
Citizenship and the Recognition of Cultural Diversity: The Canadian Experience

Response to Jenson and Papillon Backgrounder

Will Kymlicka

The background paper discusses two broad topics: multiculturalism and national minorities. I have a few comments on each section.

Immigrant Multiculturalism: The paper asks whether, or under what circumstances, multiculturalism might threaten "social cohesion". To answer this, we need to unpack the notion of social cohesion (as the CPRN has done elsewhere). Social cohesion has become a catch-all term for a wide range of often unconnected phenomena.

In its maximal form, social cohesion means something like a `harmonious' society, in which people cherish each other's identities and differences, and in which there are no conflicts or misunderstandings or fears related to ethnic diversity. The multiculturalism policy in Canada has certainly not produced such a society, but in my view, this sort of `harmony' is not only unrealistic, but inappropriate as a goal of public policy. There always will be tensions and disagreements over how best to accommodate diversity. To hope that these disagreements will disappear is as inappropriate as hoping that disagreements over the economy will disappear. Indeed, part of what it means to accept multiculturalism is to accept that people hold different conceptions of the good life which are, to some extent, in competition with each other. So accepting multiculturalism entails rejecting the fantasy of `harmony', which can only be achieved by suppressing our real diversity.

Of course, it is important that people agree on the procedures by which these disagreements are peacefully and democratically resolved. And so one way to define social cohesion is precisely in terms of civil peace (the absence of violence) and political legitimacy (acceptance of the democratic process, and of the legitimate authority of the legislature, courts, police). Multiculturalism is surely no threat to social cohesion in this relatively thin sense. Immigrant groups express overwhelming support for the maintenance of the existing political system, and for peaceful social and political relations. (Indeed, many have come here precisely because we are a

peaceful democracy). They do not question the right of the legislature to pass laws, or of the police to uphold the law, or of the courts to interpret the law. Only the most paranoid critic could think that the multiculturalism policy will threaten this consensus. If anything, the policy has helped cement immigrant's commitment to civil peace and political legitimacy, although I think this commitment would have existed even in the absence of multiculturalism. (Questions of political legitimacy do arise in the case of the Quebecois or Aboriginal peoples - I return to this below).

So if social cohesion is defined minimally as a consensus on peaceful democratic procedures, then multiculturalism has not threatened it; and if it is defined maximally as 'harmony', then it is a fantasy that is not worth pursuing. In-between these two, we can identify several intermediate notions of social cohesion. One such intermediate notion is that of tolerance or civility in inter-ethnic relations. People who are committed to peace and democracy may nonetheless have strong feelings of antipathy, prejudice and fear that make it difficult for them to work with, or talk to, members of other groups (ie., a country can have peaceful democratic politics but tense social relations). It is important that citizens learn to show respect and civility when interacting with people of other races and religions. This is not the fantasy of 'appreciating' the other, or even necessarily of understanding them, but a more modest idea of accepting that we need to be able to sit together on public transit, to work together in the workplace, to live together in mixed neighbourhoods, and to talk together in public forums. It is an important task of any multiculturalism policy to promote this sort of civility, although it is not always easy to know how best to do so (or even how to measure success in doing so). However, it appears that civility in this sense has increased in Canada since the adoption of the policy in 1971, as measured by studies of prejudice and indicators of social distance.

Another intermediate notion is 'solidarity'. Even if we are more tolerant of each other at an individual level, are we less committed to each other at a social level? Are Canadians less willing to make sacrifices for their co-citizens, and if so is this due to multiculturalism? A strong sense of solidarity requires that citizens see the beneficiaries of social programs as members of a shared community of fate - as "one of us" in some important sense. Ethnic diversity can sometimes jeopardize this sense of solidarity. In the United States, for example, it is often argued that racial divisions are partly responsible for the cutback in welfare programs, as whites are unwilling to support programs that they see as primarily or disproportionately helping blacks. It appears that Canadians too are questioning their support for welfare programs, and some commentators think this is due in part to the fact that multiculturalism emphasizes our differences, rather than our commonalities, and so makes us less likely to see our co-citizens as "one of us".

However, it's not clear to me that Canadians are less willing to make sacrifices for their co-citizens than they used to be. By some criteria (eg., inequality in post-tax income), Canada does as well now as we have done in the past in mitigating inequalities, and in protecting the vulnerable. We could do much better - as many other countries do better than us - but I don't think that Canadians have abandoned the principle of solidarity. In any event, insofar as there has been a reduction in solidarity, I doubt that multiculturalism is to blame. It is more likely due to a wave of neo-liberal reforms that have affected every Western democracy, regardless of whether they have adopted multiculturalism or not (eg., France). Every Western democracy has gone through a period of retrenchment and reform of the welfare state that is quite independent of multiculturalism. We are fortunate, I think, that few if any of Canada's social policies are seen as race-coded. When people think about social policies like health, education, family allowance or disability pensions, they don't typically assume that it is whites who pay the taxes and blacks or Asians who get the benefits. If

that were the case, then multiculturalism policies would have to address those perceptions head on (either by arguing that the perception is inaccurate, or by defending the need for social policies that disproportionately benefit minorities as members of our 'community of fate'). But to date, I don't think this has been a problem in Canada the way it has in the US.

