

## Canadian International Council

---

Marketing Canadian Pluralism in the International Arena

Author(s): Will Kymlicka

Reviewed work(s):

Source: *International Journal*, Vol. 59, No. 4 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 829-852

Published by: [Canadian International Council](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40203985>

Accessed: 05/05/2012 14:25

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at  
<http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Canadian International Council is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Journal*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

WILL KYMLICKA

# Marketing Canadian pluralism in the international arena

---

ONE OF THE STATED GOALS of Canada's foreign policy is to promote a greater understanding and appreciation of "Canadian values." Many of these values are in fact widely shared across the western democracies, if not around the world—e.g., human rights, peace, development, the environment. But some of these values are more distinctively Canadian. Foremost amongst these is the value of diversity or pluralism. When Canadian politicians and diplomats act on the international stage, they often emphasize that diversity is a defining characteristic of Canadian society and of Canadian identity. To understand Canada, it is said, one must understand the Canadian model of diversity. Moreover, this model is said to offer valuable lessons for other countries. While acknowledging that tensions remain amongst some of our ethnic, national, and linguistic groups, it is often suggested that Canadians have some special experience and expertise in accommodating diversity. We have some unique understanding of the benefits that diversity can bring, and of the tools needed to manage diversity in a non-violent and cooperative way. Sharing this understanding is one of Canada's major contributions to the international community.

In this article, I will explore this discourse of a "Canadian model" of pluralism, and the way it is invoked in the international arena. I will

*Will Kymlicka holds the Canada Research Chair in political philosophy at Queen's University. He is also a recurrent visiting professor in the nationalism studies program of the Central European University in Budapest.*

begin by noting some of the ways in which the Canadian government promotes this discourse internationally and its various motives for doing so. I will then consider whether there really is anything distinctive about Canada's approach to diversity, and if so, whether it is successful and suitable for emulation elsewhere. While I support many aspects of Canada's approach to pluralism, I will argue that the government discourse on diversity obscures as much as it reveals about the Canadian experience and its international relevance.

#### PROMOTING THE CANADIAN MODEL ABROAD

In various public speeches and documents, Canadian officials assert that Canada has been successful in accommodating diversity. By itself, this claim is not unusual. The government of every country wants the world to believe that its citizens form a harmonious society where the various ethnic, national, and linguistic groups respect each other's differences and get along well. Paeans to "unity in diversity" are ubiquitous when government officials speak in international contexts. These ritual pronouncements are not only intended to promote a positive and peaceful image of the country, but also to uphold the state's legitimacy. For a state to admit that some groups are excluded, oppressed, or rebellious would put in question the state's legitimate authority to speak for those groups in international contexts.

While all countries claim to be harmonious, not all of them want this claim to be examined closely by the international community. In the Canadian case, however, these public pronouncements have been supplemented with efforts to encourage greater international knowledge of Canada's experience. The Canadian government actively funds academic research, conferences, and policy workshops that explore the international relevance of the "Canadian model," including the Metropolis network on immigration, the Forum of Federations, and the International Council of Canadian Studies. All three of these initiatives provide financial incentives and logistical support for researchers and policy-makers in other countries to examine Canada as a model of accommodating diversity. This is of course just a partial list. One could also mention various international contexts where the Canadian government presents itself as a world leader on indigenous issues, and encourages other countries to study its policies.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For example, Canada promotes its Inuit policies in the Arctic Council and its policies regarding treaties and Status Indians at the UN.

It might seem surprising that the Canadian government would spend so much time and effort encouraging people in other countries to study our policies on diversity, given that many of these policies are neither popular nor well-understood at home. For example, virtually every study of multiculturalism in Canada has concluded that the policy has been “barely explained at all to the Canadian public,” and that “no serious effort was made by any senior politician to define multiculturalism in a Canadian context,” and that this has seriously jeopardized public support for the policy.<sup>2</sup> Much the same can be said about bilingualism or indigenous rights. Public opinion surveys repeatedly show considerable public confusion about the content and justification of these policies, which the government has done little to dispel. At times, the main public defence of these policies in the domestic context is simply to denounce critics of these policies as intolerant and un-Canadian.

Why would the government spend so much time and money promoting its policies on diversity to foreign audiences, when so little time and effort is spent on the domestic Canadian audience? First, there are humanitarian reasons. Many people in the foreign policy community genuinely believe that other countries would benefit by studying the Canadian model. Moreover, the perception that Canada is an even-handed respecter of diversity at home helps sustain its reputation as a potential honest broker in mediating conflicts abroad, further enhancing our capacity for humanitarian work.

