GUY ROCHER, UNREPENTANT CRITIC OF CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM

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Guy Rocher is one of Canada's greatest sociologists. A member of the Parent Commission that inspired educational reform in Quebec, a former vice-chair of the Canada Council for the Arts and a Companion of the Order of Canada, he has worked all his life for the democratization of public institutions and social justice. Yet he was one of the first academics to propose a critique of Canadian multiculturalism. In 1972, Rocher judged this concept to be "ambiguous, erroneous and dangerous in its more or less long-term consequences[1]." Nothing less.

Rocher's opposition to multiculturalism policy seems all the more surprising given that he is one of those who have worked hardest, since the 1950s, to recognize the diversity of Quebec society. He has always believed that Quebec should be open to international influences and view the diversity of its cultures as an asset. Indeed, he often evokes these views in the face of the criticism on the part of colleagues who are quick to equate his critique of multiculturalism with an unforgivable withdrawal into oneself.

Rocher readily admits that Quebecers are not free of xenophobia. But, for him, the problem raised by multicultural policy is not primarily a matter of personal opinion. We can agree that Indigenous peoples, for example, who are reluctant to accept the Canadian government's multicultural policy are not, on this account, more racist than other citizens.[2]

1 The text was reprinted in Guy Rocher, « *Les ambiguïtés d'un Canada bilingue et multiculture*l [1972] », in *Le Québec en mutation*, Montréal, Les Éditions Hurtubise HMH, 1973.

2 Haresamudram Srikanth, "Multiculturalism and the Aboriginal Peoples in Canada", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 47, No. 23, 9 June 2012, pp. 17-21.

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In Rocher’s case, his criticism of multiculturalism stems from a reading of the power relationships within the federation. He criticizes this policy on several counts: for drowning the Quebec nation in a pan-Canadian identity, for stooping to a socio-psychological vision of integration, for contributing to the assimilation of Francophones and for promoting the Balkanization of the country. This text presents a summary of these four criticisms.

DROWNING THE QUEBEC FISH IN CANADIAN WATERS *AD MARE USQUE AD MARE*

Rocher argues that multiculturalism runs counter to the bicultural and binational nature of Canadian society, as it was enshrined, in his view, starting in 1867. Like many people of his generation, he sees Canada as a country composed of two “societies”, two “communities” or two dominant “cultures”, English and French, both of which constitute the “foundations” of the country. He thus echoes the deliberations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (also known as the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission), which, while taking into account the contribution of all ethnic groups “to the cultural enrichment of Canada,” was charged, at the time of its creation, with “recommending measures to be taken to ensure that the Canadian Confederation would develop according to the principle of equality between the two peoples who founded it.”

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Although Rocher began to include Indigenous peoples in his analysis in the 1990s, he generally embraces the myth of the pact between two founding peoples, a political construction that has been used since the late 19th century to justify certain constitutional concessions[3]. It seems to him that this conception of a two-nation country best reflects Canada’s history, as the earliest historical roots of multiculturalism cannot compete with the thousand-year-old ancestry of cultural communities in China or Russia. He certainly does not believe, as Trudeau stated in his declaration to the House of Commons establishing multiculturalism as official government policy, “that cultural pluralism is the essence of Canadian identity[4].”

Rocher believes that the vision of a multicultural country was accepted by English Canadians

3 Stéphane Paquin, *L’invention d’un mythe. Le pacte entre deux peuples fondateurs*, Montréal, VLB éditeur, 1999.

4 Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, Declaration in the House of Commons, 8 October 1971.

because, by 1971, there was no such thing as an "Anglo-Saxon" community[5] from the time of the Second World War on. The former colonial elite, now in the minority, was quick to embrace multiculturalism because it offered a "divide and rule" strategy not unlike the one it had followed as a "mercenary" in the service of the British Empire, allowing it to continue to hold the top spot in the "vertical mosaic" without having to be challenged in its privileges[6]. At the time of its adoption, multiculturalism was for Rocher, in other words, perfectly suited to the historical aims of big business that shaped the country.

AGAINST A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL VISION

Rocher adheres to the historical and sociological perspective of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission. He starts from the observation that the two communities, English and French, were at the origin of Canada and endowed the country with social and political structures specific to this union, including the federal system (forgetting in passing to recall that the federal system has been adopted in many other countries without national duality, including the United States). He also acknowledges that immigrants eventually integrate into one or the other of the two linguistic communities, from both the language and cultural points of view. He readily agrees with André Laurendeau and Davidson Dunton who believed, as he does, that in order to avoid a major political crisis, it is necessary to place "the two pillars of the Canadian nation based on English-speaking culture and French-speaking culture on an equal footing," by recognizing, "duality as the fundamental reality of Canada"[7].

