

## PONDERING OVER PLURALISTIC QUEBEC

Editorial Note

The Pleasure of Difference:  
Why Would Quebec Deprive Itself?

Welcoming Religious Diversity  
in Open Secularity

Concerted Adjustments and  
Reasonable Accommodations: Ideas  
and Suggestions Presented to the  
Bouchard-Taylor Commission

A Pluralistic Quebec in  
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Intercultural Practice

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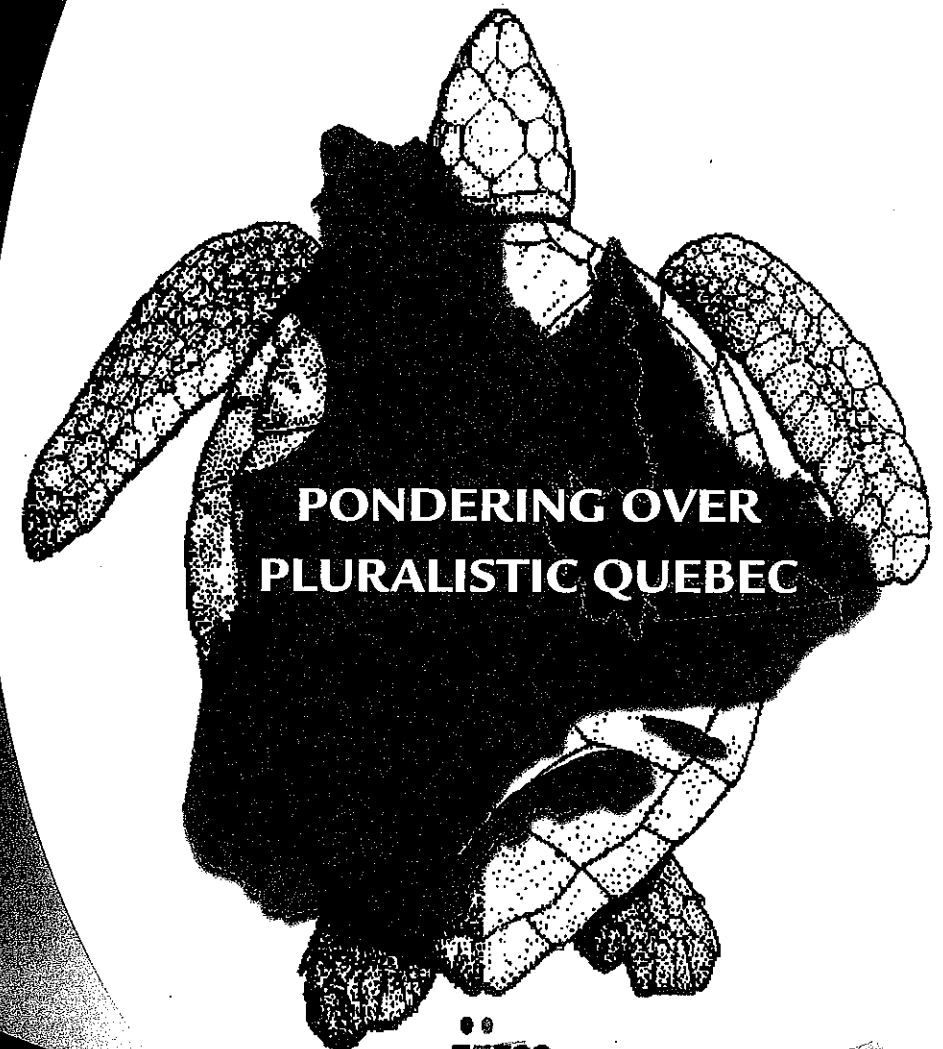
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*What is America?*  
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# InterCulture

Issue 156 April 2009



PONDERING OVER  
PLURALISTIC QUEBEC



Intercultural Institute of Montreal

# InterCulture

English Edition

InterCulture is an international journal of intercultural and transdisciplinary research established in 1968 and published by the Intercultural Institute of Montreal

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*In Canada: Individual \$23 — Institution \$40*

*Abroad: please add \$5*

*Quebec please add PST 7.5%*

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*or by an International Money Order.*

*GST: R-118847581 — PST: 1006100976*

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InterCulture appears twice a year in April and October, in English (ISSN 0828-797X) and French (ISSN 0712-1571). An Italian version is published by the Associazione Interculture, via Porrettana Sud, 130, 40043 Marzabotto (Bo), Italia. Phone/fax: (39) 051-917292 [interculture@virgilio.it](mailto:interculture@virgilio.it)

InterCulture is:

member of the Canadian Magazine Publishers Association (CMPA)  
[www.genuinecanadianmagazines.ca](http://www.genuinecanadianmagazines.ca)

currently abstracted by  
Religious & Theological Abstracts,  
PO Box 215, Myerstown, PA 17067 USA

indexed in the ATLA Religion Database, published by the American Theological Library Association.

Legal deposit: 2009  
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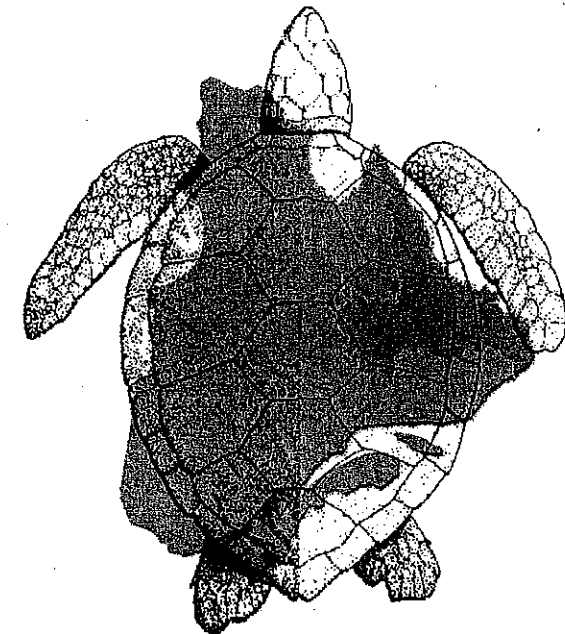
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Layout: Kesse Soumahoro — [skesse@videotron.ca](mailto:skesse@videotron.ca)

Imprimerie Bourdon Inc.

Phone: (514) 385-9748, Fax: (514) 385-6905

## PONDERING OVER PLURALISTIC QUEBEC



Although the Bouchard-Taylor Commission did not deal with the Native Indian Reality, one should take into account that the first reasonable accommodation that took place in this land of Quebec, were those of the various Native Nations towards the newly arrived Europeans. On this topic, see the article by Michael Kanentase Rice, from the Mohawk Nation, that we published in issue 154 of *InterCulture*. This is the reason why we have chosen the indigenous symbolic reminder of Turtle Island as that which supports the country of Quebec.



Intercultural Institute of Montreal

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# PONDERING OVER PLURALISTIC QUEBEC

## Editorial Note<sup>1</sup>

By Lomomba Emongo

What is left of reasonable accommodations after the recent uproar? Are they part of an outdated discussion or the remnants of a flash in the pan? Of course there was the Bouchard-Taylor Commission's official report. But what else...

It seems interesting, therefore, to revisit this topic far from the media hype that has surrounded it. In doing so, we do not wish to reevaluate the phenomenon: we will not show how the subject was handled during the stormy weeks of the Commission, nor will we discuss the final official report, the series of applications, or the report's recommendations. We are also not going to offer a new synthesis of the numerous memorandums submitted to the Commission. We are even less interested in sparking more controversy. Rather, we will pose a question that has undoubtedly passed unnoticed: what if the issue of reasonable accommodation both originates and ends somewhere beyond the narrow political, judicial, and media contexts that recently characterised the subject in Québec?

