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Society Course –
Why do Québeckers
reject Canadian Multiculturalism?

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<u>Introduction</u>

      Canadians define their national consciousness and identity by embracing multiculturalism and bilingualism. This nation's perception of its identity has been built over years of large immigration influx, and is backed by statistics suggesting a nation as diverse in languages, cultures, and religions as there can be. The current 35 million Canadians comprises 200 linguistic groups, and from this total population, 57% have English as a mother tongue, and 23% consider French as their native tongue, these two being the largest ethno-cultural groups in Canada. The largest minority in Canada, with approximately 8 million people, and known as the Québeckers, populate the French-speaking province of Québec and represents a little less than a quarter of the total population of Canada. An important part of the Canadian identity, Québec is one of the reason why Canada has been described as having multination federalism due to its territorial autonomy for First Nations (Aboriginals) and with official recognition of Québec as a distinct nation.

      This cultural mosaic, a term frequently used to describe the exceptional multicultural fabric of the Canadian bi-national society, has historically relied on immigrants and refugees to boost economic and population growth, however not without adjusting immigration controls to protect the initial homogenous whiteness of the developing nation. Nowadays, Canada has the enviable reputation of being a very open society, which encourages and embraces immigration, and after all, also enabled the coexistence on the same land of its two founding nations, the British and the French. Despite the achievements, Canada still has a dark history when it comes to the treatment of minority groups, but this nation's not so enviable past has no doubt shaped its identity and present affinity with multiculturalism. While Canada's controversial past views towards immigrants and refugees may be solely seen as a negative, it can be argued that some positive emerged from this period, as it diminished future racial tensions within the nation, which in turn set the right conditions for Canadians to embrace the natural evolution of its immigration policies over the years, and ultimately multiculturalism.

However, multiculturalism does not work everywhere in the world, and for that matter, not even throughout Canada. France actually sees multiculturalism as a failure to integrate immigrants. The province of Québec, which hosts the majority of the French speaking population in Canada sees multiculturalism as a threat to the Québeckers' culture and language, and immigration, if not done within favourable parameters, could also exacerbate the dangers that multiculturalism apparently represents for the French-Canadian enclave which has been thriving along the shores of the Saint-Lawrence River for now 400 years. This short paper will seek to describe the origins of Canadian Multiculturalism, and then explore the diverging views towards this societal ideology and integration model which exist in France, but also even within the Canadian Federation, in the province of Québec.

The Grand Idea of Canadian Multiculturalism

Canada was the first country in the world officially to adopt a multiculturalism policy to support the integration of newcomers. Multiculturalism now plays a central role in Canada's strategy for immigrants' integration, and in the 1960-70s, it was regarded as a clear departure from the protectionist and assimilation strategy which had been the norm since Confederation. This new Canadian strategy was first formulated in 1971, by then Prime Minister (PM) Trudeau (father), in a speech to Parliament with the aim of bringing Canadians together around a policy that could promote the value of their differences. At the time the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism proposed acknowledging Canada as a bilingual, bicultural country based on the contribution of two equal founding populations, the French and the English speakers. But PM Trudeau feared that the recognition of two founding peoples would lead to the division of Canada and feed the aspirations of the Québec sovereignty movement. In multiculturalism he saw a political strategy that might strengthen Canadian unity. This policy aimed to bring all citizens together, whether they were French or English speakers or from immigrant populations.

In his keystone speech, one that would lay the ground to Canada's 1982 Constitution Act and its Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, PM Trudeau

made clear that multiculturalism was intended to promote the integration of immigrants into the mainstream society. The idea was quickly embraced by Canadians, and the public opinions gathered at the time, showed that the idea of multiculturalism was immediately adopted as a key feature of national identity. Polls showed that multiculturalism was ranked quite high as a national symbol; while not as high as the Canadian flag or the Universal Health Insurance, it was deemed equal to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and above hockey and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The acceptance of multiculturalism was also facilitated because it became a point of distinction between the Canadian society and that of the United States which had seen, during the Civil rights movement in the 1950-70s, a lot of racial turmoil. It was, and is still today, very important for Canadians to set themselves apart from their neighbor of the South, and multiculturalism had become yet another way to do just that.

