Kenyeres, János

Aspects of Canadian multiculturalism : history, policy, theory and impact

Stable URL (handle): https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/134378
Access Date: 17. 02. 2024
Version: 20220831

Aspects of Canadian Multiculturalism: History, Policy, Theory and Impact

Aspects du multiculturalisme canadien : histoire, politique, théorie, impact

János Kenyeres

Abstract

This article looks into the history of Canadian multiculturalism by surveying its political and economic background, its roots in political theory, its implementation by policy makers and its impact on Canadian cultural life, as well as the major challenges and criticisms it has been facing since the early 1970s. The government policy of multiculturalism was not an idealistic philosophy but a political necessity which was aimed at establishing a Canadian national identity to be shared by all. Although multiculturalism played an important role in helping minority cultures become visible and recognised by mainstream Canada, the difficulties in creating such a uniform national identity based on the diversity of minority cultures is demonstrated by exactly the works and theoretical debates which arose in the aftermath of the implementation of the multiculturalism policy.

Keywords: multiculturalism, minorities, Canadian cultural life

Résumé

Cet article se penche sur l'histoire du multiculturalisme canadien en sondant son contexte politique et économique, ses racines dans la théorie politique, sa mise en œuvre par les décideurs politiques et son impact sur la vie culturelle canadienne. Ainsi, l'article examine les principaux défis et critiques auxquels le multiculturalisme a été confronté depuis le début des années 1970. La politique gouvernementale du multiculturalisme n'est pas une philosophie idéaliste, mais une nécessité politique qui tente d'établir une identité nationale canadienne pouvant être partagée par tous les Canadiens. Bien que le multiculturalisme ait joué un rôle important en aidant les cultures minoritaires à devenir visibles et intégrées à la société canadienne, les difficultés dans la création d'une telle identité nationale uniforme fondée sur la diversité des cultures minoritaires est démontrée par les travaux et les débats théoriques consécutifs à la mise en œuvre de la politique du multiculturalisme.

Mots-clés: multiculturalisme, minorités, vie culturellecanadienne

Canadian multiculturalism is a doctrine, system of thought and a government policy, extending to the area of political theory, social studies and the humanities, with a significant impact on immigration and everyday life. In recent years it has become a staple of Canadian identity and has been so closely associated with anything Canadian that it is both an unavoidable concept and a commonplace, which latter fact nevertheless does not detract from its applicability and relevance. As a term, multiculturalism is usually regarded as an ideology promoting the coexistence of multiple communities and cultures. As one definition goes, "Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity" (Song). In the Canadian context, however, the word is used to describe diverse, albeit interrelated, facts and concepts, such as:

> the demographic reality of a Canadian population made up of peoples and groups representing a plurality of ethnocultural traditions and racial origins; a social ideal or value that accepts cultural pluralism as a positive and distinctive feature of Canadian society; and government policy initiatives designed to recognize, support, and – some might argue – manage cultural and racial pluralism at federal, provincial, and municipal levels. (Troper, 997)

Indeed, the demographic reality, the social ideal and the multicultural policy extending over the various governments of Canada in the past few decades have been a means and driving force by which contemporary Canadian culture and literature have evolved, and which prominently contributed to their form today. The present cultural canon has thus been shaped within the broader context of what Elliott and Fleras call "*engaging diversity as different yet equal*" and a "package of policies and programs for managing diversity by integrating minority women and men into the institutional framework of society" (279). As multiculturalism has had a significant role in the recognition and promotion of minority artists and their work, it has been of great significance in a cultural ontological sense; had it not been for multiculturalism, Canadian culture would probably be essentially different today, with artists and authors coming from minority groups being much less visible.

Considering that Indigenous cultures displayed a great variety of traditions well before pre-contact times, Canadian multiculturalism may be conceived of as going back to time immemorial. Nevertheless, as a conscious policy and system of thought influencing social structures it has been a fairly recent development. As a term, multiculturalism was coined in Canada before it spread to other countries,[1] such as Australia,

---

1)   The word "multi-cultural" was probably first used in writing in *Book IV, The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups* of the *Report* (1969) of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The context in which the term was used is this: "Among those of non-British, non-French origin, some accept official bilingualism without hesitation but categorically reject biculturalism. They consider Canada

and even though, as a result, it is not exclusive to Canada, in the early twenty-first century most Canadians consider multiculturalism an essential element of their national identity, a feature which distinguishes Canada and Canadians from other countries and nations. Having said this, Canadian multiculturalism has been challenged by a number of theoretical concerns and practical problems, and its opponents, such as Neil Bissoondath and Richard Gwyn, contend that multiculturalism leads to ghettoization, promoting differences between ethnic groups rather than establishing a common Canadian identity (Bissoondath 98, 110–111; Gwyn 274).

