

2008 Expert Roundtable on Canada's Experience with Pluralism

## Canadian Pluralism in Comparative Perspective

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The past 20 years have witnessed growing pessimism around the world about the effects of ethnic diversity. Study after study has suggested that ethnic heterogeneity is a “problem” along multiple dimensions, showing, for example, that countries with higher levels of ethnic heterogeneity are likely to be less peaceful, less democratic, have lower economic growth, and lower levels of social spending to help the needy. High levels of ethnic diversity, in short, are seen as dangerous and dysfunctional for modern societies. Moreover, this perceived threat is exacerbated by the increasing tendency of ethnic minorities to mobilize politically for public recognition in the form of multiculturalism and minority rights. In an era of “identity politics”, the effects of ethnic heterogeneity have become more pronounced.

Against this background, Canada stands out as an important exception. It is a statistical outlier amongst Western democracies in its level of ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity, and has actively embraced the politics of multiculturalism and minority rights, giving public recognition and accommodation to its ethnic and linguistic diversity in a wide range of public institutions. Yet it remains a peaceful and prosperous democracy.

For this reason, Canada is often invoked as a “counter narrative” to the “master narrative” of ethnic heterogeneity’s pernicious effects. The Canadian experience suggests that the effects of ethnic diversity and identity politics are not predetermined, and that an explicitly multicultural form of democratic citizenship is viable. Not surprisingly, experts and policy-makers from around the world have become interested in understanding the Canadian experience, and in exploring its relevance for other countries. As a recent *Globe* article put it, “Pluralism: the world wonders how we pull it off” (Feb. 6, 2004). In this paper, I will discuss whether there is a distinctly “Canadian model” of accommodating diversity, and if so, whether it is successful or exportable.

## Unpacking the Canadian Model

In reality, there is no single model or principle for dealing with diversity in Canada, but rather a three-pronged approach, using different strategies for different types of diversity. We can summarize these as:

- Multicultural citizenship to accommodate ethnic communities formed by immigration;
- Bilingual federalism to accommodate the major substate national(ist) group in Quebec;
- Self-government rights and treaty relationships to accommodate indigenous peoples.

The idea that these three strategies could serve as global models rests on three central assumptions – namely, that (1) the Canadian approach to managing diversity is distinctive; (2) this approach is working well in Canada; and (3) other countries can learn from the Canadian experience. I will raise some questions about these assumptions, and argue for a more modest view of the international relevance of the Canadian approach.

My reservations are not primarily about the second premise – i.e., about how well the policies are working in Canada. Many critics on both the right and left deny that these policies are working well in Canada, either because they are fragmenting and balkanizing the country and/or because the focus on accommodating cultural diversity obscures more serious issues of economic and political inequality. In their view, insofar as other countries can learn from the Canadian experience, the lesson is to avoid Canada’s failed policies. As I discuss below, I disagree with these critics. On virtually any relevant criteria for evaluating “success” in the accommodation of diversity, I think that Canada is a *comparative* success, whether compared to earlier periods in Canadian history or to most other Western democracies.

The first premise, however, about the distinctiveness of Canada’s policies is over-stated. The policies that Canada has adopted with respect to ethnocultural diversity are broadly similar to those adopted by many other Western democracies, following the same basic trends over the past 30 years. The difference is that these policies are often more successful in Canada, with less of a backlash, greater public support (or at least public acquiescence), and greater comfort and security on the part of minority groups. If part of the goal of these policies is to encourage citizens to feel more comfortable with diversity in their personal and public lives, then there is strong evidence that they have indeed been more successful in Canada than other Western democracies, and have taken deeper root.

This suggests that the success of the Canadian model lies not in its distinctive laws or policies (which are broadly similar to many other countries), but in the distinctive circumstances in Canada that have helped facilitate the (comparative) success of these policies. And this in turn puts into question the third premise about the exportability of the Canadian model. Adopting these policies in other countries may not have the desired effect, if the underlying conditions for their success are not present.

To illustrate my concerns, I will focus primarily on the case of immigrant multiculturalism, with a briefer discussion of federalism.

## **Immigrant Multiculturalism**

The one component of the Canadian model that has been most strongly endorsed by international experts is our approach to immigrant integration. I agree that immigrant multiculturalism has indeed been a striking success in Canada. However, the specific conditions that enabled its success in Canada also set limits on its likely exportability.