It is worth noting that no memorandum taken individually or the official report of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission would be able to exhaust the subject of pluralism in Québec. The first challenge consists in understanding the real nature of its pluralism here. In planning this issue of *Interculture*, we felt that the political pluralism embodied by the multi-party system of the modern State is insufficient. This is also the case with intellectual and/or sociopolitical distinctions – classifying different groups according to language, religion, origin, skin colour, etc. – and without forgetting the mutual suspicion that individuals and groups have of each other.

It is also essential to note that if pluralism in Québec naturally stems from the very pluralism of reality itself, its current multiple expressions cannot ignore the three spheres of its intrinsic diversity: the diversity of the First Nations (including the Iroquois Confederacy), the diversity of so-called Québécois “de souche” (old stock) (the “two solitudes” as we used to say not so long ago), and the diversity of the different waves of

<sup>1</sup> Editor's Note: this article was translated by Colleen Mason.

recent immigration (that represent almost the whole world on Québec soil). We must believe, however, that this list is not exhaustive. We should, therefore, disentangle the vital threads that stitch the backdrop of each of them, i.e. the complex network of no less important threads that structure the three intrinsic diversities of Québec society. To do so, we could have asked ourselves: how far would the question of reasonable accommodation take us in this vast web? Let's ask ourselves the same question in a different way: how far can the effort go today to revisit the unresolved issue of reasonable accommodation?

In this issue, *Interculture* aims to give voice once again to the multiple diversity of Québec through some pertinent memorandums. Indeed, though they were all submitted at the time of the Commission, the reports were not widely known – how many people read only the official report? The content of these memorandums, all related to one aspect or another of the reasonable accommodation question, will undoubtedly catch the reader's attention as it did ours. We intend to fuel both critical thinking and action by publishing them here. We also hope that they provide insight into our particular "realities" (First Nations, "de souche," immigrant) and to Reality itself, to our individual horizons that are inevitably limited to the unfathomable call of the Other in so far as "I" am always other for someone else. In short, by rediscovering differences at the heart of multiple diversities in Québec, we genuinely hope this issue of *Interculture* will allow for better understanding between men and women from here and elsewhere and allow for human sublimation into the cosmic and the divine.

By way of introduction, Gilles Bibeau<sup>2</sup> presents a clarifying contextualization of the reasonable accommodation question explaining that reasonable accommodations do not constitute the first discourse of intrinsic diversity or multiple reality in Québec. This helps to come to terms with the pluralist experiences and the quest for identity from both within and outside of Québec today. This is based on the French republican model, inherited from the basic foundations of the Nation-State. And it is the Canadian multicultural model that undoubtedly dates back to certain integrationist policies of the British Colonial Empire. Still today, this past does not seem to have lost its problematic nature or its mobilizing virtues in one direction or the other. Only the vocabulary has been updated. But these references, which were previously French and English, or even Canadian, are now attached to the very soil in Québec. "We" is a term that says a lot about the multiple realities in Québec today but not always taking its shape. Its many changes – linguistic, ethnocultural, civic or republican – are filled with more question marks than exclamation marks. What new perspectives are brought by the questions and discourse on reasonable accommodations?

This is followed by the Université de Montréal's Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies' memorandum in its entirety.<sup>3</sup> If there is one defining aspect of diversity that

<sup>2</sup> Full professor at the Université de Montréal, specialising in medical anthropology, and member of the *Interculture* editorial board. We have published here nearly his entire text, which was discussed, adopted, and then submitted to the Commission as the ERASME memorandum (an acronym that refers to the Équipe de Recherche et d'Action en Santé Mentale et culture. This group is made up of around twenty professors and researchers from five universities – Université de Montréal, McGill, UQAM, Laval and Ottawa – and three groups of community and alternative organizations – Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale; Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes; and PEYO).

<sup>3</sup> *Interculture* thanks the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université de Montréal for allowing us to publish their report here.

makes the strongest mark on cultural differences, it is surely religion. In Québec, we are sometimes tempted to oversimplify, as we oppose an artificial Québec that is supposedly homogenous and entirely Catholic against multiple others from recent immigration. Beyond this indispensable terminological exercise, the authors put their finger on a brilliant illustration of the unfinished nature of the relationship with the Other through religion: the Muslim headscarf in Québec. Here as well, we are invited to go beyond risky ideological simplifications that fundamentally maintain the opposition between republican secularity of modern Quebec and the feared return of religion on the public stage. As a symbol of the supposed antithesis of the emancipation of women in Québec, the veil then becomes even worse the symbol of civil regression, which is intolerable for some, in regards to a certain project for our society. Immigration is generally considered to lack sufficient investment by integrationist policies and would be, in the religious realm and more particularly in the form of the Islamic veil, a point of resistance to overcome for a homogenized Quebec identity based on an homogeneous Quebecois culture. Some jurisprudence is also criticised as an irritant by some because it is less incline to fully integrate new immigrants. But can the question of reasonable accommodation still be viewed through a sole identity model, even if it represents the majority, in a country whose social and cultural make-up is increasingly diverse? Can this question avoid community ties, including belonging to heterogeneous religious groups? The authors of the report's recommendations do not shy away from taking such a direction.

Next, in the same spirit, we present the Islam, Pluralism, and Globalization Chair's

report<sup>4</sup> that takes up the issue of identity denial. Because it is frequently fueled by ideology, identity denial clashes runs counter to the very idea of pluralism. Indeed, those who now want political ideology to drive a social project for Québec are motivated by a sentimental force focused on a singular identity, undoubtedly because they represent the majority. This is how their undeniable influence on perceiving one's own identity and the identity of others is seen as being one between integration and exclusion. The case of Islam in Québec, the authors explain, shows how much ideology influences perceptions of cultural identity that are shaped by the ignorance and fear of some Muslim behaviour and values. This causes cultural identity tensions to increase and provokes a deep feeling of injustice in a certain number of Québec Muslims, undoubtedly, because they represent less than 2% of the population. Among the planned prerequisites to reconcile the theoretical ideal of Québec society and its practical implementation, is the promotion of open secularity, in the form of an honest dialogue on the heterogeneous values present in Québec. This would be a path to "total inclusion," the only path able to promote "real pluralism." According to the authors, the question behind reasonable accommodation in Québec is "the question of discrimination linked to rights and liberties" that regulates the question of religious freedom.

Finally, the Intercultural Institute of Montréal intends, from the start, to transcend the limited nature of the Commission's approach of dealing with diversity in order to go deeper. Beyond the necessary social contract between citizens, there are deep human ties, rooted in the pluralism of reality itself. Beyond reasonable accommodations,

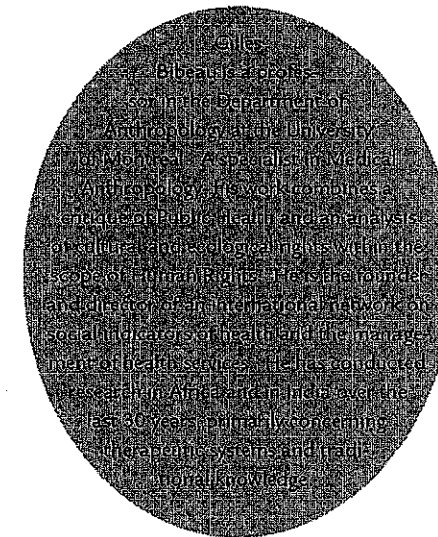
<sup>4</sup> The Islam, Pluralism and Globalization Chair is part of the Canada Research Chairs. It is linked to the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université de Montréal. *Interculture* thanks its directors who allowed us to publish this memorandum.

we find friendly intercultural dialogue and comprehension on a daily basis between people from different backgrounds, different religions, and different cultures. Québec, rich from its intrinsic diversity, is profoundly intercultural and as such, has always transcended the different objective intellectual framework, and even the different projects for a pluralist society that we have had in the past. This intercultural experience precedes the advent of modern Québec with the First Nations; it accompanies its marked emergence with the Quiet Revolution; it calls still today for a "feast of nations" as described by Jacques Langlais, the late founder of the IIM, as the most recent migratory sources have diversified. Québec's challenge today is to initiate an innovative approach to diversity. Interculturality is a term that, according to the authors, contains such a relationship with diversity. What kind of interculturality are we taking about? The answer lies in the pages that follow.

