Governance Through Social Learning

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Published by University of Ottawa Press

Paquet, Gilles.
Governance Through Social Learning.

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Chapter 7

Multiculturalism as National Policy*

Valorisons les obstacles entre les hommes... non pour qu’ils communiquent moins, mais pour qu’ils communiquent mieux.
— Jean-Pierre Dupuy

Multiculturalism is a label for many things in Canada: our multi-ethnic cultural mosaic, a policy of the federal government, and an ideology of cultural pluralism (Kallen 1982a). As a Canadian policy, it is one of the most daring initiatives of the last 25 years, but it has been assessed in varying ways, ranging from “enlightened” (Jaenen 1986), to a “manipulative device used to perpetuate control over ethnic groups” (DeFaveri 1986), to a policy that “undermines the foundation for national unity” (Kallen 1982a). These differences of opinion stem, to a large extent, from the vagueness of the language in good currency, and the Rorschach-type interpretations this vagueness nurtures, but also from the difficulty inherent in the assessment of such a bold policy move.

Our purpose is to deal with this complex question from the point of view of policy research and cultural economics: what is sought is some clarification of the underlying issues, for there is much confusion about this policy domain and some provisional conjectural evaluation of the Canadian multiculturalism policy of the last two decades. We have to be satisfied with conjectures because such a policy may not be amenable to meaningful evaluation except in the very long run.

Our approach emphasizes two major points. First, multiculturalism poses an ill-structured problem to policy analysts, a wicked problem (see Chapter 2) — the goals are not known or are ambiguous and the means–ends relationships are highly uncertain and poorly understood. Second, the central feature of the multiculturalism policy has to do with symbolic resources and the reallocation of those sorts of resources with a view to generating equality of recognition and status; economists have little experience with the analysis of the economics of symbols and of the sociocultural underground — truth, trust, acceptance, restraint, obligation — social virtues that are the underground of the economic

* This chapter is based on a paper with the same title which appeared in the Journal of Cultural Economics (1989, 13(1), 17–34). The help of A. Burgess and M. Racette is gratefully acknowledged.
We will argue that multiculturalism as an exercise in production and redistribution of symbolic resources may have had positive impacts on ethnocultural pride (and, therefore, on the efficiency of the economic system), but such a policy has also a dark side that has been occluded and may be of importance.

Consequently, any provisional and conjectural evaluation of this policy must be prudent because of the wickedness of the problem and somewhat inconclusive because of the limited development of the economics of symbolic resources. When dealing with such issues, one finds oneself in what might have been the predicament of Alfred Marshall (1907) when he was presenting his disquisition on the social possibilities of economic chivalry.

Traditional approaches to policy research focus on attempts to falsify hypotheses about an objective reality. This is too narrow a focus for policy research when the ground is in motion. This is the reason why the social learning model is helpful. It focuses on learning on the job about both the configuration of facts and the configuration of values, but it emphasizes also the importance of learning from the stakeholders in the policy game and from the many groups at the periphery who are in possession of important local knowledge. In this transactive style of planning action, hypotheses are verified as “correct” only in the process of creating a new reality. This approach à la Friedmann-Abonyi (1976) — more fully described in chapters 2 and 5 — is based on a sharp awareness of the limits of our policy research tools: one cannot hope to produce anything more than incomplete answers.

In this chapter, we present two major characterizations of the policy of multiculturalism in Canada — as containment policy and as symbolic policy; look at the dynamic this policy has triggered; give some reasons for the necessary unfinishedness of the current policy; and mention some of the pitfalls and challenges lying ahead.

The rationale for initiating such a policy thrust may have been narrowly electoralist, as some cynics claim, but an evolutionary process has been unleashed that will not be easily reversed or slowed down. Given the very limited knowledge base on which such a policy initiative is based, unintended consequences will loom large in a final evaluation. This explains why we have allowed our preliminary evaluation to be somewhat speculative; because we are in the process of learning how to be multicultural, concerns about possible perverse consequences should not be ignored even though hard evidence may still be slim or lacking. Indeed, as Schumacher (1977) wisely suggests, even though the prevailing philosophy of cartography is “if in doubt, leave it out,” navigation is much safer in these turbulent times if we adopt the opposite approach “if in doubt, show it prominently.”