What is immigrant multiculturalism? It is best understood as a repudiation of the earlier policies of assimilation and exclusion. In the past, Canada, like other immigrant countries, had an assimilationist approach to immigration. Immigrants were expected over time to become indistinguishable from native-born Canadians in their speech, dress, recreation, and way of life generally. Any groups that were seen as incapable of this “Anglo-conformity” cultural assimilation (e.g., Africans; Asians) were prohibited from immigrating to Canada, or from becoming citizens.

Since the late 1960s, however, we have seen a dramatic reversal in this approach. There have been two related changes: first, the adoption of race-neutral admissions criteria (the “points system”), so that immigrants to Canada come increasingly from non-European societies; and second, the adoption of a more ‘multicultural’ conception of integration, one which expects that many immigrants will visibly and proudly express their ethnic identity, and which accepts an obligation on the part of public institutions (like the police, schools, media, museums, etc.) to accommodate these ethnic identities.

These two changes are often described as a radical and bold experiment, unique to Canada, but potentially exportable to many other countries. In reality, however, the Canadian approach is not that distinctive. The same two-fold change has occurred in virtually all of the traditional countries of immigration, like Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Britain. All of them have shifted from discriminatory to race-neutral admissions and naturalization policies. And all of them have shifted from an assimilationist to a more multicultural conception of integration.<sup>1</sup> Even some countries that are not traditional countries of immigration, like the Netherlands and Sweden, have adopted versions of immigrant multiculturalism.

So it is important not to overstate the distinctiveness of Canada’s policies regarding immigrant multiculturalism. What is true is that these policies have been more successful in Canada than elsewhere. This is attested by the higher level of public support for immigration and for multiculturalism in Canada compared to other countries, the virtual non-existence of a far-right backlash against immigration; the higher levels of naturalization and political participation of immigrants; the perception that ethnic groups “get along well”; high and growing levels of interethnic friendships and marriages; and so on.<sup>2</sup> Earlier fears that multiculturalism would lead to balkanization, ghettoization and increasing ethnic tensions have largely been disproved.

By contrast, other countries have witnessed stronger backlashes against, and retreats from, their multiculturalism policies. France's recent ban on headscarves, and its earlier retreat from multicultural education, is the most prominent example. But we see similar debates in Australia, Britain and the Netherlands. In each case, there is not only widespread talk of a public backlash against multiculturalism, but also of a government "retreat" and a "return to assimilation".

What explains this differential success? Part of the answer undoubtedly lies in the details of policy implementation. Canada's multiculturalism policy may simply have been better administered, and/or better coordinated with broader naturalization, citizenship and integration policies. For example, the mutually reinforcing links between multiculturalism and citizenship policy in Canada were missing in both the Dutch and British cases.

However, I think these administrative details are ultimately less important than two more contingent and circumstantial factors: timing and geography.

### **Timing**

It is widely assumed that there is a connection between (a) the adoption of race-neutral immigrant admissions policy in the 1960s, which led to the arrival of large numbers of non-European immigrants, and (b) the adoption of the multiculturalism policy in 1971. It is assumed that the latter was adopted in response to the former, in order to accommodate "non-traditional" immigrants from the Third World. (And this raises the question why European countries can't also adopt such policies for their non-European immigrants).

In reality, multiculturalism was not initially intended for non-European immigrants. It was initially demanded by, and designed for, long-settled white ethnic groups, such as the Ukrainians, Poles, Finns, Germans, Dutch, and Jews. And it was demanded under very specific conditions – namely, as a reaction to the rise of Québécois nationalism, and the political reforms adopted to accommodate it. In response to growing Québécois nationalism in the early 1960s, including the rise of a separatist movement, the federal government undertook a series of reforms aimed at enhancing the status of the French language, making the federal government genuinely bilingual, and increasing the representation of francophones in the civil service. More generally, the federal government sought to re-emphasize Canada's "duality" – i.e., to re-emphasize the equality of English and French as the "founding nations" and to reaffirm "bilingualism and biculturalism".

White ethnic groups were understandably nervous about this talk about "duality", which seemed to render them invisible. They worried that government funds and civil service positions would be parcelled out between British and French, leaving ethnic groups on the margins. They insisted that the accommodation of Quebec not be done at their expense, and that any strengthening of linguistic duality therefore be accompanied by recognition of ethnic diversity. The formula that gradually emerged – "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework" – was essentially a bargain to ensure white ethnic support for the more urgent task

of accommodating Quebec. (And it has proven to be a very stable bargain). Throughout the period from 1963 to 1971 when multiculturalism was first debated and adopted, the process was driven by white ethnics. It was only much later – in the late 1970s and 1980s – that non-white immigrant groups became active players in the multiculturalism scene.

