, ignorant of their own personal socio-economic characteristics, define and describe a political society in which they believe would be best to live. It is from this that many

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critiques of Rawls arise.\textsuperscript{14} As a thought experiment, the original position is unique and thought-provoking; as a pragmatic approach to democratization, however, it is not the most realistic approach. Rawls himself recognizes and eventually addresses this broadly, as well as how it pertains specifically to his overlapping consensus, when he tells his readers that the overlapping consensus is not designed to create a balance between pre-existing comprehensive doctrines; “There is plainly no guarantee,” states Rawls, “that justice as fairness . . . can gain the support of an overlapping consensus.”\textsuperscript{15} Rather, the utility of an overlapping consensus is found, removed from the Rawlsian hypothetical, in its ability to demonstrate the strength and potential unity that can be found within a pluralistic society.

Two other prominent theorists who focused, at least in part, on pluralism, are Flathman and Sartori. As Flathman states, though not all pluralisms are liberal, all notions of liberalism have inherent to them a degree or notion of pluralism.\textsuperscript{16} As such, his research is not directed towards whether pluralism should be a facet of liberal democracy, but rather, which pluralism is most acceptable. His book is dialogical in that, in each chapter, Flathman engages with the work of a particular theorist, and in weaving theories of pluralism from James, Arendt, Hampshire, and Oakeshott together, Flathman argues two things. The first is that an inward-facing notion of pluralism—a plurality within the individual person—is that which is, or should be, most central to liberalism. This is a point on which Flathman has faced many critiques. The second argument, however, is that the inner pluralism mentioned above is not incompatible with the more common notion of pluralism as a “diversity of individuals making up a social and political order.”\textsuperscript{17} The realization or acknowledgement that these two forms of pluralism can exist in cooperation is important, as it helps create a fuller definition of liberal democracy.

In turn, Sartori, in writing on the origins and emergence of pluralism, notes the strong relationship between toleration and pluralism (insofar as toleration is a prerequisite for pluralism), but succinctly notes their differences: “tolerance respects values, whereas pluralism posits values.”\textsuperscript{18} In search, then, of how pluralism was able to originally take root, Sartori looks at the emergence of political parties. Political parties are, in essence, the formalization of group factions who compete for power amongst one another, adding a level of legitimacy to this quest for power.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, see Harsanyi 1975; Clark 1986; Okin 2005.
As Burke writes, a party is “a body of men united, for promoting by their joint endeavours, the national interests upon some particular principle in which they are agreed.” Again, Sartori looks retroactively to the past to make an important distinction between party and faction, one which Burke made but, in his time, was unable to justify. Where “factions are parts against the whole,” parties are “part of a whole.” It is through revisiting this centuries-old distinction first described by Burke that Sartori is thus able to locate if not the reason, at minimum, a major reason for the emergence of pluralism. In modern democracies, political parties often have vastly divergent platforms and ideas, but are nonetheless recognized as legitimate political entities, even by the citizens who would never vote for a particular party.

The Evolution of Liberalism and Liberal Democracy in Canada

Both liberalism broadly, and liberal democracy specifically, have developed in Canada in ways that preserve its foundational aspects, but also allow for the emergence and growth of certain peculiarities—liberal democratic phenomena that are either unique to Canada or whose developments are largely contributed to Canada. The remainder of this section will be spent discussing exactly this—how liberalism and liberal democracy have shifted Canada through time—and will be divided into two time periods: pre-1960 and post-1960. This is done for two reasons. First, it is not until after 1960 that all law-abiding adult Canadian citizens were granted the right to vote—a crucial aspect that underpins the legitimacy of elections. Second, despite its shortcomings that were largely addressed later in 1982, the Diefenbaker government’s 1960 Bill of Rights represents a marked and fundamental governmental shift towards the protection of individual liberties.