MULTICULTURALISM: A CONTAINMENT POLICY

The social fabric of Canada has been polyethnic and multicultural since the very beginnings of the country. The native population was displaced by French
and English invasions, and the new ethnic groups occupied the whole of the
territory. Despite efforts in the 19th century to stimulate immigration from
other countries, in 1881 the population of non-British, non-French extraction
was a shade less than half a million and represented only about 11% of the
Canadian population. After the 1967 change in the Canadian immigration
laws, the process of visible multiculturalization accelerated: before 1970,
12–13% of immigrants were Asian; now the figure is 50%. In 1981, more than
8 million people or 31% of the population were members of non-British,
non-French ethnic groups (Sheridan 1987), and by 1986, the proportion was
38% (Cardozo 1988).

But multiculturalism is more than a reality in Canada. It is a set of social
values, an ideal type. It has been said of Canadians in the 19th century that
they only had “limited identities,” i.e., that they did not define themselves
together or even primarily as Canadians. Rather, they identified first with their
region or province, and only in a limited way with the nation (Paquet and
Wallot 1987). This reality of “limited identities” has made it easier to accept
and even to promote the legitimization of multiple identities: from a country
lacking a global identity and being loyal first and foremost to regions or
sections of the country, we have drifted toward a celebration of ethnocentrism
and to the development of a mosaic model of Canada, in which distinctive
ethnic collectivities make up the country. Collective cultural rights making all
of us hyphenated Canadians, with “equal weights on each side of the hyphen”
would ensue (Kallen 1982a). The positive valuation of ethnic segmentation,
which necessarily follows from these assumptions, is not shared by all Cana-
dians. But it is most certainly defended with lesser or greater vehemence by
many stakeholders.

A soft version of this mosaic model became government policy in the early
1970s. Faced with a growing electorate from ethnic communities that were
neither French nor British, the Trudeau strategy was to recognize symbolically
both the right of ethnic groups to choose to maintain their distinctiveness, and
a protection of individual rights of members of ethnic groups to choose
whether to maintain their ties and loyalties to their ethnic community.

The objectives of the 1971 policy were fourfold: (1) support of ethnocul-
tural diversity for cultural communities that choose this option; (2) assistance
to people to overcome cultural barriers; (3) promotion of creative interchanges
between ethnic groups; and (4) assistance to immigrants in acquiring one of
Canada’s official languages. On items (2) and (3), there was little disagreement.
On item (1) — the encouragement of cultural diversity — there were two
schools of thought: some supporting the promotion of ethnic identity as of
valence (Burnet 1976), and others suggesting that this would make Canada into “some kind of ethnic zoo” (Brotz 1980). There was also strong disagree-
ment on item (4) between those for whom living cultures and languages are
inextricably linked,” who argued that linguistic rights of ethnic communities
and immigrants should also be recognized and guaranteed, and those for
whom assimilation into one of the two official language groups was essential
and the egalitarian mosaic model on this front had to be subjected to the
overriding official languages constraint.

If one had to find a label for this Canadian model, an apt description might
be "contained pluralism" (Arnal 1986), for our pluralism is constrained in a
variety of ways by a number of core Canadian values (bilingualism, democracy,
nonviolence, etc.). Multiculturalism is only one of many core values and one
that is limited by all the others.

Such important constraints imposed on the pure mosaic model have led
many to argue that the policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework
is nothing but a policy of appeasement and containment designed to accom-
modate the demands of non-French/non-British groups and those of French
and English Canadians (Peter 1978). The limited efforts to implement this new
policy in the 1970s lent some support to this view (Lupul 1982). In 1972, a
minister of state for multiculturalism was appointed and, in 1973, an advisory
body was established (later to become the Canadian Multiculturalism Council)
to help the minister implement the policy.

