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**Multiculturalism or Transculturalism:**

**Towards a Cosmopolitan Citizenship.**

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**Abstract**

The public policy of multiculturalism, passed by the Trudeau Government

in 1972, was according to the theory behind it, to establish an eventual

cosmopolitan identity of Canadian citizenship. More political than social,

this policy, has led to many discussions vis -a-vis the Ghetto nature that has

evolved from it. The Mosaic has remained divided. The pluralistic idea of

transculturalism (seeing oneself in the other), basically relying on the forces

of society (not politicians), has a more interactive (for citizens) and

egalitarian approach. With the break down of numerous borders (both

physical and psychological), which position is the more harmonious with a

true citizenship for the world?

**Introduction**

The difficulty of being in contact and understanding the culture of

otherness “alterité” is not new. Human history and recent events in Bosnia,

Rwanda, Oldham, to name just a few, are outstanding examples that human

understanding and respect of the other, based on a religious, racial and

cultural perspective, despite numerous legislation, still remains to this day

very elusive. The persistent barriers of racism, fear, ignorance and

imaginative stereotypes remain constant obstacles to fruitful human

relations and need to be addressed and destroyed in order for the human

experience to progress.

We have all had the experience of reading historical travel accounts that on

the surface present exciting detail descriptions of exotic civilizations and

cultures which inhabited our world. We now know, through fundamental

historical research that these accounts were completely tainted with

passages of ethnocentrism (mostly emanating from the colonial empires of

history) and in many ways perpetuated and fostered paternalistic attitudes

towards cultures of difference. We also know that the great explorers of the

past were mire traders looking for gold, spices, and material wealth and in

numerous instances practiced genocide in order to attain their materialistic

end. Missionaries under the guise of “saving souls” and the advancement

of Christianity really wished to unify the world under their type of religion,

believing it was the one “true” religion. Other cultures and civilizations

encountered were seen as objects of possession or destruction, as the

encounter of the Europeans and the Native Peoples of the Americas.

In many ways our modern or post- modern world still functions with this

same fear and loathing of the other. In Michael Harrington’s world we

have replaced the clash of ideologies with the clash of civilizations1. And as

Immanuel Wallerstein would have it, culture is the ideological battleground

of the *Modern World System*. Actually both of these distinguished scholars,

have stated what in my humble opinion is the obvious.

Cultural clashes began when people started to be on the move, even within

their own national and local territories. Throughout history the

misrepresentations of cultures, the hatred of different cultures, coupled with

an ignorance of cultures have always been the underlying reasons for

human conflict. These unchanging realities of our modern world, coupled

by the fact that *time* and *space* are no longer insurmountable barriers have

fuelled an urgency, especially within the last fifty years of the 20th century,

in providing a model for cultural harmonization or at the very least cultural

understanding, in the process of human interaction for our new century.

Today, with accessible rapid means of transportation at our disposal, *time*

and *distance* have been shortened. The electronic media (e.g. the Internet)

provides us with an instantaneous contact with the *other*. However, even

with these new scientific developments the question remains, has our

facility for rapid physical and virtual travel really put us in contact with the

*other* and fostered an understanding of the *other*?2

In reality, do we not displace ourselves (physical travel and virtual travel)

in order to seek out what resembles our own image and thereby indirectly

making us search for our home? Octavio Paz, in his reflections on multiple

identities and a transcultural world, postulates that when we move from one

place to the other, we are in reality remaining in the same place.

The recognition that modern societies are no longer monolithic, that the

imaginary social space has mushroomed into a multitude of identities has

propelled us into a realization that we are in an era where interculturality,

transculturalism and the eventual prospect of identifying a cosmopolitan

citizenship can become a reality. However we still remain circumscribed by

our *Little Italies*, our *China Towns* etc., which beyond the pleasures of

experiencing culinary delights, nevertheless create a self illusion that we

have attained a level of cultural awareness of the *other*. One wonders, how

can this be? Why countries such as Canada which are immigrant nations,

have not transgressed to this day the cultural boundaries, which have

separated us in the past? Has the policy of Multiculturalism3 established in

1972 succeeded in bridging or of dividing Canadian society?

