THE ONGOING DEBATE BETWEEN MULTICULTURALISM AND INTERCULTURALISM[1]

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Clearly, interculturalism is an -ism like any other. But what interculturalism are we referring to here? Is it the interculturalism of the Indian philosopher Raymond Pannikar, who proposed a critique of Western societies based on a series of meditations on "dialogical dialogue," and who inspired the thinking of the Intercultural Institute of Montreal? Or perhaps the interculturalism of Gérard Bouchard, who regards this model as a means of defending Quebec's cultural rights in the face of the existential threats posed by Canadian-style multiculturalism? And what is the relationship of multiculturalism to these very different visions of interculturalism, as we mark its 50th anniversary this year? Are we right to contrast interculturalism with multiculturalism, or is this a semantic debate only of interest to academics? Are there real differences between the two paradigms, or is this just an attempt to manipulate the debate for political purposes? Why does the debate between these two paradigms persist?

In countries like Canada, where multiculturalism is seen as a pillar of political culture, it is always surprising to learn that for some groups it can be experienced as a form of hegemony.[2] This is the case in Quebec, a French-speaking province within Canada, which, for historical reasons, is wary of multiculturalism, not only as a policy of "diversity management", but also as a marker of identity. This perceived disparity between a *multiculturalist Canada* and an *interculturalist Quebec* is problematic for several reasons. Not only can one find multiculturalism in Quebec and interculturalism in the rest of Canada, but the two models have influenced each other since the inception of multiculturalism in the early 1970s. However, an analysis of the tensions between the two models as worldviews makes it possible to reflect on the paradox of diversity

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1 A longer version of this text was published in the journal *Possibles* (see White 2019).

2 According to several research and polling sources, multiculturalism is one of the "Canadian values" most cherished by Canadians of all backgrounds (Rocher and White 2014), despite the distrust it creates in some sectors of the population in Quebec.

that lies at the heart of modern nation-states.

A number of important observations must be made before undertaking any serious comparison of the two models. First, it is important to distinguish between state-based policies or programs and the social realities that they seek to frame. Second, Quebec must be seen as a majority French-speaking province that enjoys a particular status within Canada. Lastly, it must be noted that interculturalism often emerges in plurinational contexts wherein a struggle exists between majority and minority populations. This predicament of a fragile majority – what Rachida Azdouz (2018) has referred to as "manoritaire" – is essential to understanding the importance of interculturalism in Quebec.

It would be easy to fall into the trap of those analysts who give the impression that there is a broad consensus on interculturalism in Quebec. Bouchard makes this mistake repeatedly, not least because his analysis seeks to place interculturalism on an equal footing with multiculturalism. One study identified at least four strands of thought in Quebec that are critical of interculturalism (Rocher and White 2014). Not only do many native anglophones in Québec have difficulty with the model of interculturalism, but also many immigrants and immigrant communities resist interculturalism because they believe multiculturalism (and thus by extension Canada) is "more open to diversity". The same is true of many Indigenous communities, although for different reasons.

In recent years there has been an ongoing debate about the relative value of the two models; this debate has become polarized and ideologically charged.[3] On the one hand, there are those who defend multiculturalism as part of their political heritage, presenting arguments to show the merits and evolution of this public policy. On the other hand, there are those who criticize multiculturalism for contributing to communitarianism and the rise of "parallel lives". For interculturalists, multiculturalism is a thing of the past. Meanwhile for multiculturalists, interculturalism is simply an iteration of multiculturalism, or, in more moderate formulations, a continuation of multiculturalism. From the interculturalist perspective, multiculturalism is a way of undermining Québec; from the multiculturalist perspective, interculturalism simply adds fuel to the fires of populism and intolerance.

In an effort to promote their respective positions, most of the authors who contribute to this debate fall into binary arguments that pit interculturalism and multiculturalism against each other. Some authors take a moderate position in order to demonstrate that each model has positive aspects to contribute to the debate and that there is a certain complementarity between the two models. Others attempt to compare the two models, setting out to maintain a balance in their analysis of the similarities and differences; but often end up being biased, favouring one model over the other. One thing that is certain about this debate, which almost always takes place in English – is that multiculturalists tend to minimize the differences between the two models, while interculturalists tend to emphasize them. In some analyses, such as those of Charles Taylor (2012), each model has its own historical context and trajectory. According to Taylor, interculturalism is the appropriate model for Quebec because it is the model that has emerged over time and embodies the historical consciousness of Quebecers.

