

Critical Reflections on Nationalism and Multiculturalism

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From the vantage point of Canada— the first country in the world to adopt a policy of official multiculturalism— a case could clearly be made for showing the ways in which multiculturalism and nationalism are compatible in a real, existing liberal democracy. However, even from the Canadian vantage-point it is clear that contestation and conflict surround how the national “we” is defined, as made glaringly apparent in the way the Canadian flag was brandished by supporters of the “Freedom Convoy” that occupied Ottawa in 2022. This paper focusses on Canada within a comparative frame of reference. Attention is given to what Abu-Laban calls the elasticity of nations and nationalism which she argues should caution scholars against advancing categorical answers to the relationship between nationalism and multiculturalism (liberal or otherwise) or foreclosing new conversations. In particular, critical theoretical approaches, based on social movement organizing, point to the urgent need to attend to the historic and contemporary violence associated with settler-colonialism, racism and state power in advancing principles of self-rule, fairness and anti-oppression.