MULTICULTURALISM, INTERCULTURALISM, AND THE EFFECTS OF A WEAK *ETHNOS*

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ABSTRACT

A model of integration is a vastly complex creature that interweaves political, legislative, and administrative processes, but it also boils down to a relatively coherent conceptual core. Canada's model of integration includes norms, policies, and practices that are quite standard fare internationally (at least among Western democracies), but it is uniquely framed by a "multicultural" self-definition. Canada stands out as a particular case among liberal nation-states: not only is its *ethnos* distinctly weak, for historical reasons, but its leadership and population have largely embraced the idea of civic integration. Ironically, in spite of Quebec's strong nationalist streak, this province also has a weak *ethnos,* because the French Quebecois' claim to peoplehood is effectively contested. This helps to understand why there is no significant rift between Canada's multiculturalism and Quebec's interculturalism, either in principle or in practice, otherwise than in a matter of degree and ideological sensibilities.

Canada's "multiculturalism" and Quebec's "interculturalism" are what are usually called *models of integration,* that is, normative and policy frameworks that seek to define and facilitate immigrants' transition toward full national membership. A model of integration is a vastly complex creature, as it interweaves political, legislative, and administrative processes at many levels and with different methods and resources, but it also boils down to a relatively simple and coherent conceptual core. In other words, a model of integration is supposed to reflect a society's particular idea of what membership means (or, put more precisely, what the social contract that binds members together mean), which in turn relies on that society's existential bearings: its national identity, beliefs of shared origin and destiny, common values, etc. This doesn't necessarily mean that the "facts on the ground" are in sync with those basic cultural understandings – actually countless contradictions are commonly observed – but the model of integration nevertheless provides a master narrative with which the government and public opinion make sense of the collective challenges they face. For instance, in spite of the highly dissenting political and ideological viewpoints that make up the current immigration discussion in the United States, most participants still hold the notion that theirs is a "country of immigration" and they tend to describe their current conundrum with the trope of "the system is broken". The cliché of the "melting pot", while discredited since the civil rights movement (that brought awareness of the clear limits of "racial fusion" in U.S. history), still stands in the back of many Americans' mind as an unspoken reference when assessing the integration – or lack thereof – of Latinos into society's fabric. While I'm not arguing that such images and ideas represent some sort of "essence" from which public policy orientations and social behaviour and attitudes would naturally derive, I do contend that a country's historical path and reified cultural norms (including memories, symbols, rhetorical shortcuts) underlie institutional structures, government priorities, expert counsel (including scholarly production), and public debate on integration.

Now, Canada's multicultural model occupies a particular place in this country's self-definition. Of course, all bounded national entities establish membership rules and develop their own conception of "nationalness"—who belongs and who doesn't, what does belonging entail, how one comes to belong (or ceases to do so). But I'm not only referring to civic rights and duties, rules of nationality and naturalization (and loss of citizenship or residency privileges): I'm also thinking of the ways in which a given country may specifically articulate those parameters. A society that consistently pursues collective self-introspection – i.e. putting the question of "who are we?" at the center of the public conversation – will write down charters of rights, declarations of common

values, guides for newcomers, policy guidelines, "white papers", etc.; it will create consulting bodies, launch educational campaigns, fund citizenship-building initiatives, etc. Much of that body of work generated by elected representatives, government agencies, the media, civil society organizations, and academia will consist of discourse. Or put in other terms, the ratio of words to deeds will be very high. This is exactly the case of Canada's multiculturalism. *What is done* – any factual or tangible measure (actual funds distributed or spent, policies and regulations enforced, actions or processes initiated, etc.) – will pale, in numbers, compared to *what is said*. But should this be the measure with which we assess the true importance of multiculturalism in Canada? Hardly so. It is true, though, that the advocates of multiculturalism (for whom it promotes openness, ensures equality, enriches us all) and its critics (who see it bringing about ethnic ghettos, hurting social cohesion, threatening universal values) mostly clash against each other's abstract idea of what societal membership means and what society should become (and is, and was), rather than about a comprehensive and empirically-based set of analyses and programs.

