CANADIAN CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING: FROM TAYLOR TO KYMLICKA TO REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

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ABSTRACT

Canadian discourses about immigrant and minority integration have evolved over the past four decades; a large number of federal and provincial government programs and policies are now involved in the integration process; Canada has been more successful than any other OECD country in welcoming and integrating millions of people while maintaining economic prosperity and social peace. Yet, negative discourses have crept in. This article provides a narrative on how cross-cultural understanding and multicultural citizenship came to be Canadian products that gave this country its edge.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author.

This issue of *Canadian Diversity* on cross-cultural understanding looks at culture as a carrier of many elements, such as ethnicity, language, religion, arts, cuisine, leisure and sports. The implication is obvious, for it involves inter-faith dialogue, the linguistic duality of the two official languages/cultures, and the desire to understand the myriad of over 200 ethnic groups in Canada, as well as the broader issue of identity and belonging. Since others in this issue tackle the core theme from practical or policy angles, this article, although coterminous, is limited to a narrative of the philosophical debate of the past twenty years.

CROSS-CULTURAL DIALOGUE

Cross cultural dialogue is a quintessentially Canadian answer to addressing the challenges faced by our society with regards to social transformation. It is precisely needed if such transformations are construed as presenting potential sources of cantankerous future tension. The Canadian approach of public dialogue and royal commissions has served the country well over the decades. In this Canadian tradition, experts call for open discussion on issues surrounding multiculturalism and citizenship.

Through peaceful dialogue, Canada has tendentiously more progressive views on socioeconomic issues and immigration and multiculturalism compared to those expressed in Europe and elsewhere. Dialogue since the early 1960s has ubiquitously led to building a Canadian vision of the future without sanctimony: an evolutionary, peaceful transformation from the Quiet Revolution in Québec to the sophisticated federal and provincial legislative framework around social, gender, and racial equality and multiculturalism.

Perhaps, a good point of departure is inter-faith dialogue: In 1776, at a convention to draw up the constitution, a delegate named Heinrich Roth, from a small sect who had emigrated from Germany to escape religious persecution, argued for the inclusion of a clause guaranteeing *freedom of religion* in the constitution. Benjamin Franklin, who chaired the session and was well known for his strong secular and anti-clerical beliefs, asked Roth why a religious person would want freedom of religion. Roth answered, "Because we're not sure we are right," to which Franklin responded that he was the most admirable religious person he had ever met, because all the others were so self-assured. Professor John Sigler of Carleton University took this story a step further:

> *"In the dialogue which is being practiced in Canada, we will need much more of that spirit of listening to others with the recognition that we have so much to learn from each other. And we should always be aware of our biases and prejudices if there is to be any genuine effort at mutual learning. On that basis alone we can enter any real dialogue of healing in this troubled age."*[1]

Almost 228 years later, at a conference on religion in Berlin in 2002, German philosopher Jurgen Habermas threw an intellectual bomb against established views about religion, and in line with his opposition to conventional thought process in current western political culture. He called for a philosophical program that completes the Enlightenment process and a pragmatic approach that benefits society, where citizens are the main doers. He said that religions are essentially "intolerant" projects because they are "closed" (in his words, they are "un-enlightened" projects), built on eternal irrefutable facts and statements, and on fixed dogmas that cannot be modified or replaced no matter how long *inter-faith dialogue* continued. To him, the adherents of every religious denomination believe that they own complete truths and those who belong to other religions are wrong in their beliefs; for if they agree with the views of members of other religions, they risk doubting their own beliefs. Religious ideologies do not accept thought outside their own religion, e.g., Catholic catechism says that the Church does not accept any other religion; in Muslim *sharia,* Islam is the only religion of God, and accepting any other belief endangers faith.

Habermas here was not anti-religious, nor an atheist. He was simply delivering a clear message that "integrating" all religions into a single universal one is impossible, if not hypocritical. What participants in inter-faith dialogue believed to be rapprochement, or agreement, was in fact hiding or downplaying fundamental differences, and bringing forward what unites. Rather, Habermas suggested that conferrers should focus on seeking to know the religions of one another and respect them for what they are and make peace with them, without antagonism or attempts to prove one another to be wrong. Such mutual understanding would then be transferred to the *public sphere* – Habermas' recurrent theme – i.e., brought out to community, the media, and governments, to facilitate cooperation and working together in day to day life. And this represents the guts of Habermas' position on the primacy of dialogue: people go through "discursive" and "dialogical" exercises to reach practical commonalities that make life easier.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1977) guarantees the freedom of religious belief:

2. Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:
(a) Freedom of conscience and religion;
(b) Freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
(c) Freedom of peaceful assembly; and
(d) Freedom of association.

