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The "Canadian Diversity Model": A Repertoire in Search of a Framework

By

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Introduction

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Is there one Canadian people or are there many Canadian peoples? Who are we? Whence do we come? Whither shall we go? Are we a rope of many strands, or are we solidified into a nation by a pure and durable cement? Survey Canada and what do you discern between sea and sea? Where the Atlantic rolls upon Canadian shores there is as great variation in the Canadians as there is between the tides which, in the Bay of Fundy, sometimes rise and fall ten feet an hour, and on the other side of the peninsula do not exceed ten feet a day.

Arthur Hawkes, *The Birthright. A Search for the Canadian and the Larger Loyalty*
(Toronto: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1919, p. 47)

Canada is a miniature world. It has problems of geography, climate, resources, language and religion. Yet out of a diversity of racial groups scattered over half a continent, the builders of Canada have moulded a nation with a spirit strong and distinctly its own. But Canadianism is a blend – the very diversity has softened, and at the same time broadened it, but not detracted from its inherent worth.

W. J. Lindal, *Canadian Citizenship and Our Wider Loyalties*
(Winnipeg: The Press Club, 1947, pp. 78-79)

[Canada] contains the globe within its borders, and Canadians have learned that their two international languages and their diversity are a comparative advantage and a source of continuing creativity and innovation.

Prime Minister Jean Chrétien
(Berlin, June 2000)

Canadians have worried about national identity and maintaining unity in a context of cultural diversity for all of the country's history. At the core of these concerns has been the conviction that Canadianism could never be built by seeking simply to eliminate difference. The myth of a single and undifferentiated national identity has never been a viable option. It was rejected when Lord Durham proposed it in the first half of the 19th century, again when the Fathers of Confederation chose federal institutions as a means of recognizing and protecting cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, and throughout the 20th century.

To say that standardization was rejected does not mean that living with diversity has been easy. Nor has it been universally valued. In Canada, as everywhere else, xenophobia and other forms of exclusiveness have been, and are at present, shaping actions in civil society and the state.

Such expressions of intolerance are not the subject of this paper, destructive as they are and persistent as they seem. Rather, our description focuses on the tensions that arise because of the coexistence of fully legitimate, real concerns about how to *balance competing values*. In Canada, respect for cultural diversity has come to exist and to rest on three key pillars: linguistic duality, recognition of Aboriginal peoples' rights, and multiculturalism. We must still, however, debate and decide *how* to respect such cultural diversity while maintaining the cohesion necessary to sustain Canada into the 21st century.

While the country is founded on principles derived from its European heritage, it also recognizes the legitimacy of Aboriginal peoples' cultural differences and the resulting diversity in social practices, lifestyles, conceptions of justice, and governance. We must still choose how to translate such recognition into practice, however. Canada is also a country of successful immigrants for whom inclusion into both a pluralistic society and market institutions have generally been accompanied by significant economic and social success. Ensuring social justice for the most recent waves of new Canadians may require more than opening doors, however.

These vying concerns demand – and have evoked – a way of responding that can be termed an active *search for balance*, that is, for compromise.[1] New conditions are always a challenge to previous compromises across legitimate value differences. Because the values are legitimate, albeit competing, the institutions in which the search is conducted are very important. The need to take into account a range of values makes *democracy*, and therefore well-functioning and inclusive democratic institutions, absolutely key to the success of the Canadian way.

While much is done in civil society through cultural practices, religious institutions and labour markets, the state in Canada has also played a key role by establishing some boundary conditions and by promoting certain practices allowing for greater inclusion in a highly diverse society. The state, then, is a major player within the repertoire of what we might call the "Canadian diversity model," itself a key foundation of the Canadian citizenship regime.[2]

The objective of this paper is to provide an analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of this diversity model. As such, we do not propose a new theory of diversity and unity. Rather, by building on the work of many other scholars, we propose an *approach* to understanding existing practices. We call this the *repertoire* of the diversity model. This repertoire has emerged in response to Canada's long-standing sociological diversity, and comprises both content and process, that is, several dimensions of difference and the practices for locating collective choices about diversity.

Caveat: This paper does not seek to provide a *critical history* of this model and repertoire. In the past as in the present, neither the existence of such a model nor a commitment to it could or did guarantee that inequities, inequalities, discrimination and intolerance were banished from Canadian society. Blind spots need to be identified, perverse and unintended results addressed, and improvements incorporated. The model can – and should – be critically assessed and its consequences, failures and successful outcomes tracked by scholars and policy communities alike. Indeed, this work is ongoing in several places.

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[1]   On the forms of balance in values and attitudes to diversity, see Margaret Adsett, and Michael Willmott, "Attitudes towards Diversity in Canada in the Context of Social Cohesion," unpublished paper, Canadian Heritage, 8 June 1999. For a recent discussion of the history of the policy, see Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[2]   On diversity as one of the challenges confronted within the Canadian citizenship regime, see Jane Jenson, and Martin Papillon, "The Changing Boundaries of Citizenship: A Review and Research Agenda," in Canadian Centre for Management Development, *Modernizing Governance: A Preliminary Exploration* (Ottawa: CCMD, 2000), which is also available at http://www.ccmd-ccg.gc.ca/research/longterm_e.html

Our goal is more limited than to write such a critical history. It is simply to describe the intersecting dimensions that we consider constitute the model, as well as the place of democratic practices within it. Then we provide a "reading" of one policy, that of the federal government's Multiculturalism policies that have been in place since the early 1970s, to assess how and if they continue to meet the needs of the Canadian diversity model.