Once again, may this issue of *Interculture* fuel the reader's critical thinking and actions on the issues and challenges that arise, today more than ever, from the complex reality of contemporary societies called to pluralism and interculturality.

By Gilles Bibeau

## The Pleasure of Difference: Why Would Quebec Deprive Itself?



*Je me souviens  
Né sous le lys  
J'ai grandi sous la rose<sup>1</sup>*

The collective exercise of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission is based on the idea that the two principal models of integration of immigrants, namely multiculturalism and republicanism, are outworn; that they are incapable of proposing clear functional guidelines that would allow the host societies to maintain their national identity, while remaining open to different immigrant cultures. In our reflexion, we shall explore a third way that takes its inspiration from "interculturalism" which integrates certain aspects of republicanism and multiculturalism; while taking some distances in certain aspects from this two major models.

In this article, we will sketch in broad outline the profile of a new type of plural society that could emerge in Quebec. This approach could be globally described as

This article is a revised version of a text that the author prepared for a group discussion, while editing the brief presented by ERASME to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. ERASME (Equipe de Recherche et Action en Santé Mentale et Culture) is a group comprising about twenty professors and researchers from five universities (University of Montreal, McGill, UQAM, Laval and Ottawa) and three community organizations (Regroupement des ressources alternatives en santé mentale, Table de concertation des organismes au service des personnes réfugiées et immigrantes, and PEYO).

Editor's Note: this article was translated by Rosemary Roberts and Audrey Saldhana.

<sup>1</sup> What exactly must Quebecers remember? The "I remember" of the poem engraved on the Parliament Building in Quebec is followed by a verse that is clearly bi-national and bi-cultural that says: "Born under the lily, I grew up under the rose". Is it possible that the poet tried to recall the fundamental ambiguity of Quebecois identity?

post-republican and post-multicultural. As an introduction, we have deemed it useful to compare what is happening within two groups of Western countries: (1) in Anglo-Saxon countries where multicultural policies are presently being criticized and attacked for nurturing, according to some, social division rather than solidarity; (2) in Latin countries, especially France, which opted rather for a republican model, and which put in place laws and regulations that restrained the expression of differences within the public sphere, particularly within schools. As much in England, in Ireland, as well as in France, we are witnessing troubled, sometimes alarmist, reactions concerning the transformation that immigration, according to some, would be imposing on the national identity of these countries.

We will undoubtedly better understand the specificity of Quebec following comparisons with two countries, Britain and France, with whom the four-century history of Quebec is so profoundly interrelated. The model we are proposing of socio-cultural integration of new Quebecers, refuses to define the national Quebec identity through any particular set of cultural traits. Rather, we envisage a collective identity of the Quebecois nation, and of all other nations, as "Virtual fields" that are constantly recomposing at the same time that they are creating continuity. Our model presents a certain kinship with the policy of "interculturalism" that has evolved in Quebec over the last thirty years. We have conceptualized our model by examining the position occupied by Quebec in the present global context. We postulate that the only way to freedom open to Quebec follows an increased democratization of our society, a democratization that must show greater respect towards the differences which new Quebecers represent. Quebec will perhaps overcome its insecurities with relation to its identity by discovering the pleasure of "difference".

## 1. The return of "us" in the debate about accommodation

Since the onset of the storm sparked, shall we say, by a few particularly problematic religious accommodations, members of various groups and associations have been wondering if the time has not come for Quebec to create, as in France, its own Charter defining and enshrining the values of Quebecois society (a democracy of equal citizens, the secular State, French as the official language in the public domain, equality between men and women, etc.). This Charter of Quebec Culture would, according to its promoters, provide a clear and indisputable reference point for all those living in Quebec, irrespective of their ethnic origins, and the period of time since their settlement on this territory. The Charter would also offer a clear affirmation of values from which the public sphere in Quebec could continue to structure itself, and to develop along the historical bases of Quebec society, all the while integrating elements contributed by new arrivals. The promoters also hope that the adoption of such a Charter could engender a "vivre ensemble", a process analogous to that of the Charter of the French Language over thirty years ago.

The newspaper articles, and the declarations of politicians in search of political capital, contributed to a resurgence of an ethnically-accented nationalism that was thought to have disappeared in Quebec. Divisive nationalism had in fact receded over the last ten or fifteen years, or so we thought, swept away by a civic nationalism that was both inclusive and pluralistic. This nationalism was suddenly revealed to be much less inclusive than was previously thought.

The collective psychodrama initiated and nourished by often alarmist debates concerning reasonable accommodation served to increase the feelings of insecurity among the population, engendering a disquieting

regression in the quality of relations between the host society and new Quebecers, even to the point unexpectedly of holding the latter solely responsible for the supposed "non-integration" of neo-Quebecers. Leaders of opinion (politicians, intellectuals, journalists) were rarely heard to moderate these debates, to defuse the situation by redefining the questions in a clear-minded way, within a larger context, and with reference to the facts<sup>2</sup>.

Frequently neglected, in the course of these debates, was relating the question of accommodation to the larger one: that of the conditions that facilitate, delay or block the integration of immigrants to Quebec society. Little attention was paid to questions of discrimination or racism to which some groups of neo-Quebecers are particularly vulnerable. Little effort was made to identify the obstacles that arise during the process of integration, be it access to adequate lodging, the job market or participation in the public sphere.

The detour of Quebec's national identity and autonomy, that was created by the debate about accommodation, presents potential dangers that are difficult to side-track: it risks the resurgence of "old demons" that polarize "us" and "them"; it almost certainly repositions the debate in terms of exclusion rather than inclusion; and it provokes an inward retreat and a mistrust of the Other. Is it really worth taking these risks? The Commission no doubt had no other choice than to

<sup>2</sup> Who publicly said that only 30 of the 4000 or so complaints received between 2000 and 2005 by the Human Rights and Youth Commission were concerning reasonable accommodation? Who clarified that over half of these 30 complaints were made, not by Muslim fundamentalists or dangerous extremists, but rather by Jehovah Witnesses, by Protestants and by Catholics from the host society? Who dared to denounce the vast movement of intolerance that swept through a large segment of the population? Who had denounced the quasi-religious attitudes that many Quebecois adopt concerning the supposed secularity of Quebec? All of these questions were avoided, thus compromising serious enquiry into the process of constructing a truly pluralistic Quebec.

encompass within the same reflection the questions of reasonable accommodation and that of Quebecois identity.

## 2. Countries following the British tradition are losing faith in the multicultural credo (with the possible exception of Canada)

An incident involving a turban in Ireland, that destabilizes "Londonistan" and other ethnic enclaves in Great Britain, carries a number of lessons for our reflection. Ireland has just excluded from its police force all Sikh policemen who wish to exercise their duties while continuing to wear a turban (the "kanga", in Punjabi, which is one of the five symbols of Sikh identity). The Irish Minister of Integration justified the decision of the government by affirming that all immigrants living in Ireland must accept the rules of the host country and behave like the Irish.<sup>3</sup>

"If we want to take integration seriously, added the Minister, "people who settle here must be reminded of our customs. When the Irish travel to Asia, they accept the cultural ways of the country of their destination. It is a reciprocal situation". The Minister doubtless spoke without thinking: since when do the Irish really behave like the locals when they are abroad? By banning the turban, and for purely political reasons, Ireland has, in fact, broken with practices prevalent in all Commonwealth countries, notably in Great Britain, Australia and Canada, all countries that adopted practices recognized

<sup>3</sup> During this announcement, the Irish Minister said he was quite aware of the high degree of symbolic importance of the turban for the Sikh community; he did not specify, however, if he saw the turban as an historical reminder of the warrior-saints that founded the Sikh religion, thus a true religious symbol, or as a simple sign of secular identity (such as wearing a cow-boy hat or a base-ball cap).



as legitimate in India.<sup>4</sup> Through the regulation forbidding policemen from wearing the turban, Ireland is sending a clear signal distancing itself from Britain. The new Irish policy also seeks to break with multiculturalism that is considered an inheritance from the old British Empire.