A third intermediate notion of social cohesion is a sense of effective political agency and trust in government. Even if citizens accept the legitimacy of our political system, they nonetheless often feel frustrated at their inability to influence that system. Feelings of political efficacy and trust in government have been declining in Canada, resulting in a sense of political 'alienation'. But here again, this trend can be found in most (all?) Western democracies, whether or not they have adopted multiculturalism. So I can't see any plausible connection between adopting multiculturalism and reduced political efficacy. Political efficacy is a problem in Western democracies, but its roots are structural, and multiculturalism is neither the cause nor the cure.

In short, we need to disaggregate the idea of social cohesion into the different sorts of issues that are of concern to us: civil peace, democratic stability, personal tolerance, social solidarity, political efficacy, and so on. Vague talk about 'cohesion' versus 'fragmentation' is unhelpful, I think, and encourages alarmist speculations that are often unsupported and untestable. We need to be more specific in our analysis. And my guess is that if we disaggregated social cohesion in this way, we would find that the links with multiculturalism vary. To oversimplify, we could say that multiculturalism in Canada (i) should not be used to pursue the goal of 'harmony'; (ii) probably promotes peace and legitimacy, although these values are safely entrenched in Canada regardless of multiculturalism; (iii) should play (and has played) a role in promoting civility and tolerance; (iv) has had little impact on solidarity and political efficacy, which are changing as a result of structural forces that are independent of multiculturalism. So the links are varied, but in none of these cases do I see any evidence that multiculturalism in Canada is causing any reduction in social cohesion. Nor, on the other hand, is it likely to be the cure in many cases. We should be sceptical about claims that multiculturalism threatens social cohesion, but also modest in our expectations about the extent to which it promotes cohesion. I suspect that the impact of multiculturalism on these dimensions of social cohesion ranges from neutral to mildly positive.

I would also guess that the evidence from other countries with comparable multicultural policies would be similar. By 'comparable' policies, I mean countries (a) where multiculturalism is primarily a matter of immigrant diversity rather than national minorities or indigenous peoples (unlike 'multiculturalism' in Eastern Europe); (b) where multiculturalism is seen as a supplement to, rather than a substitute for, citizenship (unlike 'multiculturalism' for Turks in Germany). In this sense, multiculturalism in Australia, New Zealand and Britain would be the most comparable, since in each case multiculturalism is part of a process of integrating immigrant citizens. My guess is that multiculturalism has not jeopardized civil peace, democratic legitimacy, personal tolerance, social solidarity or political efficacy in any of these countries. But we can only test this assumption, at home or abroad, if we first break down the notion of social cohesion into more usable terms.

National Minorities: The paper asks about the different forms of institutional recognition for national minorities in other countries. If we restrict our attention to the Western democracies, I believe that we can see a clear trend on this issue. The accommodation of minority nationalism has increasingly - almost universally - involved federal or quasi-federal forms of *territorial autonomy* (hereafter TA). And these forms of TA almost always involve some element of 'asymmetry'.

In some countries, this shift to TA has been achieved by adopting a federal system, since federalism allows the creation of regional political units, controlled by the national minority, with substantial (and constitutionally protected) powers of self-government. Countries that have adopted federalism to accommodate minority nationalisms include Switzerland (to accommodate the French and Italians), Canada (to accommodate the Québécois), Belgium (the Flemish), and Spain (the Catalans and Basques). It is important to distinguish these 'multination' federations from those federal systems that were not designed as a response to ethnocultural pluralism - eg., the United States, Australia, Germany or Brazil. In these uni-national federal systems, the federal units do not correspond in any way with distinct ethnonational groups who desire to retain their self-government and cultural distinctiveness. In the U.S., for example, a deliberate decision was made not to use federalism to accommodate the self-government rights of national minorities. Instead, it was decided that no territory would be accepted as a state unless national minorities were outnumbered within that state. As a result, none of the 50 states can be seen as ensuring self-government for a national minority, the way that Quebec ensures self-government for the Québécois.

We can call the American federal system a form of "administrative-territorial" federalism, rather than a multination federalism. American federalism is a way of dividing powers on a territorial basis within a single national community, whose members are dominant within each of the subunits. It is not a way of accommodating minority self-government. The same is true in Brazil, Australia or Germany. In multination federations, by contrast, the boundaries of one or more subunits are designed with the purpose of enabling a national minority to exercise self-government. This is the sort of federalism we see in Canada, Belgium, Spain, and Switzerland (and also in India, Nigeria, Malaysia, Ethiopia and Russia).

