

**INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON
INTERCULTURALISM :
A QUÉBEC-EUROPE DIALOGUE**

MONTRÉAL, 25-27 MAY 2011

Steering Paper

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PLACE AND TIME: Montréal, 25-27 May, 2011

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF: Professor Gérard Bouchard, Université du Québec à Chicoutimi

SYMPOSIUM AIMS:

- 1- At global (macro-social) level: refining our definition of interculturalism, and emphasizing the originality and specific character of interculturalism as a model for integration¹ compared with other models (such as multiculturalism, republicanism, assimilationism, the “melting pot approach”, etc.);
- 2- Illustrating the progress achieved in that respect in Québec, in European societies, and elsewhere;

¹ In accordance with North American tradition, the concept of integration is used to refer to those mechanisms and processes (of articulation or insertion) through which social bonds are created, including their symbolic and functional foundations. Such mechanisms and processes are of concern to all citizens (whether new or old), and they operate at various levels (individual, community, institutional and State) and on many dimensions (economic, social, cultural, etc.). In terms of culture, it should be noted that the concept of integration, thus defined, is exempt from any assimilationist overtone. In order to avoid confusion, the term *integrationism* will be used here, when referring to those forms of integration that are not respectful of diversity.

- 3- Assessing the future of interculturalism as a model for social, economic and cultural integration in diverse societies that are governed by the rule of law and a concern for pluralism;
- 4- In dual societies: analyzing how to ensure, as democratic societies, the continuity of majority identities and cultures (sometimes called “founding cultures”) while respecting minority cultures²; in bipolar or multipolar societies (think of Belgium, Switzerland), developing ways for articulating and facilitating the interaction between established cultures;
- 5- At micro-social level: exploring the various dimensions of interculturalism and the dynamics of interculturality, based on relevant experience gained in Europe and Québec (in community life, in education, in health, in employment, and so forth);
- 6- Clarifying the responsibilities and proper role of the State (in terms of public policy) and of individuals (in terms of private and community initiatives).

SPECIFIC AIMS :

- 1- Exploring interculturalism as a way to foster civic participation and to promote democratic ideals;

² Some of which also happen to be founding cultures; e.g., Québec’s English-speaking minority.

- 2- Assessing ways of implementing interculturalism in various social contexts (*e.g.*, diversity within sovereign nations, diversity within stateless nations, diversity in plurinational societies, etc.);
- 3- Exploring future co-operation between Québec and various bodies, notably in Europe, in order to improve and further theoretical and practical thinking on the various dimensions of interculturalism;
- 4- Highlighting intercultural experience in various institutional settings (such as the school system) and at the micro-social level;
- 5- Designing public policies and programs, including original ways for developing and applying them.

ARGUMENTS

The necessity for sharing and strengthening expertise regarding interculturalism on both sides of the Atlantic is central to the dialogue between Québec and Europe that is proposed here. The Symposium owes its relevance to the fact that in the West and elsewhere, many nations are at a loss about how to deal with ethnocultural diversity. For example, in Europe, various nation States are searching for a model that would be a compromise approach between outright assimilation (*e.g.*, forced homogenization, or integrationism) and a “communitarian” approach that is often seen as leading to social ghettos and detrimental to social cohesion. Many (including the 47 Member States

of the Council of Europe³) now see interculturalism as one of those in-between approaches.

As a model for integration, interculturalism operates on two distinct levels. At the global (or macro-social) level, interculturalism refers to state and institutional policies and programs; it is, therefore, a general approach to (and philosophy of) ethnocultural relations. At the micro-social level (interculturality), interculturalism is concerned with the daily management of ethnocultural diversity in various institutional settings (such as the education system, the health services, or private enterprise), and in the community at large. On the one hand, therefore, one finds a set of guiding principles and programs mandated at a global level; on the other hand, there is the actual day-to-day dynamics of relations among individuals and groups coming from different cultures.