This is important, because it means that a fundamental fear that many people have about multiculturalism, particularly in Europe, simply did not arise in Canada when it was first adopted – namely, the fear that the logic of multiculturalism requires tolerating illiberal practices brought to the country by immigrant groups. For many people, a major risk of multiculturalism is that immigrant groups will invoke its ideology to demand legal protection of illiberal practices such as female genital mutilation, forced arranged marriages, or honour killings. This idea never arose in the initial debates in Canada. After all, the European ethnic groups who were demanding multiculturalism had been present in Canada for several generations, and were typically well integrated. When these groups first arrived in Canada, some native-born Canadians expressed scepticism about their capacity to integrate into society, and their capacity to adjust to liberal-democratic values. However, by the mid-1960s these groups had proven their loyalty to Canada in World War II, were often fiercely anti-Communist during the Cold War, and were seen as proud and patriotic Canadians, as well as fully committed to the basic liberal-democratic principles of the Canadian state. More generally, they were seen as sharing a common “Western” and “Judeo-Christian” civilization. As a result, the idea that the multiculturalism policy might involve a “clash of civilizations” between Western liberal-democratic values and conflicting religious or cultural traditions did not arise. The cultural differences between third-generation Dutch-Canadians and fifth-generation British-Canadians are simply not perceived that way.

By contrast, in many European countries the accommodation of such “civilizational” differences is seen as a central dilemma of multiculturalism – indeed, as the central issue. For example, in a recent document on multiculturalism, the Dutch government said:

It is probably more fruitful to describe the conflicts concerning integration between autochthonous Dutch citizens and some groups of immigrants in terms of ‘clashing’ norms and values. Against this background fundamental reflection is needed upon the norms and values that Dutch society wants to uphold in their policies, against the pressure of the norms and values of immigrants. Dutch tolerance is considered important, but the question is what are its limits.<sup>3</sup>

Here we have the Dutch government telling its citizens that they should conceptualize multiculturalism as an issue of how the liberal native-born Dutch majority should tolerate illiberal immigrants. Not surprisingly, Dutch citizens have responded by saying: “well if that is what multiculturalism is about, then we’re not keen on it”, and there has been a predictable backlash and retreat.

I believe that if multiculturalism had been viewed this way in Canada in 1971, it would not have been adopted. If multiculturalism in Canada had initially been demanded by groups who were perceived as having strong religious/cultural commitments to illiberal practices – say, by Somalis or Saudis rather than Ukrainians and Italians – and if their demand for multiculturalism had been perceived as a demand that such practices be tolerated and accommodated then multiculturalism would probably not have arisen.

Over time, non-European immigrants to Canada have become more active in the multiculturalism debate. Indeed, by the 1980s, they had become the main players. And so, inevitably, questions arose about "the limits of tolerance". Canadians started to ask how the state should respond to illiberal cultural practices, such as female genital mutilation (FGM) or forced arranged marriages, or whether courts should accept the so-called "cultural defence", in which (for example) husbands attempt to excuse wife-beating by saying it is part of their culture.

This issue was first made prominent in Canada in a 1990 book by Reginald Bibby (*Mosaic Madness*), and then picked up by Bissoondath (*Selling Illusions: the Cult of Multiculturalism*, 1994) and Gwyn (*Nationalism without Walls*, 1995), not to mention innumerable columns and editorials – all in the first half of the 1990s. So in this period at least, there was a major public debate about the possibility that multiculturalism would become a vehicle for the perpetuation of illiberal practices. Predictably, as in Europe, this led to a backlash. If we track public support for multiculturalism since its adoption in 1971, support was lowest in the early 1990s. In this period, there was a concerted effort by critics to persuade Canadians that multiculturalism was grounded in the idea of cultural relativism, and hence would require tolerating whatever practices immigrant groups bring with them to Canada. Had they succeeded, I think we would have seen a retreat from the policy.

However, this didn't happen. From its low point in the early 1990s, support for multiculturalism has not only rebounded to its original levels, but in fact is now at historic highs – a recent poll showed 80 percent support. Whereas other countries have witnessed the rise and fall of multiculturalism, Canada has seen its rise, decline, and revival.