A second motive is more self-interested. The more people abroad view Canada as a “diversity-friendly” country, the more likely they are to think of Canada as an attractive place to visit, study, do business, or even settle permanently. In a globalized world where Canada is competing with many other countries for tourists, skilled immigrants, and foreign investors, the reputation for multicultural tolerance can give us a competitive advantage. Third, and paradoxically, these international initiatives also have a domestic audience. Selling the Canadian model to foreigners can, indirectly, help to sell it to Canadians. In effect, the Canadian government hopes that if international organizations and experts can be encouraged to describe Canada as a successful model of accommodating diversity, this will marginalize critics of the model.

<sup>2</sup> Freda Hawkins, *Critical Years in Immigration: Canada and Australia Compared* (Montreal/Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1989), 221.

within Canada. A good example is the government's role in creating the Forum of Federations. This organization was created (in part) in the hope and expectation that it could provide a setting for international statesmen to extol the global virtues of Canadian federalism. This hope was fulfilled in spades when then-President Bill Clinton declared Canadian federalism a model for the world in accommodating diversity during the first international conference of the forum, held in the heart of Québec at Mont Tremblant in 1998. This international praise serves to discredit Québec separatists. If the rest of the world is declaring Canadian federalism a success in accommodating diversity, Québec separatists who declare it an oppressive failure appear as radical ideologues, living in a nationalist myth disconnected from reality.

I think a similar motivation underlies the Canadian government's role in creating the Metropolis network on immigration. This too was done, at least in part, in the hope and expectation that it would provide a setting for international policy-makers and experts to extol the virtues of Canadian multiculturalism. This international praise serves to disarm right-wing critics of multiculturalism in Canada. If the rest of the world is declaring Canadian multiculturalism a model for other countries to adopt, right-wing politicians or columnists who declare the policy to be a divisive and dangerous failure appear, at best, ill-informed, and at worst, xenophobic demagogues. In these ways, government encouragement for an international discourse about the Canadian model can be seen as a way of discouraging domestic criticism of the model.<sup>3</sup>

In short, there is a mixture of motives behind the international marketing of the Canadian model of diversity: a humanitarian concern to help countries that are not dealing well with their own ethnic relations; an economic concern to attract foreign investment and skilled immigrants; and a political concern to delegitimize domestic critics of government policies. No doubt there are other motives as well.

3 The complex relationship between the humanitarian/foreign considerations and strategic/domestic elements is illustrated by the government's ambivalent approach to the codification of international norms of minority rights—e.g., its objections to the 1993 UN draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and its refusal to ratify the 1990 UN convention on the protection of the rights of all migrant workers (1990). Ratifying these international norms might serve the humanitarian goal of protecting minorities around the world but would have no domestic pay-off and so is not part of current efforts to market the Canadian model abroad.

Have any of these goals been achieved? The broad goal of enhancing Canada's international reputation as a diversity-friendly country has certainly had some success. Canada's reputation in this area has steadily grown over the past 15 years. One striking example is the new "global centre for pluralism." In a recent visit to Canada, the Aga Khan, spiritual head of the world's 15 million Ismaili Muslims, declared that "Canada is today the most successful pluralist society on the face of the globe... That is something unique to Canada. It is an amazing global human asset."<sup>4</sup> To help spread the good news about the Canadian model, he is spending \$40 million to set up a "global centre for pluralism," headquartered in Canada, to serve as an international clearing-house of best-practices about the accommodation of diversity.<sup>5</sup>

Similar ideas about Canada have also been invoked by a wide range of non-governmental, intergovernmental and academic organizations around the world. Many international organizations today are expected to have a policy about multiculturalism and minority rights, to ensure that their activities recognize and accommodate cultural diversity. This is true, for example, of the UN, UNESCO, the ILO, the Council of Europe, and the World Bank, to name just a few organizations that have developed recommendations or declarations on respect for diversity. And in formulating these recommendations, each has looked to Canada, in part because it is a "statistical outlier" in combining high levels of different types of diversity with peace, democracy, economic prosperity, and individual freedom.<sup>6</sup> International organizations are genuinely curious about how this works in Canada. The most recent example is the just-released 2004 UN human development report, entitled "Cultural liberty in today's diverse world," which champions multiculturalism as a crucial component of successful development, and which repeatedly cites Canadian examples.<sup>7</sup>

So Canada's reputation in this area is clearly growing. Whether this is due to the government's international marketing of the Canadian

<sup>4</sup> Michael Valpy, "The world of the Aga Khan," *Globe and Mail*, 2 February 2002; John Stackhouse and Patrick Martin, "The Aga Khan extols Canada's virtues," *Globe and Mail*, Focus interview, 2 February 2002.

<sup>5</sup> John Ibbitson, "Pluralism: the world wonders how we pull it off," *Globe and Mail*, 6 February 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Leslie Laczko, "Canada's pluralism in comparative perspective," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 17 (January 1994): 20-41.

