RECOGNITION AS A CORE VALUE OF THE MULTICULTURAL PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

The author answers the following questions on the topic of Religion:

1) Developments on the world stage in recent years require better understanding of the role of religion and faith-based communities in public discourse in Canada. What approaches and strategies could be used to engage faith-based communities, foster public awareness, and combat religious discrimination?
2) Demographic projections show noticeable growth in some religions in Canada. What impact could this growth have on economic, social and political integration?
3) What are the implications, if any, of religious diversity on policy developments in Canada?
4) Is there religious extremism in Canada and what are the manifestations? What is its impact, if any, on the future of Canada?
5) What factors lead to Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and religious intolerance in general?
6) What is the place of religious issues in education and school curricula, media coverage, public opinion, and the separate school boards?

The controversies surrounding multiculturalism affect all democratic societies. Indeed, these controversies seem to have intensified over the last ten years, especially concerning religion. One of the aspects of this controversy deals with *identity* – be it claimed, confirmed or assigned – and with *recognition*, which is increasingly emerging as a fundamental value of multicultural epistemology. But the supposed threat raised by multiculturalism is usually that of social disintegration, that is, a myriad of identity affiliations exerting a centripetal force on the groups' members. Is this fear well founded? I think not.

To varying degrees, individuals think of their integration into the political sphere in terms of how they perceive themselves and the image with which they have become identified, in short, with their own complex and multifaceted identity. Religion is a part of this multifaceted identity. Except in rare cases, religious groups do not claim collective rights with a view to creating an autonomous political community within the State. They want public institutions and laws to be more responsive to cultural differences, and thus to recognize, respect and integrate them. There is a shift in the act of representation in what is akin to a *democracy of identities*:

> "It is a question of representing the distinction among persons and among groups, and of representing them in the sense of making and maintaining the public visibility of this distinction. It involves ensuring their participation as equals in public discussion, but by virtue of what differentiates them, of what they themselves see as their essential distinctiveness".[1]

For some authors, these dynamics of identity lead perforce to the liberal *archipelago* of communities (as described by Kukathas). Accordingly, the scope of political theories was greatly transformed, especially regarding the issue of *recognition*. This can be linked to the observable empirical dynamics of identities.

The Dynamics of Identity and Recognition

The influence of de Rawls in the United States opened up the *issue of justice* as a fundamental pre-requisite for the equality of citizens in a pluralistic society. His theory undoubtedly improved the prospects for *recognition*, even though the latter concept is not central to his political philosophy. Charles Taylor made a more direct contribution by giving the "politics of recognition" a more important role in his social theory.[2] Fraser[3] later formalized a new way of thinking about recognition, by asserting the need to replace the redistribution (of economic and social goods) with recognition of personal dignity. In a similar vein, A. Honneth[4] maintains that the idea of recognition, together with its opposite (lack of

respect, humiliation), constitute an excellent litmus test for attitudes of injustice in multicultural society. According to Honneth, the normative premises of social interaction are based on the reciprocal principles of mutual recognition that help form a positive self-image. There is a connection between this thesis and that of C. Taylor, who focuses on the *dialogism* through which identity is formed: "The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the *mis*recognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back a confining, demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves".[5] Thus, these authors prompt us to view recognition as a core value of the multicultural paradigm.

Despite the politicization that is inevitable in identity dynamics, it seems that recognition, in the way Fraser and even Taylor understand it, is more conducive to encouraging respectful interaction. Recognition also prevents identity-related counter-attacks that arise in reaction to identities imposed or denied by a State advocating a universalistic common identity. Group cohesion is still a concern of constitutional States, but this cohesion is no longer the upshot of individual wills subsumed under a homogeneous and unifying political project. Identity dynamics change conceptions of collective life. Thus, the claims of political neutrality and promises of equality proclaimed by liberal democracies must tally with what occurs in the real life of citizens.

The legal interpretation of the *Canadian Multiculturalism Policy* is linked to a type of recognition that places great importance on individual choice (in accordance with the *Charter of Right and Freedoms*), provides safeguards against pressures to conform (either vis-à-vis the majority group or within minority groups) and views the integration of diversity, within the public sphere, as a positive value. However, up to what point is the accommodation of civil society demands of a religious nature compatible with the principle of the equality of all before the law and does it really promote integration? Can the legal activism of members of religious groups exploit multiculturalism for communitarian purposes?