I think there are three main reasons why critics' attempts to reframe multiculturalism as an issue of tolerating illiberal groups failed:

- First, the multiculturalism policy had been in place for 20 years before the issue of cultural relativism or the limits of tolerance emerged. It had become embedded, not just in a particular federal department, but in virtually every public institution – the CBC, schools, museums, hospitals – not to mention its inclusion in the Constitution in 1982. An entire generation of Canadians had grown up with this idea, become comfortable with it, and viewed it as an important part of the Canadian identity. The idea of abandoning multiculturalism, after such deep institutional embedding, was difficult to conceive.
- Second, by the time the question publicly arose whether non-European immigrants would use multiculturalism to demand accommodation of illiberal customs, it was already

answered in practice. By 1990, non-European groups had already taken their place within the larger framework of Canadian multiculturalism. Since the 1970s, visible minority ethnic organizations had begun taking a seat at the table, and so we already knew what sorts of demands they would make in the name of multiculturalism. And the reality is that no major immigrant organization had demanded the right to maintain illiberal practices. The Somalis had not demanded exemption from laws against FGM, Pakistanis had not demanded exemption from laws against coerced marriages, and so on. These groups had proven their willingness to work within a liberal human-rights-based multiculturalist framework.<sup>4</sup>

- A third reason concerns the role of Islam. Commentators often discuss “non-European immigrants” as a single category, all of whom are perceived as potential bearers of illiberal traditions at odds with the values of Western liberalism. But some non-European groups are seen by white Canadians as more of a threat than others. Throughout the West today, Muslims are seen as most likely to be culturally and religiously committed to illiberal practices, and/or as supporters of undemocratic political movements. This is particularly the case after 9/11, but probably dates back to the Islamic revolution in Iran.

As a result, the fear that multiculturalism is a vehicle for perpetuating illiberal practices is related to the visibility of Muslim immigrants. In most of Western Europe, the largest group of non-European immigrants is Muslims – up to 80 percent in some countries. And many of these Muslim immigrants are from parts of Africa or South Asia where traditions of FGM or arranged marriages persist, or where Islamic fundamentalism is strong. Racism and Islamophobia combine to generate a perception of recent non-white immigrants as a threat to liberal values. Even in Britain, where the immigrant intake is more mixed in terms of religion, issues of Islam have come to dominate the debate. The initial push for multiculturalism in Britain was spearheaded by (predominantly Christian) Caribbean Blacks, but political mobilization and public debate is now dominated by South Asian Muslims, and the result has been a decided cooling of public support. A recent article in *The Spectator* was titled “How Islam Has Killed Multiculturalism” (May 1, 2004: 12-13), and it seems true that public support for multiculturalism has declined as Muslims have come to be seen as the main proponents or beneficiaries of the policy.

In Canada, by contrast, Muslims are a small portion of the overall population (2 percent), and form only a small fraction of recent non-white immigration. 90 percent of our recent immigrants are not Muslim. The two most visible immigrant groups in Canada are Caribbean Blacks (particularly in Toronto and Montreal), and Chinese (particularly in Vancouver). Neither are Muslim, and neither are perceived as bringing “barbaric” or “illiberal” practices with them. There are certainly many prejudices and stereotypes about these groups, particularly against Caribbean Blacks. These include perceptions about criminality, laziness, irresponsibility, lack of intelligence, and so on. In short, old-fashioned racism.<sup>5</sup> But these groups are not widely perceived as having a religious or cultural commitment to offensive and illiberal practices.<sup>6</sup>

In all of these respects, I believe that Canada has been lucky in our timing. Let me put it this way: If we wanted to ensure public support for multiculturalism as a framework for integrating non-European immigrants, the ideal sequence would be to first adopt the policy for groups that are seen as “safe”, because they are part of the Judeo-Christian/Western civilization; then provide ample time (say, a generation) for this policy to become institutionally embedded and a part of people’s identities before the perceived “hard cases” arise. And finally, when the potential hard cases do emerge, they ideally would do so gradually and imperceptibly, not all at once, so that the ability and willingness of such groups to work within a liberal multicultural framework could become established in practice before it becomes a matter of heated public debate. The fact that Canada followed this sequence was entirely fortuitous. Unfortunately, as I discuss below, few other countries are in similar circumstances.