<sup>7</sup> UNDP, "Cultural liberty in today's diverse world: human development report card," New York, 2004.

model is more difficult to assess. The idea of Canada as a global model was already circulating amongst experts in the field well before the Canadian government took an active interest in promoting it. In fact, I suspect that the establishment of the Metropolis network and Forum of the Federations was in part a response to this pre-existing discussion, rather than the initiator of it. Having noticed that experts were looking to Canada as a model for accommodating diversity, the government realized that Canada could benefit by creating high-profile international fora where issues of diversity are discussed.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it is precisely the fact that independent experts had already recognized Canada as a world-leader in this area that gives credibility to the government's promotion of the Canadian model.

So it is difficult to judge the extent to which the government's own marketing efforts are responsible for Canada's growing reputation in this field. It is even more difficult to judge whether this growing reputation, whatever its causes, has actually served the more specific humanitarian, economic, and political goals mentioned earlier. Has the marketing of the Canadian model abroad helped other countries deal with their ethnic problems? Has it inspired more people to visit, invest, or settle in Canada? Has it helped reduce domestic opposition to these policies?

So far as I know, there is no systematic evidence on any of these questions. (Indeed, it is difficult to know how precisely one could test these questions.) All we have are educated guesses. And my best guess is that there have been some important benefits, at least on the economic and political front.

On the economic front, there is anecdotal evidence that some immigrants and foreign students have chosen Canada over other countries because of our reputation for multicultural tolerance. (I think this is particularly true post-9/11, as many would-be foreign students and immigrants feel that the US, and perhaps also Australia, have become less welcoming of newcomers.)<sup>9</sup> This evidence comes not only from

<sup>8</sup> This must have been particularly desirable given that Canada has been falling behind in its traditional areas of foreign policy strength—e.g., peacekeeping, foreign aid, and the environment. It also fit well into Axworthy's "human security" framework.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Queen's University had a sudden upsurge in foreign students after 2001. On the other hand, it's also important to note that many immigrants feel frustrated at the difficulties in getting recognition of their professional credentials, and some in fact leave Canada as a result. Our reputation overseas does not always survive the reality of day-to-day life in Canada.

discussions with immigrants in Canada, but also from discussions with policy-makers in other countries, who believe they are losing skilled immigrants to Canada for this reason. Defenders of multiculturalism in countries like Britain or Germany often say that adopting more visible multiculturalism policies would help ensure that they are competitive in recruiting the most desired immigrants.

On the political front, there are indications that the rise in Canada's international reputation for accommodating diversity has helped defuse some domestic opposition to these policies. As we will see below, in Canada, unlike some other countries, support for multiculturalism has rebounded in recent years, and I suspect that this is in part due to the awareness that Canada's track-record in integrating immigrants is envied by much of the world. When the national newspaper runs articles entitled "Pluralism: the world wonders how we pull it off,"<sup>10</sup> it is difficult for patriotic Canadians not to start taking pride in our record, even if their patriotism under other circumstances might have led them to be skeptical about multiculturalism. Moreover, the fact that international experts endorse the Canadian approach undercuts many of the traditional critiques of these policies. For example, multiculturalism used to be dismissed as simply a ploy by the Liberal party to win the ethnic vote. Yet such domestic partisan considerations can hardly explain why foreign experts in international organizations would endorse Canadian multiculturalism. If nothing else, the awareness of international support for Canada's policies helps shift the burden of proof in public debate, putting domestic critics of these policies on the defensive.

So I suspect there have been economic and political consequences from Canada's growing reputation as a model of diversity. However, my main interest is in the humanitarian question, which is after all the main official justification for marketing the Canadian model abroad. In the rest of this article, therefore, I want to focus on the idea that Canada might provide a model for other countries in dealing with diversity.

#### UNPACKING THE CANADIAN MODEL

What exactly is "the Canadian model" of accommodating diversity, and what would it mean for other countries to adopt it? In reality, there

<sup>10</sup> *Globe and Mail*, 6 February 2004.



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 Québec;
- self-government rights and treaty relationships to accommodate indigenous peoples.

Each of these has been described as a potential model for immigrants, substate nationalist movements, and indigenous peoples in other countries.

The idea that these three strategies could serve as global models rests on three central assumptions—namely, that in each case,

- the Canadian approach to managing diversity is distinctive;
- this approach is working well in Canada; and
- other countries can learn from the Canadian experience.

I would like to raise some questions about these assumptions, and argue for a more modest view of the international relevance of the Canadian approach.

I should emphasize that my reservations are not 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 success, at least in comparison with earlier periods in Canadian history, and in comparison with most other western democracies.