According to Rocher, in turning its back on this appeal, the government of Pierre-Elliott Trudeau chose to view the problem of Canadian unity from a psycho-sociological perspective. Trudeau asserts that "[o]ne of the fundamental needs of humanity is a sense of belonging" and that ethnic groups fulfill such a need. "Ethnic pluralism can help us defeat or avoid the homogenization and depersonalization of mass society.[8]" In addition to combating contemporary anomie, "ethnic pluralism" is useful for the consolidation of Canadian unity, according to Trudeau. He elaborates:

> *"The more secure we feel in a given social context, the freer we are to explore our identity beyond that context. Ethnic groups give people a sense of belonging that better equips them to deal with the rest of society than they could as isolated individuals. Loyalty to one's own culture does not necessarily, and normally does not, diminish one's even greater loyalty to community and country[9]."*

5 George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, 40th Anniversary Edition, Montréal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.

6 John Porter, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1965.

7 André Laurendeau et Davidson Dunton, "*Rapport préliminaire de la Commission royale d'enquête sur le bilinguisme et biculturalisme*", Ottawa, Imprimeur de la Reine, 1965, p. 95.

8 Pierre-Elliott Trudeau, Declaration in the House of Commons, 8 October 1971.

9 Ibid.

> **“He is quick to observe how groups that are true to their own culture are celebrated by Trudeau only when it leads them to cultivate an even greater attachment to Canada, and chastised when it leads them to claim special collective rights.”**

For Rocher, this may be true from a psychosocial perspective, but it is highly questionable when transposed onto the level of political power relations. He is quick to observe how groups that are true to their own culture are celebrated by Trudeau only when it leads them to cultivate an even greater attachment to Canada, and chastised when it leads them to claim special collective rights. How many English Canadians, he inquires, consider Quebecers who play folklore to be attractive, while viewing as racist those who advocate for the Parti Québécois?

There is only one group in Canada that constitutes a majority in one province (which excludes the territories) and a minority in the country: the francophones of Quebec. It is this group, therefore, that is most vehemently denounced by other Canadians, especially since there is a strong English-speaking minority within the province’s borders. Rocher sees the constitutional debate as an illustration of Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s folkloristic conception of multiculturalism: Trudeau has never accepted the granting of special status to Quebec, being prepared to welcome “loyalty to one’s own culture” only insofar as it does not, as the quotation above says, diminish but rather increases “the even greater loyalty to… the country”.

AN ASSIMILATION MACHINE

Rocher disassociates himself from his colleagues who present multiculturalism as “the ultimate in recognition and respect for diversity”.[10] Behind their pious speeches, he believes he detects a darker vision. In reality, he writes, “multiculturalism is a facade, a window, a screen behind which an efficient assimilation of all diversities is exercised in the great English-speaking whole that is Canada.”[11] For Rocher, pretending that Canada is not a country where the English language reigns and English-speaking culture dominates is an illusion. There are parallels to be drawn between the 1969 White Paper (which sought to make First Nations people Canadian citizens like everyone else) and the multiculturalism of 1971.

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By claiming that the interactions between the various cultural groups in Canada are built on free

10 Guy Rocher, “*Du pluralisme à l’égalitarisme. Le multiculturalisme canadien feint de respecter la multiculturalité ethnique*”, *Le Devoir*, 18 décembre 1997, p. A-7.

11 Ibid.

mutual enrichment, Rocher believes that the reality of power relations in the country is being masked. Multiculturalism pretends that the Ukrainian or Vietnamese immigrant who settles in Alberta has a free choice to learn French or English. There are concrete reasons why the vast majority of immigrants who arrive in Canada are eager to learn English and choose to gravitate towards the Anglo-Canadian world, even in Quebec.

To further counter the nationalist fervour in Quebec, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau wanted to distinguish between language and culture: he therefore put forward a policy in favour of bilingualism that was separate from that in favour of multiculturalism. For Rocher, the two cannot so easily be separated. In his October 1971 statement, Trudeau promised to provide non-official language textbooks to ethnic groups who requested them, because, he argued, "the acquisition of the language of one's ancestors is an important part of the development of a cultural identity." Not only was Trudeau announcing measures for the maintenance of non-official languages that he had never agreed to for the maintenance of French in Quebec, but he also recognized in such a statement the connection between language and culture, after having denied this same link when it came to the bilingualism and biculturalism of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission.

For Rocher, there may be bilingual individuals, but there is no bilingual culture in Canada. In fact, few Canadians are bilingual. Without sociological roots, the government's bilingualism seems artificial, abstract, disembodied. As a result, Canadians' support for bilingual programs is likely to decline as the proportion of Francophones in the various regions of Canada decreases. Rocher fears that the official status of French will one day be treated as a relic of another age and that we will wonder why, if the country is not culturally bilingual, we should care about French in provinces where it is the seventh language spoken in the home.