It is interesting to note that multiculturalism is not an idea which was first conceived within the bounds of philosophy and then implemented by policy makers. On the contrary, its evolution displays an opposite direction of moving from policy making to philosophy, with its direct roots going back to a 1971 policy statement made by Prime Minister Trudeau, which claimed the following:

> A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework commends itself to the government as the most suitable means of ensuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all. (Canada 1978: 45)

The policy statement also deals with the question of "national identity," seeing a natural harmony between a person's individual, cultural or ethnic identity and his or her national allegiance to Canada: "*Canadian identity* will not be undermined by multiculturalism. Indeed, we believe that *cultural pluralism* is the very essence of Canadian identity" (Canada 1978: 50). It was following these political statements that theories of multiculturalism were elaborated by such scholars as Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, as discussed below.

---

to be a country that is officially bilingual but fundamentally multi-cultural. In reply to this objection we wish to repeat that "in our view the term 'biculturalism' covers two main realities. The first is the state of each of the two cultures, and the opportunity of each to exist and flourish. The second is the coexistence and collaborations of these two cultures . . . ." (Canada 1970, 12). As Pat Duffy Hutcheon has remarked, "the Commissioners referred to multiculturalism as it is defined today only in order to refute the premise on which it is based" (Hutcheon, 1988). It must also be mentioned, however, that even though the *Report* claimed that "Acculturation is inevitable in a multi-ethnic country like Canada," it acknowledged that "those whose origin is neither French nor British do not have to cast off or hide their own culture. ... Canadian society, open and modem, should be able to integrate heterogeneous elements into a harmonious system, to achieve 'unity in diversity'" (Canada 1970, 6–7). Thus, even with its wavering position, the *Report* was an important step in the road towards recognizing Canada as a multicultural society.

   Unlike in the Canadian experience, multiculturalism in other parts of the world, especially in Europe, has proved to be rather unsuccessful. In October 2010, German Chancellor Angela Merkel admitted that the German model of multicultural society "has utterly failed" (qtd. in Siebold). She stressed that Germany was in need of foreign skilled workers but emphasised that immigrants had to adapt to German society and learn to speak German. In Britain, too, multiculturalism has failed to live up to the expectations. The same has happened in the Netherlands; in June 2011, Dutch Interior Minister Piet Hein Donner submitted to parliament a bill which claimed:

> The government shares the social dissatisfaction over the multicultural society model and plans to shift priority to the values of the Dutch people. In the new integration system, the values of the Dutch society play a central role. With this change, the government steps away from the model of a multicultural society. (qtd. in Kern)

   By contrast, in Canada multiculturalism is viewed by many as not only the most adequate way to handle immigration and the coexistence of people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, but also as the only practice that has gained political support from the various governments of Canada since its introduction in 1971. In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted, whose Section 27 recognized multiculturalism as a Canadian value, which was then further confirmed and broadened by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988. Other laws were also enacted, contributing to the formation of a coherent multicultural system; the Broadcasting Act of 1991, for instance, states that Canadian broadcasting should reflect the diversity of Canadian cultures. As a result of the policy, backed by legislation and strongly supported by all levels of the educational system from preschool to university, multiculturalism has seeped into the various levels and groups of society and exerted a massive impact on all walks of life, dramatically transforming social, political and cultural thinking. In this sense, as Troper asserts, it has become

> a social ideal, a value that regards the growing Canadian pluralism as not only a positive aspect of society worth preserving but also one that reflects positively on the Canadian way of life. Accordingly, a multicultural Canada is accepted as a country in which the norms of civic behaviour and the modes of social interaction are respectful, even supportive, of ethnocultural and ethno-racial pluralism. In this way, the idea of multiculturalism carries with it visions of a society characterized by inter-ethnic and inter-racial harmony, respect for cultural differences, and a belief that ethnic group cohesion and individual fulfilment are not mutually exclusive. Rather they can best be realized when individuals and communities are enabled to define their cultural identities in an atmosphere of respect for the right of others to do likewise. (998)

Multiculturalism was officially announced by Pierre Trudeau in Canadian Parliament on 8 October 1971; however, the proclamation was preceded by a number of previous laws extending human rights within Canada. In 1947 Saskatchewan adopted a bill of rights, the first of its kind in Canada, ensuring both fundamental freedoms and equality rights, prohibiting racial, ethnic and religious discrimination in public life. In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly, Canada included, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Saskatchewan's example was followed by other provincial legislations in framing anti-discriminatory laws. This process was symbolically completed when Parliament passed the Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960. Thus, multiculturalism can be viewed as opening a new chapter in this lineage, expanding personal rights to collective rights to the benefit of all.

In the early 1970s the atmosphere was ripe for a change in the official policy regarding minority groups for at least three additional reasons. The first can be connected to the economy. After World War II Canada became a major industrial power, and economic growth required new workforce, to be supplied by immigrants. Therefore, restrictive immigration laws, which had been in force since the 1920s, were gradually lifted, replaced by less stringent regulations, allowing a large number of foreigners to find their new home in Canada and put their talents to the boosting of its economy. As a result of the new immigration laws entering into force and a massive number of immigrants arriving in Canada, the country's ethno-cultural composition went through a significant change, requiring new approaches on behalf of the federal government.