Ireland is distancing itself from Britain at a crucial turning point in British migratory history. Great Britain has been engulfed, for at least two years, in a tumultuous debate concerning the definition of "Britishness" and what this "Britishness" should mean to newcomers, notably the million and a half immigrants from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh that have settled in the old metropolis. These immigrants, originally from the ex-Raj Empire, who constitute the largest ethnic group in Great Britain, were often cited as "prototypes" of desirable immigrants. In government documents, statistical information and in the media, the British habitually refer to them as "British Indians" or "British Asians".

A series of events have recently shaken the positive image that the British had of the "British Indians" settled in their country. The British were very surprised to learn that, in a recent survey conducted by the BBC, close to 40% of Asian immigrants considered themselves "slightly or not at all" British. The true allegiance of these "British Indians" was suddenly perceived as a betrayal to Britain: at best, said the British, it could be a case of their giving themselves twin identities—that of the host country and of the country of origin; at worst, adopting an

identity totally outside of the British one. The British were moved radically re-examine their multicultural practices, their modalities of integration of new-Britishers into their society, and the fact of allowing the settlement of entire neighbourhoods by Indians or Pakistanis, for example in Finsbury Park in East London.

In August 2007, debates concerning "Britishness" were renewed with the demand by Nikita Lalwani, novelist and finalist (short-listed) for the Booker Man Prize 2007, that journalists refer to her as "Indo-British" and not "British Indian". The reversal of the two terms shocked the British inasmuch as the celebrated author has lived in Cardiff, capital of Wales, practically since her birth (she was a year old when her parents immigrated), she married a Britisher of Indian origin, and she is well integrated into the cultural institutions of the country, notably the BBC radio, on which she was an animator for several programs.<sup>5</sup> In inverting the order of identities, the writer sparked a veritable storm throughout Britain, a storm that could affect all the Commonwealth countries that habitually follow the example set by the British concerning immigrants from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh.

The British are presently asking themselves, more and more overtly, if the policy of multiculturalism, now in the process of being abandoned, has not brought their country to an impasse. They are suddenly realizing that successive British governments had avoided imposing on immigrants active measures of socio-cultural integration, apparently considering inopportune to ask new Britishers to absorb English culture and identity in order to possess a British passport. The uncertainty of the British concerning their national identity puts them in a

paradoxical situation from which that they would like to be extricated.

In presenting the national identity of Britain as an on-going plural, fluid and open process, constantly in construction, multiculturalism has resulted in children of immigrants being brought up in at least two value-systems, with a sense of belonging to one or the other, without totally identifying with one or the other. Multiculturalism has certainly allowed, even encouraged, living on the frontiers of several worlds, which has resulted, in Britain as elsewhere, in a series of mini-cultural worlds, juxtaposed with one another in the same global social space; each of these mini-worlds relating, more or less in-depth, with the values and practices of the host society.

In reality, as much (if not more) sociological forces than the policy of multiculturalism which explain the community groups that have burgeoned in well defined geographical areas. One of the major reasons explaining why so many neo-Britishers have maintained close proximity with their community of origin is the protection that the community offers to its members, as much on the economic level as the cultural and the religious. The strength of this sense of belonging will vary in intensity from one community to the other: for some, there is a quasi-total fusion between personal interests and that of the group; for others, there is a distancing from the group, sometimes to the point of rupture.

Let us return to Canada and the question of the turban. In August 2007, the Canadian authorities apologized to the parents of three Sikh children whose applications for passports were denied because they were wearing turbans on their identification photos. The Canadian authorities assured the parents that the error made by the bureaucrats at the Passport Office would be corrected, thus indirectly recognizing that wearing the

turban is protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Canada has apparently not embarked on a revision of its multicultural policy as in the case of Ireland, or in a more timid fashion, Britain. It is clear that the government of Quebec does not interpret the articles of the Canadian and Quebec Charters in as liberal as Canada does.

### 3. The impasse of the French republican model

Does the integration policy of republican France better guide the immigrant than do the countries following the British tradition? Since 2007, the turban is also causing tremors in France, following an action taken by Shingara Mann Singh, a French citizen of Indian origin. Before the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, Mr. Singh contested the constitutionality of a French law requiring the head to be uncovered in identification photos. Mr. Singh was refused the renewal of his driver's licence after submitting a photo where he was wearing a Sikh turban. The incident recalled the affair of the head-scarf that rocked France in 1989, when a school principal refused entry to three Muslim students wearing headscarves. France was then divided into two clans: on one side, the neo-republicans refused the argument of respecting cultural differences and sought to reaffirm the secular character of republican schools; on the other, a more pragmatic group argued that France could stumble into arbitrary and intolerant attitudes in waging, according to Alain Touraine, "three headscarves against the integration of three million Muslims in France". This group called for a more detailed examination of the social, economic and cultural barriers that blocked the way for immigrants in their integration into French society.

For the philosopher, Alain Finkielkraut, "republican France" should never bow down before "tribal France" of which "the good

<sup>4</sup> The reader is reminded here that the current Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh is himself from the Sikh community and that he wears at all times the symbols of his community of origin. The same goes for soldiers, policemen, and bureaucrats in India who publicly display, by their apparel or accoutrements, their identity and community adherence. One must witness the parades of the regiments of the Indian Army to appreciate the extraordinary ethnic and religious diversity within this huge, pluralistic country, a diversity that can be seen, among other things by the clothing and headgear of the soldiers.

<sup>5</sup> The fact that N. Lalwani comes from a reputable intellectual family, from a privileged background, close to the progressive British artistic milieu, gave weight to her demand to be considered "Indo-British".



apostles of cultural identity" were promoters. The neo-republican front to which Finkielkraut belongs, also includes Régis Debray, Elisabeth Badinter and the Islamic specialist, Maxime Robinson, who said that the rise of "communitarism" was all the more dangerous for France because of its religious nature. In the polarization based on a symbol of religious apparel, questions concerning the real obstacles for immigrants to integrate into French society were avoided. Touraine insisted that schools should not be assigned the task of "rejection" and that return of the "assimilation ideas" into French society, was of concern to all. At the end of 1989, Lionel Jospin chose a legal option to break the impasse: the State Council that he had convened decided that wearing religious symbols in schools "is not of itself incompatible with secularity", with the condition, however, that they be neither "ostentatious" nor "in protest".

In 2003, the problem of religious symbols was again raised in France, this time following the exclusion from a high-school of two students wearing the hidjab. To calm the unrest, the President of the Republic (Jacques Chirac) appointed a Commission of reflection on the application of secular principles in French public institutions, particularly schools, where the directors were demanding clearer guide-lines than those announced by the State Council in 1989. The Commission, presided by Bernard Stasi, submitted its report in December 2003, which then served as the framework for a law in March 2004, forbidding all ostentatious signs in schools as well as hospitals... To provide guidance for practical application, the High Council for Integration established in January 2007, the French Charter of Laicism in public services, that does not take into account that France, an increasingly cosmopolitan country, needs a real policy of integration. Laicism is presented as equivalent to "French republican rule" in astonishing mix of laicism and

franco-french patriotism, which risks blocking the evolution of French society towards pluralism.