It was only in the 1980s that institutionalization of this policy began: in
1982, multiculturalism was mentioned in the Canadian Charter of Rights and
Freedoms; in 1985, a Standing Committee of the House of Commons on
Multiculturalism was created. In its June 1987 report (Mitges 1987), it recom-
mended the creation of a separate department. In 1988, new legislation — The
Multicultural Act — was passed, and a full-fledged ministry to deal with mul-
ticulturalism was created. Recently, efforts to help fund nonofficial-language
training have been acknowledged, and some work has been done on the issue
of confronting racism (Stasiulis 1988). If the total budget of this sector remains
minuscule — approximately $1 per Canadian per year — there are clear signs
that additional financial resources will be forthcoming. The construction of
new infrastructure (ministry, research institute) is bound to make multicultural
issues more visible and create a channel through which interest groups might
be able to communicate their concerns.

If progress has been slow and no all-out effort to move Canadian society
toward the ideal cultural mosaic template has been attempted, this is due to a
situation in which power and opportunities are still largely shared by the two
founding nations. However, opposition is not restricted to this group; Canadi-
ans as a whole are only "mildly positive toward the idea of cultural diversity"
(Berry 1977). The political strategy of containment and accommodation by
Canadian governments through most of the period since 1971 appears to
reflect fairly accurately the state of mind of the nation.

Some cynics would go so far as to say that the objective of the multi-
culturalism policy has always been for the state to regulate the collective interests
and goals of minority groups. In this sense, the political strategy may be said
to have worked rather well (Stasiulis 1980) and, if this is correct, one might
regard it as unlikely that the institutionalization of the department will do
much in material terms to effect dramatic changes under the circumstances.
But this conclusion stems from an interpretation of multiculturalism that is
too narrowly focused on the concept as a social policy designed to eliminate discrimination and reduce income and employment inequities in a social system that is not free of cultural barriers. Progress on these fronts has clearly been very slow, even though this was most certainly one of the objectives of the 1971 policy. But it would be unwise to reduce multiculturalism policy to this dimension.

MULTICULTURALISM: A SYMBOLIC POLICY

The true significance of the multiculturalism policy is to be found at another level, and at that level it is truly revolutionary for it corresponds to some of the new roles of the state in the affairs of the mind in modern society (Tussman 1977; Lowi 1975). It is a contribution "to the reconstruction of the symbolic system and to the redistribution of social status among linguistic and ethnocultural groups in Canadian society" (Breton 1984). As Breton has shown rather well, multiculturalism is "largely an instrument for re-structuring society's identity system and for managing cultural tensions that arise in the process," for it may be hypothesized that people are less interested in their ethnic cultures and organizations than in maintaining their ethnic identity, finding ways to express it in suitable ways, and gaining recognition for their status (Breton 1984; Gans 1979).

Multiculturalism is an effort "to regenerate the cultural-symbolic capital of society: to restructure the collective identity and the associated symbolic contents," and such efforts may be analyzed in terms of production and distribution of symbolic resources (Breton 1984).

The Canadian policy on multiculturalism has been interpreted in many ways: (1) as a social policy, designed to eliminate inequalities between ethnic groups and remove barriers to entry into the mainstream of Canadian life; (2) as the purposeful construction of a mosaic of institutionally complete ethnic communities; (3) as an effort to produce "symbolic ethnicity" as a psychological benefit. On the whole, reactions to these partial versions of the multicultural policy have been skeptical. If the first objective is sought, this policy was unnecessary, for the Charter of Rights and other instruments could well take care of the problem. In terms of the second objective, the policy is simply an unrealistic exercise in social architecture. If "symbolic ethnicity" is the name of the game, some have argued that it is an unwarranted activity on the part of the state, for the state has no business in the affairs of the mind nor in the symbolic order.

These partial characterizations have not fully captured the import of the Canadian multiculturalism policy and most certainly have not recognized the central importance of symbolic ethnicity. This is much more than simple psychological gratification. Changes in the symbolic order often have fundamental impacts on the framing of decisions and on the dynamics of society; the slow process of status-enhancing of ethnic minorities in Canada has acquired a logic of its own which has blown away the containment of the 1970s.
Culture is a "shared symbolic blueprint which guides action on an ideal course or gives life meaning" (Roberts and Clifton 1982). Cultural identity formation is the result of a progressive crystallization of a new ethos: the sum of characteristic usages, ideas, norms, standards, and codes by which a group is differentiated and individualized in character from other groups (Banfield 1958). In a sense, identity formation occurs very much like capital formation: only if a new social contrivance proves to be "profitable" for some will it emerge and persist.

