INTERCULTURAL DIMENSIONS IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT[1]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we argue that the ideas of multiculturalism and interculturalism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their difference and sometimes adversity must be situated within the context of two competing nation-building projects – a context in which Québécois interculturalism reveals traces of Canadian multiculturalism and multicultural Canada promotes intercultural dialogue without writing the latter on its forehead.

INTRODUCTION

The term "intercultural" has recently gained much currency in international organizations, such as the UNESCO and the European Commission, where it often stipulates fairly harmonious and egalitarian forms of integration that are based on cultural respect, dialogue, and learning. In the Canadian context, the term "intercultural" has a direct linguistic reference to "interculturalism" which stipulates Québec's approach to immigration, integration, and distinct "national" Québécois identity. On the one hand, it seems fair to say that Québec's policy of interculturalism was formulated in response to Canadian multiculturalism. Admittedly, in both cases, whether these ideological distinctions translate into practice is the object of heated debates. On the other hand, the notion of "intercultural" is not entirely lost on non-Québécois Canadians. The Canadian Intercultural Centre, for example, has been providing intercultural training services for internationally-assigned government personnel since 1969. Recently, however, it has also sporadically served federal departments, Crown corporations, agencies and offices within Canada. In this paper, we first discuss the impact of Canadian multiculturalism upon Québécois interculturalism. We then explore to what extent the term "intercultural" has also been used and developed in and for Canadian federal – and thus officially "multicultural" – institutions. We argue that the ideas of multiculturalism and interculturalism are not mutually exclusive. Rather, their difference and sometimes adversity must be situated within the context of two competing nation-building projects – a context in which Québécois interculturalism reveals traces of Canadian multiculturalism and multicultural Canada promotes intercultural dialogue without writing the latter on its forehead.

CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AS A BACKDROP TO QUÉBÉCOIS INTERCULTURALISM

Even before its foundation as a country in 1867, Canada was populated by at least three collectivities: Aboriginal Peoples, French settlers, and British colonizers. Large-scale immigration in the early 20th century reinforced another form of ethnic diversity arising from immigration. In the 1930s, with the proliferation of ethnic diversity becoming more and more noticeable, the metaphor of the Canadian mosaic emerged. The social-normative context, however, remained racist and exclusionary as Canada's self-understanding as a British society remained unaltered until after the Second World War.

Canada's changing attitude towards ethno-cultural diversity in the 1960s was prompted by two global developments: First, economic growth led to labour shortages which in turn increased immigration from Southern Europe and later from Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean. Secondly, assimilationism was criticized in the wake of decolonization and the world revolution in human rights. The emergence of a new national identity in Québec transformed the former dualism of linguistically defined French and English Canadians into a territorial opposition between Québec and the rest of Canada (ROC). Within this context, Canadians of immigrant origin were identified as "ethnic groups". In response to these groups' cultural and political claims, in 1971, "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" was declared not only an official state policy but also the essence of Canadian identity. Both Francophones in Québec and Aboriginal Peoples opposed the policy, which they saw as a cooptation strategy undermining their own claims for rights and recognition. Over time, the legal arrangements accommodating Canada's minority nations – Aboriginal Peoples and the Francophones of Québec – as well as ethnic groups of immigrant origin became "three vertical silos" with policies pertaining to these distinct groups being disconnected from each other normatively, legally, and administratively[2].

In the decade after its announcement, multiculturalism focused on symbolic rather than on material matters: it provided Canadians of immigrant origin with a normative and institutional framework that allowed them to identify with the Canadian nation. In the 1980s, addressing the concerns of discrimination voiced by Canada's racialized minorities, multicultural policy shifted its focus from heritage issues to anti-racism, social participation and equity issues. In 1982, multiculturalism was enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and, in 1988, made law through the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. During the 1990s, multiculturalism policy became aligned with the notion of shared citizenship, no longer emphasizing separate ethno-cultural groups but rather democracy and participation in mainstream Canadian society. In the 21st century, multiculturalism remains a central characteristic of Canadian national identity. However, it is also increasingly questioned in the face of national security concerns, globalization and religious extremism. Interculturalism or Multiculturalism in Québec?

