The challenge of developing a stable political community amidst great ethnic, religious, regional, and linguistic diversity has been a constant theme in Canadian history. The following collection of essays suggests that the challenge will be with us for a long time to come. None of the essays suggest these forms of diversity will fade in their sociological incidence or political salience. Nor do they suggest that the challenge of managing diversity will somehow take care of itself if just left to the logic of the free market or to the solicitude of individual Canadians. Managing diversity in Canada has always required conscious state policies, and will continue to do so.

Many of the issues discussed in the essays, therefore, will be familiar to readers: ie., how to reconcile the recognition of diversity with the building of common feelings of membership and solidarity; how to understand the links between economic disadvantage and cultural exclusion, since many minority groups suffer from both; how to promote genuine mutual understanding rather than simply the tokenistic appreciation of diversity; how to enable greater public participation, yet also ensure that participation is conducted responsibly, with a spirit of openness and fairness, and is not simply a way of asserting dogmatic claims or scapegoating unpopular groups.

Ce sont là quelques-unes des questions opposant fréquemment les étudiants de la citoyenneté canadienne. Alors que ces questions de base n'évoluent pas beaucoup au fil des ans, il existe certains changements dans les concepts que nous employons pour en parler. Par exemple, de nouvelles notions de « cohésion sociale » et de « capital social » ont fait leur entrée dans le débat au cours des dix dernières années. La première notion provient d'Europe alors que la seconde, des États-Unis. Les deux ont vite trouvé leurs voies dans les débats canadiens et elles sont fréquemment invoquées dans les essais qui suivent. Il reste maintenant à se demander si la popularité de ces notions est simplement une question de mode intellectuelle ou si ces concepts peuvent en fait contribuer à une meilleure compréhension du phénomène. (I'm more optimistic that "social capital" will prove a fruitful addition to our conceptual toolkit than "social cohesion")

In addition to changes in our conceptual vocabulary, there are also changes to the nature of society itself. The challenges Canada faces today are different from those we faced 10 years ago. The most obvious change concerns the salience of religion in debates about Canadian diversity, including the essays in this issue. This is partly due to the events of 9/11, which have put Muslim communities under a spotlight throughout the West. But the rediscovery of religion as a pivotal issue predates September 2001. The claim that the Canadian model of multiculturalism marginalizes religion was advanced first by evangelical Protestant groups, linked to similar Christian movements in the United States. Some conservative Jewish and Muslim groups have entered into an alliance with evangelical Protestants to push for a more "religion-friendly" model of multiculturalism, particularly in the field of education. Aboriginal Canadians have also emphasized the centrality of spirituality to their visions of Aboriginal self-government. Even those Canadians who are not religious have started to recognize that an understanding of world religions is needed to make sense of various international conflicts, or indeed of our own history in Canada.

All of these factors have highlighted religion as a form of diversity that must be debated and accommodated. Pessimists might wonder whether the "Canadian model" can cope with this additional challenge, or whether this will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. After all, none of our earlier challenges of diversity have been solved: charges of racism against blacks in the police forces and judicial system are again in the news; the appalling conditions on many Aboriginal reserves remain a national disgrace; recent immigrants have had a more difficult time finding an economic footing; not to mention the unsettled constitutional wrangling with Quebec. Can we hope that a system under such strain can cope with the demands of increasingly assertive religious groups, particularly when one of these groups has become associated with fundamentalism and terrorism?

Pour ceux qui sont de nature pessimiste, il y a matière à s'inquiéter. Quelques-uns des essais suivants expriment le désespoir et le découragement. Sur une autre note, ils expriment aussi une confiance surprenante que le Canada surmontera ces obstacles, en apprenant au passage et en évoluant à partir des leçons passées au sujet de la gestion de la diversité. Il semble y avoir un consensus général que les bases constructives menant au succès de la diversité sont en place au Canada, non seulement en termes de lois et d'institutions politiques, mais aussi en termes d'attitudes populaires. Nous nous accordons aussi à dire que les leaders politiques responsables pourront canaliser ces ressources pour traiter avec n'importe quel défi que nous affronterons.

We can compare this confidence with the anxious, almost panicked, response to diversity that we see in some other Western countries, reflected in the rise of extreme right anti-immigrant parties in France or Belgium, or the "retreat from multiculturalism" in the Netherlands, or the heavy-handed coercive policies towards immigrants in Austria. In all of these countries, there has been a strong backlash against new immigrants, and against multicultural accommodations. In the Canadian debate, by contrast, we find general support for the basic outlines of our immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism policies. There is no suggestion in the following essays that we should dramatically reduce our immigration intake, or curtail access to citizenship, or retreat from our public commitment to multiculturalism. The authors suggest ways of extending these policy commitments, not of backtracking on them.

Of course, this may be a biased sample: perhaps the authors invited to contribute to this issue already have a personal or professional stake in the success of the Canadian model. Undoubtedly there are many people in Canada with more pessimistic views. One can find such views expressed loudly in newspaper columns or radio talk shows. And yet I think the confidence expressed in the following essays reflects the predominant view within the Canadian public. There have been periodic attempts by some politicians to whip up opposition to our immigration, citizenship and multiculturalism policies, but they have been surprisingly unsuccessful, at least in comparison with most other Western countries. The public might not be in the mood for the sort of bold leap forward that some authors recommend, but nor do they support any serious retrenchment or backtracking. Given the uncertain times we live in, and the dangers of ill-conceived over-reactions to new challenges, that sort of calm support for the status quo is perhaps not a bad thing.

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