INTRODUCTION

On October 16 and 17, 2003, the Department of Canadian Heritage, in partnership with the Canadian Embassy in France, hosted in Gatineau (Quebec) a conference and workshop on *Canadian and French Perspectives on Diversity.* This event was a follow-up to an earlier one hosted by the Institut de Recherché sur les Sociétés Contemporaines (IRESCO) of the Centre national de la recherché scientifique (CNRS) in Paris, in the spring of 2001. Both events, along with a workshop to take place in Paris June 3 to 6, 2004, were held to increase understanding between the two countries in matters of diversity, and ultimately to foster comparative research in this area in time for the celebration of Champlain's 400 year ago arrival in Canada. This edition of *Canadian Issues* is devoted to highlighting some of the research involved in the October 2003 event.[1]

One of the most striking differences between the French and Canadian perspectives on diversity relates to how it is perceived. For Canadians, the primary markers of diversity are culture and language (English/French), though the former is in the process of being displaced by race after the introduction of the concepts of visible minority and employment equity into Canadian society. Religion is towards the end of the list, whereas for the French, religion is the primary marker. In the French case, this is in part because much of what Canadians would perceive to be diversity in France is perceived by the French to be regionalism (e.g. Corsica, Alsace and Brittany). However, more importantly, it is because the French Republican model, to which several of the articles in this issue refer – especially that of Jean-Charles Lagrée – is blind to diversity. The French Constitution dictates this blindness, and as the article by Yael Brinbaum attests, it places severe restrictions on the types of diversity data that can be collected in France through the census. In fact, her article suggests that the very ability to move beyond the concept and measurement of "foreigner" to that of "immigrant" has been a long struggle.

The question remains after reading the articles in this issue, as to why religion occupies such a prominent position in French discourse on diversity and such a weak one in Canadian discourse. One answer might be the Canadian multicultural model that has tended to "culturalize" religion (as it has "culturalized" race in the recent past). Also, unlike France, Canada has never experienced religious wars or persecution. This historical difference is one of the factors that has shaped two very different societies as regards the relationship between Church and State. This difference in relationship can be gleaned from Micheline Milot's article on differences between Quebec, English-speaking Canada and France with regard to the place of religion in the school system. The article by Jean-Paul Willaime further explains the issue of religion and public schools in France in the context of the separation of Church and State, highlighting other aspects of the issue as well, such as the fundamental role of the public school system in fostering integration, or as Lagrée has written, in creating French citizens.

In many of the articles relating to the place of religion in French schools, the reader will encounter the concept of laïcité, a concept important to understanding French discourse with regard to religious diversity. In Bauberot's article on laïcité and the crisis of the nation-state, the concept is fairly central. As Denise Helly points out in her article about the differences between the Canadian and French contexts with respect to managing diversity, the Canadian state is secular while the French one is laïque. There has been a clear division between Church and State in France at the constitutional level, but this is not the case for Canada. While the French state is constitutionally neutral with regard to religion, the Canadian state is not, at least not in the French sense of being blind to all religions. On the contrary, as Micheline Milot explains, the Canadian state is required through Supreme Court rulings to treat all religions equally. These nuances are important because they help shed light on why the turban could be allowed as part of the official RCMP uniform in Canada, and why Muslim school girls or state employees in France cannot wear the head scarf, despite the fact that the constitutions of both countries are quite similar with regard to the individual rights enshrined in them, especially as they relate to religion.

Pierre Bréchon in his article on value change in France and the rest of Europe writes about of the strength of the value of public order in French culture. This is another important concept for understanding French discourse and Canadian and French differences with respect to diversity. In fact, the concept of public order is a limiting factor on the religious freedoms outlined in the French constitution and this very concept has been used to prohibit the wearing of the headscarf (or other religious signs) in French schools. At first blush, it is difficult for a Canadian to understand how a young school girl in a headscarf could threaten public order. As Jean-Charles Lagrée explains it, individuals must transcend their individual wills (or differences) to become part of the general will, on which the political community is based. If they do not, the political community is threatened. Or, as I explain in my article on the different philosophical traditions behind the Canadian and French models, equality, and ironically liberty, as the French understand these concepts, are threatened when there is not uniformity (transcendence) in the public sphere. It is for reasons such as these that the headscarf threatens public order.

While the French place a high value on public order and conformity in the public sphere, Donna Dasko

demonstrates the strong support Canadians have for diversity, be it related to Canada's multicultural or official languages dimension. Yet Canadian support for diversity is not without limits and not all diversity is equally valued; some of the data Jack Jedwab highlights in his article on Canadian attitudes towards diversity provide evidence of this. I suspect that if it were possible to obtain comparable data from France we would find that the French have a slightly different hierarchy when it comes to diversity preferences. Either way, one of the biggest points of departure between French and Canadian thought regarding diversity rests on how much diversity can be tolerated. For the French, it is a little, at least with respect to the public sphere. For Canadians, it is a great deal, although this has not always been the case. The French fear that the Canadian model leads to a fragmented society. While in the extreme this might be true, Denise Helly's article and that of Neil Nevitte both provide evidence that the Canadian model does integrate. Whether Canadian society is more fragmented than French society is an empirical question in need of research. Besides, too little toleration for diversity could lead to implosion from within. Another important question, if we are to move beyond ideology and both learn how to improve upon how our societies manage diversity, would be whether minorities actually fair better in Canadian than French society? These are important considerations for there can be no doubt that greater diversity is the wave of the future.

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Note

[1] Note that a more complete version of the conference proceedings will be published by the Department of Canadian Heritage (Citizenship and Heritage Sector) in the summer of 2004.