15. (1) Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability.

Dialogue in the public sphere was the backdrop of strong foundation for multicultural citizenship in Canada.

RISE OF MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

TAYLOR/THESIS

Canadian social history could provide rationale for the legislative developments, but it was work by enlightened men that gave this rationale depth and texture, such as Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor. In 1992, Taylor argued that societies, such as Canada, have become increasingly multicultural and more open to migration. This has led to a situation where some cultures impose themselves on others (with assumed superiority of a hegemonic culture) and placed minority cultures in danger of vanishing. The recognition or non-recognition of minority cultures then influences identity formation; non-recognition causes damage/pain and oppresses people (e.g., African Americans and women in history). Therefore, the demand for recognition has become a basic human need. German philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) provides two guiding principles: (1) society's acceptance that every individual is *original;* and that (2) it is an ethical ideal for everyone to be true to oneself. These principles of originality are not only for individuals but also for groups of people as carriers of culture (if one is not true to oneself, then they suffer from cowardice and eventually of alienation as well explained in Sartre's existentialism). Taylor suggests that:

> *"Equal recognition is not just the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. Its refusal can inflict damage on those who are denied it… The projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized."*[2]

In this vein, Taylor advocates a modern notion of individual identity, where everyone is recognised for their particular identity, distinctness, and particularities, and is not subject to assimilation by the mainstream or to oppression of the group they belong to. The recognition should be limited to a combination of rights and cultural traditions since the state cannot be made responsible for enforcing equal recognition of private interests:

> *"...it (the politics of difference) asks that we give acknowledgement and status to something that is not universally shared. Or, otherwise put, we give due acknowledgement only to what is universally present – everyone has an identity – through recognizing what is peculiar to each. The universal demand powers an acknowledgement of specificity"*[3]

Habermas/Anti-Thesis

In a symposium held at Stanford University in January 1995, Habermas responded to Taylor's thesis[4]. The issue was individual versus group rights and whether a constitutional democracy based on individual rights and freedoms ought to recognize group rights, which might lead to what the French call *communautarisme;* this would create a cleavage between individual rights vs. collective goals, complete equality vs. recognition of difference (special rights (and equal rights) for everyone but allowing restrictions for "special" citizens). Habermas then made this polemic:

> *"Should citizens' identities as members of ethnic, cultural, or religious groups* publicly *matter? And if so, how can collective identities make a difference within the frame of a constitutional democracy? Are collective identities and cultural memberships politically relevant, and if so, how can they legitimately affect the distribution of rights and the recognition of legal claims?"*[5]

For him, religion and ethnic identities are private matters and have no place in the public sphere. It is harmful to bring forward group rights in a constitutional democracy based on individual rights and responsibilities, and the state cannot allocate claims when religious or ethnic identities are forced upon the public sphere. Habermas criticizes attempts in Western democracies to revive nationalist dogmas – whose disastrous outcome is a painful matter of historical record. They must be combated by *constitutional or civic citizenship* that respects democratic principles[6]. Therefore – and here lies Habermas' master statement – all *concrete legislation should be evaluated in light of universal normative precepts embodied in the constitution itself.* In line with his philosophical discourse, he argues that national identity should be based on an appeal to universal principles of justice, human rights and democracy and not on beliefs of rights or wrongs based on immediate or particularistic points of reference as re-enforced by one's peer group or nation (even if that means the majority ethnic or linguistic group):

> *"Laws are legitimate only if they are in tune with the opinions, values, and norms generated discursively in civil society... Legitimate laws must be consistent with moral, ethical, and pragmatic considerations and serve the good of the legal community"*[7]

For a democratic constitution to take root it must be supported by a political culture consistent with modern morality and resonate with ethical understanding of all cultural groups in the country. A political culture cannot be seen as an expression of particular values of the majority culture[8]. Habermas' call for *civic citizenship* as compared to *ethnic citizenship* found meaning in Germany of the 1990s; where it contributed to a modern citizenship law in 2000. He saw hope in a new era of political community that transcends nationalism-based states (based on ethnic and cultural likeness) towards one based on equal rights and obligations of *legally vested citizens.* This civic democracy requires a political community which can collectively define its political will and implement it as policy through the legislative system. This political system requires an activist public sphere, where matters of common interest and political issues can be discussed, and the force of public opinion can influence government decision-making process.