However, I believe that the first premise about the distinctiveness of Canada's policies is false, or at least overstated. The policies that Canada has adopted with respect to its three main forms of ethnocultural diversity are broadly similar to those adopted by many other western democracies, following the same basic trends over the past 30 years.

What is true is that these policies are often more successful in Canada than in other countries. Policies for accommodating diversity may be similar across many western democracies, but they have worked more smoothly in Canada, with less of a backlash, higher levels of public support (or at least public acquiescence), and higher levels of 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 these policies have indeed been more successful in Canada than most other western democracies, and have therefore 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 rather in the distinctive underlying 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.

#### IMMIGRANT MULTICULTURALISM

The one component of the Canadian model that has been most strongly endorsed by international experts and organizations is our approach to immigrant integration, and the Canadian government actively promotes it as a model for other countries. I agree that immigrant multiculturalism has indeed been a striking success in Canada. However, in this section, I want to argue that the specific conditions that enabled its success in Canada also set limits on its likely exportability.

Immigrant multiculturalism is best understood as a repudiation of earlier policies of assimilation and exclusion. In the past, Canada, like other immigrant countries, had an assimilationist approach to immigration. Immigrants were encouraged and expected to assimilate to the pre-existing society, with the hope that over time they would 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 sort of cultural assimilation (e.g., Africans or Asians) were prohibited from emigrating to Canada or from becoming citizens.

Since the late 1960s, however, we have seen a dramatic reversal in this approach. There were two related changes: first, the adoption of race-neutral admissions criteria (the “points system”), so that immigrants to Canada are 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 with growing numbers of immigrants. 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, or 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>11</sup> Even some countries that are not traditional countries of immigration, like the Netherlands and Sweden, have adopted versions of immigrant multiculturalism.

To be sure, Canada was a leader in this regard. Its formal declaration of a multiculturalism policy in 1971 was the first in the world and strongly influenced subsequent official declarations by Australia and New Zealand, as well as shaping public debates and public policies in many other countries. But by the late 1980s, there was little, if anything, that was still unique or distinctive in the Canadian approach.

What is true, however, is that these policies have been more successful in Canada than in other countries. This success is attested to by the higher level of public support for immigration and for multiculturalism in Canada compared with other countries; the virtual non-existence of a far-right backlash against immigrants; the high

<sup>11</sup> There are differences in how formal this shift to multiculturalism has been. In Australia and New Zealand, as in Canada, this shift was officially marked, but even in the United States, we see similar changes on the ground. As Nathan Glazer puts it, *We are all Multiculturalists Now* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). Similarly, in Britain, while there is no nation-wide multiculturalism policy, the same basic ideas are pursued through race relations policy. See Adrian Favell, *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001).

naturalization rates of immigrants; the perception that ethnic groups "get along well" (higher in Canada than other western democracies); the emergence of Toronto as "the most multicultural city in the world" without losing its reputation as a clean and peaceful and prosperous city, and so on.<sup>12</sup> Earlier fears that multiculturalism would lead to balkanization, ghettoization, and increasing ethnic tensions have largely been disproved.<sup>13</sup>

By contrast, other countries have witnessed stronger backlashes against, and partial retreats from, their multiculturalism policies. France's recent ban on headscarves, and its earlier retreat from multicultural education, is perhaps the most prominent example. But we see similar debates in Australia, Britain, and the Netherlands. Multiculturalism has not taken root in these countries to the same extent as in Canada. In each case, there is not only widespread talk of a public backlash against multiculturalism, but also of a government "retreat from multiculturalism" and a "return to assimilation."<sup>14</sup>

12 For relevant evidence, see Andrew Parkin and Matthew Mendelsohn, "A new Canada: an identity shaped by diversity," Montreal, Centre for Research and Information on Canada, CRIC Paper#11, October 2003; "Canada's welcome mat," *Globe and Mail*, 31 May 2004, A12; Irene Bloemraad, "The North American naturalization gap," *International Migration Review* 36 (spring 2002): 194-228; Will Kymlicka, *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998). The old Reform/Alliance party is often described in the Canadian context as an "anti-immigrant" party, but its expressed policy goal of reducing the intake of immigrants in half would still leave Canada with the second largest per-capita intake of immigrants in the world. This is nothing like the anti-immigrant programs of Le Pen or the British National Party or other neo-fascist, white-supremacist parties in Europe.