Interculturalism and other models, such as multiculturalism, share a pluralist outlook⁴; however, as Québec experience over the last decades shows, interculturalism strives for a distinct approach. The endorsement of pluralism accounts for similarities between interculturalism and other models, notably in terms of policies and programs; but, when considered from a macro-social point of view, interculturalism features a number of crucial differences, the main of which is a recognition of the dynamic relationship between a majority

³ See: COUNCIL OF EUROPE (2008). *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue*, especially at p. 19. http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/Source/Pub_White_Paper/White%20Paper_final_revised_EN.pdf.

⁴ Broadly speaking, pluralism refers to a way of managing diversity that respects fundamental rights. Such an approach was part of the great lessons learned from the horrors of the two World Wars, the experience with fascist and totalitarian regimes, the twentieth-century decolonization movement, and the emancipatory struggles of oppressed groups such as Aboriginals, women and religious, racial, sexual and other minorities. A pluralist outlook is today shared by most democratic nations. The differences between them lie mostly in means of implementation and specific orientations, policies and programs.

and its minorities (whereas in multiculturalism, for instance, there is no such thing as a majority culture). Interculturalism also features other traits, such as an emphasis: *a)* on cross-cultural interactions; *b)* on the development of a shared culture (based on initial cultural identities, but also transcending them); and *c)* on integration⁵. Thus, interculturalism is a distinctive attempt at reconciling and articulating the relationships and tensions inherent in ethnocultural diversity.

In dual societies, therefore (or more precisely: in societies where ethnoculturality is addressed through the lens of a duality), a balance must be struck between the perpetuation and development of majority cultures, taking into account their ongoing history and founding myths, and the integration of minorities, taking into account their rights⁶. The main challenge is to arbitrate between majorities and minorities in a spirit of conciliation, interaction and negotiation that respects ethnocultural diversity, while providing for the continuing cultural identity of founding groups and their heritage. Respect for the fundamental values of host societies and the emergence of shared cultural expressions and practices, as part of the process of integration, also are at the heart of interculturalism.

Outside of dual societies, interculturalism is also of relevance, as mentioned before, to nations that are composed of two or more ethnocultural groups of similar size that are officially recognized, thereby

⁵ Somehow, three distinct webs intermingle and partially merge in the long run: the majority culture, the various minority cultures, and a shared culture.

⁶ Specifically for that reason, the Symposium will not address the situation of Aboriginal nations. In Québec, the Government, paying heed to the requests of Aboriginals, has resolved to negotiate with them on a nation-to-nation basis. Therefore, the native population cannot and should not be treated as an ethnocultural minority within Québec society, an approach that has been rejected outright by Native leaders themselves.

enjoying a degree of permanence. The main objectives of interculturalism will remain the same, especially the search for common grounds, and facilitating interactions and shared initiatives between established cultures.

The foregoing obviously requires an ethics of reciprocity, significant flexibility, and a great deal of pragmatism: hence, the crucial role of first-line actors, especially within public institutions⁷ and in the community sector. Promoting interculturalism is an eminent responsibility for the State and its institutions, but interculturalism, to the same extent, also relies on civil society and on the initiative of ordinary citizens in everyday life: this allows, at the inter-personal level, for empirical experience, innovative practices, and new solidarities.

As mentioned before, the concept of integration is wide in scope, ranging from cultural aspects to economic and social dimensions. It is important, therefore, to emphasize that reducing inequality, fighting economic and social exclusion and all forms of discrimination, as well as encouraging full civic participation, are essential pre-conditions to any process of integration. Inclusion stands at the very core of integration.

In short, and going back to the overall aims of the Symposium, those will consist in developing a common conception of interculturalism in its macro-social and micro-social dimensions, and in designing and exploring specific applications of that model that would be adapted to the context of each nation. The Symposium also aims at formulating concrete proposals in terms of further dimensions to be explored, policies to be implemented, and co-operation to be developed.

⁷ Such as: civil servants responsible for immigrants, teachers, health workers and professionals, social workers, etc.

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