Some French specialists in immigration, notably the sociologist, Jean Baubérot, who was a member of the Stasi Commission, pleaded for a return to a more inclusive secularity in France, based on the law of 1905, which affirmed a clear separation of Church and State. The danger here is an increased tendency on the part of religious minorities to turn to private schools, as is the case in Quebec; if the Charter of Laicism is imposed in other public services, there is also a risk of developing a parallel system of private religious health services, such as in the United States.

The Charter for Laicism, established by the "Haut Conseil à l'intégration", in January 2007, provides principles to guide practices in public services, particularly schools and hospitals. This Charter project was drawn up following "incidents" where some Muslim men and women objected to male doctors treating women. It is surprising that these types of derogations provoke strong reactions in the media when it comes to Muslims, but are muted when similar demands have been made, far more frequently and over a long period of time by, for example, Orthodox Jews or Pentecostal Christians. The heightened reactions say much about the perception of Islam in the population at large, a generally negative one based largely on prejudices concerning the supposed fundamentalism in Muslim communities.

The French Charter of Laicism settled the question by pronouncing that "users of public services may not, by reason of their convictions, reject a public servant or other users, nor demand an adaptation of equipment or functioning of a public service". However, in France, as in Quebec, the law upholds a patient's right to choose his/her own doctor, and as this law has priority over

the clauses in the Charter, it would abrogate its application. It is possible that the debate will soon resurge over this question of gender in seeking health care, the idea of choosing a male or female therapist being defensible, according to some, taking into account the evolution of the sensibilities in hyper-sexualized Western societies. Such a debate could resemble, but in reverse, the discussions that took place when separate classrooms for girls and boys were changed to mixed classes.

The French Charter "canonizes" secularity by rendering it the equivalent of "republican rule". In the wake of France, some Quebecers have advanced the somewhat preposterous idea of a similar Charter in Quebec. The path chosen by France seems to inspire certain Quebecers who practise laicism as others practise Catholicism or Islam, and who oppose all accommodation of a religious nature on the pretext of potentially undermining the secular character of Quebec society. It is true that the concept of secularity is not understood in the same way in Quebec as in France: it is because of the neutrality of the State, and equal rights for all citizens that reasonable accommodation is accepted. The re-organization of school boards from confessional to linguistic did not transform Quebec into a lay society on the constitutional level. The introduction, in September 2008, of a new program on ethics and religious culture aims to foster greater respect among students towards all religious traditions. It will terminate a process begun in 1995 during the Estates General on Education that saw Quebec schools change to a non-confessional status. The new programme of initiation to the great world religions has the support of educators (though it leaves a number of parents perplexed), and charts a course towards real pluralism in school environments. In replacing Christian religious instruction by initiation to religious diversity, the new programme is a good illustration of the

Quebecois concept of secularity by respecting religious traditions.

Schools that have taken stock of the immense variety of religious traditions represented in the classrooms, now believe that mutual respect between students will only improve as they get to know each other better. The challenge remains on how to open minds to religious diversity while fostering a culture of civic secularity. Being too receptive to religious pluralism, is there not a risk that religion will be promoted in a State that sees itself as both secular and neutral? Is there not also a danger of one religion gaining preference to the detriment of others? In the collective imaginary, Quebec seems to be tending more and more towards the French republican laicism, albeit, in its own original way.

The France of Nicolas Sarkozy seems to blow hot and cold, appointing female ministers from visible minorities to important posts, thus signalling to newcomers that it is possible to successfully integrate into French society. At the same time, a "Ministry of Immigration, Integration, Co-development and National Identity" was set up, and stringent new laws on immigration were announced, particularly concerning the reunification of families. All this seems to be in line with public opinion, with the support of the majority of citizens, as judged by the popularity of the President. All the same, in June 2007, eight historians resigned from a coordinating committee at the Cité nationale de l'histoire de l'immigration (CNHI: an ambitious museum project initiated before the election of Sarkozy) because they felt that the "nationalistic and stigmatic" discourse inscribed in the designation of

the new ministry contradicted the spirit of open-mindedness present at the CNHI.<sup>6</sup>

The combination of terms such as "national identity" and "immigration", according to these historians, translates the dangerous mixture that Sarkozy advances of "endured immigration" and "chosen immigration", reaffirming the right of France to choose the profile of immigrants that the country wishes to accept: they should, of course, be young, qualified workers, speak French, etc., in short the ideal immigrant such as we also would like in Quebec....

#### 4. Four turns in the same political spiral in the integration of neo-Quebecers

It would be important to the understanding of the current exercise concerning reasonable accommodation, to take note of six government documents relating to the socio-cultural integration of immigrants that were produced over the last three decades. The texts are as follows: (1) *Charte de la langue française* (loi 101), 1977; (2) *Autant de façons d'être Québécois*, 1981; (3) *Au Québec, pour bâtir ensemble*, 1991; (4) *La gestion de la diversité et l'accommodement raisonnable*, 1993; (5) *Un Québec pour tous ses citoyens. Les défis actuels d'une démocratie pluraliste*, (Avis du Conseil des relations interculturelles), 1997; (6) *La citoyenneté québécoise*, 2000. In these texts that trace the whole of Quebec's policy, the question of integration of immigrants into Quebec society was formulated in four successive phases: first linguistic (1974-1977), then cultural and ethnic (1981), then civic (1991), and, finally, in increasingly republican rhetoric since 2000.

<sup>6</sup> The historians who opposed Sarkozy announced the creation of a Group of Observers of the Ministry of Immigration, Integration, Co-development and National Identity: they need to keep the Ministry under observation since, according to them, old stereotypes of immigration continue to be circulated, creating mistrust and hostility towards immigrants who are indirectly presented as threats to French national identity.

It forms the same spiral that unfurls around the definition of national identity, constantly picking up the former trajectories: starting with the national affirmation through the protection of the French language, consolidating in the affirming of specific values defining the national identity of Quebec and arriving at a promotion of civic nationalism. Each of the four turns subsume to a certain degree the preceding ones, and they all lead to the summit of the spiral, to a project oriented towards a republic, which, paradoxically, correlates with the intercultural policy.

*The linguistic turn* (1974 and 1977): To reverse the historic tendency towards the absorption of new Quebecers by the minority Anglophone community, Quebec had recourse to several linguistic laws that placed it in opposition to the policy of Canadian bilingualism. From 1974, the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa made French the official language in Quebec (Law 22). In 1977, the Parti Québécois of René Lévesque adopted the *Charte de la langue française* (Law 101), whose aim was to promote the French character of Québec, particularly with regard to immigrants, who were thereafter compelled to send their children to French schools (elementary and secondary); it also established French-language classes (COFI) to facilitate the integration of neo-Québécois into Francophone society; as well, it mandated French as the working language in businesses, and in French-only commercial and public signs. Law 101 legally enshrined the French language as the primary marker of the collective identity of the "Québécois people", a term that appears for the first time in a legislative text in Quebec in 1977.

In the context of Ottawa's "coast-to-coast" bilingualism, the monolingual policy of Quebec provoked immediate reactions of anxiety, even strong opposition, as much with the minority Anglophones, as with the immigrants who were traditionally

integrated into this community. From 1977 onwards, Alliance Quebec contested Law 101 before the courts and succeeded in invalidating some articles. The Quebec government responded to demands of the Anglophone minority by legally entrenching the rights of Anglo-Quebecers with regards to maintaining their schools, and their health and social service institutions to function in English. The descendants of Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Chinese and Jewish families, settled in Quebec over two, three, sometimes, four, generations, and having frequently adopted English as a second or third language, also reacted rather negatively to being required to integrate into the Francophone majority. The debates were vociferous in Parliament: in Ottawa, the newly-elected government (1968) of Pierre Elliot Trudeau was preparing to vote for laws on bilingualism and multiculturalism, twin laws that aimed to create a Canada that was bilingual and ethnically pluralistic. In Quebec, things were not going at all in the same direction. The decade of the 70's was one of language debates (some would say, linguistic wars), and was marked on one end by the famous October crisis in 1970, and on the other, by the controversial decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, to declare as unconstitutional certain articles of Law 101 that had been adopted two years previously by the National Assembly of Quebec.