13 For examples of these fears, see Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada* (Toronto: Penguin, 1994), and Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism Without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995). For overviews of these debates, see Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Daiva Stasiulus, "Ethnic pluralism under siege: popular and partisan opposition to multiculturalism," *Canadian Public Policy* 18 (December 1992): 365-386; and John Biles, "Everyone's a critic," *Canadian Issues* (February 2002): 35-38. A new fear is that the ideology of multiculturalism enables terrorist organizations to use Canada as a base for their activities. See Stewart Bell, *Cold Terror: How Canada Nurtures and Exports Terror Around the World* (Toronto: John Wiley, 2004). Yet terrorist organizations often set up shop in countries like Germany, Spain, or Italy that do not have multiculturalism policies. Indeed, they may prefer such countries, since the members of ethnic/religious communities in these countries are less integrated into the larger society and less connected to the state. Multiculturalism policies, by contrast, encourage immigrant groups to engage with the state.

14 See Rogers Brubaker, "The return of assimilation?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24 (July 2001): 531-548; also Stephen Castles, "Migration, Citizenship, and Education," in James Banks, ed., *Diversity and Citizenship Education: Global*

What explains this differential success? I would highlight two contingent factors: timing and geography.

### *Timing*

The way the story is usually told, there is assumed to be a connection between the adoption of race-neutral immigration admissions policy in the 1960s, the arrival of large numbers of non-European immigrants, and the consequent adoption of the multiculturalism policy in 1971. It is often implied, then, that the latter was adopted in response to the former, to accommodate “non-traditional” immigrants from the third world—an interpretation that raises the question of why European countries can’t also adopt such policies for their non-European immigrants.

But it’s important to remember that the multiculturalism policy in Canada was not initially intended for non-European immigrants. It was initially demanded by, and designed for, white ethnic groups—particularly 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 within Québec, 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”: to re-emphasize the equality of English and French as the “founding nations” and to reaffirm “bilingualism and biculturalism.” Understandably, white ethnic groups were nervous about all of this talk about “duality,” “two founding nations,” and “bilingualism and biculturalism,” which seemed to render ethnic groups invisible. They worried that government funds and civil service positions would be parcelled out between British and French, leaving immigrant/ethnic groups on the margins. The white

---

*Perspectives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004); Hans Entzinger, “The rise and fall of multiculturalism in the Netherlands,” in Christian Joppke and Ewa Morawska, eds., *Toward Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States* (London: Palgrave 2003), 59-86; and Les Back et. al, “New labour’s white heart: politics, multiculturalism and the return of assimilation,” *Political Quarterly* 72 (October 2002): 445-454.

ethnics insisted that the accommodation of Québec not be done at their expense, and that any strengthening of linguistic duality therefore be accompanied by recognition of ethnic diversity. The formula which gradually emerged—multiculturalism within a bilingual framework—was essentially a bargain to ensure white ethnic support for the more urgent task of accommodating Québec. (And indeed it has proven to be a very stable bargain.)<sup>15</sup>

The key point here is that throughout this whole period from 1963-1971 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 multiculturalism was first adopted. For many people, a major risk of multiculturalism is that immigrant groups will invoke the ideology of multiculturalism to demand legal protection of illiberal practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM), forced arranged marriages, or honour killings. This idea never arose in the initial debates in Canada. After all, the white ethnic groups who were demanding multiculturalism had been present in Canada for several generations, and were typically very well-integrated. When they first arrived in Canada, some native-born Canadians expressed skepticism about their capacity to integrate into society and their capacity to adjust to liberal-democratic values.<sup>16</sup> 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 sharing a common “western” and “Judeo-Christian” civilization.

15 For the role of white ethnic groups in the process, see Linda Blanshay, “The nationalization of ethnicity: a study of the proliferation of national mono-ethnocultural umbrella organizations in Canada,” PhD thesis, Department of Sociology, University of Glasgow, 2001; and John Jaworsky, “A case study of the Canadian federal government’s multiculturalism policy,” MA thesis, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, 1979.

16 Howard Palmer, “Reluctant hosts: Anglo-Canadian views of multiculturalism in the twentieth century,” in Douglas Francis and Donald Smith, eds., *Readings in Canadian History: Post-Confederation* (Toronto: Harcourt, Brace, 1994), 143-161.

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 *the* central challenge of multiculturalism. For example, in a recent document explaining the idea of multiculturalism, the Dutch government has 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 and to what extent Dutch integration policy ... is consistent with [basic liberal values].”<sup>17</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 with a predictable backlash and a 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 non-European groups who were perceived as having strong religious or cultural commitments to illiberal practices—say, by Somalis or Pakistanis, rather than Ukrainians and Italians—and if their demand for multiculturalism was perceived as a demand that such illiberal practices be tolerated and accommodated, then I’m quite sure that multiculturalism would not have been adopted, or taken root.