Secondly, the proclamation of the government's multiculturalism policy can be linked to the crisis leading to the depletion and exhaustion of the national identity cherished by people of British descent, the single largest "ethnic" group of Canada. British Canadian identity before the Second World War mainly saw itself as a strong outpost of the British Empire and as a guardian of its values, surrounded by a hostile Quebec in the east, the alien forces of nature in the north and a potentially aggressive United States in the south. The feeling of being an integral part of Britain and defending British values far away in the New World was a central element of this identity. With the collapse of the British Empire and the decline of British political dominance, however, this sense of belonging lost its foothold. British values gradually became void and meaningless (cf. Troper, 1001).

Thirdly, the bicultural model as a government policy composed of the two dominant cultures of Canada, the English and the French, failed to live up to the expectations after the Second World War. This became obvious with the rise of nationalism in Quebec in the aftermath of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, which finally led to the October Crisis in 1970, requiring military force to be employed in Montreal and Ottawa, intensifying strains between Anglophones and Francophones (cf. Morton 281–283).

Therefore, due to the growing number of immigrants and immigrant groups arriving in Canada, the loss of the British imperial dream in which English Canada's identity used to have its moorings – now all gone – and in the face of the rising tensions between English and French Canada, demonstrating the failure of biculturalism, policy makers had no choice but to search for a different social and cultural model on which national unity and a new national identity could be based. From this point of view, the multicultural policy introduced by the Trudeau government was less an initiative than a response to the call of the times.

Practically speaking, from the point of view of the majority community, assimilation had been traditionally viewed as the most expedient tool to solve the issues of societal and cultural difference. With the huge influx of immigrants in North America in the second half of the twentieth century, assimilation (or, as it was often called, "Anglo-conformity"), as well as the melting-pot model, chiefly experimented with in the United States, which was intended to create a new, unified population out of the combination and admixture of different ethnic and cultural communities, no longer managed to resolve the challenges arising from the coexistence of various groups with diverse backgrounds. In Canada, the bicultural model emerging after the Second World War, recognizing the community rights of the two large ethno-cultural parts of Canada, the English and French, remained inadequate with the indigenous and immigrant populations left out of play. John Porter's influential study, *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, published in 1965, was an important step in this realisation. The keyword in the title was not "mosaic" – an image first used to describe Canada's cultures in John Murray Gibbon's 1938 book *Canadian Mosaic* – but "vertical," pointing to the lack of equal chances for minority groups in Canadian society.

The above also serves as an explanation of the relative success and applicability of multiculturalism in Canada as opposed to European countries. Among the specific reasons, the nature of national identity is of special significance. Whereas in Canada the dominant Anglo-British identity experienced a crisis which led to its waning and crumbling away, European nations have not been exposed to a similar challenge. In Canada, the Anglo-British identity was easily and successfully replaced with the narrative that (with the only exception of Aboriginal people, but, in a sense even them) everyone was an immigrant, therefore equally a newcomer, which paved the way for the multicultural discourse. In Europe, in the absence of the weakening of national identities, the prevailing majority communities have continued to enjoy a dominant position with a national awareness of their own even after the appearance of increasing numbers of immigrant groups. Therefore, the European social context is much less suitable for multiculturalism to become the dominant social ideal.

Having said this, it is obvious that despite its general appeal and popularity, multiculturalism has received considerable suspicion and animosity in Canada, too. Both on the Anglophone and Francophone side, there were voices which considered the policy harmful to their own status as one of the two major communities of Canada. On the other hand, many thought that the policy served the interests of English-Canadian primacy by diverting the attention of immigrants, native and other minority groups from the political arena and the economy to the cultural field, barring them from power. At the same time, some representatives of minority groups decried multiculturalism as an inadequate substitute for financial aid. And of course there were those who believed, not without reason, that the policy served the immediate political interest of obtaining the "ethnic vote."[2] If we add the theoretical concerns regarding the Canadian way of "managing diversity," it is clear that multiculturalism has been through a lot of controversy to our day.

While it is true that multiculturalism as a government policy had been adopted before its specific theoretical background was elaborated in political philosophy, it must also be recognised that the constituents of multiculturalism in the original policy statement – such as the terms "freedom," "national unity," "individual identity" and "fair play for all" – can be traced back to a long tradition of Western philosophy dealing with such fundamental concepts as social justice, the social good, the social contract and human dignity. In order to see the extent to which the policy statement rests on the basic tenets of Western social theory, it is worth examining one of the key sentences of the Trudeau proclamation: "National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions." The above sentence reveals several aspects of the original idea of multiculturalism: the first is that the purpose of multiculturalism (and of its adoption by the government) was to achieve national unity. The second is that the proclamation interprets national unity from the point of view of the individual, "in a deeply personal sense," as it asserts, implying that this "deeply personal sense" is the only one which is worth considering or, alternately, which has a proper meaning. Thirdly, the proclamation claims that "confidence in one's own individual identity" is a prerequisite to the desired national unity, something in the absence of which national unity cannot be established or even imagined. Next the statement maintains that only out of the "confidence in one's own individual identity" can grow respect for the identity of other people, as well as a willingness to enter into dialogue with them. This call for a reasonable dialogue had a special significance at the time when the

---

2)   The growing importance of ethnic voters in politics prior to the introduction of the multiculturalism policy is discussed in Champion 23–46. However, as Troper remarks, the political manoeuvrings did not work "as well as politicians had hoped or those opposed to multiculturalism feared. Individuals of non-British or non-French descent do not vote as a single bloc" (Troper 1003).