## **Geography**

Consider now a second source of good fortune: geography. A key feature of the Canadian context is that we face no threat of large-scale influx of unwanted migrants from neighbouring poor countries, whether illegal immigrants or asylum seekers. Most Western countries are in geographic proximity to poor and/or unstable countries that are capable of producing large numbers of unwanted migrants seeking to enter the country. This is true of the US with respect to Mexico (land) and Haiti (sea), of Spain with respect to North Africa, or of Italy with respect to Albania. And given free movement within the EU, virtually all EU countries face the prospect of sizeable numbers of unwelcome migrants from Eastern Europe or North Africa. It is even true of Australia, which fears large numbers of sea-borne migrants from south Asia. In all of these countries, illegal immigrants and asylum seekers who wash up on shore form a sizeable percentage of the overall migrant population.

By contrast, it’s virtually impossible for people from poor or unstable countries to get to Canada without government authorization. Canada has a land-border with only one country – the United States – which is richer not poorer than Canada. Very few people who manage to enter the US have any desire to move to Canada. So there is no threat of large-scale movement of unwanted migrants across the land border. And it is essentially impossible for people from poor countries to get to Canada by sea. So the only way for people from poor/unstable countries to get to Canada is by air, and it is impossible to board a plane to Canada without a visa. This means that virtually all migrants to Canada are people that the government has chosen and/or authorized to come.

This is important to the success of immigrant multiculturalism in Canada for several reasons. First, it reduces fear about being “swamped” by unwanted migrants, thereby lowering the temperature of debates, and making people feel secure that we are in control of our own destiny. Second, in most Western countries, there is a strong moralistic objection to rewarding migrants who enter illegally or under false pretences (e.g., economic migrants making false claims about escaping persecution). Such migrants are seen as flouting the rule of law, both in the way they entered the country, and often in their subsequent activities (e.g., working illegally). Many citizens have a strong moral objection to rewarding such behaviour.



Moreover, such migrants are often seen as “jumping the queue”, taking the place of equally needy or equally deserving would-be migrants who seek entry through legal channels. There is also a prudential objection to providing multiculturalism policies for illegal immigrants, since this may encourage yet more illegal migration.

Much of the anti-immigrant feeling in the US or Europe is in fact anti-illegal-immigrant feeling. Citizens do not want to encourage or reward such illegal behaviour, and oppose multiculturalism policies that would benefit such migrants. I believe that this would be equally true in Canada were we faced with comparable levels of illegal immigration. Consider the hysteria that accompanied the offshore appearance of four boats containing 600 Chinese migrants in 1999. There was overwhelming support in the Canadian public for forcibly repatriating them to China without allowing them to land and make asylum claims. I believe that Canadians are as opposed to illegal immigration as the citizens of any other Western country. If such boats appeared on Canadian shores every week, as happens in Italy, Spain or Florida, I suspect there would quickly be a powerful anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalism backlash. As a result, one of the central risks associated with immigrant multiculturalism in most countries – namely, that it will reward and encourage illegal immigration – simply does not exist in Canada.

The fact that Canada faces no threat of a large-scale influx of unwanted migrants from a neighbouring poor country also means that there is no danger that a single ethnic group will dominate the stock of immigrants. Because immigrants to Canada are selected by the government, rather than showing up at the border uninvited, they are drawn from all corners of the world, and no single ethnic group forms more than 15 percent of the total immigrant intake. In the United States, by contrast, 50 percent of immigrants come from Mexico. Similarly, North Africans dominate the immigrant intake in Spain or France. In a situation where immigrants are divided into many different groups originating in distant countries, there is no feasible prospect for any particular immigrant group to challenge the hegemony of the national language and institutions. These groups may form an alliance amongst themselves to fight for better treatment and accommodation, but such an alliance can only be developed within the language and institutions of the host society, and hence is integrative. In situations where there is a single dominant immigrant group originating in a neighbouring country, the dynamics may be very different, and more conflictual.<sup>7</sup>

The fact that immigrants to Canada do not show up uninvited from neighbouring poor countries also reduces the risk of creating an ethnic underclass. In countries where most migrants enter illegally, and then often work illegally, without the protection of the law and without access to social benefits, there is a danger that a racially defined underclass will emerge, and that the category of “immigrant” will come to be identified as “poor” and/or “criminal”. This in turn can lead to a situation where debates about the welfare state become racialized – i.e. native-born citizens withdraw support for welfare programs that are seen as disproportionately benefiting poor non-white immigrants. Canada has mercifully avoided this poisonous dynamic.