*The ethno-cultural turn* (1981): The P.Q. government, after 1981, transformed linguistic nationalism into cultural nationalism, which they tried to share with neo-Quebecers, promising at the same time to respect their cultures of origin. The policy developed in 1981 in *"Autant de façons d'être Québécois"*, had three objectives: 1) to ensure the maintenance and development of cultural communities within Quebec society; 2) to sensitize Quebecers to the contribution immigrants make to the shared patrimony; 3) to facilitate their integration

into Francophone Quebec society. During the entire decade of the 80's the policy of welcoming new Quebecers was developed, notably under the influence of the minister-poet, Gérard Godin, who promoted two approaches: "Integrate into the Francophone majority" and "Quebec will respect your cultural differences". The Quebec government thus set up programmes to teach immigrant children their language of origin, and to support community media (newspapers and radio) and community organizations (social clubs, etc.) As well, Quebec promised to remodel its public institutions in such a way as to reflect the growing ethno-cultural diversity of Quebec society.

From 1981, the concept of "cultural communities" was the heart of the new Quebec integration policy for immigrants, and identified as "allophone" all those whose origins were neither that of the two founding peoples, nor of the indigenous peoples. In regrouping the new Quebecers by the origins of their parents and their cultural heritage, aside from their mother tongue, with no distinction between long-settled and newly-arrived communities, many descendants of Italian, Greek, Portuguese, Jewish or Chinese immigrants who were living in Quebec since decades, were doubly affected: on the one hand, they were transformed into communities with which some maintained few ties; on the other, by "canonizing their Otherness", many of these citizens had the feeling of being "strangers", notwithstanding their roots in Quebec, nor their fluency in French. Many specialists in immigration described Quebecois "interculturalism" as a utopian policy, which could be construed as dangerous for the construction of a pluralist collective identity in Quebec society. The notions of "interculturalism" and "cultural convergence" that formed the basis of this theory of ethnic plurality were never really clearly defined.

On the other hand, the Native nations had reaffirmed since 1990 (during the crises at Kanesatake and Kahnawake) that they were the first inhabitants of this land, and that they intended to claim greater autonomy, even sovereignty, in their own territories. For their part, the Anglo-Quebecers forcefully maintained that Quebec was part of Canada, that the English minority occupied a legitimate place that was distinct from this "mosaic of cultures" in Quebec, and that English should also be recognized an official language as in the rest of Canada. Some analysts today have the impression that the Native people and the Anglophones were the only ones to really take seriously the pluralist policy of the Quebec government, since it allowed them to claim in all legitimacy their rights as "communities" that were different from the "cultural communities" of the neo-Quebecers. Referring to the policy of interculturalism, Native people and Anglophones demanded their cultural and linguistic rights as historic rights in the territory of Quebec. Increased tensions for members of "cultural communities", caught between Canadian multiculturalism and Quebecois interculturalism, obliged Quebec to back-track towards a "common public culture".

*The civic turn*, (1991): Notions of "common public culture", "civic convergence", "cultural contribution" and "moral contract" became the centre of the civic approach that Quebec started to put into place from 1991. Quebec values (a democracy of equal citizens, the secular State, French as the official language of the public life), institutions and laws form the "common public culture", which, according to the policy of 1991, newcomers must accept and respect as a "moral contract" at all times over and above the religious and cultural practices of their country of origin. There is no more leeway in this policy for programs supporting cultural communities, since this practice apparently, so they say contributed to community

introversion, creating tensions, sometimes violence between groups. Interculturalism has continue to survive somewhat, through a trickle-down process, through the concept of "cultural contribution" that the Ministry's ideologues created to refer to "diverse cultures that came, have come, and will come to enrich the patrimony of Quebec society" (MICC 1991:80).

Quebec, in 1991, thus joined a certain number of countries of immigration in a tendency towards greater civic conformity, integration and assimilation, in which there was less and less place for pluralism and the presence of differences that the "Other" may bring to public life. The notions of "common public culture", civic convergence" and "moral contract" were the pillars of the civic approach from 1991 onwards. Quebec rejected the federal multicultural model by demanding neo-Quebecers coming from "contributing cultures" to accept a "moral contract" with the host society. Already required to learn French, newcomers had also to respect a number of norms and customs prevalent in Quebec, with particular regard to equality between men and women and child-rearing practices, this even if they were "incompatible with their religion or personal values" (Moral contract, 1993). Concerning family organization, the text of the "moral contract" stipulates that "Men and women have the same responsibilities and enjoy the same rights in the eyes of the law, in public affairs as well as in private life", that "marriage unites a man and only one women" and that "polygamy is illegal"; that "only a civil divorce granted by virtue of Canadian law is recognized as legal", that "the repudiation of one spouse by another has no legal effect", that "in the case of divorce, the estate of the couple belonging to the family patrimony is divided equally between the spouses" that "the law obliges parents and tutors to provide security to children and attention necessary to their well-being", and finally, that

"violence towards a child, a spouse or any other person is forbidden, thus excision is also illegal".

The "moral contract" imposed on neo-Quebecers is based on the idea that a common Quebec culture existed before the arrival of immigrants, that the fundamental values have been clearly articulated and could not be displaced by the "contributing cultures". Accommodation is possible, but, according to the text of "Moral contract", care must be taken to avoid "*reconfessionalizing the public sphere*" or provoking "*segregation or exclusion*". Quebec has thus in 1991 joined other countries of immigration in a more and more civic, integrational and assimilating discourse, where there is less and less room for pluralism in the public space and for respect of the Other's differences.

*The republican turn* (2000): During the summer of 2000, a consultation document entitled "*La citoyenneté québécoise*" was widely circulated throughout Quebec. This document, produced by the Ministry for Relations with Citizens and for Immigration, served as the basis for discussion at a National Forum on Citizenship and Integration that was held in Quebec on September 21-22, 2000. A new version of the socio-cultural integration policy for immigrants was presented, which proposed a restructuring around the notions of Quebec citizenship, the Quebecois people, shared patrimony, and the "civic contract", this last being a more radical version of the "moral contract" of 1991; in the name of cohesion with the host society, this contact would become a true instrument of integration of neo-Quebecers into the project of the State of Quebec. The document states that "*the learning of the language is insufficient for a successful integration*", and that necessarily "*the knowledge of the language must be accompanied by sharing essential cultural markers, identity reference-points, as well as participation in institutions that manifest or embody them.*" (FNCI 2000: 20).

According to the "civic contract" that the government wished to implement, the knowledge of French is thus no longer more than the minimal condition to gain Quebec citizenship; a supplementary condition is added which requires the newcomer to show complete "allegiance" towards the "cultural patrimony of Quebec" of which the neo-Quebecers become successors by their decision to settle in Quebec. The notions of cultural communities, of allophones, of common public culture, were thus deleted from the vocabulary and replaced by an integration policy that required all newcomers to display loyalty to Quebec: the plurality of their identities and their attachment to multiculturalism and bilingualism of Ottawa were seen as threats to Quebec. To guide the integration of neo-Quebecers, the document proposed setting up an inclusive policy that would comprise, among others, the following activities: the promotion of symbols (the flag) and emblems of Quebec, the commemoration of our important historical events, a new civic calendar, support for civic participation, awareness of the reality of indigenous peoples, and promoting "*historic places which help the understanding and the adoption of a common civic patrimony*" (FNCI 2000:29).