announcement was made due to the growing number of immigrants and the rising tensions and lack of communication between Anglophone and Francophone people in Canada, known as the "Two Solitudes" (as disseminated by Hugh MacLennan's 1945 novelof the same title). The policy statement thus deems multiculturalism as a means to achieve the goal of national unity, which can only be realised through "confidence in one's own individual identity," implying that individual identity cannot be complete if deprived of its constituent elements, including those which link the individual to certain cultural, ethnic or religious groups within society. It is also interesting to observe the strong bond of the original formulation of multiculturalism to the philosophy of individualism; it is the individual who is in the centre of the above line of thought; it is the individual citizen around whom the whole argumentation turns.

As mentioned above, multiculturalism as an academic theory started with some delay as compared to the government policy but quickly established itself as an autonomous branch of political philosophy. As a discipline, multiculturalism is concerned with minority rights and the just treatment of minority groups. Since western philosophy primarily rests on an emphasis of liberalism and individual rights, attention given to the rights of minorities within society is a relatively late development. For liberalism, chiefly concerned with individual rights and values, collective rights are to some extent out of focus and of secondary significance. Once the conditions for a decent and dignified human life are ensured for the individual, liberalism argues, the major goals have been achieved and there is no need for great concern.

The two prominent Canadian theoreticians of multiculturalism, Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, belong to two different branches of theory. Taylor approaches multiculturalism from a communitarian position and offers a communitarian critique of liberalism (cf. Song). Challenging the liberal view which gives primacy to individual rights and liberties over community rights and collective goods, and rejecting the notion that the individual is prior to the community, Taylor considers social goods "irreducibly social" (cf. 1995, 136–140) and acknowledges that the need for recognition "comes to the fore in a number of ways in today's politics, on behalf of minority or 'subaltern' groups, in some forms of feminism and in what is today called the politics of 'multiculturalism'" (1994, 25). According to Taylor, diverse cultures are irreducibly social goods and should be recognised as being of equal worth: "the further demand we are looking at here is that we all recognize the equal value of different cultures; that we not only let them survive, but acknowledge their worth" (1994, 64). In addition, within the framework of the politics of difference, which, as he contends, is "is full of denunciations of discrimination and refusals of second-class citizenship" and which "grows organically out of the politics of universal dignity" (1994, 39), a concept he traces back to Rousseau and Kant, there comes the need for providing special rights to minority groups: "So members of aboriginal bands will get certain rights and pow-

ers not enjoyed by other Canadians, if the demands for native self-government are finally agreed on, and certain minorities will get the right to exclude others in order to preserve their cultural integrity, and so on" (1994, 39–40).

Although Will Kymlicka's philosophical thought emerges out of the framework of liberalism, his conclusions regarding multiculturalism are similar to those of Taylor. Kymlicka distinguishes between three large "group-differentiated" (or, in other words, group-specific) rights: "self-government rights (the delegation of powers to national minorities, often through some form of federalism); polyethnic rights (financial support and legal protection for certain practices associated with particular ethnic or religious groups); and special representation rights (guaranteed seats for ethnic or national groups within the central institutions of the larger state)" (1995, 6–7). In Kymlicka's model, furthermore, Canadian minorities fall into two large categories: national minorities and immigrant groups. National minorities (or minority nations) are composed of the First Nations and Quebecois population, who are founding nations of Canada and have a unique role in the history of the country. Immigrant (or "polyethnic") groups are also entitled to a number of special rights in Kymlicka's system, but these differ according to their particular needs and also on account of the fact that (with the exception of refuges) they voluntarily chose to leave their homeland and relinquished having access to their native culture. In this sense, minority nations deserve stronger rights from the state than immigrant groups on account of the fact that minority nations did not choose their minority position. Whereas minority nations should be granted the right to self-government, polyethnic groups are not supposed to enjoy this right as they have come to the state of their own will and thus are responsible to adopt the standards of their new country and integrate into the new society. But they, too, are entitled to a number of rights, including exemptions from the force of certain laws (such as wearing a helmet on a motorcycle) and their special needs must also be accommodated.

When discussing the nature of Canadian multiculturalism, one is confronted with diverging views that appear to be irreconcilable. Did multiculturalism bring about social cohesion? Did it change Canadian society for the better? Did it strengthen Canada's democracy? Did it promote the arts? These questions are all related to the essence and practical implementation of Canadian multiculturalism and can be brought into connection with the concept of "immature" and "mature" societies, as formulated by Northrop Frye. According to Frye,

> A primitive or embryonic society is one in which the individual is thought of as primarily a function of the social group. In all such societies a hierarchical structure of authority has to be set up to ensure that the individual does not get too far out of line. A mature society, in contrast, understands that its primary aim is to develop a genuine individuality in its

members. In a fully mature society the structure of authority becomes a function of the individuals within it, all of them, without distinctions of sex, class, or race, living, loving, thinking, and producing with a sense of space around them. Throughout history practically all societies have been primitive ones in our present sense: a greater maturity and a genuine concern for the individual peeps out occasionally, but is normally smothered as society collapses back again into its primitive form. (8)

The question is, therefore, whether multiculturalism has moved Canada towards a "mature" society in Frye's sense. Instead of offering a simplistic answer, the following pages are intended to examine some differing arguments on the role that multiculturalism has played in Canada in the past few decades.