Geography, in short, is pivotal. To ensure public support for immigrant multiculturalism, the optimal conditions would be that immigrants are legal, not illegal; that they come from distant countries, not contiguous countries; and that they come from multiple sources, not a single dominant source. In all of these respects, Canada's geography serves us well. Had our geography been different – if Mexico or China were 20 miles off the Canadian coast – I think it is less likely that Canada would have adopted multiculturalism, or that it would have taken root.

I believe that these two factors – timing and geography – help explain the success of immigrant multiculturalism in Canada. And if we take these factors seriously, they suggest limits to the exportability of the model. To oversimplify, we can put countries into three broad categories:

- First, there are countries that share the same general conditions regarding timing and geography as Canada. Two countries come close – New Zealand and Australia – and these are precisely the two countries that studied and adapted the Canadian model in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Second, there are countries that did share some of the same fortunate conditions as Canada when ideas of multiculturalism first arose, but whose circumstances have since diverged significantly. The two cases that come to mind are the US and Britain. In these countries, the initial demands for immigrant multiculturalism came from legally-admitted immigrant groups, originating in distant lands, who shared a Judeo-Christian religion (white Europeans in the American case; Caribbean Blacks in the British case).<sup>8</sup> And so they too started down the multiculturalism road in the 1970s and 1980s. But in these cases, unlike Canada, the debate over multiculturalism quickly became focused on groups that were either unwanted/illegal migrants from neighbouring poor countries (Hispanics in the US) or perceived as illiberal (South Asian Muslims in the UK). And so support for Canadian-style multiculturalism diminished.
- Third, there are countries where the issue of multiculturalism was, from the start, tied up with groups that were either perceived as illiberal or as unwanted migrants from neighbouring poor countries, or both. In many European countries, the largest group demanding multiculturalism has been illegal migrants from a neighbouring Muslim country – the very opposite of the Canadian situation. In these countries, ideas of multiculturalism have typically met maximal resistance, and attempts to promote Canadian-style multiculturalism are least likely to succeed.

## **Federalism and Québécois nationalism**

A similar analysis can be given of Canada's experience in accommodating Québécois nationalism. Canada's use of federalism and official bilingualism to manage a powerful substate nationalist movement is viewed by many international experts as a success, and a model for other countries. It is indeed a success in Canada, but here too there are special conditions that have enabled its success, and that set limits on its exportability.

Federalism in Canada is a complicated set of institutions, but if we focus on its role in accommodating Québécois nationalism, I would highlight three key features: (a) territorial autonomy – that is, creating a federal subunit in which the Québécois form a local majority, and so can exercise meaningful self-government; (b) official language status for French; (c) institutional completeness – that is, the Québécois have access to a full range of public institutions (educational, media, political, legal) that allow its members to achieve a high degree of class mobility and professional accomplishment within their own community, without having to integrate into the larger English-speaking society. These three features define a special sort of federalism – what we can call a ‘multi-nation’ federalism. Any federal system that exhibits these features is grounded, implicitly at least, on the principle that the substate national group will endure into the indefinite future, and that its sense of nationhood and nationalist aspirations must be accommodated.

The adoption of multination federalism is sometimes seen as a uniquely Canadian achievement, although potentially exportable to other countries. In reality, however, the Canadian experience is not unusual. We see the same trend throughout the Western democracies. Virtually every long-standing Western democracy that has a powerful substate nationalist movement has adopted the same three-fold package of territorial autonomy, official language status, and institutional completeness. This is true of the Flemish and Walloons in Belgium, the French and Italians in Switzerland, the Germans in South Tyrol in Italy, the Scots and Welsh in the UK, Catalans and Basques in Spain, the Swedish minority in Finland, and Puerto Rico in the US.

So it is important not to exaggerate the distinctiveness of the Canadian approach to substate nationalism. Moreover, unlike the case of immigrant multiculturalism, multination federalism has taken root in all of these countries. There is no danger of a public backlash or government retreat from multination federalism in any of them. If multination federalism has been a success in Canada, it has equally been a success in all of these countries, providing a means of managing nationalist conflict while preserving peace, individual rights, democracy and economic prosperity.