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From a systemic perspective, both interculturalism and multiculturalism are part of a larger family of political thought, namely pluralism. Multiculturalism and interculturalism share several important principles of pluralist thought including the pursuit of social cohesion, the rejection of assimilationism, the recognition of diversity, and the fight against discrimination. But there are also important differences between the two models (see White 2019). If this analysis is correct, it can be argued that the debate that pits interculturalism against multiculturalism is itself an example of intercultural miscommunication. Here I use the word "intercultural" in the broadest possible sense, that is, meaning an encounter between worldviews, where the root "culture" refers not to ethnic or racial identity, but to any group identity that can constitute an expression of sociability but also a mechanism of exclusion. Much more than merely concepts or political programs, multiculturalism and interculturalism are cultures, with all that the word "culture" implies and fails to adequately explain.

In a recent article on this topic, Tariq Modood presents multiculturalism as a political paradigm that has been the victim of bad press and "misrepresentation" by interculturalists. In the article titled "Must Interculturalists Misrepresent Multiculturalism?", Modood attempts to demonstrate that interculturalism cannot replace multiculturalism as a political paradigm (2017: 5). According to his analysis, interculturalism

3 See *Canadian Diversity* Volume 9(2) (2012), the debate between Ted Cantle and Tariq Modood in *Ethnicities* in 2016, also *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 33 (2), and *Comparative Migration Studies* 2018 (6).

can contribute to the evolution of multiculturalism, but it must somehow integrate multiculturalism, much in the same way that an immigrant seeks to integrate her new host society. Modood's analysis illustrates a tendency in the literature defending multiculturalism to see interculturalism as a derivative (or maybe even a deviation) of the larger multiculturalist framework (ibid: 18). This argument is not acceptable to those who defend interculturalism, largely because, from their point of view, interculturalism constitutes a distinct tradition, with its own thinkers, concepts, and policy perspectives (Emongo and White 2014). For staunch interculturalists, this multiculturalist formulation is an arrogant, even contemptuous argument that deserves a retort along the same rhetorical lines, i.e. "Why Must Multiculturalists Misrepresent Interculturalism?"

In a more recent publication Modood and Mansouri, explain that multiculturalism and interculturalism, which have often been opposed in the past, are now entering a period of complementarity (Mansouri and Modood 2021). This complementarity, at least in the research conducted in the Australian context, is characterized by a particular form of differentiation, where multiculturalism provides macro-level policy orientation and interculturalism addresses the micro or local level issues, a division of labor that would put interculturalism at the service of multiculturalism.[4] This analysis, while based on empirical research in one particular context (Australia), does not hold water. Firstly, it fails to recognize that intercultural thinking often emerges in contexts where minority communities are trying to defend their cultural and linguistic rights (Quebec, Catalonia, Mexico). Before proposing a universal model of the relationship between the two paradigms, we must first examine the nature of political dynamics at the national level. Second, and more importantly, this analysis uncritically reproduces the nationalist discourse of governmental interculturalism (citing Bouchard), without considering the fact that this version of interculturalism is rejected by many actors and communities within Quebecois political life (Frozzini 2014). Finally, the presupposition of an historical linear progression from opposition to complementarity (what the authors refer to as the "4th phase") is simply not supported by the empirical data on interculturalism elsewhere (Emongo and White 2014). We know that there are any number of relationships between the two approaches, that the relationship between the two varies according to the national context, and that complementarity (which is also not defined in this text) is only one possibility among many.

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and intercultural thinking fiercely resists the imposition of hegemonic frameworks. One solution would be the model of intercultural integration proposed by the Council of Europe in its Intercultural Cities program. Starting at the level of local governance and without ignoring the importance of multilevel analysis, the intercultural cities program takes as its starting point the basic principles of human rights culture.[5]

How can we imagine the connection between these two giants of pluralistic thinking without reproducing the two solitudes that were the basis of their emergence as models for managing diversity in the first place (Winter 2011)? Time will tell, but first we must recognize each approach has its own history and that these two histories are interwoven. It is problematic to present interculturalism as a paradigm that will surpass or replace multiculturalism, but it is equally problematic to present interculturalism as merely a a variant of multiculturalism, or even worse, as the local labor that will enable multiculturalism to finally realize its dream of a more just and humane society.

4 One of the most common stereotypes of interculturalism is the tendency to characterize it as a micro-level approach, or even worse, one that is limited to interpersonal dynamics (White 2019).

5 For more information on the evolution of this network in Canada, see the Réseau des municipalités en immigration et en relations interculturelles du Québec (RÉMIRI): www.remiri.net

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