However, while Canadians have been identifying to and supporting multiculturalism for decades, they have high expectations concerning the immigrants' integration. Canadians, while favoring high levels of immigration, demand that immigrants will blend into society and adopt the recognized values as set in the Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. They do not expect immigrants to lose their identity or culture, which some Canadians argue may open the nation to cultural rifts and isolated communities as seen in France, but rather seek for them to embrace the Canadian values above and beyond the ones they already have. In a way, this makes the Canadian immigration strategy both multicultural and at the same time, places a lot of emphasis on the importance of social integration.

Thanks to the current Canadian Immigration Policy and its point system, integration is rather successful as it has at its basis, a stringent selection process which relies more heavily on skilled migration by people who have skills or resources needed in the Canadian economy. Under the points system, potential immigrants score points for occupation skills, education, language ability, and other personal characteristics. As such, immigration authorities can grant permanent

residency if an applicant's total points surpass the government-set threshold. In the late 1990s, 50-60% of all immigrants and their dependents arrived as independent migrants, 26-36% entered under family reunification, and 13% arrived as refugees. It is proven by a number of academic studies such as the one completed by George Borjas (1999), in which he explained that points systems screen out individuals with low human capital, producing better results for immigrants and their receiving society. As Canada's immigration policy selects immigrants with better language skills and education, it is expected and proven that they will be more likely to fully integrate, leaving little room for them to fall in the margins of the Canadian society, build resentment towards their new country, and eventually accept extremist views.

France's case of integration through assimilation

It is a natural reaction to compare the two main integration models of multiculturalism as seen in Canada on one side, and the assimilation model as implemented in France. The multiculturalism model is based on a policy of accepted differences and values amongst the people forming a nation which dictate that all citizens must have the right to live according to their culture and their religion. On the other hand, the assimilation model as seen in France, claims blindness as far as differences are concerned. Based on the principle of equal dignity for its citizens without any differentiation based on race, culture or religion, really the center piece of this ideology, it is built on attributing the same rights to all, regardless of their differences.

Continuing with the example of France, when comparing it to the views on Canadian multiculturalism, the French government and public both draw a clear line between multiculturalism and social integration. France has a totally different view on how it integrates immigrants to the country and the integration model of multiculturalism, and actually views the latter as a threat to social integration. These views are rooted in the French Revolution that defines the country as a native country of human rights and land of refuge. The French view on the potential and undesirable result of multiculturalism is that of a society fragmented in various ethnic

groups and communities without a necessity to integrate, or assimilate, in the mainstream society. As an example of this social fragmentation in France, the word 'ghetto' became widely popular in French society in reference to areas heavy with immigrants where rampant poverty and growing violence are associated with allowing ethnic groups to form and grow outside of the mainstream society. This state of affairs has also led those disenfranchised groups forming on the margins of the French society to bring their concerns and problems to the public eye through organized demonstrations which were most often than not, punctuated by destruction and violence. Nothing to help their cause in the public opinion, or bring them closer to the mainstream society, and actually fueling racism and discrimination towards those marginalized groups.

In the views of the French people, multiculturalism is the opposite of a successful integration, which they understand as being a complete assimilation of the immigrants and refugees in the mainstream society. In order to avoid for assimilation to leave room to multiculturalism, the French legislature itself is built in a way as to protect the French identity, and assimilate as a way of integration, newcomers into the French society. As an example, Article 1 of the French constitution established in 1958 states that "France shall be an indivisible, secular, democratic and social republic. It shall ensure the equality of all citizens before the law, without distinction of origin, race or religion. It shall respect all beliefs." That being said, the accepted government and public interpretation is that this is an affirmation that France does not recognize minorities, whether they be ethnic, religious, linguistic or other. Under French law, all citizens have equal rights, and the law is not intended to accord specific rights to given ethnic groups defined by their community of origin, culture, beliefs, language or ethnicity. To be sure, yes, France is a culturally diverse country, one of the most diverse in Europe, and this dimension is not ignored entirely.