The real question is whether multination federalism is relevant farther afield, in post-communist Europe, Asia, Africa or the Middle East. Unfortunately, there appears to be little appetite for multination federalism in these regions. Consider the conflicts between Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka; Macedonians and Albanians in Macedonia; Arabs and southerners in Sudan; Greeks and Turks in Cyprus; Turks and Kurds in Turkey; Serbs and Albanians in Serbia; or Moldovans and Slavs in Moldova. In all of these cases, we have a minority group that, like the Québécois, is regionally-concentrated, with a distinct language and culture, forming a significant percentage of the population, mobilized around a nationalist political movement, seeking territorial autonomy and official language status. Viewed from Canadian eyes, bilingual federation seems the obvious solution. Yet in all of these countries, the state has chosen to suppress rather than accommodate minority nationalism, and rejected bilingualism and federalism. Indeed, they have all risked civil war

rather than consensually negotiate a solution based on bilingual federalism, and the result has been years of instability and violence.

What explains this differential receptiveness to multination federalism? Here again, I would focus on two key preconditions: geopolitical security and individual security.

### **Geo-political security**

The treatment of minorities within a state is intimately linked to relations between neighbouring states. Where states feel insecure in geo-political terms, fearful of neighbouring enemies, they are unlikely to treat fairly their own minorities. More specifically, they will not voluntarily accord self-governing powers to minorities that they view as potential collaborators with neighbouring enemies. In all of the cases I just mentioned, this is precisely how states perceive the situation. These are countries with one or more powerful enemies at or near their borders, and they have ingrained (and sometimes credible) fears that if these enemies invaded or otherwise attempted to undermine the state, their minorities might well collaborate with the aggressor. One reason why minorities are assumed to be potential fifth columns is that they often have religious, cultural, ethnic or linguistic ties to the neighbouring state. In Canada, by contrast, there is no comparable fear that the Québécois will collaborate with Canada's neighbouring enemies, in part because Canada has no neighbouring enemies for the Québécois to collaborate with. Of course, Canada does have long-distance potential enemies – such as Soviet Communism in the past, Islamist jihadism today, and perhaps China in some future scenario. But in relation to these long-distance threats, the Québécois are on the same side as the state. If Quebec gains increased powers, or even independence, no one in the rest of Canada worries that Quebec will start collaborating with Al Qaeda or China to overthrow the Canadian state.

This geopolitical factor helps to explain the success of multination federalism not only in Canada, but throughout the West. In the past, fears of disloyalty were an issue in Western Europe. For example, prior to World War II, Italy feared that the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol was more loyal to Austria or Germany than to Italy, and would therefore support any attempt by Germany/Austria to invade and annex South Tyrol. Similar fears were expressed about the German minority in Belgium or Denmark. These countries worried that Germany might invade in the name of “liberating” their co-ethnic Germans, and that the German minority would collaborate with such an invasion. Today, however, this is a non-issue throughout the West with respect to historic national minorities.<sup>9</sup> National minorities are assumed to be allies, not enemies, and accommodating them poses no risk to the basic geopolitical security of the state. This is a key precondition for the success of multination federalism in Canada, but is absent in most of the rest of the world.

### **Individual Security**

A second factor that explains the willingness of states to adopt multination federalism is confidence that self-governing national minorities will respect the human rights of everyone living on their territory. In particular, states will not voluntarily grant self-governing powers to

minorities if they fear that members of the dominant group who live on the minority's territory will be persecuted, expelled, or killed.

In the established Western democracies, this confidence arises from the existence of a deep consensus across ethnonational lines on basic values of liberal democracy and human rights. As a result, it is taken for granted that any self-government powers that are granted to national minorities will be exercised in accordance with shared standards of democracy and human rights. Everyone accepts that these substate autonomies will operate within the constraints of liberal-democratic constitutionalism, which firmly upholds individual rights. In virtually every case of multination federalism in the West, substate governments are subject to the same constitutional constraints as the central government, and so have no legal capacity to restrict individual freedoms in the name of maintaining cultural authenticity, religious orthodoxy or racial purity. Not only is it legally impossible for national minorities to establish illiberal regimes, but they have no wish to do so. On the contrary, all of the evidence suggests that members of national minorities are at least as strongly committed to liberal-democratic values as members of dominant groups. In many parts of the world, by contrast, there is a credible fear that once national minorities acquire self-governing power, they will use it to persecute, dispossess, expel or kill anyone who does not belong to the minority group. (Think about the Serbs in Kosovo).