John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* are often cited when discussing the development of the Americas, and are useful in the pre-Confederation, and thus pre-1960, era. Locke’s work was originally published in 1690 and, the second book in particular, is largely seen as justifying both the use of slavery and, in a broader sense, the colonial activities that England was engaged in at the time. While this included slavery, Locke’s views on private property and land also meant that it included a justification for the dispossession of land from the Indigenous peoples of the Americas to the European colonizers. This dispossession of land, of course, is ultimately what allowed for the formation and emergence of the Canadian state. Some scholars, though Arneil in particular, utilize the work of Locke to thoroughly examine

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how he and his work have been used to defend atrocities, which the liberal democracy that has come to envelope Canadian political society, would not be able to justify or defend. In her earlier work, Arneil uses three realms of Lockean thought to analyze colonialism in the Americas—the notion of natural law, an economic justification, and a justification based on property—all of which blend into Locke’s main contribution to liberal theory: the importance of private property and the particular types of land use.

While some economic arguments were based on the wellbeing of England—arguments which posit that the economic benefits received by England will outweigh the initial costs of setting up plantations in the Americas, for example—Locke’s use of property suggests that he transcends the former argument and is attempting to morally justify the forceful acquisition of land in the Americas. Certainly, there were pragmatic reasons as well. Many in England were opposed to their country’s colonial efforts (though, again, not for moral reasons). However, Locke’s justification goes beyond what would have been necessary if all he attempted to do was convince the people of England that their colonial efforts would not prove detrimental to their own country. Though Locke argues against the dispossession of land beyond “that which can be cultivated” in order to ensure there is land remaining for others, eurocentrism permeates this argument. Indeed, throughout his work, Locke gives no regard to the multiplicity of ways in which Indigenous peoples used the land, nor to the inherent utility or importance that land may have to these peoples.

Centuries later, this liberal justification led to Canadian Confederation—after which, the Canadian state took a staunchly assimilationist approach to its relations with Indigenous peoples—and remnants remain even in the recent Canadian past. The forceful relocation of Indigenous children to Indian Residential Schools (IRS), the use of “assimilation-through-enfranchisement” policies, and the relegation of Indigenous peoples to the periphery of Canadian civil and political society has rendered Indigenous-state relations strained through much of Canadian history (if not all of it, including the present).

In 1960, two major events occurred which suggested a turning point in the formation of Canadian liberal democracy. First, as of 1960, Indigenous peoples in Canada were no longer required to

21 Also see Flanagan 1989.
surrender their First Nations status in order to cast a ballot in a federal election. While many Indigenous peoples have convincing reasons for abstaining from electoral participation, it is nonetheless important that they be allowed to participate should they so choose. Second, the Canadian government under Prime Minister Diefenbaker, passed the Canadian Bill of Rights. Though this law has been defined as quasi-constitutional and lacking teeth in terms of its ability to enforce the very rights it outlines, it nonetheless signified an important moment for Canadian liberal democracy. Diefenbaker’s Bill of Rights sought to guarantee the “right of the individual to life, liberty, security of the person and enjoyment of property,” the right to equality before the law, and freedoms of religion, speech, assembly and association, and the press. The Bill also outlined that, unless expressly stated, future laws should conform to the notions set out in the Bill of Rights. While the criticisms of the Bill of Rights, especially in a pre-Charter Canada, are fully legitimate and valid, the recognition of, at minimum, the symbolically significant aspects of the Bill are equally legitimate.

Two decades later, in 1982, the successor to the Bill of Rights, the Constitution Act, 1982, was passed. This included the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which entrenched nearly all of the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights in the Canadian Constitution. Section 27 of the Charter, however, also enshrined a relatively new concept within the Constitution: multiculturalism. The Canadian government had officially adopted a multicultural approach to governing in 1971, and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (CMA) was further passed in 1988. As important as Section 27 of the Charter is, the CMA fully expands on what multiculturalism is, and what obligations and responsibilities the state must undertake in order to ensure its protection. This has also led to the formation and protection of group-based rights in Canada, contrasting against the individual rights approach promoted by liberalism.

