Multiculturalism in Canada
Don Sparling
Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic

In no state has the concept of multiculturalism become such a central part of the national discourse as in Canada. The birth of the concept dates to the end of the 1960's and beginning of the 1970's (the word "multiculturalism" itself being a Canadian coinage[1]), though there have been considerable changes in multicultural policy over the years. As a result of the perceived and actual successes of Canada in dealing with the challenges of an increasingly heterogeneous society, the country has been hailed as "the prototype of the first multicultural nations" and even "*the* multicultural society of the world"[2]. Yet from the very beginning the concept has not been without its critics within Canada, both individuals and spokesmen for certain groups or sections of the country (notably Quebec), and in recent years the debate has become more strident. In order to see why this should be so, I shall look at the development of multiculturalism in Canada over the past thirty years, dealing in turn with why multicultural policies should have found such fertile soil in Canada, how official policy has developed over the years and how perceptions of multiculturalism have changed.

To begin with, however, it is useful to consider the word "multiculturalism" itself, since part of the confusion surrounding the debate in this field stems from the use of the term to refer to at least three interlocked but different ideas. First, multiculturalism may be only one element of a general ideology or philosophy of cultural pluralism. Second, the term may be simply descriptive, a label for a society marked by ethnic diversity. And finally, it can be understood as relating to a social policy implemented through specific laws and regulations of the state. In Canada all three definitions come into play, but the third is particularly important and deserves most attention.

The most significant underlying factor in explaining the receptiveness of Canadians to the concept of multiculturalism lies in the relative lack of definition of the Canadian identity. Canada is not and never has been a nation state. The coexistence of French and English-speaking communities in what is now Canada for over two centuries has prevented the development of any commitment to the idea of "E pluribus unum", and the creation of a federal state in the nineteenth century gave this linguistic and cultural dualism powerful political expression. Moreover, the position of the two linguistic and cultural communities has remained curiously imbalanced: while the Anglophone community has always maintained economic, political and demographic dominance, members of the Francophone community have consistently been in the vanguard in developing a sense of their own collective identity. In the nineteenth century, they were already "Canadiens" at a time when the Anglophone majority regarded itself as British (or even, God help us, English). In the twentieth century, the notion of a French-Canadian (Quebecois) nation has emerged, while Anglophone Canada, having outgrown its British colonial tutelage only to slip into the warm embrace of the American cultural and economic empire, has remained immune to similar national(ist) self-identification. As a result, there is scarcely any sense of an "English-Canadian nation", and the term "Canadian nation", with all the resonance such a phrase might conjure up, is simply meaningless. The only thing Canadians across the country share is citizenship - and that only since 1947, before which time they were British subjects. As a result of this very

specific development, the "Canadian identity", though the focus of much intellectual navel-gazing, has remained open, flexible, undefined.

It was the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec in the 1960's that set off a series of wide ranging changes in the way Canadians saw their country. The emergence of a modern Quebec, no longer dominated by the Catholic Church but committed to progressive change, a Quebec with a rich and dynamic cultural life and wider intellectual horizons forced a re-examination of the relationship between the country's two "founding peoples". One important form this took was the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-1969). The "Bi and Bi" had as its basic task the examination of ways in which more suitable and equitable expression might be found at the national level for the dual linguistic and cultural nature of the country. But at the hearings it held across the country, other views began to emerge, those of spokespersons for ethnic communities representing the roughly one-third of Canadians at that time who were of neither British nor French origin. So the mandate of the Commission was extended to take into consideration "the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada and the measures that should be taken to safeguard that contribution". When its final report appeared, the fourth volume (issued in 1970) dealt with *The Cultural Contribution of The Other Ethnic Groups*. Though the Commission in fact saw these "other ethnic groups" as little more than marginal adornments to an essentially dual Canadian culture, this may be considered the point of origin of the multicultural trajectory. In 1969 the Commission's work had led to the adoption of the Official Languages Act, confirming the policy of dualism by making English and French official languages at the federal level. Yet only two years later, in 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau announced a Federal Policy on Multiculturalism that stressed, in a masterly example of the Canadian talent for compromise, "multiculturalism within a bilingual framework".

A peculiarity of this policy was the way in which, though English and French seemed to be given a privileged position, this did not hold for the cultures which they expressed and embodied: Canada was said to have no "official culture", and so in this respect all ethnic groups, including the English and the French, were equal. A second odd feature was the rather paradoxical emphasis on cultural pluralism as "the very essence of Canadian identity". Less problematic, perhaps, was the assertion that fostering a wider choice of lifestyles and cultural traits could be a positive factor in shaping society and acting as a counterweight to the homogenisation and depersonalisation of mass society, and the concern for civil rights and the struggle against discrimination.

In the next decade and a half, the multiculturalism policy took on institutionalised form. In 1972 a Multiculturalism Directorate was established within the Department of the Secretary of State, though in the beginning its activities and budget were limited, being restricted largely to providing support for individual ethnic groups and immigrant organisations, and monitoring multicultural activities within the federal government's cultural agencies. Gradually, however, its scope was broadened, and the Directorate began to play a more active role. An expansion of its programmes in 1978 led to a concern for cultural integration, support for ethnic studies, and a stress on intergroup communication. But perhaps the most significant indication of the general direction in which policy was moving came in 1982, with the establishment of a Race Relations Unit.