Kymlicka/Synthesis

Canada was the golden mean between Taylor and Habermas, as brought forward by Canadian thinker Will Kymlicka. Canada after 2000 proudly displayed her own brand of civic citizenship called *multicultural citizenship* that recognized minority rights. Kymlicka explains the triumph of multicultural citizenship thus: for years the central critique of multiculturalism and minority rights theory was based on the argument that justice required state institutions to be "colour-blind" and therefore the onus remained firmly on proponents of minority rights "to show that deviations from difference-blind rules that are adopted in order to accommodate ethno-cultural differences are not inherently unjust"[9]. But this onus has shifted as Western democracies have come to recognize, at least in theory if not always in practice, the legitimacy of minority rights and policies with respect to both immigrants and

Aboriginal peoples, and adopt multiculturalism and self-government for national minorities in some countries. "The burden of proof" became much more balanced in terms of defenders of so-called colour-blind institutions now having to demonstrate that maintaining such institutional arrangements will not lead to injustices for minority groups.

This balance has, in turn, forced critics of multiculturalism and minority rights to search for a new basis for their critique. What Kymlicka claims the ideal of a so-called "normal" state model has shifted away from the centralized and homogenous model of the past, toward a multicultural *ideal*. Throughout much of the 20th century, Kymlicka writes, the most influential example of a *normal* state was France – i.e. a highly centralized state with an undifferentiated conception of republican citizenship and single official language; France had no room for minority rights. But this has changed dramatically since the 1990s and the best example was the European Union's decision to make respect for minority rights one of the accession criteria for would-be members. Kymlicka sees in this shift a moral redefinition of the modern state ideal wherein denying the existence of minorities or treating them as politically inconsequential is seen as evidence that one is not yet ready to become a member in good standing of the club of democracies. He then lists three key features that mark the shift away from the older ethnic citizenship to multicultural citizenship. These three features are:

(1) The repudiation of the idea of the state as belonging to a dominant group.
(2) The replacement of assimilationist and exclusionary nation-building policies with policies of recognition and accommodation.
(3) The acknowledgement of historic injustices and offering amends for it. Canada was indeed moving forward as an example to the world of a successful democracy that respects all its citizens.

THREATS TO MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

Over the past ten years, civic citizenship both in Canada and Europe has been hit by an erosion-critique. There was a growing European discourse that wanted to return to a conventional national identity. Habermas considered such discourse as a regression for the modest gains that Germany has made as a democratic nation in the decades that followed the war[10]. His advocacy of civic citizenship for Europe was encountering serious acrimony, and his unfolding enlightenment project was challenged by social realities on the ground in Europe including declarations by governments that multiculturalism was dead and that things were not going well for minorities and migrants in their midst.

In *Multicultural Odysseys,* Kymlicka explains how the European experiment is challenging the global spread of Canadian multiculturalism[11]. Although he became pessimistic about the up-take of Canadian multiculturalism globally, he remained committed to its advancement in terms of protecting vulnerable groups from injustice. In his clearest and most recent statement yet, he writes[12]:

> *Ideas about the legal and political accommodation of ethnic diversity – commonly termed Multiculturalism – emerged in the West as a vehicle for replacing older forms of ethnic and racial hierarchy with new relations of democratic citizenship. Despite substantial evidence that these policies are making progress toward that goal, a chorus of political leaders has declared them a failure and heralded the death of multiculturalism. This popular master narrative is problematic because it mischaracterizes the nature of the experiments in multiculturalism that have been undertaken, exaggerates the extent to which they have been abandoned, and misidentifies not only the genuine difficulties and limitations they have encountered but the options for addressing these problems.*

The European backlash to Canadian multiculturalism has crept into Canada where an emerging discourse was re-interpreting national identity in terms of European roots and symbols, giving pride of place with respect to the two founding peoples – the French and English, and throwing doubt whether all Canadians truly identify with our state as a multicultural one in the way that Kymlicka suggests. Historians and journalists preached a uniform pre-multiculturalism past and argued that Canada is an oasis of Western democracy that could be spoiled by the coloured immigrant[13]. Since opponents of multiculturalism can no longer rely on a justice-based critic that was ended in the 1990s, many have re-grouped now around a concern for "stability" rather than "justice". As Kymlicka puts it, "critics focus not on the justice or injustice of particular policies, but rather on the way that the general trend towards minority rights threatens to erode the sorts of civic virtues, identities, and practices that sustain a healthy democracy" [14].