Multiculturalism is perhaps the one policy decision that has become an integral part of Canada’s liberal democratic system itself; it has been woven into the very fabric of Canadian society. The extent of this is shown through many public opinion polls. In a Government of Canada report, 84% of respondents agreed that “Canada’s multicultural makeup is one of the best things about Canada.” Further, 61% believed that multiculturalism strengthens national identity, 64% believed that multiculturalism breeds a richer and more tolerant society, and, without being

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prompted with any potential responses, multiculturalism scored higher than any other aspect of Canadian society in response to a question about what most deserves to be celebrated on Canada’s 150th birthday. When the negative response was in favour of multiculturalism, the trend was the same. For example, 59% of Canadians did not believe that Canada is changing too quickly because of the number of visible minorities, and 64% disagreed that Canada would be better if everyone shared the same customs and traditions. These surveys were administered between 2006 and 2010, showing that even during a time when Canadians were increasingly favouring a conservative political party, these progressive views towards multiculturalism remained.

Liberal democracy, then, contains the above features, but is tempered by safeguards such as the executive-judicial division of power and regularly scheduled free and fair elections. As such, I posit that liberal democracy in the Canadian context can be defined as an overarching political system which, while placing importance on notions such as individual liberty and private property, also incorporates an overt multiculturalist and group-rights based approach when dealing with minority groups, and is safeguarded by the measures mentioned above. It might seem then, that liberal democracy is favourable towards Indigenous peoples. It would further appear as though multiculturalism would specifically be helpful for Indigenous peoples and their causes or interests. This, however, is not necessarily the case.

Multiculturalism & Indigenous Reconciliation: Points of Tension

Reconciliation, in the Canadian context is underexplored conceptually, at least in the public realm. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has now been around for a decade, and there is now a host of literature written on the topic. However, the Canadian state and its people have not had the careful and nuanced conversation necessary to decipher what exactly reconciliation means theoretically, or what it entails pragmatically. As such, due to the somewhat limited scope of this article, I define reconciliation in a simple way as: ideas, policies, and actions that will lead to the amelioration of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada’s settler population. This makes numerous assumptions, but nonetheless provides a working definition against which these tensions can be analyzed. In other words, there will be issues with any definition of reconciliation—it is an essentially contestable term—so, at some point, a definition must be selected, even if just so hypotheses can be tested, or an argument can proceed.

Multiculturalism, despite its open and tolerant nature, does not always work alongside Indigenous interests. I identify four
specific points of tension that are stressed when settler-colonial reconciliation is pursued within a multicultural framework. The first two can be attributed to the work of Will Kymlicka; the problematic nature of his typology of minorities (divided between polyethic groups and national minorities) will be investigated, as will his idea that multiculturalism will lessen the need for mutual understanding through a decrease of engagement between Indigenous peoples and the state. The third point of tension comes when multiculturalism is viewed as a theory or ideology of equality, and the fourth stems from the fact that multiculturalism, no matter how it is utilized, remains an instrument of the settler state—a non-neutral actor that has its own interests to promote and protect.

When Kymlicka speaks of multicultural theory and group rights, he suggests that after the majority group and minorities are divided, the minority group can be further divided into polyethic groups and national minorities. The easiest example of polyethic groups are immigrant groups: people who are not part of the majority group and came to Canada of their own volition. National minorities, however, are “a historical society, with its own language and institutions, whose territory has been incorporated (often involuntarily) into a larger country.”27 In Canada, both the Quebecois and First Nations fit into this category. Certainly, leaving these categories as just described is easily problematized, as a group that includes both Indigenous peoples and settlers is likely to not be of much use. While both Quebecois and Indigenous peoples have a different relationship to the state than immigrant groups, the difference between Quebecois and Indigenous peoples is also significant. Kymlicka tried to rectify this in a later work by changing his terminology and creating a further distinction. Kymlicka replaces polyethic with “new” minorities, and national minorities with “old” minorities, and further divides old minorities between “Indigenous groups and other historic minorities, often called ‘national minorities’ or ‘nationalities.’”28 However, the book in which this new typology is found has a distinctly international focus, unlike many of Kymlicka’s earlier works. Thus, while this typology may make sense in other states who have a greater number of minorities to fit under the “old minority” umbrella, it is not of much use in Canada. Indeed, as MacDonald argues, “Indigenous peoples are not ‘immigrants among immigrants,’ nor ‘citizens plus,’ nor ‘minorities’ among a majority.”29

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Aside from not being overly useful in the Canadian context, two sharp critiques of this typology of minorities are also offered by Dick. She argues, first, that Kymlicka’s emphasis on group rights, while working to protect cultural traditions, goes even further in that it “affirms the ability of national minorities to oppress their members in the name of cultural authenticity.”