A whole new stage was inaugurated in 1988 with the passing of the Multiculturalism Act. This reflected many of the changes that had taken place in Canada and abroad in the preceding years: the Citizenship Act of 1977, the Canadian Charter of

Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Canadian Human Rights Act (1985), provincial human rights codes, and various United Nations conventions. The most significant change in the provisions of the Act was the downplaying of the bilingual framework of the 1971 policy. Instead, there was the assertion that all members of Canadian society were free to preserve and share their cultural heritages, and a general concern (reflected in the full title of the Act) for the "preservation and enhancement of multiculturalism in Canada". In addition, stress was laid on the need to promote equal opportunity and greater understanding among members of Canadian society.

Since then, the emphasis of the federal multicultural programme has shifted heavily in favour of the latter priority, in particular to promoting the long-term integration of immigrants and their families into Canadian society. As a benign form of social engineering, this takes the form of funding programmes aimed at making immigrants more aware of Canadian values and encouraging them to take a more active part in society, and at the same time working with the media, cultural institutions, employers' organisations, labour unions, municipalities and other groups and sectors to sensitise them to the need to be more open to new Canadians. Major practical efforts are made to address the problems and prejudices that must be overcome on both sides if these people are to become full members of the community, with particular stress being laid on building awareness among primary and secondary-school students. At the academic level, this concern is reflected in the 20-volume series of histories of Canadian ethnic groups sponsored by the multiculturalism programme, and the 26 chairs devoted to various ethnic groups and multicultural themes that it has helped set up at Canadian universities. Its grants in this area have been instrumental in establishing ethnic studies as a university discipline, and the reverberations of this in the media and the school systems have been immense.

The change in emphasis of multicultural programmes since the early 1970's is therefore quite clear: the virtual disappearance of the bilingual framework within which it was originally conceived, reduced interest in the more obvious trappings of ethnicity (in particular its folkloric aspects, but including language), and a massive shift towards efforts aimed at promoting positive attitudes to new immigrants and their values in order to help them perform more successfully in Canadian society as well as at combating racial and ethnic stereotyping and discrimination.

Given this change in emphasis in government multicultural policies, it is clear why certain groups have expressed disenchantment with the programme, in particular Quebecers, members of older ethnic communities, and white, "non-ethnic" Canadians, particularly members of the older generations.

From the beginning, many Francophones remained profoundly unimpressed by the policy of multiculturalism. For them, multiculturalism was yet another way of undermining the unique position of the French in Canada and their status as one of the two "charter peoples", and the suggestion that their culture and traditions were on a par with other minorities in Canada was deeply insulting. This distrust of a "level playing field" multiculturalism was deepened by the actual situation within Quebec, which was witnessing a gradual decline in the French language's dominant position as a result of the assimilation of new immigrants to the Anglophone community. Faced with this threat, Quebec chose a different path for dealing with its increasingly multi-ethnic reality: a series of laws reinforcing the use of French in the province, restrictions on who would be allowed to send their children to English-language schools, and the development of a policy of interculturalism". Making a clear distinction between "ethnie" and "nation", it

stresses the primacy of the French language in the province, regards the minority communities as "cultural communities" and emphasises the integrative capacity of the official culture (where integration "has a sense much closer to gentle assimilation"[3]).

Growing disenchantment with the policies of multiculturalism could also be felt in many of the older immigrant communities. Here the cause was more a sense of unfulfilled promises, in particular with regard to support for particular ethnic institutions and heritage languages. This was heightened by the clear shift in the multicultural programme's priorities that occurred in response to the profound transformation that Canadian society had undergone in the 1970's and 1980's as a result of changes in immigration policy.

Until the 1960's, preference had been given to "suitable" immigrants, which in effect meant virtual exclusion of those from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. As a result, before 1961 about 95% of the country's immigrant intake was from Europe and the United States, and "visible minorities" represented approximately 3% of the population. The following year, a new federal statute barred discrimination on the grounds of race, national origin, colour, religion or sex, and in 1967, a "points" system was introduced that confirmed the reversal of the older practices. Currently, "non-whites" make up about 70% of annual immigration, and have grown to account for around 13% of the total population.[4] In the major cities, where the majority of these immigrants settle, their numbers are significantly higher. Roughly one-third of the Toronto area's four million population now consists of visible minorities, and demographers see the city becoming half non-white around the year 2005.[5] In Vancouver, a majority of people now speak a language other than English at home, and visible minorities account for about 85% of this group.[6]

These statistics help explain why multicultural priorities have changed, with race and colour and, to a lesser extent, religion coming to the fore as key terms in the multicultural discourse. In the process, many members of the older established ethnic minorities have come to feel that their position has been ignored or downplayed, and their disappointment and resentment is often reflected in criticism of the multicultural policy as a whole. But this whole new factor has also led to increased questioning among other Canadians of the extent to which accommodation can continue. Paradoxically, in this situation the very lack of consensus of what is Canadian - a feature of the country that originally helped smooth the path for the acceptance of multicultural ideals - has now become more problematic. Given the hazy sense of Canadian identity, symbolic issues - such as whether Sikh members of the Mounted Police should be allowed to wear turbans instead of the regulation hats - take on disproportionate importance. Change is associated with loss, and the question "What exactly is Canadian?" becomes more and more acute as increasing numbers of people seek to identify whatever common "Canadian values" remain, a shared heritage around which the country can be defined and, as it were, continue to exist as a separate and distinctive "imagined community".