The object of this text, on the one hand, will be to attempt to bring certain

clarifications and to induce a certain reflection on the idea of a how

Transculturalism or Multiculturalism should lead to the establishment of a

cosmopolitan citizenship. On the other hand, the paper will also present a

critical appraisal of the policy of Multiculturalism as its pertains to the

understanding and acceptance of the different cultures that inhabit

contemporary Canada.

**Culture, Multi-culture or Trans-culture.**

If culture, is defined by anthropologists and cultural historians as an

evolutionary process, how can we still ask if in our contemporary societies,

is there such a thing as a pure or unique culture. As Guy Scarpetta, wrote

in *L’impurité4*, “ Impurity is the order of the day. The *we* and *you*, include

also the *he* and the *she* of all linguistic groups, of all nationalities, of all the

sexes. We are of all the cultures. Each person is a mosaic.”5

In the social phenomenon of immigration, the movement of individuals or

groups is a process of dialogue, a *métissage*, and sometimes confrontation.

Has the policy of multiculturalism as applied in Canada since 1972, helped

or hindered this process of dialogue, *métissage* and the recognition of

oneself in the *other*. Seen from the outside, multiculturalism as adopted by

the Trudeau government of 1972 does in essence seem an enlightened

political policy. Who would question an idea of bringing people together,

of promoting their cultural heritage so that we could all enrich ourselves?

The idea conveys an atmosphere of utopianism, and human progress we

cannot reject.

There are of course traditionalists and social conservatives who would

prefer a process of integration into one or the other of the two founding

cultures (English and French), based on the historical context “of the two

founding nations and peoples of Canada”. Following this line of logic,

shouldn’t we have all by now integrated into the First Nations of Canada?

Were they not the first ones to inhabit this geographical space?

However the question remains has the political policy of multiculturalism

lived up to the expectations of creating a cosmopolitan citizenship. Has the

policy brought forward by the Liberal Government of Pierre Elliot Trudeau

brought us closer to this goal or has it distanced us from it. It must be

understood what I mean by cosmopolitan citizenship, is a citizenship that

recognizes that each person of that nation-state processes multiple identities

that not only link him or her to their own cultural heritage, but also to the

culture of the host country, continent, neighborhood, street etc…

We must remember that beyond and long before the policy of

multiculturalism there existed multiculturalism as a social phenomenon,

one predicated upon immigration coming to Canada from all over the

world. In other words before 1971, was Canada objectively multicultural?

Of course it was. Multiculturalism is an objective fact produced by

immigration, people moving and settling around the world, for whatever

reason. Multiculturalism as a social phenonimon, directly linked to

worldwide immigration, it did not suddenly exist because a government (in

this case the Canadian Government) decreed it so.

Any personal experience, such as my own, of any Canadian growing up

especially after World War 2 and attending high school (but equally

experienced since the first massive immigrations to Canada of Jews and

Italians in 1900) in the major metropolitan cities of Montreal, Toronto and

Vancouver would attest to the multicultural world that was Canada.

Surrounded by the Budnick’s (Polish), the Spyro’s (Greek), the Charles’

(African-Canadian), the Stessik’s (Ukrainian) etc.. revealed to all who were

opened minded that we were living in an immigrant, multicultural and

multilingual society. Did these immigrant groups have their own cultural

groups? Of course they did. The Polish had their *Dom Polski* halls and

their *Saint*-*Mary’s Church* with the Black Virgin of Cracow. The Italians

had their Casa d’Italia’s and every Saturday morning my Ukrainian friends

Bob and Walter Weikerchuck would go to Saint-*Michael’s Church* to learn

the Ukrainian language and dance. What the policy of multiculturalism of

1971 did was to recognize what was already there.

**Multiculturalism: a political policy gone awry?**

In recent years many eminent scholars and noted novelists such as Kenneth

McRoberts and Neil Bissondath have written about and directed criticisms

toward the idea that multiculturalism, as a political policy remains the only

avenue towards a cosmopolitan harmony in Canada. McRoberts in his

most recent book6, returns to the debate surrounding the policy of

multiculturalism and traces the objections on the one hand of Quebec and

on the other of prominent left leaning scholars. For Quebec, as reported by

McRoberts, the policy of multiculturalism has always been seen as a

political ploy to disenfranchise the idea that Quebec is a nation and one of

the two founding nations of Canada. McRoberts cites Philip Resnick a

prominent Canadian and leftwing scholar as one of the critics as he writes:

“English Canada is not some tabula rasa or blank sheet to be recast every

time new cultural communities come along”.7

As McRoberts states the policy of multiculturalism did meet with support8

in the Canadians of British decent community, who saw this policy as a

way of differentiating Canada from the United Sates. Yet thirty years after

the installation of this policy McRoberts states: “If multiculturalism policy

did help some Canadians feel better integrated into Canadian society and

provided a clearer basis of Canadian identity, then it served the cause of

national unity. However it is far from clear that this has happened; in fact,

cogent arguments have been made to the effect that, multiculturalism has,

on the contrary, undermined national unity. With time this arguments seem

to have gathered force.”9 McRoberts continues,” It has been argued that the

policy of multiculturalism has impeded rather than facilitated the

integration of immigrants into Canadian society. In effect, there is an

inevitable contradiction between the first two goals of the multiculturalism

policy, namely preserving cultures and eliminating barriers to mobility.

This criticism has even come from the Canadians who ostensibly benefit

from the policy.”10

Actually the harshest critic is the Trinidadian, and Governor General

Award winner, novelist Neil Bissondath. Bissondath in *Selling Illsuions11*,

who argues at length that the celebration of cultural diversity (as defined by

the policy of multiculturalism) has sustained divisions among Canadians

and prevented its supposed beneficiaries from being fully accepted into the

mainstream of Canadian life. He states: “Multiculturalism, with all of its

festivals and its celebrations, has done- and can do- nothing to foster a

factual and clear-minded vision of our neighbors. Depending on stereotype,

ensuring that ethnic groups will preserve their distinctiveness in a gentle

way, it has done little more than lead an already divided country down the

path to further social divisiveness.”12

Emmanuel Castells 13 in his monumental work: “The Information

Age:Economy, Society and Culture:” writes that with the break down of the

18th century concept of the nation-state, due to rapid globalization, the idea

of a primary culture as the sole identity of an individual or a group has reemerged

because of a sense of marginalisation. What we must understand

by Castells findings is that in a world that is more interconnected (Internet,

television, travel) and the advent of the “Global Village” enunciated by

Marshall McCluhan in 1954, has produced the opposite effect of distancing

cultures and created a return to the concept of national identity. In

countries, such as Canada even where the object of the policy of

multiculturalism was intended to get away from the primitive concept of a

single identity, and foster the concept of interculturalism of multiple

identities, this has not happened.

A case in point in recent Canadian history was the Serbian-Canadians who

joined in many numbers the Bosnian-Serb militias fighting against the

Bosnians in Sarajevo. When the Canadian government accepted, under the

protection of the United Nations, to house the temporary stay in Canada of

Bosnians coming from the refugee camps, the same Serbian-Canadian

community through its leaders denounced and opposed the Canadian

government policy as counter productive to Canadian society. Canada who

has always opened it gates to immigration and has a deservedly world

reputation as the foremost country in the area of peace keeping and peace

making, was taken to task by some of its own citizens who felt more local

to the reactionary forces killing Bosnians than to the openness of the

Canadian soil. How, in this case, did the policy of multiculturalism foster

the recognition of the *other?*

Allan Touraine, also states that “ very often a political policy of

multiculturalism creates and imposes a judicial approach to social

interaction and destroys the democratic representative institutions”.

Similarly Gilles Bourque and Jules Duchastel in: “Multiculturalisme,

Pluralism et Communauté Politique: Le Canada et le Quebec”, conclude

that the policy of multiculturalism has lead to the atomization of the

political process. A policy that at the outset had wished to bring all

Canadians together has on the contrary, forgotten the principles on which

this nation had originally been founded. No where do we recognize the

Quebecois as a people (we are not even taking about a nation here) or the

Acadian people or even the First Nations. They believe that the policy was

inherently political and in many ways has even contributed to today’s

impasse with regards to the constitutional issue of Quebec.