In 2007, the French Ministry for Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development was created by then President Sarkozy. One of its mandates was to promote the French identity with immigrants and facilitate their integration.

While integration was recognized by this Ministry as a two-way process that involved migrants as well as the host society, it was nonetheless clear that immigrants were expected to integrate into the existing French culture and society and as such go through a process of assimilation. To reinforce this view on rejecting multiculturalism as a way of immigrants' integration, in 2011, the French Minister of the Interior noted the importance of diversity to France, but also stated that diversity in France should not lead to the adoption of multiculturalism. That was a clear statement, leaving no room for interpretation as to the views of the French government concerning immigrants' integration, and the expectations that they would have to abandon portions of the ethnic identities if they wanted to become French citizens.

Québec's rejection of multiculturalism in the favor of interculturalism

As in France, Québec sees multiculturalism as a threat. The same fear of a fragmented society found in France, is also present in the French Canadian society, however in Québec, the main concerns evolve around the potential loss of its distinct French culture and the probable erosion of its majority status within the only French-speaking province in Canada. The province of Québec, with almost one quarter of Canada's population, has obtained a status similar to that of a state within the Canadian society over the last few decades. As Victor Armony put it in 2016, it has become a sort of a 'nation within a nation', and was formally recognized as such by the federal government. In this province, its government supported by a majority of the population, imposes the mandatory use of French in businesses and education, and uses different selection and integration criterions for newcomers, mostly based on Québec's interests vice that of Canada. As a matter of example, French is the only recognized official language in Québec, by law, and the Charter of the French Language, which regulates the use of language in many areas of social life, has constitutional status in that province. The English-speaking population is granted constitutionally protected rights, but they are still limited as to not give them an advantage over the French-speaking majority. The use of French is mandatory in the

private sector, under certain conditions, and, at a time, Québec's government even invoked the notwithstanding clause in Canada's Constitution in order to override some individual rights. The public opinion in Québec is widely in support of such legislations, as it is perceived that in the absence of such protections, the French culture and language would be eroded and eventually absorbed by a predominantly English-speaking North American continent, and the English-speaking waves of immigration. While justified or not, the French culture fears of being eventually assimilated by an English-speaking majority, become even more exacerbated in the context of a widely implemented multicultural Canadian immigration policy, which would bring thousands of immigrants to Canada, especially considering that they naturally tend to learn the language of the national majority, in this case English.

Considering the immigration legislations currently in Québec, and the French-speaking population's views on the fragile status of their culture within the Canadian Confederation and the North American context, it would seem that the integration model being best suited and actually in place in French-Canada would be closer to that of France and thus support the use of assimilation. However, when observing its society, it seems Québec still believes in the essence of multiculturalism which at its core is based on a policy of promoting the integration of immigrants into the mainstream society, by accepting the differences and common values amongst the people forming this nation, which in the end dictate that all citizens must have the right to live in peace according to their culture and their religion. The Québec difference lies in its distinctiveness from the majority English-speaking society, and it represents in reality the cause of Québec's departure from multiculturalism, towards an integration model called interculturalism. But what is interculturalism?

Interculturalism is an integration model that favors harmonious relations between cultures based on intensive cultural exchanges, centered on an integration process that does not seek to eliminate differences, but rather fosters the development of a common identity. Interculturalism also entails that, in spite of their particular cultures, all communities must adopt a common public culture, and as in the case of

Québec, one that is defined by the use of the French language, and by certain fundamental values such as public secularism, and gender equality. This model has developed in order to bridge the gap over a perceived weakness of the multiculturalism model, which, as observed in the immigrant ghettos of France, has divided society by legitimizing segregated communities that have isolated themselves from the French society and accentuated their specificity. A key feature of interculturalism is that it also asks members of the majority culture, the French-Canadians in the case of Québec, to question their own assumptions of what it means to be a member of the mainstream society, and open channels of communication and interaction with minorities.