Most of these federal systems are in fact combinations of 'administrative/territorial' and 'multination' forms. That is, typically only a few of the federal units are vehicles for self-governing national minorities (and hence embodiments of multination federalism), while the rest are simply regional divisions within the majority national group (and hence embodiments of administrative/territorial federalism). This is the case in Canada, where the province of Quebec secures self-government for the Québécois, but the nine remaining provinces reflect regional divisions within English-speaking Canada. A similar situation exists in Spain, where the Autonomous Communities of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia secure self-government for national minorities, while most of the other 14 Autonomous Communities reflect regional divisions within the majority Spanish (Castilian) national group. And in the new Russian federation, 32 of the subunits are nominally intended to enable minority self-government (eg., Tatarstan, North Ossetia), whereas the other 56 subunits reflect regional divisions within the majority Russian national group. In these federations, then, some units embody the desire of national minorities to remain as culturally distinct and politically self-governing societies ('nationality-based units'), while others reflect the decision of a single national community to diffuse powers on a regional basis ('regional-based units').

Nationality-based units typically seek different and more extensive powers than regional-based units. As a result, all of these federations exhibit some form of *asymmetrical* federalism. It is often said that asymmetry is rare in federal systems, but that is only true of administrative/territorial federal regimes. In multination federations, asymmetry is the norm.

The tendency towards asymmetry is even stronger when we add in the cases of quasi-federal territorial autonomy. In some countries, or for some national groups, there may be geographic or demographic reasons why federalism in the technical sense will not work. In these cases, we see the emergence of various quasi-federal forms of TA. For example, Britain has recently adopted a quasi-federal system of devolution to Scotland and Wales, which now have their own legislative assemblies. And while Puerto Rico is not part of the American federal system (ie., it is not one of the 50 states), it has a special self-governing status within the United States as a "Commonwealth". Similarly, while Italy and Finland are not federations, they have adopted special forms of TA for the Austrians in South Tyrol; and for the Swedes in the Aland Islands. In all of these cases, TA enables national minorities to establish and govern their own public institutions operating in their language, including schools, universities, courts and regional parliaments.

Similarly, indigenous peoples in most Western democracies have demanded and increasingly acquired substantial quasi-federal forms of self-government over their lands. Indian tribes in the United States and Canada are recognized as having rights of self-government, and are acquiring (or re-acquiring) control over education, health care, policing, child welfare, natural resources, and so on. Similarly, the Scandinavian countries have created a Sami Parliament; the Maori in New Zealand have increased autonomy. Even indigenous people in Latin America, who long faced the threat of coercive assimilation or even extinction, are now acquiring forms of TA in some cases (eg., in Colombia).

Note that all of these quasi-federal forms of TA involve asymmetry. It is conceptually possible (though difficult and rare) to have a symmetric multinational federation, but is impossible to have a symmetrical form of quasi-federal TA. These are by definition forms of 'special status'. So if we add the cases of asymmetric federalism to the cases of asymmetric quasi-federal TA, we can see that there is an overwhelming trend towards accommodating national minorities through some or other form of asymmetric self-government.

This trend is very widespread in the West. Amongst the Western democracies with national minorities, only France and Greece have rejected any notion of TA for their historic minorities (as they reject multiculturalism for their immigrants). To be sure, the trend towards asymmetrical TA remains controversial in many countries, including Canada. I would argue, however, that this trend has been beneficial, and indeed quite successful, as measured by any of the criteria which should matter to liberals, such as:

- civil peace and democracy: conflict over minority nationalism is now a matter of "ballots not bullets", with no threat of terrorism by the minority or the state, and no threat of military coups or authoritarian regimes taking power in the name of national security;
- individual rights: the accommodation of minority nationalism has been achieved within the framework of liberal constitutions, with firm respect for individual civil and political rights.
- economic prosperity: this accommodation has also been achieved without jeopardizing the economic well-being of citizens.
- inter-group equality: multinational federalism (or quasi-federal TA) has promoted equality between majority and minority groups. By equality here I mean non-domination, such that one group is not systematically vulnerable to domination by another group. Multinational federalism has helped create greater economic equality between majority and minority; greater equality of political influence, so that minorities are not continually outvoted on all

issues; and greater equality in the social and cultural fields, as reflected for example in reduced levels of prejudice and discrimination and greater mutual respect between groups.

On all these criteria, multination federalism and quasi-federal TA must be judged a success. This helps explain why they have become so common in the West. Unfortunately, many citizens still think of asymmetry, not as the norm in multination states, but as an abnormal deviation.

(May 2000)