I believe that these two factors – geo-political security and human rights protection - have been crucial to the successful operation of multination federalism in Canada. And if we take these two factors seriously, it suggests serious limits on the exportability of the Canadian model. If we ask which countries around the world share these two conditions, the answer is very few. More specifically, the countries that share these two conditions are precisely the countries that have already adopted some version of multination federalism. In most countries in Eastern Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, one (and typically both) of these conditions are absent.

## **Conclusion**

If the analysis I've given is correct, we should be modest in our expectations about exporting the Canadian model of diversity. Insofar as most countries lack the fortunate circumstances that have underpinned Canada's comparative success in this field, we have little basis for expecting other countries to voluntarily adopt the Canadian model, or for assuming that the model would actually work in their very different circumstances. The Canadian experience provides no lessons about how to manage the sort of diversity that arises from large-scale illegal migration, or from irredentist national minorities, or from many of the other ethnic problems that beset countries around the world. Whether immigrant multiculturalism and bilingual federalism would be useful in these contexts simply cannot be predicted on the basis of the Canadian experience.

I am not recommending that Canada abandon its humanitarian desire to protect minorities around the world, or that it should turn a blind eye when countries adopt assimilationist or oppressive policies towards minorities. On the contrary, I firmly believe that a robust set of

minority rights is needed to achieve justice in multiethnic states, and that the international community has a responsibility to help achieve justice for minorities. Canada can and should do more to help strengthen the international protection of minorities. But it is naïve (and narcissistic) to suppose that the only or best way to protect minorities is by diffusing the Canadian model of diversity abroad. More attention should be paid to strengthening international norms of minority rights, and improving mechanisms for their protection. And insofar as we do promote the Canadian model abroad, we need to think critically about what we can do to promote the underlying conditions that sustain the Canadian model, such as the geo-political desecurization of state-minority relations.<sup>10</sup>

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In Australia, New Zealand and Canada, this shift was officially marked by the declaration of a multicultural policy by the central government. There is no comparable formal policy at the national level in the UK or US, but in both cases we see similar changes on the ground, in the actual operation of public institutions (police, schools, health care etc.) - see N. Glazer's *We Are All Multiculturalists Now* (Harvard UP, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> For relevant evidence, see M. Adams, *Unlikely Utopia: The Surprising Triumph of Canadian Pluralism* (Viking, 2007); A. Parkin and M. Mendelsohn, *A New Canada: An Identity Shaped by Diversity* (Centre for Research and Information on Canada paper #11, 2003); I. Bloemraad, *Becoming a Citizen: Incorporating Immigrants and Refugees in the United States and Canada* (University of California Press, 2006). I survey this evidence in "The Current State of Multiculturalism in Canada" (Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2010, Catalogue No. Ci96-112/2010E-PDF; <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/pdf/pub/multi-state.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in O. Verhaar, "Principles and Pragmatism in Dutch 'Multicultural Policy'" (presented at NWO International Conference on Ethics and Public Policy, Utrecht, May 2003).

<sup>4</sup> On the broad consensus across racial/religious lines on a human rights-based liberal multiculturalism in Canada, see R. Howard-Hassmann, *Compassionate Canadians: Civic Leaders Discuss Human Rights* (University of Toronto Press, 2003); Banting et al 2007.

<sup>5</sup> See F. Henry, *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism* (University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>6</sup> In reality, illiberal practices can be found amongst all groups, and several 'cultural defense' cases were in fact launched by East Asian immigrants to the US (Okin 1999). Yet in terms of public perceptions, East Asians are seen as less likely to be committed to illiberal practices than Muslims.

<sup>7</sup> For the sorts of fears this can generate, see Huntington's "The Hispanic Challenge", *Foreign Policy*, March 2004: 30-45, who argues that the contiguity and numerical dominance of Hispanic immigrants in the US means they are unlikely to integrate, and that multiculturalism exacerbates the problem.

<sup>8</sup> I am focusing here on *immigrant* multiculturalism. There were also demands in the US for multiculturalism from African-Americans, which involved different sorts of issues, often relating to historic injustice. In terms of immigrant multiculturalism, however, the initial demands were from white ethnics, and then shifted to Hispanics.

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<sup>9</sup> Since 9/11, there are security concerns in Western states about Muslim immigrants. But there is no comparable concern about historic regional/national minorities.

<sup>10</sup> For more on how we can strengthen international norms of minority rights, and promote the underlying preconditions of multiculturalism, see my *Multicultural Odysseys* (OUP, 2007).