It would be naive to expect a cultural identity to evolve in a vacuum: there are public goods and social overhead capital attached to this production process, as there are in other sectors. One cannot expect that such overhead capital (meta-rules) will evolve organically: the state may have a role to play, and the optimal amount of coercion may not be zero. In the same way that the state is seen as legitimately involved in the creation and sustenance of a monetary system and a political order, it is quite legitimate for the state to "sustain the appropriate state of mind" (Tussman 1977), and in fact the state is involved in many ways in shaping the institutions of awareness, in politics of cognition, and in managing the forum — "the whole range of institutions and situations of public communication."

Breton (1984) has argued that public policy in our socioeconomies attempts to shape or modify the symbolic order — "the shaping and protecting of awareness" (Tussman 1977) — by producing and allocating symbolic resources. These interventions amount to a *bricolage* of the underlying ethos and translate into the reranking of status groups and the redistribution of recognition.

Multiculturalism as a national policy is such a granting of status and recognition to various ethnic communities. Although this production and redistribution of symbolic resources may not translate into big budgets, one would be unwise to presume that they are unimportant. Multiculturalism is redrawing mental maps and redefining levels of aspirations. This in turn modifies the frame of mind of those groups, but not always in a positive way.

It is true that status enhancement through multiculturalism might be presumed to have a positive impact. By providing primary securities for the ethnic communities and by helping to develop collective pride and redefining higher levels of aspiration, multiculturalism might be expected to modify the framing of decisions by members of those communities and to engender an outburst of entrepreneurship (Light 1972; Paquet 1986, 1989f). This is a process that has been noted elsewhere. Some have even argued that the ethnocultural communities might take advantage of their intimate awareness and appreciation of cultural nuances to become go-betweens with our foreign trading partners and thus enhance Canada's trade potential (Passaris 1985).

But there is also the possibility that the multiculturalism policy might have the opposite effect. For this form of psychological self-poisoning is maximal in societies where more-or-less egalitarian rights coexist with considerable differences in the power, wealth, culture, etc., of the various groups (Scheler
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It was Nietzsche who understood the importance of spite and rancor in modern societies. Multiculturalism policy may generate ressentiment in the very population it was meant to upgrade. A French word is necessary here as

Ressentiment is to resentment what climate is to weather. Ressentiment is a free-floating disposition to visit upon others the bitterness that accumulates from one's own subordination and existential guilt at allowing oneself to be used by other people for their own purposes, while one's life rusts away unnoticed. [Friedenberg 1975]

Canadian multicultural policy has had an impact of this sort. An illustration of this outcome is provided by Bharati Mukherjee (1985) in the introduction to Darkness. Mukherjee, who was born in Calcutta, lived in Toronto and Montreal, and became a writer here before moving to the United States. Her words are rather harsh.

In the years that I spent in Canada — 1966 to 1980 — I discovered that the country is hostile to its citizens who had been born in hot, moist continents like Asia, that the country proudly boasts of its opposition to the whole concept of cultural assimilation. With the act of immigration to the United States, suddenly I was no longer aggrieved, except as an habit of mind. I had moved from being a 'visible minority,' against whom the nation had officially incited its less-visible citizens to react, to being just another immigrant. For me, it is a movement away from the aloofness of expatriation, to the exuberance of immigration. I have joined imaginative forces with an anonymous, driven, underclass of semi-assimilated Indians with sentimental attachments to a distant homeland but no real desire for permanent return.... instead of seeing my Indianness as a fragile identity to be preserved against obliteration (or worse, a 'visible' disfigurement to be hidden), I see it now as a set of fluid identities to be celebrated.... Indianness is now a metaphor.

