MULTICULTURALISM, INTERCULTURALISM, CONVERGING TOWARDS A COSMOPOLITAN CITIZENSHIP IN LIBERAL DEMOCRACIES

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ABSTRACT

Multiculturalism has been the cornerstone of Canadian cultural policy for the last forty years. Is it time to move on and build towards a new cultural envelope that will define Canada for the next century? Immigration and the widespread movements of peoples will continue to be a direct result of globalization moving forward. Just as liberal democracies must evolve in order to protect our democratic values, multiculturalism must also evolve and go beyond the boundaries put in place by ethnic communities. Cosmopolitan citizenship, integration and transculturalism based on individual rights and freedoms, are the key socio-cultural challenges that Canada will face in the 21st century.

All nations and peoples are living and experiencing the process and the eventual effects of globalization. This process of globalization can be observed in areas such as immigration (movement of peoples), culture (policies of multiculturalism or the rejection of multiculturalism) and cultural exchanges (interculturalism and transculturalism). The objective fact remains; since the advent of massive globalization and the explosion of communication technologies (i.e. in reference to the Global Village concept of Marshall McLuhan) the world has become a massive cultural mosaic, interacting (or as they say in the new techno linguistics "interfacing") and thereby creating a multicultural space of exchange, hopefully producing the positive result of interculturalism.

Nevertheless, in spite of the hope of creating an on-going intercultural exchange, the fear of cultural homogenization, a negative by-product of globalization, remains an apprehension felt by peoples around the world. As John Tomlinson states in *Globalization and Identity:* "It is fair to say that the impact of globalization in the cultural sphere has, most generally, been viewed in a pessimistic light. Typically, it has been associated with the destruction of cultural identities, victims of the accelerated encroachment of a homogenized Westernized, consumer culture" [1].

Therefore what we are witnessing, in reaction to this fear, is an upswing in identity politics. Identity in this context of an anti-globalization mentality can be defined in connection with a multiplicity of aspects that eventually create a comfort zone of acceptability. Language and the safeguard of that language can define identity. Culture and the safeguard of that culture can also define it, as with the safeguarding of different religions and spiritual beliefs. To fully understand the socio-cultural phenomenon of identity politics is not only to recognize it through societal practices or legislation, but also to put in place mechanisms that will create the space necessary to incorporate it into the wider concept of human rights based on law as practiced, though not perfectly, in liberal democracies.

Unfortunately, as 2011 drew to a close, three of the most important liberal democracies pivotal in structuring the democratic backbone of the new Europe; the United Kingdom, France and Germany, all declared that multiculturalism in their respective countries was a failure and that for the future these countries would promote integration into the culture of the host country. Integration has always been the mainstay of France, based on the principles of "La république". Without actually having any legislative policy on multiculturalism, Germany and the UK did have an open approach toward

the acceptance of immigrants nonetheless. With regards to the United Kingdom, immigrants from the British Commonwealth of nations possessing British passports could be accepted while the Germans maintained an open-door policy for immigrant workers to propel the German economy. This about-face by these three countries, based on an anti-Muslim backlash has fostered a questioning of multiculturalism in other European countries.

This rejection of multiculturalism by the most prominent countries of Europe demonstrates very clearly that these three nation-states have failed to conciliate, (because it is always a question of reconciliation) the concept of multiple cultures, with identity politics and ultimately with basic human rights for all peoples living within their borders. In this regard Canada has succeeded modestly in securing the necessary parameters through its multicultural policy, of constructing an essential space for a cultural and multicultural debate. This is not to say that more should not be done to enhance multiculturalism and even go beyond the strict parameters as prescribed by the law on multiculturalism.