Regarding the practical impact of the multiculturalism policy, it is beyond any doubt that the government statements of the early 1970s were not just fine words but led to specific cultural programs launched by the Canadian government. The idea of the state devising and implementing a "cultural policy" raises suspicion and often evokes bad memories in many; however – and especially in view of this fact – it is worth looking into the various initiatives to reveal the original plan, the way in which it was put into practice, the extent to which it transformed Canada's cultural establishment and the situation of the individual artist, and some significant reactions by intellectuals in Canada.

Since 1972, there has been a minister in charge of multiculturalism, and in 1973 the Department of the Secretary of State established the Canadian Multiculturalism Council as well as a Multiculturalism Directorate. Several specific initiatives were launched in order to support writers and artists from diverse backgrounds on all three levels of state administration: the federal, the provincial and the municipal. Out of these three levels on which multiculturalism was implemented, federal initiatives proved to be the most comprehensive and efficient. One of the contributors to these programs on the federal level was the Hungarian-born Judy Young, who spent twenty-five years directing multiculturalism and inter-ethnic relations programs for the government of Canada,[3] and her own account provides a knowledgeable and authentic source for the specific details of the initiatives which were put in place in the course of the operation of the policy.[4]

The programs extended not only to social and cultural affairs but had an influence on education, the justice system, the police, the media, healthcare, social institutions and even the economy. The principal objectives of the programs included "helping

---

3)   Cf. Young 2008.

4)   The discussion below about the programs is primarily based on Judy Young's article "No Longer 'Apart'? Multiculturalism Policy and Canadian Literature." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33.2 (2001): 88–116, which provides ample details about the specific implementation of the policy.

the full and active participation of Canadians of all origins in society; working toward social justice and the elimination of discrimination; and creating a sense of belonging and attachment to a Canada that recognizes and respects the value of diversity" (Young 2001, 95). These objectives were, in turn, aimed at creating a cohesive society which acknowledges both individual and collective identity.

The 1971 policy announcement was followed by several specific government programs assisting the implementation of the policy. The Writing and Publication Program started in 1977–78, supplementing the Performing and Visual Art Program and the Canadian Ethnic Studies Program, which supported research. According to the Program brochure, the Writing and Publication Program served two purposes: "to encourage the writing and publishing efforts of writers who use the non-official languages for their creative work as well as those writers who use the official languages but who have a specific cultural experience to convey"; and "to encourage the Canadian literary establishment and the reading public in general to view this literature as an aspect of Canadian literature" (qtd. in Young 2001, 96). In subsequent years these objectives were supplemented with the goal of integrating multicultural literature into the educational system. The examination of the range of literary works which received support at the outset in the 1970s and 80s reveals that, among other languages, German, Hungarian, Polish, Spanish, Ukrainian, Yiddish books and anthologies of prose and poetry were published with the financial assistance of the Program. In order to ensure the accessibility of minority literatures to a wider readership, translations into English and French from third languages were also supported. George Faludy's *East and West* (1978) and Modern *Canadian Punjabi Poetry* (1983) are just two examples of a whole array of translations published separately, in anthologies or as part of special issues of literary journals during the initial years. A special issue of the *Canadian Fiction Magazine* in 1980, for example, contained as many as thirty-four stories translated from almost as many languages, including Armenian, Chinese, Czech, Estonian, German, Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Punjabi, Slovak, Spanish and Yiddish, as well as Cree, Micmac, and Ojibway. In addition, several non-literary works were published, concentrating on historical and cultural topics. Contacts were made with "mainstream" writers, publishers, academics and libraries to advertise the Program and its initiatives and to promote the organization of public readings and conferences. Various organisations received financial support to invite representatives of the minority literatures to their own events and academic conferences were encouraged to discuss multiculturalism. Public readings were held by such prestigious organizations as the League of Canadian Poets and the Vancouver Writers Festival. The Program also initiated a range of studies to explore ethnic literatures so that the information gathered could be used by academics and teachers in their work. This led to the publication of works analysing the output of writers of Hispanic, Hungarian,

Italian, Polish, Punjabi, Urdu or other South Asian backgrounds, as well as black and Quebec writers of various origins. This is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that with the exception of Watson Kirkconnell, English-Canadian literary critics until the 1980s had almost completely ignored immigrant literature written in the minority languages (cf. Rasporich and Seiler 312).[5]

In the second phase of the Program the main objective was to assist minority writers and their work in becoming an integral part of mainstream Canadian literature and the Canadian cultural establishment. This took place in the mid-1980s, which was symbolically signalled by a special issue of *Canadian Literature*, the principal academic journal in the field, with the title *A/Part*, dedicated to the question of Canadian literature and multiculturalism. *A/Part* contained the papers delivered at the 1984 Ottawa Conference on Language, Culture, and Literary Identity in Canada, the first major conference on this subject, co-organised by the Program. Among already established authors such as Austin Clarke, Louis Dudek, NaimKattan, Joy Kogawa, Henry Kreisel, John Marlyn and Bill Valgardson, the work of some lesser known writers, such as Moyez Vassanji, Waclaw Iwanjuk and Magda Zalán, also appeared. One of the focal points was novelist Josef Škvorecký's keynote address. The special issue of *Canadian Literature* was a breakthrough in bringing hitherto unknown minority writers and critics (including George Bisztray) to the attention of the general reading public and critics, and was followed by additional special editions on multiculturalism.