Mukherjee has not found in the celebration of a fragile cultural identity a basis for cultural equality; yet one of the objectives of the multicultural policy was to respond to the status anxieties that had been voiced. Far from breaking down "cultural jealousies" as the prime minister announced in 1971, the policy of multiculturalism has led to some dissatisfaction in the ethnocultural communities, to interethnic competition, and to heightened demands for more symbolic capital (Breton 1986). Moreover, given the expectations created by the policy, there has been much frustration at the slowness of the process of "realization" of the cultural equality that had been promised. Political leaders responded to these growing pressures, especially in the 1980s, by legislating ethnicity as a feature of Canadian life and by raising again the level of multicultural promises: from the preservation of cultural heritage to the enhancement of ethnocultural communities.

THE DYNAMICS OF MULTICULTURALISM

One cannot predict unambiguously the future of the daring multicultural experiment Canada has embarked on. Nothing less than a research program paralleling this experiment, tapping continually into the local knowledge at the periphery — in the ethnocultural communities — taking fully into account the values of the stakeholders, their Weltanschauungen or theories of reality, and
the dynamics of political gaming can offer any hope of leading to a plausible scenario. But even in these quasi-ideal circumstances, the amount of ignorance would remain great: the action hypothesis on which the multicultural gambit is based can only be verified in the course of its unfolding.

Yet, a few unintended consequences are emerging from the experiment and might be worth noting if only to ensure vigilance. As we said earlier, our norm is if in doubt, show it prominently.

The first of these consequences is a growth of ethnocentrism in Canada. Some have referred to it as a tribalization of Canadian society (Spicer 1988). As Claude Lévi-Strauss has put it, "loyalty to a certain set of values inevitably makes people partially or totally insensitive to other values... a profound indifference to other cultures... a guarantee that they would exist in their own manner and on their own terms" (quoted in Geertz 1986). Such imperméabilité does not authorize the oppression of anyone, but it leads to a growing segmentation and to a drift away from unhyphenated Canadianism into ethnic bloc-action. This has already led to the ugly confrontations noted in recent nomination meetings (Spicer 1988). For even if segmentation is somewhat idealized in the mosaic model, most experts would agree that it leads to ethnic particularism and impedes national unity (Kallen 1982a).

The second notable factor is a resurgence of racism under a different name. As a result of the growth of ethnocentrism, a new rhetoric, based on the right for each culture or ethnoculture to be different, has emerged. This rhetoric has led in turn to a sort of juxtaposition of ethnocultures, each claiming its right to be different but also to be equal. This claim that groups can be equal but different is an illusion: a whole literature from de Tocqueville to Louis Dumont (1983) has clearly shown that in any society, a difference can only mean a value difference, i.e., some explicit or implicit hierarchy (Taguieff 1987). In Canada, "intentionally or not, the multicultural policy preserves the reality of Canadian ethnic hierarchy" (Kallen 1982b). A new differentialist neo-racism is germinating here, as it flourishes in other polyethnic societies that have consecrated this illusory search for equality/difference (Taguieff 1987).

The third negative force at work is the permeating influence of envy in inter-ethnic relations. It is well known since de Tocqueville that egalitarian societies, or societies claiming to decree equality are more prone to envy. The equality among ethnocultural groups decreed by multiculturalism has provoked a heightened degree of inter-ethnic group competition and animosity. Indeed, the sort of resentment described above by Mukherjee is at the very root of envy as symbolic behaviour (Foster 1972). This in turn poisons inter-ethnic relations, as the success of group A is perceived by group B as a sign that the latter group has been injured or maligned. The zero-sum syndrome looms large.

Multiculturalism may claim to try to break down cultural jealousies (a rather innocuous zeal in the preservation of something possessed — as any dictionary indicates) but it has been the source of envy (displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of another person in happiness, success, reputation, or the
In his study of envy as symbolic behaviour, Foster examines the socioeconomic and psychological conditions that breed envy and the cultural forms used by those who fear the envy of others (concealment, denial, symbolic sharing, and true sharing) and the institutional forms used to reduce envy. One of the latter is a system of encapsulation — a device making use of the egalitarian principle to produce subsocieties "marked off from each other by social, psychological, cultural and at times geographical boundaries" (Foster 1972: 185). However, the balancing act between ethnocentrism/encapsulation as institutional forms and envy/re-sentment as a state of mind may become a vicious circle with a violent outcome, if they were ever to begin reinforcing each other in our society (Dumouchel and Dupuy 1979).