But if that's the case with Canada and its own model of integration – a web of norms, policies, and practices that are quite standard fare internationally (at least among Western democracies) but which is framed by a "multicultural" self-definition –, what makes Canada different from other countries in this regard? Is it only a matter of discourse, that is, Canada "would talk the multicultural talk" more than others, or is there a fundamental difference when compared to, say, Australia Spain or Sweden? Again, I'm not discussing here concrete types and scales of government action (laws promulgated, budgets appropriated) or policy outcomes (e.g. which country shows a better record on the integration of immigrants), which would display some interesting variations but certainly not a sharp divide between self-defined multicultural Canada and the rest of the world. In this regard, let's mention that Queen's University's Multiculturalism Policy Index shows that, other than Canada, Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden had explicitly affirmed multiculturalism or had created a relevant public entity to implement multicultural policies in 2000 and/or 2010. That is, 11 countries out of 21 examined were deemed multicultural while, curiously enough, the United States did not make the cut. Canada may get consistently high scores on the multiculturalism indicators (although not always the highest), and it certainly leads the way on several issues, but it's not entirely atypical within the group. In fact, the gap that separates Canada from other countries that adopted multicultural approaches to diversity (with or without using the label itself) stems, in part, from Canada's – to use Will Kymlicka's words – "thinner" or "tamed" model of nationhood. But I would go further. If, as Seyla Benhabib puts it, the politics of peoplehood consists of a negotiation between the *ethnos* ("a shared community of fate") and the *demos* ("a democratically enfranchised totality of all citizens"), Canada stands out as a particular case among liberal nation-states: not only is its *ethnos* distinctly weak, for historical reasons (i.e. not by choice), but its leadership and population have largely embraced the idea of civic integration[1]. Of course, other multiculturally-inclined countries have done the same, at least to a certain extent, but the notion of an overriding national identity that commands loyalty and, eventually, full assimilation, is still very much present in those places (all the more so in the wake of the current anti-multiculturalism backlash in Europe).

Now, what about Quebec? A quite common, albeit flawed, approach to Quebec's model of integration has been to oppose it to Canada's model by referring to the tension of *ethnos* and *demos*. Quebec's nationalistic thrust would naturally put the emphasis on the ethnic definition of peoplehood, instead of following (English) Canada's path towards civic integration. While certain aspects of this contrast may be founded (historically speaking, much less so politically in today's context), it is important to challenge the simplistic notion that (English) Canada and Quebec have contradictory models of integration, as well as the idea that one model is right and the other is wrong. Regarding the latter, it goes without saying that the *ethnos* needs to be "tamed" for the *demos* to flourish. However, the "shared community of fate" is also necessary for social cohesion and solidarity to exist. This is a complex debate about a fragile balance that any liberal nation-state in the globalization era is bound to address. But I shall focus here on the alleged disparity between (English) Canada and Quebec. Quebec has officially adopted an "intercultural" model, which posits interaction and exchange between cultural groups rather than maintaining ancestral identities. Interculturalism also entails that, in spite of their particular cultures, all communities must adopt a common public culture, defined by the use of the French language and by certain fundamental values (such as secularism and gender equality). But doesn't Canadian multiculturalism also promote interaction rather than isolation, and seek a convergence in the public sphere around a common language and universal values? Actually, in my view, there is no significant rift between Canada's multiculturalism and Quebec's interculturalism, either in principle or in practice, otherwise than in a matter of degree (more or

less general tolerance to the manifestation of cultural differences in the public realm) and ideological sensibilities (the use of specific words or historical references).

Ironically, in spite of Quebec's strong nationalist streak, both (English) Canada and Quebec share a weak *ethnos*. I don't mean by that that French Quebecois' national identity is frail – a majority of them feel quite strongly about their "community of fate" – but rather that their group's claim to peoplehood is effectively contested. Put it simply, no one credibly challenges the fact that France belongs to the French people. But the question "Does Quebec belong to the French Quebecois people?" is seen by many as a fair one to debate, and not all answers are unconditionally affirmative (as they would be in France's case). Canada's multiculturalism and Quebec's interculturalism are two variations of the same model of integration, one that favours civic inclusion rather than assimilation, plays down public displays of patriotism, values diversity in itself, and judges immigrants' contribution to society as mostly positive. This depiction is supported by abundant research data on Canada and Quebec's political and social realities, as well as by many media content analyses and opinion polls. This doesn't mean that all is fine, but it certainly supports the hypothesis that a weak *ethnos* encourages people to collectively discuss membership rules (the social contract), and when that happens in a highly democratic setting, multiculturalism (or interculturalism), as the optics through which to tackle diversity, almost inevitably appears as the way to go.

NOTES

[1] For Benhabib and Kymlicka's views on nationhood, see : Seyla Benhabib *et al., Another Cosmopolitanism: Hospitality, Sovereignty, and Democratic Iterations,* (ed. Robert Post), Oxford University Press, 2006.