In the period between 1973–1992, over 1,300 publications appeared as a result of Program grants, excluding writing or translation grants, and the conference, reading, promotion and research grants also awarded during those years (Young 2001, 99). As a result of this process, after the initial years writers coming from minority groups had a fair chance of winning established Canadian grants. Today many of the most renowned Canadian writers are first or second generation immigrants whose work has become an inseparable part of the Canadian literary establishment. As the Multiculturalism Program is considered to have achieved its principal goals, as of 1998–99, it no longer offers funding for literary and arts projects.

Regarding the question of the success of the multiculturalism policy and whether multiculturalism marginalizes artists coming from minority groups, Young concedes, on the one hand, that "[i]t is clear that many writers (and other artists) are still struggling to be heard and many are excluded from the recognition and active participation that is the multicultural ideal" (2001, 105) and, on the other hand, that "affiliation with an ethnic or racial or gender group may provide support and intellectual stimulation for some" while "[f]or others it is seen as a ghetto to be broken out

---

5)   Kirkconnell published translations of poetry by émigré poets in the volume *Canadian Overtones* in 1935 and dedicated a section to "New Canadian Letters" in the *University of Toronto Quarterly* from 1937 to 1964.

of" (2001,109). Nevertheless, she is of the firm view that "Multiculturalism did not marginalize artists; marginalization was a fact of life before the Multiculturalism policy" (2001, 105). Young makes some relevant additional observations; the first relates to the ambiguous and in fact interchangeable nature of the centre and the margins, which places the above questions in a postmodern perspective:

> we can no longer unequivocally say where the centre is and where the margins. In our pluralist (post-modern? post-colonial?) society it is no longer clear who is where. Nor can we assume that the centre is what everyone aspires to or that being on the margins is all negative. It can be very positive to be on the margins and many writers prefer to be there because it is creative or because they can critique better from a position outside the centre. (2001, 106)

The second observation points to the uncertain position and inadequate nature of ethnic identity as a category to differentiate artists:

> Not only is the centre/margin distinction ambiguous, so is the ethnic identity of the writer. One cannot lump together all writers of a given origin on the basis of that origin alone, even if there are identifiable communities of writers . . . "Visible minority", writers of "colour", or Aboriginal writers are no more appropriate as artistic categories than English or French-Canadian. All such terms (often used for convenience) are inaccurate and hide not only the essentially artistic qualities but also the diversity inherent in all of them. (Young 2001, 106–107)

The third observation expands on this point, claiming that it is a fallacy to conceive of individual experience, perspective, identity and the various art forms and other categories through which works are seen as static and fixed; rather they should be thought of as fluid, altering and subject to change: "the complexities, paradoxes, and ambiguities in the experience of the writers are reflected in their work which is characterized by shifting perspectives, multiple identities, hybrid art forms, transnational connections, and a constant questioning about who we are and where is home" (Young 2001, 107). These are substantial questions inherently linked to the nature of contemporary literature, and this approach, far from exaggerating the place and role of multiculturalism, regards the multicultural reality only as one of the essential factors shaping present-day art, the others being such fundamental contexts as postmodernism and postcolonialism.

Examining the history and summarising the principal assertions of the critiques that multiculturalism has received in the past four decades, Joseph Garcea concludes that they come from three major stances: "the anti-multiculturalism perspective, the

laissez-faire multiculturalism perspective, and the reformist multiculturalism perspective" and suggests that even though they are inadequate, unsubstantiated or problematical, they should be taken seriously by policy makers as they "have considerable support among intellectuals and members of the general public" (155).[6] Phil Ryan attributes some of the current debates over multiculturalism to the fact that critics are not talking about the same phenomenon: "The wide range of passionate opinions about multiculturalism suggests that it is a concept around which clarity is lacking" (6). This view is supported by the examples invoked below.

Opinions supporting the idea of multiculturalism maintain that both theory and practice have promoted recognition and social cohesion and created a social texture in which the principle of equal chances has been reinforced. By contrast, critics of multiculturalism, such as Neil Bissoondath and Richard Gwyn, are of the view that multiculturalism leads to the cementing of differences and the creation of cultural ghettos in society. Kymlicka disagrees with the viewpoints of Gwyn and Bissoondath, who "make very similar claims about the results of the policy" (Kymlicka 1998, 16) and refutes Bissoondath's assertions. In his book *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, Bissoondath claims "multiculturalism has led to 'undeniable ghettoization'" and "[i]nstead of promoting integration, it encourages immigrants to form 'self-contained' ghettos 'alienated from the mainstream', and this ghettoization is 'not an extreme of multiculturalism but its ideal: a way of life transported whole, a little outpost of exoticism preserved and protected'" (qtd. in Kymlicka 1998, 16). By reference to empirical evidence from the past few decades, including statistical figures, Kymlicka demonstrates that, in contrast with Bissoondath's (and Gwyn's) statements, political and societal integration of immigrants into "mainstream" Canada has been largely successful (cf. Kymlicka 1998, 16–24).