The Canadian model of multiculturalism is based on our form of liberal democracy. One of the foremost experts on multiculturalism, Will Kymlicka[2], has actually coined the phrase *"liberal multiculturalism"*, which facilitates the understanding of the concept as applied to Canada. This is not to say that we have not encountered difficulties and certain contradictions in applying our policy. Since the promulgation of the *Multiculturalism Act* in Canada the challenge has been to conciliate the rights and freedoms of every individual living in Canada, regardless of citizenship, enshrined in our constitution and the charter of Rights and Freedoms and the collective rights of each ethno-cultural community that exist within Canada. On the one hand we have enshrined basic human individual rights and freedoms for each person living in Canada, regardless of race, religion, gender, age, profession or class. While on the other hand, we have cultural rights of ethno-cultural communities based on custom, religion, history, language, and at times on parental authority. We know through experience (40 years) this has led to many conflicts, which have been left up to the courts to settle.

Over the years we have been witness to a cumulative corpus of critical research directed towards Canada's multicultural policy. Neil Bissoondath[3], a noted Canadian author of Trinidadian descent, feels that the institutionalization of multiculturalism has led to the "ghettoization of the different ethno-cultures in Canada" and subsequently to a reduction of the supremacy of individual human rights and freedoms and to the hegemony of ethno-cultural rights based on custom etc.

Other critics, such as Nancy Fraser, write: "By enjoining the elaboration and display of authentic, self-affirming and self-generated collective identities, it puts moral pressure on individual members to conform to group culture. The result is to impose a single, drastically simplified group identity, which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications and the cross-pull of their various affiliations"[4] Anne Philips, a post-multiculturalist critic writes much in the same vain: "Multiculturalism exaggerates the internal unity of cultures, solidifies differences that are currently more fluid, and makes people from other cultures seem more exotic and distant than they really are. Multiculturalism then appears not as a cultural liberator but as a cultural straitjacket, forcing those described as members of a minority cultural group into a regime of authenticity, denying them the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves."[5]

What should Canada do with regards to these criticisms? Should Canada just push aside such debate or should Canada follow the lead of the United Kingdom, France and Germany? Canada should do neither. By facing these "critiques", Canada should go forward and build on the solid base created by 40 years of experience that we can humbly say, though it's not perfect, the Canadian model of multiculturalism has proven its worth. The time has come to go forward and forge a new model, based on multiculturalism, yet going beyond it as well.

INTERCULTURALISM/TRANSCULTURALISM

Multiculturalism should be seen as only the starting point of the understanding; applying, safeguarding and encompassing culturally based human rights. The ultimate goal of any culturally based society should be the creation of a cultural awareness based on a cosmopolitan citizenship. William Kymlicka talks about a multicultural citizenship which defines the concept of citizenship in accordance with the experience and application of multiculturalism in the last 40 years. A concept of cosmopolitan citizenship demands that we move beyond and start to proceed towards an understanding of culture and individual freedoms through the prism of interculturalism, or as this author prefers to name it, transculturalism.

The South American scholar Fernando Ortiz originally defined transculturalism in the 1960's[6]. Ortiz postulates that in the early stages of transculturalism, there is synthesis of two simultaneous actions. This objective process, which includes one's past while confronting the present, thereby forges a mixed identity based on a dual culture. As the mixing continues with other cultures encountered in a multicultural society, we add on other cultural identities, thusly producing a mosaic of identities. As Guy Scarpetta[7] wrote, "each person is a mosaic".

Let's be clear here, we are not talking about a psychological identity, but a cultural identity. If we have a mosaic of cultures (multiculturalism), the proximity of these different cultures should produce a mosaic of identities. Our cultural identity is not uniquely one-dimensional. History and anthropology have shown us that people are products of different influences, even the multiplicity of the cultures that surround us. Once we have broken down the barriers of the national culture, the recognition of self in the other (transculturalism) based on shared human values, leads to a new form of humanism. This new form of humanism, based on the multiplicity of identities and culture, leads to a mutual and common understanding of human rights. Human rights therefore does not only exist based on a strictly judicial context but more importantly in a societal context as well. The type of citizenship that evolves out of this construct leads inevitably to the concept of a cosmopolitan citizenship.