However, in criticizing multiculturalism and minority rights policies in the broader context of democratic citizenship and identity, critics have placed themselves in the awkward position of having to infer – if not proclaim explicitly – that there may be something about the ethnic minority-focus of multiculturalism that is undemocratic and destabilizing for the larger society (i.e., recognition is bad). But this is an awkward position because it seems

to, at the same time, force them to emphasize that the roots of Canadian democracy are "European" roots. In other words, adopting an eroding citizenship-critique of multiculturalism seems to require that a corresponding emphasis be placed on the ethno-national (European) origins of Canadian democratic values and institutions. This position is stated by Philip Resnick[15]:

> *Canada is not a blank slate to be reinvented with each new immigrant or group of immigrants that arrives at our airports. Its underlying political and social values are ultimately European-derived ones: peace, order, and good government, constituted authority, political community, individual liberty, and citizenship equality.*

In effect, what this position amounts to is denial that multiculturalism might represent a truly "Canadian" democratic innovation. And this is a rather ironic outcome for these critiques, as it may represent an attempt to "ethnicize" democracy itself. What the "eroding citizenship-critique" seems to suggest is that multiculturalism is divisive, baleful, destabilizing and ultimately undemocratic; whereas democracy and its underlying principles is European (particularly British and French). They have in effect used a Euro-centric approach and propagated it in an avalanche of recent books that considered democracy as essentially European and that some nations – and by extension, some ethnic groups and religions – are loath to embrace such values and would fail the test of identity and belonging. The position then is a racialized construal practiced by the same individuals who cry wolf about Western democracy. Conferences were held in Canada and Europe to talk about demographic growth of minorities at a time when serious government and academic research has proven this to be a hoax at best.

TRIUMPH OF MULTICULTURAL CITIZENSHIP

The backlash discourse has since failed, at least in the Canadian context, on two accounts:

- First, it ignored multiculturalism as a distinctly Canadian product in its attempt to convince the public that it was not working in Europe, where things are not going well for majority/minority relations. Using European experiences to illustrate their position and without logical transition of argument, was simply raining on Canada's parade[16]. They purposely ignored the fact that no European country has the sophistication and lengthy experience (41 years) in laws and programs that Canada has. Rather, Europe uses an attenuated version that mounts to rhetoric.
- Secondly, the assumed failure of the integration process in creating identity and belonging is refuted by the fact that people are not sedimentary rocks or anthropological creatures; they do change and do embrace Canadianness. In 2008, the Department of Canadian Heritage has commissioned Kymlicka to do work on the state of multiculturalism in Canada in the early 21st century. His findings and a long list of supporting evidence confirmed the success of the Canadian model.

  Kymlicka presents four kinds of refutations against the negative discourse:
  - First, he disputes the caricature of multiculturalism as the uncritical celebration of diversity at the expense of addressing grave societal problems such as unemployment and social isolation. Instead he offers an account of multiculturalism as the pursuit of new relations of democratic citizenship, inspired and constrained by human-rights ideals.
  - Second, he contests the idea that multiculturalism has been in wholesale retreat, and offers instead evidence that multiculturalism policies have persisted, and have even grown stronger, over the past ten years.
  - Third, he challenges the idea that multiculturalism has failed, and offers instead evidence that multiculturalism policies have had positive effects.
  - Fourth, he disputes the idea that the spread of civic integration policies has displaced multiculturalism or rendered it obsolete. He instead offers evidence that multiculturalism policies are fully consistent with certain forms of civic integration policies, and that indeed the combination of multiculturalism with an "enabling" form of civic integration is both normatively desirable and empirically effective in at least some cases.

Canada's multicultural citizenship was not after all about forcefully assimilating religious and visible minorities, but rather about recognizing the importance of pluralism and diversity in social cohesion by constantly building common spaces and wide avenues of voluntary integration. Further, it was not about separateness and divisiveness but about respect for difference and the inclusion of all Canadians. Public opinion polls, socio-economic studies, and evidence of greater integration have demonstrated that Canada is adapting well to religious and ethnic diversity. A continued application of responsible policies and programs in Canada, and the spread of public education and greater awareness have helped reduce the potential for paranoia.