It was hoped that, once and for all, clear guidelines for newcomers would put an end to serious problems that had arisen from the dual models of integration by Canada and by Quebec. "*The transmission of civic patrimony is perturbed by concurrent frameworks of legitimacy. A conflict of legitimacy and concurrent identity references is problematic to the acquisition and exercise of citizenship for all Quebecois, be they immigrant or not.*" (FNCI 2000:19). This document presents the inclusion of immigrants following one set of criteria for integration: it is only by accepting a sovereign Quebec that they could truly and successfully be integrated. No more "dual symbols", farewell to conflicting loyalties

and out-dated pluralistic identities, and may unanimity triumph!

Hidden under the rhetoric of a common citizenship was de facto a rather clumsy appeal for the sovereignist cause, one that was quickly unmasked. Once again Quebec seemed to opt for a detour, by means of an immigration and reception policy, to reaffirm itself as a nation seeking autonomy from Canada and its policy of bilingualism and multiculturalism. Apart from its republican jargon, the proposal of the new policy seemed inflated by a passionate project to revitalize the nation of Francophone Quebec. Some wondered if Francophone Quebec, once liberated from its "siege mentality", was now reverting to a policy of resentment towards the Anglophone minority and demanding loyalty from neo-Quebecers, who no longer are received for themselves and for the differences that they bring with them.

The "civic contract" that seriously twisted the "moral contract" of the 90's, risked becoming more of a means of control than of liberty. Such a contract, thankfully, was never in fact instated. The debates around reasonable accommodation tend to indicate that, since the return of the nationalism of the 1970's, Quebec seems caught in a double impasse from which it tries to extricate itself. On the one hand, there is the nationalist agenda that tends to draw the Other into its Self and to associate it with the larger project of the Francophone majority; on the other, to distance itself from the Foreigner, in the worst case to reject his difference, or, at best, to remain indifferent or in mutual ignorance. However, the Quebecois people, with extraordinary pragmatism, seem to refuse to imprison themselves in one or the other impasse, where much of the political discourse and projects have bogged down; projects relating to the construction of Quebec true to its own collective identity while at the same time remaining open to

integration of differences brought in by immigration.

### 5. Envisioning National identity as a virtual field

As soon as we attempt to define national identity by reducing it to a few particular traits, we are setting it up for collapse. What, in effect, could Quebecers have in common besides, for example, being well-groomed, wearing suits or dresses, speaking French and going to the Sugar Shack from time to time? Others will say, rather, that they see Quebec as a terrain, evoking "*les rangs*"—rows of farmland throughout the countryside—and the memories of evenings past spent dancing the *rigodon* with the whole family, and the churches, now emptied of worshippers, still anchored in the hearts of our villages and the neighbourhoods of our cities. That was yesterday's vision of Quebec, which will perhaps be corrected by those Quebecers who uphold, with just as much reason, that being *Québécois* means having an open mind, accepting other cultures and recognizing the richness brought by immigrants.

Others will undoubtedly insist that the definition of the nation's identity be based on charters, on the laws that they protect, in particular the law of religious freedom that is recognized in article 3 of the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. And more fundamental still is the right of equality for all citizens, establishing no hierarchy between the descendants of the first settlers and more recent immigrants. Indirectly, the Charters remind us that notions of nation, of peoples and of ethnic identity reflect a historical construction that never ceases to move, a dynamic relationship that often becomes a hierarchy within the society, borders that fluctuate according to the stakes and the contexts of interaction. Ethnicity, identity and ethnic differences appear as fluid realities constructed together.

Ethnicity is never defined once and for all, and is not transmitted genetically.

In *Les Québécois* (1974), the great sociologist Marcel Rioux demonstrated that all societies, and Quebec is no exception, respond with a double strategy when confronted with difference. On the one hand, they tend to reinforce their own identity by a reinforcement of their heritage, by repetition of the status quo, and by a "return to our roots" quest, an approach that Quebec has spontaneously adopted each time it has felt threatened. On the other hand, identity is created in approaching and at times intermixing with the Foreigner, by borrowing from the neighbour's world and by patching up the divide between the Self and the Other. This was the approach that Quebec favoured overall, according to Rioux, when it consisted of a French-language colonial society in America. A brief look at the history of Quebec relations—first with the First Nations peoples, subsequently with the English—is important if we want to understand the ambivalence that contemporary Quebec harbours with regard to immigrants. This detour becomes even more important considering that the First Nations and English-speaking peoples still represent, for Quebecers, the two groups perceived most undeniably as Other.

Ever since the early part of the nineteenth century, Quebec has been described as a society continuously stretched between two poles. On the one hand is fidelity to a language that has served as a principal identity marker since ancient times, to a cultural heritage coming primarily from *la Nouvelle-France* and to a collective imaginary, a "historical conscience" as Fernand Dumont put it, which was largely formed before the English Conquest. On the other hand, the consistently (re)affirmed political plan, periodically started and pushed back again, to construct a French-language society in the Saint Lawrence Valley, with a identity distinct from that of English Canada, and engaged

in a process of adjustment to the pluralistic and globalized world of today. Between the Quebecers' compulsive return to their roots and the memory of often traumatic encounters with First Nations, English and pre-Law 101 immigrants who were largely anglicized, there does indeed seem to be a place in the Quebecers' collective imaginary for the welcoming of differences brought by new generations of immigrants.

On an external level, Quebec has tried to model itself after its societies of origin—France and Great Britain—as much as has the rest of Canada and North America. On an internal level, a parallel movement has drawn a clear distinction between the descendants of the two "founding populations", differentiated at once by their origin, their culture and their language. Indians and Inuits had little place in this founding myth, and their Otherness has remained encased symbolically, as it has been spatially on the reserves. Today, attempts to separate them from each other seem to be stronger than ever before, though the arguments have changed and the big picture appears muddy. In the 1970s, the bards of independence were the poets, the singers, the intellectuals who gathered around the words of G. Vigneault, "*Gens du pays*". In the 1990s, the leaders of the movement were business men and women, and their mobilizing slogan was "We are able".

It may be useful to say a few words on the subject of each of the five scenarios that have been proposed, during recent years, to pave the way that will eventually lead to the construction of a pluralist society. In Quebec, one can find partisans of assimilation (the majority culture rules, that is, the republican model); of cultural convergence (the culture of the host community serves as the centre of gravity around which immigrant communities revolve); of juxtaposed ghettos (contact with the host society and other groups is limited to economic relations); of pluralist

integration (the centre of gravity of all, old and new, is found ahead, in a society built together); of shared public culture (the host culture requires that all newcomers accept its charters of personal rights, its history and its democracy; the rest is the domain of pluralism); and of multiculturalism (all additional cultures have identical rights, including the right to live as in the country of origin). In reality, five scenarios have dominated in Quebec these past several years, each associated with a particular thinker and a principal concept: "common reasons" with F. Dumont; "shared public culture" with J. Harvey and G. Caldwell; "geometrically variable citizenship" with C. Taylor; trans-culture with L. Tassinari; and the anti-multiculturalism of N. Bissoondath. Each of these five scenarios also carries with it a particular political agenda.

### 5.1 Fernand Dumont's common reason

Quebec intellectual Fernand Dumont was deeply intrigued by the question of the Nation of Quebec, by the relationship between national identity and openness to alterity, and by the political agenda of sovereignty. His interpretation of the beginnings of Quebec society (*Genèse de la société québécoise*, 1993) supports the theory of a culture that is more movement than heritage, more distancing than repetition and more endeavour than quiet possession, as if the collective memory could only express itself in the anterior future, somewhere between historical roots and continuous recomposition, between a foundational reference and an open collective imaginary. These "common reasons" are, for Dumont, at once ancient and contemporary, of both yesterday and today, and they exclude "neither differences nor *métissage*" (1995: 251). Dumont puts the "culture of convergence" at the heart of his pluralism, evoking, with this notion, the common spaces where people rally together,

where the core of Quebec culture must be reworked within the notion of welcoming difference itself.