Québec's attempts to establish itself as a "host society" can be traced back to the 1960s (Quiet Revolution), becoming even more pronounced after the first failed referendum on independence in 1980 when the Québec government started to promote a more inclusive definition of membership in the Québécois nation based on French Canadian culture and language within a territorial state. Québec's position on immigration and integration policies developed with the creation of the Québec Ministry of Immigration in 1968 and became formally articulated after the Accord Canada-Québec in 1991, which provided Québec with some autonomy in the selection of its immigrants. The concept of interculturalism developed as a result. It is argued to be a distinct approach to immigration and integration policies that differs from multiculturalism. The latter is seen as postulating the equality of all cultures and civilizations within the same nation and therefore as inadvertently promoting segregation and ethnic ghettoization within the Canadian "mosaic". By contrast, the preferred metaphor in interculturalism is that of a tree into which various rootstocks are grafted: a solid Québécois core culture is to be enriched by the contributions from minority cultures[3]. As such, interculturalism concentrates on both promoting Québec's dominant culture and French language to the immigrants, as well as raising the acceptance of immigrant cultures with the host society. This two-way street of *interaction* – hence *inter*culturalism rather than *multi*culturalism – is argued to render the integration process between the cultures harmonious[4].

The principle underlying Québec's ideology of interculturalism – convergence – is characterized as a model where immigrants are said to be full members of Québec's society. It is based on a reciprocal "moral contract" between the state and newcomers: the state offers to support the immigrant in his/her integration efforts. In exchange, the immigrant must take on the responsibility to integrate successfully. In other words, Québécois interculturalism can be summed up as: (i) a society in which French is the common language of public life; (ii) a secular, democratic society where participation and the contribution of everyone is expected and encouraged; (iii) a pluralist society open to multiple contributions within the limits imposed by the respect for fundamental democratic values, and the necessity of intercommunity exchange[5].

The ideological differences between multiculturalism and interculturalism set aside, in practice, the programs and policies of immigration and integration in Québec by and large follow the developments of immigration and multiculturalism at the federal level: the selection process abroad, the integration programs for the newly-arrived (information sessions, settlement aid), language training, integration to work programs, etc. Also, as explained above, multiculturalism policy is far from promoting ethnic segregation and situates diversity clearly within the

framework of "unity". As such, it could be argued that, in comparison to multiculturalism, interculturalism merely places a stronger emphasis on the host society's language and culture – which comes as the unavoidable side-effect of being a linguistic minority within Canada and on the North American continent. Nevertheless, compared to multiculturalism's underlying "unity in diversity" concerns, interculturalism's emphasis on convergence also reveals a much stronger desire for societal integration ("faire société"). However, situated within the context of liberalism, globalization, and minority nationhood, this societal integration is difficult to achieve[6].

For example, the recent developments in Québec point to a weaknesses of interculturalism, although possibly less to the model as such as to its operationalization. First, situated within the Canadian legal and linguistic context, Québec's strict language politics have always been contentious. Most recently, in 2009, the Supreme Court of Canada declared unconstitutional a law adopted unanimously by Québec's National Assembly in 2002 that cleared the ambiguity between the Canadian Charter (used by immigrants and others to circumvent Québec's mandatory requirement of attending French-language schools) and the Québec *Charter of the French Language* (provisions dealing with minority language education). The Supreme Court judgment in *Nguyen v. Québec (Education, Recreation and Sports),* 2009 SCC 47 requested a free choice of language (English or French) of elementary private schooling. Though intended to strike a balance, the decision was widely described in media as a "win" for minorities in Québec and "loss" for Francophone minority in Canada.