So how does Québec's distinctiveness and status as a 'nation within a nation' justifies its embrace of interculturalism in lieu of the Canadian integration model of multiculturalism? The answer lies inside Canada's history as a country that developed over time a bi-national identity, comprised of a majority English-speaking culture, and a minority French-speaking one. The differing ideas that those two cultures hold with regards to their differing identities, beliefs, origins, common values and destinies, are reflected in their respective societies' model of integration. When the English-speaking Canadians became the majority, the population was mainly comprised of citizens who traced their ascent from the British Isles, English, Scottish, and Irish. Anybody else, who was not of those origins, was often subjected to discrimination and left on the margins of society. This was reinforced at the time by the political identity of English Canada, which was closely linked to the British Empire and its Commonwealth. In the post Second World War period, shifts in immigration policies, patterns and eventually in overall Canadian demographics, an increasingly smaller portion of Canadians shared that British origin. Considering the makeup of the Canadian population today, Canadians of British origin represent approximately one third of the total population. The shift in the majority found in Canada, which became even more prevalent in the 60-70s, is what is believed to have initiated the move to Canadian multiculturalism. As the English majority was

shrinking, and the minorities including the French-Canadians, kept growing, it became harder to build the Canadian identity solely on the British origins. As explained by Charles Taylor in 2013, 'it had to be made clear that one was no closer to the heart of the Canadian identity if one was called Jones, than if one's name was Kowalski or Minelli.' In a way, it can be explained by the idea of making a sharp distinction between the culture or origin of a Canadian, and an actual Canadian citizenship. It was deemed that a multiracial Canada would be much easier to build under multiculturalism, than it would have been to assimilate newcomers into the English culture, which was already becoming a weaker majority.

While the multiculturalism approach in broader Canada worked quite well and was embraced easily by Canadians, it just could not be accepted in Québec. The first reason being that about 70% of Québec population is descended from the original French settlers, a rather homogeneous group when compared to the multiple origins of the English settlers, and the francophone group still represents the vast majority within this province. Another reason for Québec to reject multiculturalism is that their language and culture has been under serious threats of assimilation for more than 200 years, ever since the British conquered the French colonies of New France and started to inundate the land with English-speaking settlers. The last reason, also related to the language, is due to the English-speaking majority in Canada, an overwhelmingly domination of the English language in North America, and finally but not the least, the fact that globalization speaks English. Because of those historic, demographic, and linguistic reasons, integration must be a more complex goal in Québec through interculturalism, then there is in the rest of the country through Canadian multiculturalism. In this province, because of its distinct culture, language, and minority status within Canada and North America, while integration also means ensuring that immigrants find jobs, make contacts, join groups and associations, and find their place within their new society, Québec must ensure that the integration will take place in French instead of English. So considering all those reasons, it would be impossible for Québec to accept to lose its ancestral identity by simply declaring that

it has no official culture, as it was done in the rest of Canada by accepting multiculturalism as the basis of the Canadian society.

Conclusion – Identity survival through protecting ancestral identity

Simply put, the people of Québec have been engaged for centuries in a long-term struggle to survive as a francophone society in a minority situation, but they have also been working at enhancing and growing as a democratic society based on equality and human rights. As such, immigrants are invited to participate in this project as full members, which means learning the French language and becoming integrated in the society. They are also expected to have a say like all people of Québec, because their opinions and contributions are just as important as those of the native born. Canadian multiculturalism chooses to set aside the country's ethnic foundation and history, and refrains from putting another identity in its place through the means of officialization. Similar to that of France in protecting the original nation's identity, but remaining short of asking newcomers to abandon their cultural identity, Québec interculturalism commences by protecting the francophone ancestral identity, the most important piece of the puzzle in their society, but still sees this identity as changing, evolving over time via the integration of all citizens' views, regardless of their identity as immigrants or natives. Although this integration model seems to work well in theory, it remains hard to prove its success due to a lack of empirical data. Still, in a way, this integration model, while well suited to protect the Québec society and allow it to thrive despite its minority status, seems more inclusive than multiculturalism, and as such provides better opportunities for newcomers to participate and integrate fully in their new society.