THE IDEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF MULTICULTURALISM AND INTERCULTURALISM

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the ideological origins of Canada's multiculturalism policy and compares the meaning and significance of multiculturalism with Québec's policy of interculturalism.

In 2011, after a group of Sikhs were turned away from the Québec legislature for carrying kirpans, Parti Québécois critic for secularism, Louise Beaudoin made headlines when she praised the decision on the grounds that "Multiculturalism is not a Québec value." Beaudoin conceded that multiculturalism may be a Canadian value "but it's not a Québec one" because Québec's approach is interculturalism "and it's supposed to not be the same thing." (Panetta, 2011)

This claim is not new and it's not just critics who make it. Even among the defenders of the federal government's policy of multiculturalism there are those who insist that Québec's policy of interculturalism is different. The 2008 Report of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission for example argued that "the Canadian multiculturalism model does not appear to be well suited to conditions in Québec." (p. 39) I would like to put these comments in proper context, and ask to what extent they are correct. Is multiculturalism a Québec value? To properly answer this question let's consider the meaning of multiculturalism and then compare that to interculturalism.

Multiculturalism is the name of Canada's federal citizenship policy of promoting the full participation, adjustment, and integration of diverse ethno-cultural groups into mainstream Canadian society, within a bilingual framework, and eliminating any barriers to such participation, adjustment, and integration. In the famous words of Pierre Trudeau's celebrated October 8, 1971 policy announcement, it is premised on the fact that "although there are two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other." (Trudeau, 1971, p. 8845) Unlike the US where multiculturalism typically refers to all forms of identity recognition, in Canada the term was coined specifically in reference to the accommodation of various groups defined by ethnic descent.

While the aim of multiculturalism is to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies, and to promote respect for cultural and racial diversity, its goal is neither separatism nor moral relativism. Multiculturalism does not encourage immigrants or ethnic groups to avoid mutual interaction, or to develop their own separate institutions, but is aimed at "strengthening citizen participation," "reinforcing Canadian unity" and encouraging "a willingness to share ideas." (Trudeau, 1971, pp. 8845, 8581) And it is not based on a culturally relativist philosophy that all practices (particularly illiberal ones) must be automatically tolerated, condoned, or valued equally (Kymlicka 1998, 2007). On the contrary, from its initial articulation and subsequent constitutional and statutory elaboration, multiculturalism was always meant to cohere with Canada's liberal democratic values, which is to say, in the words of the *Multiculturalism Act,* that it ensures that "all individuals receive equal treatment and equal protection under the law, while respecting and valuing their diversity."

In practice multiculturalism precludes assimilation and instead promotes fair and reasonable accommodation, integration, and adaptation within a bilingual framework. What is fair or reasonable is not pre-determined, absolute or definitive but it is something ongoing and provisional, decided in practice on a case-by-case basis, sometimes in dialogical negotiation, and sometimes the outcome of court rulings. The underlying idea is twofold: that cultural retention and accommodation, and the public expression of ethno-cultural identity are important for self-respect;

and that cultural recognition in a liberal democracy is as necessary as the freedom and equality of its citizens. The premise here is what Tully (2002) calls "a third-generation norm of legitimacy," namely that respect for cultural diversity "must be considered on a par with the norms of freedom and equality" (p. 28). Recognizing citizens as free and equal persons actually requires "acknowledging their cultural identities" (Owen & Tully, 2007, p. 277) So ethnic groups should not be pressured either to hide, disguise or erase their identities. And Canada should not punish, suppress or marginalize those who refuse to assimilate into a majority or dominant identity.

Under the older ideology of assimilation, members of the ethno-cultural majority assumed that they had the right to dictate without consultation the terms by which immigrants and long-settled minorities were expected to erase and replace their cultural identities. They expected assimilation as something normal and viewed ethnic retention as neither justifiable nor desirable. This view is often called the 'Anglo-conformist' model of assimilation (Troper, 1979) but it is essentially a racist superiority complex premised on the unquestioned supremacist assumptions that British institutions, customs and values were the measure of civilization, and into which all others must be moulded. And not just newcomers: a broader European conformity ideology of assimilation is most clearly evident in the imperial, colonial, racist and genocidal attitudes, policies, laws and practices aimed at the First Nations of the Americas. The racist ideology of Anglo-supremacy is evident in various historical attitudes, policies, laws and practices aimed at French Canadians, for example in certain provisions of the *Royal Proclamation of 1763,* in Lord Durham's infamous 1839 report and the subsequent *Act of Union,* and the numerous provincial laws passed in the 19th and early 20th centuries outlawing and forbidding the teaching of French, depriving Francophone minorities public schools, and refusing the use of their language in government institutions. Of course this racist superiority complex was always met with ridicule and disdain by the First Nations and by those of French-Canadian origins who steadfastly and unequivocally resisted assimilation policies, and defended their own separate institutions in order to protect their culturally distinct historical societies. Still, this racist ideology persisted into the twentieth century. Consider for example a speech by R.B. Bennett declaring in the House of Commons on June 7, 1928, that "the British civilization" is "the test by which all other civilized nations in modern times are measured" and "the standard by which we must measure our own civilization." This ideal was the foundation of Canada's integration policy, namely "to assimilate those whom we bring to this country to that civilization, that standard of living, that regard for morality and law, and the institutions of the country" (Palmer, 1975, p. 119).