Canadian success in creating common spaces for all citizens respects Habermas' approach and the Canadian thought tradition of Taylor and Kymlicka. Everyone comes to an open space and inter-acts, works with everyone else, lives with them, and goes to school or university with them, etc., and eventually an integrated society is achieved. An illustration of this approach is presented in a study entitled, "Integration and Identity in Canada: The Importance of Multicultural Open Spaces" [17].

The alternative to people knowing each other and talking to one another and mixing in common spaces (marriage, workplace, school, community, club, etc.) under circumstances and frameworks that are acceptable to all, is isolation and retrenchment into hostile positions that are tantamount to conflict. This came out clear in the Taylor/Bouchard Commission on reasonable accommodation in Québec that also talked about the positive role media could play, especially in terms of reporting religious and minority issues in the context of a public debate rather than in search of provocative sound bites as some media has been doing in the years 2001-2009.

CONCLUSION

The chain - leading from Taylor's right to recognition, to Habermas' public sphere, to Kymlicka's multicultural citizenship – is important to appreciate the value of public dialogue around identity and belonging, rights and recognition, and common spaces of social integration. Canada is unique in her embrace of diversity as a unifying force, a country built by immigrants and their descendants who joined the native peoples starting four centuries ago. A multicultural approach requires nothing short of mutual respect and common embrace of a unifying citizenship. The dialogue as prescribed by multiculturalism is superior to coerced integration or forced assimilation that has led to social upheavals in many countries around the world. Antipathy and suspicion toward religious and visible minorities could roll back hard-fought gains, which over the decades have won a significant degree of integration for minorities and cultivated respect for difference across Canada and gave a lot of prestige to this country all over the world.

The Canadian approach of multicultural citizenship has advanced over the past forty years and has led to many gains and great achievements supported by legislation and social programs as well as by a strong evidence base. Research has shown that social integration is a complex process that cannot be hastily imposed on individuals or groups. The ailments of French and German approaches of an over-arching super culture that almost denies diversity within its borders could be resolved by the Canadian approach to integration and Canada's well-developed programs, tools, and policies. Canadian media can help cultivate a democratic culture that values public dialogue itself, more highly than they currently do. This could be "the next frontier" of integration and recognition.

NOTES

[1] John Sigler, *Boundaries and Bridges: Muslim Communities in Multicultural Canada,* Carleton University, 1997.

[2] Taylor, Charles et al. 1994. Multiculturalism: Examining The Politics of Recognition. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 36.

[3] Taylor, Charles et al. 1994: 39.

[4] Amy Gutmann, editor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition.* Contributors: Charles Taylor, K. Anthony Appiah, Jurgen Habermas, Steven C. Rockefeller, Michael Walzer, Susan Wolf. Princeton, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1994.

[5] Jurgen Habermas, Struggles for Recognition in Constitutional States, International European Journal of Philosophy, n° 128, 1993.

[6] Habermas, "Apologetic tendencies", and "Historical Consciousness and Post-Traditional identity: Orientation Towards the West in West Germany". Cited in Habermas, p. xxi.

[7] Finlayson, James Gordon, Habermas: A very Short Introduction, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005: 141-142.

[8] Ibid.: 128.

[9] Will Kymlicka, "The New Debate on Minority Rights", In Multiculturalism and Political Theory, Edited by A. S. Laden, and D. Owen, Cambridge, U.K., Cambridge University Press, 2007: 42.

[10] Jürgen Habermas, The New Conservatism, p. xviii. Note 27.

[11] Will Kymlicka, Multicultural Odysseys: Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity, Oxford, U.K., Oxford University Press, 2007.

[12] Will Kymlicka, MULTICULTURALISM: Success, Failure, and the Future, Migration Policy Institute and Queen's University, February 2012: 1.

[13] Kamal Dib and Ian Donaldson, "The Adams-Cohen Debate on Canada's Identity and Diversity", *Canadian Diversity,* 6(4), fall 2008: 145-149.

[14] Will Kymlicka, "The New Debate on Minority Rights": 46.

[15] Resnick, P., The European Roots of Canadian Identity, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 2005: 61.

[16] Will Kymlicka, "The Current State of Multiculturalism", *Multicultural Directions,* special edition of *Canadian Journal for Social Research,* Volume 2, number 1, Montreal, Association for Canadian Studies: 15-34.

[17] Kamal Dib, Ian Donaldson, and Brittany Turcotte, "Integration and Identity in Canada: The Importance of Multicultural Common Spaces", *Multicultural Discourses in Canada,* special edition of *Canadian Ethnic Studies,* 40(1), 2008: 161-188.