Gradually, over time, non-European immigrants to Canada have become more visible actors in the multiculturalism debate. Indeed, by the 1980s, they had become the main players, displacing the original white ethnic groups. (Some white ethnics feel that the policy has been

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Odile Verhaar, “Principles and pragmatism in Dutch ‘multicultural policy,’” paper presented at a conference on ethics and public policy, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, Utrecht, 15-16 May 2003.

“hijacked” by visible minority immigrants, and that they have become marginalized from a policy that they fought for.) 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 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.

So far as I can tell, this issue was first made prominent in Canada in a 1990 book by Reginald Bibby and then picked up in books by Neil Bissoondath and Richard Gwyn, not to mention innumerable columns and editorials—all in the first half of the 1990s.<sup>18</sup> So, in this period at least, there was a major public debate, and hence public fear, 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 required tolerating whatever practices immigrant groups bring with them to Canada. Had they succeeded, I think we would have seen not just a public backlash against the policy, but also a government retreat from it.

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 per cent support.<sup>19</sup> There is an interesting untold story here: 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 institutionally embedded, not just in a particular federal government department, but in virtually every public institution: multiculturalism had been written into the mandate of the

<sup>18</sup> See Reginald Bibby, *Mosaic Madness: The Poverty and Potential of Life in Canada* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1990); also Bissoondath, *ibid.*, and Gwyn, *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> See Parkin and Mendelsohn, *ibid.*



CBC, public schools, social services, museums, and so on, not to mention its inclusion in the constitution in 1982.<sup>20</sup> More generally, 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 simply inconceivable.

Second, by the time the question arose about whether non-European immigrants would use multiculturalism to demand accommodation of illiberal customs, it was already answered in practice. After all, by 1990, when the question first arose in public debate, non-European groups had already, slowly and imperceptibly, taken their place within the larger framework of Canadian multiculturalism. Since the 1970s, visible minority ethnic organizations had begun to take a seat at the table, and so we already had a good idea about 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;<sup>21</sup> Pakistanis had not demanded exemption from laws against coerced marriages; and so on. If there was a danger that non-European immigrant groups would contest the basic

20 For examples of this institutional embedding of multiculturalism in a range of public institutions in Canada, see, on the media, Dorothy Zolf, "Comparisons of multicultural broadcasting in Canada and four other countries," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 21, no. 2 (1989): 13-26; on the arts, Peter Li, "A world apart: the multicultural world of visible minorities and the art world of Canada," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 31, (November 1994): 365-391; on schools, Sarah Wayland, "Religious expression in public schools: kirpans in Canada; hijab in France," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, (July 1997): 545-561; on municipal government, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, "Dealing with diversity: multicultural access to local government," race relations series #2, municipal race relations program, Toronto, 1988; on health care, McInnis Consulting, "Multicultural change in health services delivery project: final report," Ministry Responsible for Multiculturalism and Immigration, Government of British Columbia, Vancouver, 1997; and, on urban planning, Mohammad Qadeer, "Pluralistic planning for multicultural cities: the Canadian experience," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 63, (September 1997): 481-494.

21 The fact that ethnic organizations disavow these illiberal practices does not mean that individual members of the group do not attempt in private to maintain them, or to avoid punishment for them. But there is nothing in Canada like the debates in the UK regarding forced arranged marriages, in France about FGM, or even in the US about the cultural defence. For speculations about why immigrant groups to Canada may be less likely to maintain illiberal practices than immigrants in other western countries, see Will Kymlicka, "Multiculturalism in Canada: ethical dimensions," paper presented at a conference on ethics and public policy, Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research, Utrecht, 15-16 May 2003.

principles of liberal-democracy in the name of multiculturalism, it would have occurred already by 1990, but it hadn't. These groups had already proven their willingness to work within the framework of a liberal (human rights-based) multiculturalism.<sup>22</sup>

A third reason concerns the role of Islam. So far, I have been discussing "non-European immigrants" as a single category, all of whom are perceived as potential bearers of values and traditions at odds with the values of western liberal-democracy. But some non-European groups are seen by white Canadians as more of a threat to these values than others. In particular, throughout the west today, it is Muslims who 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 it probably dates back to the Islamic revolution in Iran.

As a result, the fear that multiculturalism is a vehicle for perpetuating illiberal practices is linked to the size or proportion of Muslim immigrants. In most of western Europe, the largest group of non-European immigrants are Muslims—up to 80 or 90 percent in countries like France, Spain, Italy, Germany, and the Netherlands. 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.<sup>23</sup> Racism and Islamophobia combine to generate a perception of recent non-white immigrants as illiberal, and hence a perception of multiculturalism as a threat to western 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 for multiculturalism. A recent article in the *Spectator* was titled "How Islam has killed

22 On the broad consensus across racial/religious lines on a human rights-based liberal multiculturalism in Canada, see Rhoda Howard-Hassman, *Compassionate Canadians: Civic Leaders Discuss Human Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

23 The popular view in the west that FGM is a Muslim practice is doubly incorrect: FGM is practiced by Christians, Jews, and animists as well as Muslims in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, and is strongly disavowed by many Muslim leaders, yet this popular perception is very strong.

multiculturalism.” The title and article are decidedly biased,<sup>24</sup> but 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 (less than two percent), and form only a small fraction of recent non-white immigration. Ninety 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>25</sup> But the idea that these groups have a religious or cultural commitment to offensive and illiberal practices is not particularly salient.