As they state, “This legalization of social interaction, puts in peril the

existence of a political community as the vital cornerstone of democracy,

and at the same time erodes the capacity of parliaments to produce

democratic rules that encompass the organization of society. It is within

this context (of legalization of social interaction) that we find the possible

negative side of multiculturalism and the hyphenated citizen”.14

They go on by quoting Touraine, “ On peut, en effet, craindre l’affirmation

d’une sorte de pluritribalisme. Cette pluritribalisme est en même temps

susceptible d’imposer un rapport fondamentalment clientaliste à l’Etat

dorénavant concu comme une espace juridique d’inscription des droits que

comme un espace public. Comme aux 19ième siècle les liberaux ont

protégé le marché en s’appuyant sur le droit de proprété, maintenant avec le

multiculturalisme il s’agira d’utiliser le droit pour fixer et pour figer les

identities et les particuliarités des identités.”15

The policy of multiculturalism in Canada has now forced the judiciary and

the right of law to define culture, identities, thus making identities a

political issue and no longer a societal issue, decided and debated in the

public space.

**Transculturalism, towards a cosmopolitan citizenship**

Of course when one directs any form of criticism, which is the basis of any

public and democratic society, towards the policy of multiculturalism in

Canada, the response that it engenders is usually dogmatic (an “us” versus

“them” attitude). A case in point is this quote from Richard Moore in his

book: *Justice and Political Stability in the Multicultural State*, he states:

“Echoing some American critics of multiculturalism, Canadian writers like

Richard Gwyn (1995) and Neil Bissoondath (1994) have argued that

official multiculturalism is leading to ghettoization, where immigrants are

encouraged to form self-contained ghettos alienated from the

mainstream.”16 We can agree or disagree with the characterization of the

arguments of Gwyn and Bissondath, but this is not the question here.

Notice the reference to “American”, in order words to criticize official

multiculturalism, you must surely be close to the Americans, maybe even a

closet American.

In other words for a Canadian nationalist the worst insult for any Canadian

who dares criticize or detract from the political mainstream of Canadian

society, in this case the policy of multiculturalism, is to be called or lumped

together with the Americans. Precisely because multiculturalism has

become a political policy and not left to its social prerogatives, it has

become in the public space “ untouchable” and therefore any possibility of

voicing a different position is frowned upon.

To be fair we must recognize in the policy of multiculturalism that it has

contributed to the exercise of establishing the different cultural

communities of Canada. It has affirmed and established through

governmental public policy the concrete reality of contemporary Canada. It

has not objectively, built the necessary bridges to do away with racism and

bigotry. This is done in a very effectual fashion by Canada’s and Quebec’s

Charter of Rights and Freedoms

It has created a basis from which to build on. It has kept alive the different

cultures that inhabit Canada, from which a cosmopolitan citizenship can be

envisaged. It is precisely this that must be put in perspective.

Multiculturalism is only the first level, the first rung in the socio-cultural

ladder and not the ultimate goal of society. In the Canadian case it has

recognized as I have stated earlier, the obvious, that Canada being an

immigrant nation is multicultural.

The next step, in my humble opinion, is transculturalism. The South

American scholar Fernando Ortiz originally defined Transculturalism in

1940. His thinking which was based on the celebrated article of José Marti

published in 1891 entitled, “Nuestra America” put forward the idea that

intercultural mixed peoples (métissage) was the key in legitimizing the

American, meaning hemispheric, identity. Marti referred to the process of

métissage (métizos in Latino) as a distinctive trait of a culture that is

founded on the Native population, and all the different immigrant groups

who had come and are still coming to the Americas. In Marti’s thinking,

the inhabitants of the Americas were biologically and culturally métis and

therefore always part of the dialectic with the *other*.

Ortiz, following Marti’s lead, defined transculturalism, in its earliest stage

as a synthesis of two phases occurring simultaneously, one being a deculturalization

of the past with a métissage with the present. This reinventing

of new common culture is therefore based on the meeting and the

intermingling of the different peoples and cultures. In other words one’s

identity is not strictly one dimensional (the self) but is now defined and

more importantly recognized in rapport with the *other*. In other words

one’s identity is not singular but multiple. As Scarpetta stated earlier “Each

person is a mosaic”

Lamberto Tassinari (director of the transcultural magazine in Montreal,

called Vice Versa), suggests that we can imagine and envision

transculturalism as a new form of humanism, based on the idea of

relinquishing the strong traditional identities and cultures which in many

cases were products of imperialistic empires, interspersed with dogmatic

religious values. Contrary to multiculturalism, which most experiences

have shown re-enforces boundaries based on past cultural heritages,

transculturalism is based on the breaking down of boundaries. In many

ways transculturalism, by proposing a new humanism of the recognition of

the *other*, based on a culture of métissage, is in opposition to the singular

traditional cultures that have evolved from the nation-state.