In parallel, one might tally growing evidence of tolerance, of a shift from juxtaposition to integration, and some signs of the emergence of a new modern concept of citizenship to replace old nationalities. But, at this time, one can see only the harbingers of this new citizenship based on collaboration and achievement rather than status. In any case, these features do not appear to have been fostered by Canada's multiculturalism policy. Proximity and closer personal contacts have eroded barriers as they do in the melting pot world and have led to some appreciation of other ethnocultures. Although it is difficult to apportion success or failure to the restructuring of the symbolic order undertaken by the multiculturalism policy as such, some have argued that, if anything, this policy might have generated on balance more emotionally-charged conflicts ascribable to status anxieties for those at the top of the vertical mosaic and to rising expectations and relative deprivation at the bottom.

CONCLUSION

Canada has faced the challenge of its polyethnic society by defining a multicultural philosophy within a bilingual framework. The national policy of multiculturalism that has ensued has been translated slowly, but more and more importantly, it has developed into a set of institutions that have performed two very different sets of functions.

On one hand, these institutions and policies have helped cultural groups to overcome cultural barriers, and they have promoted some interchange between cultural groups. But these efforts have been much less important than those that fostered, on the other hand, their ethnocultural consciousness and encouraged institutions and organizations that appeal to such consciousness.

As a result, it cannot be said that the multicultural policy has done as much as it might have to nurture an ethnic or race-relations policy in Canada. Rather, it has emphasized ethnocentrism and segmentation with unintended consequences of some import.

At this point, when important new resources appear to be likely to be channeled toward the implementation of the policy on multiculturalism, it might be useful to repeat a statement often made by Jean Burnet (1976) —
one of the pioneers in ethnic studies in Canada — about the need for more research (research of a different sort, i.e., action research) likely to help in the redefinition of our multicultural policy in line with directions that are feasible, acceptable, implementable, and effective. Such directions cannot be elicited from the centre, but need to tap into local knowledge. There is little point in encouraging specific consciousness among groups who have seemed dormant or largely assimilated for the sole reason that they are there.

Continuing redefinition of policy directions is essential in any ongoing policy domain, but if this bold gamble of Canada on multiculturalism is to succeed, such a refocusing is essential now.

And if in the midst of this complex investigation, policy analysts were ever in need of a sextant to guide them toward what might be a sense of Canadian identity in the making, they could do worse than to reread an old classic — a book of essays edited by Malcolm Ross (1954) — for Ross' introduction is a gem.

We kick against the pricks of our necessity. Yet strangely, we are in love with this necessity. Our natural mode is not compromise but 'irony' — the inescapable response to the presence and pressures of opposites in tension. Irony is the key to our identity... Our Canadianism, from the very moment of its real birth, is a baffling, illogical but compulsive athleticism — a fence-leaping which is also, and necessarily, a fence-keeping... Ours is not, can never be, the 'one hundred per cent' kind of nationalism. We have always had to think in terms of 50-50. No 'melting pot.' Rather the open irony of the multi-dimensional structure, an openness to the 'larger mosaic'... we can see vividly the actual movement from the dual irony to the multiple irony, from the expansive open thrust of the French-English tension to the many-coloured but miraculously coherent, if restless, pattern of the authentically Canadian nationhood.

As a popular philosopher used to say, "It is that simple, and that complex."

Some might be tempted to reject outright these conjectures in the name of the old cartographic orthodoxy — if in doubt, leave it out. To them, I can only suggest a rereading of Ionesco's Rhinoceros, in which the characters are turned into rhinoceroses for mysterious reasons. Yet, there is always an unmistakable clue that a character is about to be transformed into a rhinoceros: this character has just stated that he or she feels completely immune.