Sometime around the middle of the twentieth century in Canada this Anglo-supremacy superiority complex was increasingly called into question, gradually abandoned, and ultimately replaced by a new and very different ideal, which many called multiculturalism. This transformation was not natural, inevitable, or the result of good luck. Rather, it came about by the effective persuasion of an organized political movement that changed public attitudes and practices, which is to say that the assimilation ideology was defeated by a successful widespread popular struggle over recognition (Temelini 2007). The last public expressions justifying Anglo-supremacy are evident in the public hearings and submissions of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism* (RCBB), where many participants denounced bilingualism and cultural pluralism, and tried unsuccessfully to defend the ideology R.B. Bennett articulated. We all know that the RCBB was supposed to solve the crisis over Québec's demands for constitutional recognition as a nation, and to reconcile the dispute between Canadians of British and French origins. It was in response to those who adamantly rejected privileging the descendants of these historically dominant groups, that the RCBB's scope was broadened to address the recognition demands of Canadians descended from other ethnic groups. Perhaps the RCBB's most unexpected outcome was that it became the hugely popular forum in which Canadians articulated a new attitude towards these ethnic communities, and this resulted in Trudeau's famous 1971 policy of "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework." Trudeau had his own strategic and philosophical reasons for embracing the newly articulated ideology. He stubbornly refused Québécois demands for special recognition as a national minority, and he sought an antidote to cure the national question. While ignoring the RCBB's recognition of Québec as a distinct society, and the bi-nationalism sanctioned by its various reports, in order to bolster his crusade against Québécois nationalism Trudeau deftly mobilized the ideas found in Volume 4 (or Book IV) of the RCBB's Final Report, entitled "The Cultural Contribution of Other Ethnic Groups."

This has been the basis of Québec's distrust of multiculturalism ever since. It is partly because of the original context in which the idea was articulated that the Québécois have resisted using the word 'multiculturalism,' and why they have been justifiably suspicious of the policy. Not because they are opposed to accommodating diversity but because of a concern that the policy undermines efforts to protect and enhance their distinct form of life. They see multiculturalism as a clever attempt to deny their full recognition or even, as Taylor (1994) observed, "to reduce the importance of the French fact in Canada to that of an outsized ethnic minority" (p. 162). As Kymlicka (2009) concurs, they think the policy "reduces their claims of nationhood to the level of immigrant ethnicity" (p. 26).

Despite these misgivings, almost everything I've said here about multiculturalism resembles interculturalism. Like the federal policy, it's a public policy and set of practices for integrating Québec's diverse ethno-cultural communities, in a fair and reasonable way, into its mainstream liberal democratic society. In this sense, what Canadians call 'multiculturalism' and what the Québécois call 'interculturalism' are more or less the same. But there are important differences between the two policies, and it is on the basis of these differences that multiculturalism may not be a Québec value. Elegantly explained in the Bouchard-Taylor report (2008), the differences hinge on what we mean by mainstream society or what that report calls "societal norms" (p. 35). The essential difference is that Québec is a nation with an obvious common public culture. French is its common public language, and a long historical anxiety has persisted over the protection and survival of this language and distinct culture. In other words, inside Québec, unlike the rest of Canada, there is an ethno-cultural majority. And so it differs from the rest of Canada because in contrast to Trudeau's statement cited earlier, there is one official language and a dominant ethno-cultural group "constantly concerned about its future" (p. 40) that has historically demanded to take precedence over other groups. Accordingly, the key difference with Québec's integration policy is to encourage immigrants to learn French and "to reconcile ethno-cultural diversity with the continuity of the French-speaking core" (p. 40). This is the sense in which the Bouchard-Taylor report concluded that "the Canadian multicultural model" is not well suited in Québec. They cite four reasons: first, anxiety over language is not a factor among Canadian Anglophones, and second, "minority insecurity is not found there"; third, there is "no longer a majority ethnic group in Canada" while "citizens of French-Canadian origin make up a strong majority" of Québec's population; and fourth, "it follows that in English Canada, there is less concern for the preservation of a founding cultural tradition" (p. 40). There is another significant aspect to Québec culture addressed in the report which I can only briefly mention here: Québec experienced a profoundly transformative moment of secularization during the Quiet Revolution, and so as Michael Adams (2008) correctly explains, its practice of interculturalism must be understood in the context of the ensuing secular culture that "displaced the Catholic hegemony" (p. 28).

What all this means is that Canada has two models of immigrant integration reflecting two different realities: inside Québec immigrants are integrated into the dominant secular Francophone culture, and outside they are integrated into a bilingual poly-ethnicity. Taking into consideration these overlapping similarities as well as differences, what this also means is that there is a sense in which both critics and defenders are correct about multiculturalism not being a Québec value. But there is also a sense in which both multiculturalism and interculturalism are indeed Québec values, and Canadian ones too.

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