In all of these respects, I believe that Canada has simply been lucky in its timing. The ideal sequence for adopting multiculturalism would be: a) to first adopt the policy for groups that are seen as “safe,” because they are part of the Judeo-Christian/western civilization; b) to 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 c) finally, to have the potential hard cases emerge gradually and imperceptibly, not all at once, so that the ability and willingness of such groups to work within a liberal multicultural framework can become established in practice before it becomes a matter of heated public debate. So far as I can tell, the fact that Canada followed this sequence was entirely fortuitous, not a matter of inspired political leadership or farsighted policy-making. Unfortunately, as I discuss below, few other countries are in similar fortuitous circumstances, and their prospects for successfully and smoothly adopting multiculturalism are correspondingly less.

### *Geography*

Let me turn now to the second major source of good fortune: namely, geography. A defining feature of the Canadian context is that we face

24 Rod Liddle, “How Islam has killed multiculturalism,” *Spectator*, 1 May 2004. Note that Liddle says it is Islam, not Islamophobia, that has killed multiculturalism.

25 Francis Henry, *The Caribbean Diaspora in Toronto: Learning to Live with Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

no threat of a large-scale influx of unwanted migrants from neighbouring poor countries—whether it be illegal immigrants or asylum seekers. The reason for this, obviously, is Canada's geographical position. 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 either by land or sea. This is true, for example of the United States with respect to Mexico (land) and Haiti (sea); or of Spain with respect to north Africa; or Italy with respect to Albania. And given free movement within the European Union, virtually all EU countries face the prospect of sizeable numbers of unwelcome migrants from the Balkans or 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, the 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, and that country is richer, not poorer, than Canada. Very few people who manage to enter the United States have any desire to move to Canada. On the contrary, the tendency is the reverse: many people who enter Canada do so with the ultimate goal of moving to the US. 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, in effect, 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, for all intents and purposes, virtually all migrants to Canada are people that the government has chosen and/or authorized to come.

It's impossible to exaggerate the importance of this fact for the success of "the Canadian model" of immigrant multiculturalism. It has several profound implications. First, it reduces fear about being "swamped" by unwanted migrants; it therefore lowers the temperature of debates, and makes 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 the country illegally or under false pretences (i.e., 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). Most citizens have a strong moral objection to rewarding such illegal or dishonest 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.

I think that much of what is called “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 so will not support multiculturalism policies that would benefit significant numbers of 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 appearance off the Canadian shore of four boats containing just under 600 Chinese migrants in the summer of 1999. There was overwhelming support in the Canadian public for forcibly repatriating them to China, without allowing them to land and make asylum claims (which most Canadians assumed would be bogus).<sup>26</sup> 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 or Spain or Florida, I have no doubt that there would quickly be a powerful anti-immigrant and anti-multiculturalism backlash.<sup>27</sup>

The fact that Canada faces no threat of a large-scale influx of unwanted migrants from a neighbouring poor country has other important consequences. It 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

26 And, in all likelihood, most such claims were unfounded. Most of these migrants were classic economic migrants, not people fleeing persecution for their political or religious beliefs. As of July 2000, of the 501 refugee claims that had been decided, only 16 had been accepted. See Sean Hier and Joshua Greenberg, “Constructing a discursive crisis: risk, problematization and illegal Chinese in Canada,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25, no. 3 (2002): 506.

27 The same hysteria accompanied the arrival of 174 Sikhs on the shore of Nova Scotia in 1987. In response to this “crisis,” the federal government recalled parliament in an “emergency session.” See Janet Hiebert, “Determining the limits of charter rights: how much discretion do governments retain,” PhD thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto, 1991, 282-299.

single ethnic group forms more than 15 percent of the total immigrant intake. In the United States, by contrast, because of its land-border with a poor country, 50 percent of immigrants come from Mexico. Similarly, north Africans dominate the immigrant intake in Spain or France.