BALKANIZATION

Rocher's fourth major reservation about multiculturalism is that it cannot be the foundation of a nation. Rocher rejects a multiculturalism that not only "does not suit the situation of Quebec", insofar as this model "does not take into account the centuries-old dynamics in place", but also "leads to the multiplication of real socio-ethnic ghettos."[12]

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According to him, multiculturalism would result in an explosion of interest groups and pressure groups that would all strive to claim specific rights

12 Gérard Bouchard, François Rocher et Guy Rocher, "*Les francophones québécois: un essai qui fait le pari d'une francophonie moderne*", *La Presse*, 7 novembre 1991, B.3. Gérard Bouchard, François Rocher et Guy Rocher, Les francophones québécois, Montréal, Conseil scolaire de l'ile de Montréal, 1991.

and programs for each segment of the population. "The democracy of the majority is gradually being replaced by a democracy of minorities, most certainly a democracy of interest groups and pressure groups. This is the most fundamental fragmentation of contemporary society."[13] Encouraging the multiplication of ethnic groups will lead to the fracturing of the "central cultural core" of the Canadian nation. Rocher's image is that of a nebula without a " centre " or " common denominator ", and therefore without direction. He doubts that a nation can develop in a vigorous and healthy way under such conditions.[14] It is, moreover, interesting to note that Rocher turns to the independentist option around 1972 among other things to escape the social and cultural atomization to which, according to him, the Trudeauist ideology must necessarily lead.

Not without paradox, Rocher imagines that national unity would be better served across Canada by a policy that emphasizes the central role of two "core" communities and invites other ethnic groups to join in. In short, national and cultural duality would be more socially cohesive than multiculturalism for Canada. On the other hand, in Quebec itself, the "national home" of French-speaking Canadians, Rocher argues that the state must implement a policy of "cultural convergence. This Quebec policy of integration would recognize the multi-ethnic character of Quebec society, while making French the "normal" language of public activities and articulating itself around a "principal component" inherited from the French colonization of the 17th and 18th centuries. This idea was reflected in the Quebec Cultural Development Policy of the first René Lévesque government in 1977.

To ward off the charge of ethnicism, the Francophone culture that serves as the focus of this convergence is, in Rocher's mind, stripped of genealogical, historical and religious references: it is restricted to the ability to communicate in French, adherence to the fundamental values of Quebec society (democracy, tolerance, equality), a basic knowledge of Quebec's realities and institutions, respect for certain symbols of public life (national holiday and flag), the appreciation of the many non-French contributions to the formation of Quebec culture since the 17th century (Indigenous peoples, Anglophones, etc.). In short, Rocher makes the case, as he writes with Gérard Bouchard and François Rocher, for "a modern Francophonie, nourished by humanist values, carrying original collective orientations, respectful of both the ethnic plurality of Quebec and the cultural dynamics that have been in place for nearly four centuries."[15]

Gérard Bouchard evokes a principle of "precedence" in favour of Quebec's founding culture, given its fragility in the North American context. Without going that far, Rocher believes that Quebec must promote its French culture through public policies. "It is necessary that an identity be asserted and that the majority use the sources of power that it has at

13 Guy Rocher, "*Hégémonie, fragmentation et mondialisation de la culture*", *Horizons philosophiques*, 11(1), 2000, 133.

14 Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Toronto, Penguin Books, 1994.

15 Gérard Bouchard, François Rocher et Guy Rocher, "*Les francophones québécois: un essai qui fait le pari d'une francophonie moderne*", *La Presse*, 7 novembre 1991, B.3. Gérard Bouchard, François Rocher et Guy Rocher, Les francophones québécois, Montréal, Conseil scolaire de l'ile de Montréal, 1991.

its disposal to do so."[16] French-speaking Quebecers, while opening up to all ethnic groups, must first see them in a complementary relationship.

WHAT FUTURE FOR MULTICULTURALISM IN QUEBEC?

Rocher's arguments against multiculturalism have been outlined in this article. Everyone will be able to assess their value and merit at a time when we are debating the possibility of formulating an original Quebec model of coexistence. For Rocher, it is clear that if such a model is to exist, it cannot do so without the recognition of national entities, in addition to that of ethnocultural diversity. Obviously, the search for this balance between individual and collective rights is far from easy, as the tumultuous debate about reasonable accommodation in Quebec has recently shown...

16 François Rocher et Guy Rocher, "*La culture québécoise en devenir: les défis du pluralisme*", dans Fernand Ouellet et Michel Pagé (dir.), *Pluriethnicité, éducation et société. Construire un espace commun*, Québec, IQRC, p. 73.