This highlights a tension, then, between multiculturalism (or, at least, one way in which multiculturalism can manifest) and liberal democracy. This particular tension, while not explicitly tied to Indigenous peoples, will nonetheless have residual effects for them, their struggles, and their movements, as the ensuing debate will push issues such as reconciliation to the periphery. Dick’s second point of contention is that Kymlicka essentializes minority groups, which results in the prioritization of ethnicity as an identity marker and ignores existing intragroup difference. This is something that many Indigenous scholars and writers also caution against. Further, both of Dick’s critiques are easily carried into the realm of reconciliation, as Indigenous peoples are far from a monolithic group—there are over 600 First Nations in Canada, not including Métis and Inuit peoples—and engaging with Indigenous peoples in a meaningful way will require the state to acknowledge these differences.

Another component of Kymlicka’s multicultural theory under examination is his claim that mutual understanding is not only unnecessary, but that it is the role of a multicultural state’s institutions “to reduce the need for such mutual understanding, since they [multicultural policies] empower Indigenous peoples to speak for, and govern, themselves.” In explaining his justification for this, Kymlicka argues that

if we accept that mutual understanding is difficult to achieve, particularly in a context of deep cultural differences and histories of mistrust, then the aim of intercultural education should not primarily be deep mutual understanding, but rather acknowledgement of the (partial) opaqueness of cultural differences, and hence the necessity for groups to speak for and govern themselves, and the necessity of

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32 See, for example, Barcham 2000; Brownlie 2009.

33 Will Kymlicka, “Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens,” *Theory in Research and Education* 1, no. 2: 165.
finding ways of co-existing that can be accepted by all.\footnote{Kymlicka, “Multicultural States and Intercultural Citizens,” 164.}

Certainly, there are some points of agreement here. Mutual understanding between Indigenous peoples and the peoples and institutions of the settler state is difficult to achieve, and this is a fact that is likely to persist. Further, by stipulating that the primary aim of intercultural education should not be mutual understanding, Kymlicka leaves open the possibility that it is nonetheless one aim of intercultural education and dialogue. However, the current reality in which Indigenous peoples are situated—a reality that is permeated with continued stereotyping and discrimination—is likely a result of exactly this lack of understanding described by Kymlicka. In other words, Kymlicka’s argument can be followed through logically: if a state adheres to multiculturalism genuinely, then Indigenous peoples will be given greater degrees of autonomy and self-governance, and this will lead to less interaction between Indigenous peoples and the state, thus requiring a lesser degree of understanding. This, however, is not how Indigenous-state relations have developed, nor is it how it continues to materialize, in a deeply entwined political landscape.

There is also an interpretation of multiculturalism as an idea that advances the promotion of equality and egalitarianism among a nation’s citizenry.\footnote{Brian Barry, Culture and Equality: An Egalitarian Critique of Multiculturalism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 4.} A theory of equality, or an ideology for equality, however, does not leave space for the unique relationship that Indigenous peoples have with the state. Indeed, Macklem argues this to such a degree that he states that “the very ideal thought by many to be threatened by the constitutionalization of differences among citizens [equality] is promoted by the existence of a unique constitutional relationship between [Indigenous] people and the Canadian state.”\footnote{Patrick Macklem, Indigenous Difference and the Constitution of Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 5.}

Macklem goes on to argue that Indigenous peoples face unequal challenges in maintaining their culture and tradition and have uniquely legitimate claims to sovereignty and self-government, to the point where the recognition of Indigenous difference is not only helpful in terms of attaining equality, but is necessary. While Macklem sets up his argument through a constitutional lens and avoids dealing with multiculturalism, his argument still has ramifications for multicultural theory, as it recognizes and acknowledges a discrepancy between groups—something that multiculturalism often does not do, despite being capable.