If the Canadian model of multiculturalism has survived and grown, it is because the parameters in place were born out of liberal representative democracy. If a cosmopolitan citizenship is to be born and eventually survive in our globalized world, our liberal democracy must also grow into a more encompassing liberal social democracy, based on a pursued course of widening the path of individual freedoms.

INDIVIDUAL VERSUS COLLECTIVITY

Because the process of interculturalism requires the widening of individual freedoms supported by a social liberal democracy, the emphasis to construct this new identity must be placed on the individual. Change in a liberal and/or a social liberal democracy is based on the individual, who is enveloped by freedoms that give him or her free choice. Up to this point in the Canadian multicultural model, the importance has been placed on the collective communities, which has created a patchwork of the different ethno-cultural communities across Canada.

With this model we have also seen barriers erected between the different communities, and also between certain Canadian values based on human rights and liberal democracy. Each ethno-cultural community has its own hierarchy of power and influence, which gives rise to certain contradictions within the ethnic communities themselves and vis-à-vis the rest of Canadian society.

As we have stated above, barriers, no matter where they are found, are broken down or perforated by individuals who wish to forge ahead and institute change. Presently in Montreal we have an interesting intercultural phenomenon that is taking place among the young artistic community in a section of the city called the Mile-End. This area, which in the past 15 years has become the home for young artists from all ethno-cultural communities, was for many years a working class area habited by different communities, who represented the cultural mosaic of Canada, but who never crossed the community barriers to meet with the other. The Portuguese stayed with the Portuguese, the Italians stayed with the Italians, the Jews stayed with the Jews etc. and the Québécois Francophones were not even present.

Individual artists, encouraged by the explosion of musical styles, based on a shared urban pop culture and reality forged a synergy that included 'the other'. Musical groups, and later theatre groups, writers, poets and performance artists, in order to expand their urban popular reality, very eagerly crossed the ethnic boundaries, while respecting their historical and cultural heritage, to create a new reality, new music, new writing and transcultural identities. They created a new artistic space that gave rise to a new cultural space.

This has become a transcultural experience in this neighbourhood that does not rely on any sort of organizational program. This experience came from a shared love for the creative arts, and individuals in a liberal democracy who dared cross boundaries. As Leonard Cohen, once wrote and sang "The street where all the races meet".

CONCLUSION

Therefore, a journey from institutionalized multiculturalism to interculturalism/transculturalism, which this author believes is one of the challenges of the 21st century for liberal democracies, places culture at the centre of a new humanistic prism. Culture seen through the working of transculturalism, becomes a pivotal process that breaks down boundaries, between nations, peoples, ethnic communities and individuals.

Of course this new horizon cannot be produced over night. It remains an evolutionary process, supported by an expanded liberal social democracy, people of good intensions and individuals who are willing to take a leap of faith in breaking down collective barriers. As Jürgen Habermas writes: "(…) even in a world-wide consensus on human rights could not serve (presently) as a strong equivalent to the civic solidarity that emerged in the framework of the nation-state. Civic solidarity is rooted in particular collectives identities; (while) cosmopolitan solidarity has to support itself on the moral universalism of human rights alone.

NOTES

[1] Tomlinson, John, "Globalization and Cultural Identity", in David Held and Anthony McGrew, *The Global Transformation Reader: An Introduction to the Globalized Debate,* Cambridge UK, Polity Press, 2033: 268.

[2] Kymlicka, William, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Human Rights,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998.

[3] Bissoondath, Neil, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada,* Penguin, 1994.

[4] Fraser, Nancy, "Recognition without Ethics", *Theory, Culture and Society,* 18(2): 24.

[5] Philips, Anne, *Multiculturalism without Culture,* Princeton University Press, 2007: 14.

[6] Ortiz, Fernando, *Transculturalismo,* Mexico, 1965.

[7] Scarpetta, Guy, *L'impurité,* Paris, Seuil, 1989: 26.

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