Since Bissoondath has been one of the most influential critics of multiculturalism (cf. Ryan 23), it is worth expanding on his views in some more detail. Some sociologists, such as Pat Duffy Hutcheon, hear the voice of concern in Bissoondath's critique: "Bissoondath . . . expressed the fear that the policy of multiculturalism, far from promoting understanding and acceptance, has instead divided citizens by underscoring differences" (Hutcheon 1999, 188). Indeed, other claims by Bissoondath about the superficial nature in which different cultures tend to be represented at social events reveal a sense of alarm and bewilderment. As Bissoondath writes, "[t]he public face of Canadian multiculturalism is flashy and attractive; it emerges with verve and gaiety

---

6)   In the course of a survey of the criticism Canadian multiculturalism has received, Garcea distinguishes between ten different perspectives from which it has been critiqued, grouping them into four general themes: "multiculturalism segregates the population in Canada"; "multiculturalism is problematical for the Canadian, Quebecois, and Aboriginal cultures, identities, and nationalism projects"; "multiculturalism perpetuates conflicts between and within groups; multiculturalism hinders equity and equality in society and the economy" (Garcea 152–153).

from the bland stereotype of traditional Canada 'ethnic' festivals," and compares this representation to "a folksy, Canadian mosaic version of the jungle Cruise at Walt Disney World in Florida" (Bissondath 1994, 82). Thus, Bissoondath argues:

> Our approach to multiculturalism encourages the devaluation of that which it claims to wish to protect and promote. Culture becomes an object for display rather than the heart and soul of the individuals formed by it. Culture manipulated into social and political usefulness becomes folklore – as René Lévesque said – lightened and simplified, stripped of the weight of the past. None of the cultures that make up our "mosaic" seems to have produced history worthy of exploration or philosophy worthy of consideration. (Bissoondath 1994, 88)

Much as these words are harsh and even exaggerated in light of the overall impact of multiculturalism, one should keep in mind that Bissoondath's comments are directed against some popular manifestations of the policy, which he nevertheless considers as their typical and exclusive form. Indeed his views reflect the general image of multiculturalism prevalent in the 1970s, when substantial funding was spent on colourful festivities and their advertisements, showing ethnic people happily smiling in their national costumes. In "Endings," the concluding part of his book *Selling Illusions*, Bissoondath quotes the *Report* of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which were partly replaced and partly continued by the new policy of multiculturalism, as a model which Canada should have adopted instead of multiculturalism:

> Integration, in the broad sense, does not imply the loss of an individual's identity and original characteristics or of his original language and culture. Man is a thinking and sensitive being; severing him from his roots could destroy an aspect of his personality and deprive society of some of the values he can bring to it. Integration is not synonymous with assimilation. Assimilation implies almost total absorption into another linguistic and cultural group. An assimilated individual gives up his cultural identity, and may even go as far as to change his name. Both integration and assimilation occur in Canada, and the individual must be free to choose whichever process suits him...
> The process of integration goes hand in hand with what anthropologists call "acculturation." Anyone who chooses Canada as his adopted country adopts a new style of life, a particular kind of existence . . . Acculturation is the process of adaptation to the environment in which an individual is compelled to live as he adjusts his behaviour to that of the community. (qtd. in Bissoondath 1994, 209)

What can be inferred from the above is that Bissoondath's views derive from the superficial, "folksy" aspect of multiculturalism and that he advocates integration and

articles — articles

acculturation rather than a conception of culture composed of the shallow cultural manifestations of ethnic and other minority groups. Integration and acculturation are, of course, important parts of the multiculturalism policy itself and it is easy to see that Bissoondath's disagreement with the policy stems from his putting a larger weight and stronger emphasis on these factors than what the policy does, which, in turn, attributes more importance to the expression and recognition of minority experience. On the other hand, identifying multiculturalism with its folksy aspect and ignoring those developments on the literary scene which did bring about a specific kind of integration, the integration of the work of minority writers and artists into mainstream culture, risks a biased view, that fails to consider some essential elements required for a detached position.

Another intriguing aspect of the ongoing discussion about the reality brought about by multiculturalism is connected to the fact that the official multiculturalism policy encourages writers and artists to express the immigrant experience, or at least some kind of "specific" difference, even when the individual artist would wish to do otherwise. In this way, old-time "Anglo-conformism" recurs in the form of a requirement, or the artist's belief in a requirement, to conform to the expectations of the multiculturalism policy. This is not only a problem linked to authenticity and its absence but also a fervent topic appearing in literary works and mentioned in theoretical discussions, turning this question into a meta-theme. Carrie Dawson cites several examples of such occurrences: in Rohinton Mistry's short story "Swimming Lessons," the protagonist's parents worry about what will happen to their son as a writer if "'he changes and becomes so much like them that he will write like one of them and lose the important difference'"; Dionne Brand argues that "'all black writers are expected to make signs,'" in order to make it easy for the reader to "'identify black bodies and code them'"; Thomas King regards "'the demand for authenticity'" as "'a whip [that] indigenous peoples] get beaten with,'" and Fred Wah's "work also addresses the pressure to fake ethnic authenticity by considering what it means to consequently be construed and to construe oneself as a fake" (Dawson). Dawson claims that the multicultural policy of the government of Canada is responsible for these constraints, compulsions and anxieties.