Transculturalism, places the concept of culture at the center of a

redefinition of the nation-state or even the disappearance of the nationstate.

This process of recognizing oneself in the *other* leads inevitably to a

cosmopolitan citizenship. This citizenship, independent of political

structures and institutions, develops each individual in the understanding

that one’s culture is multiple, métis and that each human experience and

existence is due to the contact with *other*, who in reality is like, oneself.

Transculturalism is not a total objective reality, there has to be a conscious

subjective component which must express itself in the public space, in a

democratic fashion without political interference.

With the integration of Europe and the Americas, have lead many

researchers to question the validity of globalization on a human and cultural

scale. To integrate markets by breaking down protective tariff barriers have

been done with the stroke of a pen. Yet the globalization of cultures, the

integration of peoples, the métissage with the *other* and the eventual

recognition in the *other*, is totally another matter. What is lacking in this

globalization discourse is a cultural concept of the world. We have an

economic concept, a political concept, yet, the one that remains the most

important in our Global Village, the question of multiple identities without

barriers, based on the movement and flow of peoples and of society is

absent.

In conclusion therefore, a journey from multiculturalism to tranculturalism,

which would open the horizons and eventually lead to a cosmopolitan

citizenship, forces us to envision the world through a cultural prism.

Culture, therefore becomes the eyeglasses through which we analyze,

project and solution our problems. Culture therefore becomes all

encompassing, recognizing the interaction without barriers among peoples

as the basis of a world outlook. The policy of multiculturalism on the

contrary has created borders and boundaries, while social multiculturalism

or transculturalism left to a conscious ebb and flow of interculturality,

emanating from the grass roots and not imposed and defined by

government, projects this vision.

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**Endnotes**

1 Please see, Michael Harrington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, Cambridge, Harvard

University Press, 1998.

2 In this paper reference to the *other*, means the cultures, the races and the languages

that differ from the subject “I”. The world therefore is a cornucopia of *otherness*,

and it is this reality that forms the basis, contrary to the struggle for material wealth,

of the human experience and for human progress.

3 It is import here to distinguish between the policy of multiculturalism and social

multiculturalism. Un- fortunately when people refer to multiculturalism they are

referring to the political policy established by the government of Pierre Trudeau as

their sole reference to the concept of multiculturalism. Canada being a nation of

immigrants has always been a nation of multiculturalism, of social multiculturalism.

This distinction is important in order to dispel the falsehood that before 1972,

multiculturalism did not exist and nothing was done to create a “raprochement”

between the different cultures making up Canada of the 20th century.

4 Please see, Guy Scarpetta, *L’impurté*, Paris, Seuil, 1989.

5 Ibid.,p26

6 Please see Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National*

*Unity*, Oxford University Press, 1997.

7 Ibid, p.133.

8 The major defender and proponent for a government policy of multiculturalism

was the Ukrainian community out of Winnipeg, who felt that with the rise of

Quebecois nationalism of the sixties, they were being left out with meager

government support for their cultural activities. Lack of funding, basically a

budgetary problem actually fuelled the debate. The support grew among other

cultural community leaders who wanted also to be heard also fearing of being left

out. Throughout the years, there have be people such as Will Kymlicka, noted

philosopher who has developed a more ideological position, please see Will

Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*,

Clarendon Press,1995, and has become the primary and constant defender of the

government policy.

9 Kenneth McRoberts., op.cit., p.131.

10 Ibid., p.131.

11 Please see Neil Bissondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in*

*Canada*, Penguin, 1994.

12 Ibid., p.63.

13 Please see, Manuel Castells, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and*

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14 Gilles Bourque and Jules Duchastel, *Multiculturalisme, pluralisme et*

*communauté politique; le Canada et le Québec*, Presses Université Laval, 1997.

P.46.

15 Ibid., p.54

16 Please see Richard Moore, *Justice and Political Stability in the Multicultural*

*State*, Toronto, p.55,