Lastly, as MacDonald points out, Indigenous self-governance is often seen as simply a part of multicultural accommodation, despite the fact that most Indigenous scholars and activists “do
not identify as part of the multiculturalism rubric,” nor as a minority.\footnote{Fiona MacDonald, “Indigenous Peoples and Neoliberal ‘Privatization’ in Canada: Opportunities, Cautions, Constraints,” \textit{Canadian Journal of Political Science} 44, no. 2 (2011): 260.} This is problematic for multiple reasons. First, it tokenizes Indigenous self-governance by ignoring the struggles of Indigenous movements that have been pushing for self-governance and downplaying the legitimacy of self-governing claims. Second, the multicultural theorists who pursue this idea have prescriptive power, which should be neither ignored nor underestimated. Third, the state is not a neutral arbiter in proceedings regarding Indigenous self-governance, and to view it as such is careless at best and dangerous at worst. As Hale notes, “this notion of the state as impartial arbiter of the conflict between individual and group rights is deeply suspect, since in nearly every important question of cultural rights the state is also a key protagonist in that conflict.”\footnote{Charles Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights, and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala,” \textit{Journal of Latin American Studies} 34: 493.} In other words, the state has a vested interest in these types of proceedings, which often goes unacknowledged and unexamined.

Both Hale and MacDonald discuss and critique a notion they call neoliberal multiculturalism, which seeks to disguise the state’s neoliberal principles behind a mask of multicultural policies in order to advance policies that are in the state’s interest. Hale defines neoliberal multiculturalism as “a substantive, if limited, version of Indigenous cultural rights . . . [promoted] by proponents of the neoliberal doctrine . . . as a means to resolve their own problems and advance their own political agendas.”\footnote{Hale, “Does Multiculturalism Menace?” 487.} Coulthard discusses this from an explicitly economic perspective,\footnote{Coulthard, \textit{Red Skin White Masks}, 170.} whereas MacDonald, writing in the Canadian context, discusses the devolution of power regarding child welfare to First Nations in Manitoba as an act of neoliberal multiculturalism insofar as it is a “divestment of responsibility by the state in areas of social policy” as a public good.\footnote{MacDonald, “Indigenous Peoples and Neoliberal ‘Privatization,’” 261.}

\textbf{Conclusion}

Ultimately, this essay sought to accomplish two main tasks: outline the evolution of liberalism in order to adequately define liberal democracy in Canada; and, identify and analyze points of tension that occur between multiculturalism and settler-colonial reconciliation. To the first point, liberalism has had a long and enduring presence throughout pre- and post-Confederation...
Canadian development. It has been used to justify the dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples on a profound scale, as well as their continued colonization and oppression. It has also lead to the development of one of the most robust and stable liberal democracies in the Western world, characterized by the protection of individual rights and property, an overtly multicultural approach to diversity, and the recognition and appreciation of group-based rights. Second, there are multiple areas where conflict between multiculturalism and Indigenous reconciliation can be seen. Two of these characteristics are found in Kymlicka’s work, including his typology of minorities, as well as his idea regarding how multiculturalism will affect the need for mutual understanding. Two others can be found when multiculturalism is viewed as a theory of, or ideology for, equality, and when the government or state is seen, through its multiculturalist policies, as a benign actor in negotiations. This is not to say that it is impossible for multiculturalism to work either alongside, or directly for, Indigenous peoples. Nor is it to say that Canada must completely jettison the multicultural project in order to pursue reconciliation. What it does say though, is that there are serious consequences that can arise when state and non-state actors are not cognizant of these points of tension, and reconciliation is pursued regardless.

What Canada currently is—a robust and stable liberal democracy—is in no way a justification of the injustices described in the prior sentence (or the hundreds of others not discussed in this paper), nor is it an attempt to find a “silver lining.”
Works Cited