Second, the notion of a "moral contract" between host society and newcomers is being tested in the ongoing debate about the "reasonable accommodation" of religious minorities. In a secular society that nevertheless clings to symbols of Catholicism as part of its culture, the Québécois government's recent proposal to ban the niqab (face veil) in public space is highly contentious (see contributions in this issue). Indeed, the development of interculturalism as a "common public culture" can hardly be achieved without unsettling the established symbolic order within Québec society. As such, interculturalism is best viewed as a process of dialogue, negotiation and compromise involving not only the Franco-Québécois host society and immigrant minorities but also Aboriginal Peoples. The latter, however, are often missing from discussions concerning the definition of a Québécois culture – yet another aspect in which the policy of interculturalism is not very different from that of multiculturalism.

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE IN/FOR CANADIAN FEDERAL INSTITUTIONS

If multiculturalism has impacted the development of Québécois interculturalism, the term "intercultural" is also used in Canadian federal institutions, which are required – according to stipulations in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms – to enhance and accommodate the multicultural heritage of Canadian society. To be clear, despite detailed prescriptions in the 1988 Multiculturalism Act of how to render federal institutions more sensitive and welcoming to an increasingly diverse immigrant population, the onus of becoming "integrated" remains overwhelmingly on minorities rather than on the Canadian "host" society. There are, however, attempts to make integration a "two way street" in the truest sense of the word[7], and at least one of these attempts has to do with intercultural dialogue and training.

When the Centre for Intercultural Learning (part of the Canadian Foreign Service Institute of Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada since 1996) was first established in 1969, its dominant task was to train Canadian diplomats and foreign aid personnel working abroad. It had become clear that missing cultural knowledge and adaptation was one of the principal causes of the failure or sub-performance in international projects[8]. Hence, Canadians who are preparing to work abroad are taught how to become more sensitive to a multiethnic, culturally distinct working environment. The majority of the course participants are Canadians from various professional fields and disciplines representing NGOs, academic, public and private institutions, as well as professionals from international partner organizations, recipients of Canadian development assistance. Throughout the years, the Centre for Intercultural Learning has broadened its focus from instructing diplomats and international practitioners to also educating personnel working in federal departments, Crown corporations, members of Canadian Forces, and other government departments. As such, sporadically, and upon request, the Centre provides Canadian "multicultural" institutions with intercultural training. For example, training sessions developed and delivered in collaboration with the National Judicial Institute concentrate on the challenges of the "multicultural courtroom": How can a secular judge in the courtroom communicate best with someone who wears a face veil for religious purposes? How can he or she manage a linguistically diverse case when adequate interpretation cannot always be guaranteed? In these cases, the chief amount of time in training is devoted to teaching trainees to become aware of their own cultural baggage before engaging in the process of

making judgements, suggestions, and decisions. Indeed, it is only through intercultural dialogue and awareness that the unique communication and work-style challenges of an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous society can be overcome and a unity of purpose be found.

CONCLUSION

In Canada, the term "intercultural" relates equally to both multiculturalism and interculturalism, which are not merely modes of immigrant integration, but frameworks for society-building related to two competing nation-building projects. As such, they are blueprints for both Canadian and Québécois national identity. If Québécois interculturalism was historically preceded and influenced by Canadian multiculturalism, multicultural Canada does also promote intercultural dialogue within federal institutions and civil society. In this paper, we have provided the example of the Centre for Intercultural Learning, whose training courses have slowly come to address some of the challenges of ethnic diversity within Canada. Educating leaders, stakeholders and practitioners in intercultural dialogue is certainly a step in the right direction to further combat religious, racial and linguistic discrimination and to make integration a more balanced "give and take" between newcomers and the host society, no matter whether the latter wants to be multicultural or intercultural.

NOTES

[1] This paper is a revised version of: Winter, E. and D. Simkhovych, "Interculturalidad en Canadá: Las Políticas del Multiculturalismo y del Interculturalismo", *Diálogos A* (Instituto de Estudios de las Culturas Andinas, Puno, Perú), 1(1), Special Issue "Interculturalidad", 2011: 48-51.

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