In this context, multicultural policies can be viewed as only one aspect of the increasing pluralism of the society in general, a phenomenon evidenced in such other areas as gender and sexuality. This seems to be the place it holds, for example, in Reginald W. Bibby's vigorous attack on contemporary trends in Canada, *Mosaic Madness*.[7] Another way of looking at these issues, multiculturalism included, from a more favourable angle is to see them as reflections of what Charles Taylor has termed "the politics of recognition".[8] What both of these very different writers share is a concern with the need to establish some balance - some new balance, perhaps - between the needs

of individuals and groups, on the one hand, and those of the whole community on the other. This seems to be at the heart of the current debate on multiculturalism.

The critics' charges are many. That multiculturalism in fact ghettoises ethnic minorities, making it even more difficult for them to become an effective part of the mainstream of society. That it marginalizes them by stressing their non-Canadian rather than Canadian identities. That it caters to "professional ethnics" at the expense of those individuals seeing their primary identity as being independent of a particular group. That it creates the preconditions for divided loyalties and too often burdens people with a history (of their former homelands) that might better be thrown off. At the core of these arguments is the charge that multiculturalism fragments the country and hinders people from becoming Canadian and adopting the values that are distinctive to the society as a whole.

Ironically enough, defenders of multiculturalism would argue that it is precisely these values that multiculturalism in fact fosters. Or to put it another way, the "core values" that multiculturalism tries to promote are those found in the Charter of Human Rights, human rights legislation, the Multiculturalism Act and elsewhere: in the eyes of its defenders, what is particularly Canadian is precisely this placing of human rights and human dignity at the centre of social policy. Such a view implies an active role for government, and in the past this has indeed been a marked feature of the Canadian polity (many of the institutions that bind the country together, and foster human dignity - for example the health care system - are government creations). It also implies a more active citizenship - again, a status that is the one thing all Canadians share. The charge made by Neil Bissoondath in his powerful attack on the "cult" of multiculturalism in Canada, *Selling Illusions* - that "multiculturalism ends where notions of human rights and dignity begin"[9] - can then be seen as oddly skewed. On the contrary, it is precisely in this arena that multiculturalism as a social policy is increasingly situated.

It is true that the institutional status of multiculturalism has declined in recent years. In 1993, only two years after it had been established, the Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship was abolished and its activities absorbed into the Department of Canadian Heritage. Yet though much criticism has been directed at official means of promoting multiculturalism, and the success of federal governments at explaining the evolution and accomplishments of the policy over the years less than could be desired, the concept itself is far from being rejected. A June 1994 Maclean's/Decima poll indicated that only 6% of Canadians felt that multiculturalism was divisive; another prominent study the same year suggested that support for cultural retention was most notable among people with a strong sense of Canadian identity and distinctiveness.[10] And polls have consistently shown that Canadians have been surprisingly untroubled by the profound changes that have taken place in the society in the past thirty years. In fact, the 1996 Maclean's/CBC News poll showed that 75% of respondents found no problems with the new racial mix in the country.[11]

The Canadian imagination is pre-eminently social rather than individual. One way of looking at the creation of the Canadian state is to view it as an exercise in conflict resolution, and over the years Canadians have continued to devote much of their energy to brokering between groups (national, regional, religious) with different interests. Seen in this light, the policy of multiculturalism is a natural part of a long Canadian tradition, and its goals a reflection of the country's "core values". Whether the Canadian approach can be applied elsewhere is, of course, an open question. There seem to be too many factors specific to the country to allow any kind of confident generalisation. The most

that can be said, perhaps, is that multiculturalism as social policy has helped to make Canadians more aware of the implications of multiculturalism as social fact, and thus enabled them to deal with the rapidly changing reality of late twentieth century society in a more sensitive and informed way than in most other societies. But to say even that is to say a great deal.

Works Cited:

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[2] ibid., 1..

[3] Paquet, Gilles. "Political Philosophy of Multiculturalism", in *Ethnicity and Culture in Canada: The Research Landscape*. J. W. Berry and J. A. Laponce, edd. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994, 70.

[4] Nesbitt, *op. cit.*, 3.

[5] *Maclean's*, 30 December 1996, 39.

[6] Micron Internet Services, 13 February 1997.

[7] Bibby, Reginald W. *Mosaic Madness*. Toronto: Stoddart, 1990.

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[10] Nesbitt, *op. cit.*, 9.

[11] *Maclean's*, 30 December 1996, 38.