The Case of Kirpan

The case of a young Sikh boy being banned from wearing his traditional kirpan to school in Quebec reveals to us the democratic values that link multiculturalism, recognition and freedom of religion from a juridical standpoint. At first, the Superior Court of Quebec allowed the kirpan to be worn in school under certain conditions designed to meet security requirements.[6] The school board contested this decision all the way to the Supreme Court.[7] The judges allowed an appeal and declared the decision of the Board of Commissioners to be void. The Court saw the wearing of the kirpan as a sincere expression of faith, based on a liberal interpretative tradition of religious rights: "In assessing the sincerity of the belief, a court must take into account, *inter alia*, the credibility of the testimony of the person asserting the particular belief and the consistency of the belief with his or her other current religious practices".[9] The Court, acknowledging that the wearing of the kirpan is based on genuine religious belief, stated that the absolute refusal by the Board of Commissioners to allow it to be worn infringed on the freedom of religion guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Extracts from the decision illustrate that it tended strongly to interpret *recognition* as a fundamental value connected to multiculturalism. First, the Court bore in mind that it was not obliged to refer to more liberal interpretations of Sikhs religious standards on the wearing of the kirpan, and also referred to its own jurisprudence: "The fact that different people practice the same religion in different ways does not affect the validity of the case of a person alleging that his or her freedom of religion has been infringed".[9]

Recognition of others – and of the symbols that express their identity – as well as tolerance, are values associated with multiculturalism. Therefore, judges make peremptory reference to them. They reject the argument that the wearing of the kirpan should be prohibited because it is a symbol of violence. They also reject the argument that it sends the message that the use of force is necessary to assert rights and that conflict resolution must fail. "Not only is this assertion contradicted by the evidence regarding the symbolic nature of the kirpan, it is also disrespectful to believers in the Sikh religion and does not take into account Canadian values based on multiculturalism".

Recognition and Education

The main integration and socialization organizations (primarily schools and educational institutions) lack programs designed to promote recognition and tolerance. The educational role of schools in promoting these values figured prominently in the judges' line of reasoning: "[I]t is incumbent on the schools to discharge their obligation to instill in their students this value that is […] at the very foundation of our democracy".[11] Actually, authorizing the wearing of the kirpan comes under individual rights and is not associated with a collective right granted to minorities[12], thus reminding us yet again that multiculturalism does not go hand in hand with communitarianism. The objective sought in accepting religious particularisms in the public sphere is, in addition to meeting the requirements of Canadian law (Article 27 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*), integrating individuals who belong to minority groups into the institutions of the majority:

> "Since we have found that the council of commissioners' decision is not a reasonable limit on religious freedom, it is not strictly necessary to weigh the deleterious effects of this measure [leaving the public school system] against its salutary effects. […] An absolute prohibition would stifle the promotion of values such as multiculturalism, diversity, and the development of an educational culture respectful of the rights of others".[13]

The schools have a core role to instill the recognition of the multiplicity of conceptions of life that co-exist in the *Polis*. School is without a doubt one of the first places where children have daily contact with a range of values

and worldviews which shape individual identities. Whether schools are secular, denominational or ecumenical, they all share certain features: 1) there is no real homogenous group of students, even within the same religious tradition, since religious practices and espousal of beliefs differ from one family to another and from one individual to another; 2) in modern society there are different ways of conceiving what constitutes a "good" human life, and these conceptions arise from various religious and non-religious views; 3) children do retain their values and convictions when they enter the classroom. Neither children nor adults can be asked to abandon a large part of their identity in order to form a relationship with others.

Multicultural democratic states are expected to guarantee the paramount educational interests of children, which we have already looked at briefly. A key dimension of education is a child's right to be fully prepared for life as a citizen within a democratic and multicultural society. Citizens, however, must live together despite their moral and religious differences. Enhanced awareness of the religious dimension should be aimed at ensuring that each child, to whatever extent he or she identifies with a particular religious group, is able to acquire a positive sense of identity, without fear of being judged by others. The more a group feels marginalized socially because of its beliefs or the way such beliefs are publicly expressed, the more frequently it resorts to aggressive or defensive withdrawal strategies, at the expense of citizen participation. In conclusion, education should focus on developing abilities and attitudes which, in a manner of speaking, are the tools needed for the full exercise of citizenship. To augment this, state and policy developments need to encourage greater intercultural understanding and tolerance.

References

[1] Gauchet, M. (1998). *La religion dans la démocratie – Parcours de la laïcité*. Éditions Gallimard, coll. Le débat, p.120. Our translation.

[2] Taylor, C. (1992). The politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition* (pp. 25-73). Princeton: Princeton University Press.

[3] Fraser, N. (2005). *Qu'est-ce que la justice sociale? Reconnaissance et redistribution*. Paris : Éditions La Découverte.

[4] Honneth, A. (2000). *La lutte pour la reconnaissance*. Paris : Le Cerf.

[5] Taylor, C. (1992) *Multiculturalism and the politics of recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p.25.

[6] Wooden scabbard, wrapped with and sewn into a sturdy fabric; the assembly is sewn into the guthra.

[7] (2006). *Multani v. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*. SCC 6.

[8] *Multani*, 35.

[9] *Multani*, 35.

[10] *Multani*, 71.

[11] *Multani*, 76.

[12] That said, it is not inconceivable that some individuals in minority groups will interpret the legal right of a person identified with this group as a group right, or even as a community right. However, their interpretation would constitute a legal misconception.

[13] *Multani*, op. cit., 78.