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The End(s) of Multiculturalism I

These two interrelated panels grapple with the central question of whether multiculturalism is still relevant and viable in the face of recent attacks on it and the preceding and new alternatives to it. While multiculturalism has always had its detractors since its inception as official national policy in Canada in the 1970s and its spread to numerous western countries, it mostly weathered earlier challenges from both the political right and the left. However, more recent developments such the 9/11 bombings in the United States and the 7/7 bombings in England have fueled new attacks on multiculturalism. In addition (re)new(ed) theories and discourses that address global, national and local diversity are becoming prominent (transnationalism, globalization, cosmopolitanism, diaspora, interculturalism), threatening to render multiculturalism passé as social and educational policy and everyday discourse for depicting and addressing difference. Besides there have always been alternative, models for depicting and addressing sociocultural difference and social cohesion (e.g. African and Asian mythical figures as archetypes and embodiment of cultural values). The papers in this dual panel are based in various national, sub-national and regional contexts (Canada and Quebec held in tension, Nepal in a South Asian context, Australia and the United States) and address the limits of multiculturalism. Panel One is focused on the limits of multicultural education as an aspect of a more general multiculturalism discourse and as policy approach in educational institutions. Panel Two addresses multiculturalism and its alternatives as vehicles for representing sociocultural difference. Together, the two panels constitute a comprehensive discussion of the question of whether multiculturalism is or ought to be on its deathbed and is rightly being replaced by alternatives or whether multiculturalism and multicultural education remain resilient and with the evolution of more plaint, critical versions, will emerge as the viable future of discourses and policies for addressing diversity at local, national and regional levels.