Thus, in the eyes of some writers and critics, multiculturalism as an idea to reform society has fallen prey to the fate of ideals turning into ideologies and, thus, assumed the voice of authority and power which the individual feels obliged either to adapt to or resist. If some writers and critics feel and think this way, then this is "the reality" for them beyond any doubt, despite the clear intentions of the policy makers to the contrary: "The Multiculturalism policy is not intended to categorize people into different groups based on ethnicity, place of birth, religion, or colour of skin; nor does it create cultural 'ghettos' as has been sometimes suggested by critics of the policy.

Rather, both the policy and the Act are about inclusion into Canadian society on an equal basis and 'fair terms'" (Young 2001, 94). These words may be reassuring to many but might sound like empty words for those who feel subjected to multiculturalism as an ideology and power. In a sense, therefore, we are back to square one, Frye's "immature" societies.

Or are we? Much as the anti-ideological stance is attractive, the emancipatory results of multiculturalism in the cultural field and beyond should not be overlooked or underrated. The cultural and literary works created as a result of a multicultural social reality, backed by both the theory and the cultural policy of multiculturalism during the past decades, have undeniably given new impetus to Canadian literature and fortified its place in the rank of other literatures in the world.

Works cited

Bissoondath, Neil. *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada.* Toronto: Penguin, 1994.

Canada. Minister of State. *Multiculturalism and the Government of Canada*. Ottawa: Minister of State, 1978.

Canada. Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. *Report*. Vol. IV. Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970.

Champion, Christian P. "Courting 'Our Ethnic Friends': Canadianism, Britishness, and New Canadians, 1950–1970."*Canadian Ethnic Studies* 38.1 (2006): 23–46.

Dawson, Carrie. "The Importance of Being Ethnic and the Value of Faking It."*Postcolonial Tex* 4.2 (2008): 1. Web. 23 Aug. 2013.

Elliott, Jean Leonard and Augie Fleras.*Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race, Ethnic, and Aboriginal Dynamics in Canada*. Toronto: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2007.

Frye, Northrop. *The Double Vision: Language and Meaning in Religion*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991.

Garcea, Joseph. "Postulations on the Fragmentary Effects of Multiculturalism in Canada,"*Canadian Ethnic Studies* 40.1 (2008): 141–160.

Gwyn, Richard. *Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1995.

Hutcheon, Pat Duffy. *Building Character and Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999.

————. "Multiculturalism in Canada." 1988. Web. 16 Apr. 2013.

Kern, Soeren. "The Netherlands to Abandon Multiculturalism."*Gatestone Institute*. Web. 19 March 2013.

Kymlicka, Will. *Finding Our Way: Rethinking Ethnocultural Relations in Canada*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998.

articles — articles

————. *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Morton, Desmond. *A Short History of Canada*. 3rd rev. ed. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1997.

Rasporich, Beverly J., and Tamara Palmer Seiler. "Canadian Culture and Ethnic Diversity."*Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*. Ed. Paul Robert Magocsi. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. 304–316.

Ryan, Phil. *Multicultiphobia*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

Siebold, Sabine. "Merkel says German multiculturalism has failed." Web. 19 March 2013.

Song, Sarah. "Multiculturalism."*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Ed. Edward N. Zalta. Winter 2010 Edition. Web. 15 Oct. 2011. <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2010/entries/multiculturalism>

Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition."*Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994. 25–74.

————. *Philosophical Arguments*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.

Troper, Harold. "Multiculturalism."*Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples*, ed. Paul Robert Magocsi. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999. 997–1006.

Young, Judy."Nemkellelrejteni a származást."*Népszabadság*6 December 2008. Web. 15 Oct. 2011. <http://nol.hu/lap/vilag/lap-20081206–20081206_3–17>

————. "No Longer "Apart"? Multiculturalism Policy and Canadian Literature." *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 33.2 (2001): 88–116.

JÁNOS KENYERES / Acting Director and Associate Professor in the School of English and American Studies at EötvösLoránd University, Budapest, where he teaches English and Canadian literature, Canadian cinema, and literary theory. He has several publications in these fields, including *Revolving around the Bible: A Study of Northrop Frye* (2003). From 2005 to 2008 he was Visiting Professor of Hungarian at the University of Toronto. He is currently head of the Canadian Studies Centre at ELTE and co-editor of *The AnaChronisT*.

Address: János Kenyeres, School for English and American Studies, Loránd Eotvos University, Ajtósi Dürersor 19–21, 1146 Budapest, Hungary / < e-mail: kenyeres.janos@btk.elte.hu >