This has many consequences for the integration process. 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. Arabs in Spain or Mexicans in the United States do not need allies amongst other immigrant groups. One could imagine claims for Arabic or Spanish to be declared a second official language, at least in regions where they are concentrated, and these immigrants could seek support from their neighbouring home country for such claims—in effect, establishing a kind of transnational extension of their original homeland into their new neighbouring country of residence. This scenario may sound fanciful, but native-born citizens may nonetheless see it as a risk, one that has to be firmly prevented by restricting immigration and opposing multiculturalism.<sup>28</sup>

This fear is often compounded in situations where the immigrant group has historic claims against the receiving country, deriving from relations between the neighbouring countries. For example, in the Mexican-US case, the American southwest originally belonged to Mexico, and various minority rights were promised to Mexicans even after it was forcibly annexed by the US. Some Mexicans may believe, in light of this history, that they have a right to (re)-establish Spanish-language institutions in this region, and that the American government has no right to expect their integration into “Anglo” America.

In the case of Algerians in France, their country was forcibly colonized by France, and their language and culture were suppressed by French colonial officials. Algerian immigrants to France may feel, in light of this history, that they have the right to move to France without

28 For an example of this sort of fear, invoking the facts about the contiguity and numerical dominance of Hispanic immigrants in the US, see Samuel Huntington, “The Hispanic Challenge,” *Foreign Policy* (March 2004): 30–45.

having to undergo yet another process of cultural adaptation. Having already had the French language and culture imposed on them in the past, Algerians may feel that the French government has no right to impose it again. This is a common perception amongst ex-colonial migrants to their imperial metropole.<sup>29</sup>

In Canada, by contrast, no immigrant group has either the capacity or a territorial/historical basis to contest the basic assumption that immigrants should integrate into the institutions of the existing society. Here again, a basic risk that accompanies immigrant multiculturalism in many countries simply does not exist in Canada.

The fact that immigrants to Canada do not show up uninvited from neighbouring poor countries has a further important consequence; it 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 serious danger that a racially defined underclass will emerge, and that the category of "immigrant" will come to be seen, in many people's minds, as "poor" and/or "criminal." This in turn can lead to a situation where debates about the welfare state become racialized—where 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. If we want 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 (especially not contiguous countries with whom one has had a tense historic relationship); and that they come from multiple sources, not a single dominant source. In all of these respects, Canada's geography serves us well. This is a matter of complete luck, not a matter of political virtue or maturity. Had our geographical circumstances been different—for example, if Mexico or China were 20 miles off the Canadian coast—it is much less likely that Canada would have adopted multiculturalism, or that it would have taken root.

29 According to Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, some Jamaican immigrants to Britain view themselves as "more British than the British," and resent the implication that they need to be resocialized into British culture, given that they were born and raised in societies whose legal, political, and educational institutions were designed by their British imperial masters. *After Multiculturalism* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2002).

These two factors together—timing and geography—go a long way to explaining the success of the Canadian model of immigrant multiculturalism. And if we take these factors seriously, they suggest serious limits to the likely exportability of the Canadian model. To oversimplify, we can lump countries into three general categories.

First, there are countries that share the same general conditions regarding timing and geography as Canada. I can think of only two countries that come close—New Zealand and Australia—and these are precisely the two countries that studied and adapted the Canadian model back 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>30</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 the potential for adopting the Canadian model diminished.

Third, there are those 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. Yet these are precisely the countries which are now being encouraged by the Canadian government to follow the multiculturalism model.

Put another way, by the time the Canadian government started to think seriously about promoting Canadian multiculturalism internationally

30 I emphasize that I am focusing here on demands for *immigrant* multiculturalism. There were of course 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.



through the Metropolis network in the mid-1990s, the golden age for exporting the Canadian model was already over. Those countries that shared some or all of the conditions underlying Canada's successful adoption of multiculturalism had already studied the Canadian model in the 1970s and 1980s, and had adopted or adapted some of its features. It's not clear that there are new markets of willing buyers of Canadian-style multiculturalism waiting to be tapped.

#### CONCLUSION

If the analysis I've given is correct, we should be more 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. Indeed we have little reason for assuming that the model would work in their very different and more difficult circumstances. The Canadian experience provides no lessons about how to manage the sort of diversity that arises from large-scale illegal migration or from many of the other ethnic problems that beset countries around the world. Whether immigrant multiculturalism would be useful in these contexts simply cannot be predicted on the basis of the Canadian experience.

I hasten to add that 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 multi-ethnic states, and that the international community has a responsibility to help achieve justice for minorities. I hope that Canada will be a world leader in strengthening the international protection of minorities.

But it is naïve (and narcissistic) to suppose that the only or best way to protect minorities is by marketing 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 market the Canadian model abroad, we need to think more critically about what we can do to promote the underlying conditions that sustain the Canadian model. Promoting the Canadian model abroad without attending to these conditions may help us attract a few new immigrants, but it's unlikely to do much good for the supposed beneficiaries of our "amazing global human asset."