Dumont does not, however, believe in the politics of contracts, be they moral or civic, nor does he believe in coercive measures that aim to impose upon neo-Quebecers a cultural heritage that has made Quebec a distinct nation. The "common reasons", for him, are neither a doctrine nor a program, and even less a recipe book for politicians and administrators. The "culture of convergence" is also not, in his mind, predefined. It is a work of creation more than a contemplation of the past, a free convergence of personal choices rather than a unanimity imposed by political power. "There is no use", he wrote, "in juggling minute doses of ingredients, borrowed from here and there, in recipes and mixtures, to create an artificial *métis* culture" (1995: 67).

### 5.2 J. Harvey and G. Caldwell's shared public culture

J. Harvey and G. Caldwell describe the "common public culture" of Quebec as coming from "two great European traditions, from the experience of having made these traditions prevail on American soil, and having refused and rejected the American Republic, a system deemed inadequate" (1994: 15). According to Harvey and Caldwell, the cultural, social and legal heritage of Quebec has, over time, organized itself around a collection of values inherited from Judeo-Christian and Greek Humanist traditions: the intangible dignity of the human person; the principle of a just society; the intrinsic value of each person; the importance of intergenerational transmission; the equality of men and women; and the freedom of choice. All citizens of Quebec, no matter who they are, must adhere to these central values, without doing prejudice toward the values of other civilizations. For Harvey, the integration of immigrants

into this shared public culture is a "practical necessity for social peace" and their non-integration constitutes "a social pathology" (Harvey 1994: 923).

Through the notion of "common public culture", G. Caldwell attempted to bring to light a minimal consensus that Quebec society must establish around several values considered to be central in the expression of shared identity. For example, ways of doing things that may be perfectly legitimate in the home cultures of neo-Quebecers may not be authorized in Quebec, a position that links to the concept of a "moral contract" in which we restrict the values of others solely to the private sphere. When the expression "common public culture" arrived in the intellectual and political discourse of Quebec in the early 1990s, it was popular for two reasons, we believe: 1) it recognized the importance of all citizens to adhere, at least in the public sphere, to a common set of values that were seen as part of the collective Quebec cultural identity, and 2) it warned of the dangers of societal fragmentation and the erosion of solidarities that might ensue in a pluralist society. It is however difficult to perceive how this "common public culture" could lend itself to becoming plural.

### 5.3 Charles Taylor's geometrically variable citizenship

Philosopher Charles Taylor formulates what he sees as the major problem facing contemporary pluralist states as such: on the one hand, they must insure the equality of all citizens without making them all part of one uniform culture; on the other hand, they must avoid provoking segregation and fragmentation by respecting differences too much. The reconciliation of multiple identities constitutes, according to C. Taylor, the primary challenge of a society made up of significant social, linguistic and ethnic diversity, which hold too closely to a theory of citizenship inherited from old-fashioned

political models. Through his concept of "geometrically variable citizenship", C. Taylor proposed an original theoretical framework for conceiving of Canadian diversity in an interview for *Voir*.

There are those who conceive of themselves as individual Canadian citizens; that's the citizenship of Anglophones and newcomers to Canada. And there are Francophones who define themselves first and foremost as French Canadians or as *Québécois*. These people don't see themselves as individual citizens, they see themselves as being part of a nation inside of Canada. Their Canadian citizenship is seen first through their adherence to their group, whereas other Canadian citizens feel directly attached to Canada. ... There is a third group, the native peoples, who, like the *Québécois*, consider themselves as a group apart, a distinct nation. But their situation is even more complicated, more difficult (*Voir* 1992: 3).

Taylor's position allows for the foundation of a pluralism that recognizes at once the collective rights of Quebecers and indigenous nations to assert themselves as communities within Canadian society and the individual right for Anglophone and newcomers to be recognized as Canadian citizens, even in Quebec. Taylor's model, however, does not accord any collective rights to immigrant communities; there is no place for Canadian-style multiculturalism. On the horizon we start to see the emergence of the Two Founding Peoples theory, which the McGill political theorist completes by recognizing the First Nations' right of self-determination throughout Canadian territory. Through what he calls the "politics of recognition" (1992), Taylor puts citizenship into a complex model that makes room at once for individual and collective rights, for the history of societies and for the plurality of nations that can exist together within the space of one state. He thus freed the political view, which today dominates Canada and



the new republican Quebec, from its exclusive polarisation on individual rights.

#### 5.4 Lamberto Tassinari's transculture

Transculture is defined by Lamberto Tassinari (1989) as an intermixed, multifaceted culture made up of different values brought by immigrant communities of various ethnic, linguistic and religious origins that have settled in Quebec. This model recognizes the supremacy of the French language as a key symbol of Quebec identity, while nevertheless according a structural place to English and to languages of origin, a position that translates as trilingualism. Tassinari analyzes, from a foreigner's perspective, the city, daily life, literature, shared identity and collective memory, all of which are enriched a little more each day due to foreigners' contributions and all of which reconstitute themselves to form a new, moving, (trans)culture, more diverse than the culture left behind by the immigrant or that which the immigrant found upon coming here. Tassinari, the most well-known advocate of transculture in Quebec, recognizes that he is envisioning a utopia, "the utopia of looking through a porthole" (2000), which liberates the onlooker from administrative prescriptions and from the authoritarian politics of "contracts" that claim to know in advance what a plural Quebec will be like.

A large number of Quebec intellectuals — and not only partisans of nationalism — rejected, in the name of the precedence of Francophone culture, what Latouche (1990) called the "scandalous Babel" of transculture. Other adversaries of the concept claimed that it was nothing but a vague cultural Esperanto invented by intellectual immigrants who were incapable of recognizing the legitimacy of the Quebec culture that existed upon their arrival and into which they were asked to integrate. No fair trial for transculture. The proponents of transculture situate themselves from the start on the side

of the neo-Quebecers, identifying themselves within a plural Quebec culture all the more when they have been invited to participate in building it.

#### 5.5 Neil Bissoondath's anti-multiculturalism

Few ethnically pluralist countries have resisted the temptation to impose a single referential system on all its citizens, generally one that presents the values of the majority group as universal rules or as a historical heritage that must be maintained. Societies everywhere are afraid that ethnic-cultural protectionism will provoke an uncontrollable escalation of differences, resulting, at best, in the juxtaposition of different cultural communities, and at worst in the creation of a full apartheid. Quebec attempted "pluriethnicity" during the 1980s, which the politicians never seriously tried to establish, no doubt because it cast a shadow over nationalism. Canada, on the other hand, made "multiculturalism" the official policy of the country, a notion that led to the creation of a certain haziness around the values that define what it is to be Canadian. This ambiguity is amplified in Quebec, which has always conceived of this policy within the framework of the law on official languages, passed two years before that of multiculturalism.

"Under benevolent pretences", wrote Neil Bissoondath, "the Canadian multicultural ideology freezes cultures into outdated stereotypes and politically useful clichés, while blocking the possibilities of creation that are born from a gathering of differences, the exchange and integration in shared space. In transforming the preservation of immigrant traditions into a cultural policy, multiculturalism eats away, from the inside out, Canadian unity and identity. In this sense, it's a form — light, but nevertheless insidious — of apartheid that heightens the divisions of an already-divided country" (1995: 48). Bissoondath does not want a

return to his culture of origin that the policies of his adoptive country would impose on him. "The plural culture of my country of origin is always available; I distance myself or I approach it when I please. This culture, I carry it in my pocket" he adds. Bissoondath does not view positively the practice of pooling immigrants into cultural communities; for him, culture is personal business, and it cannot be interfered with by one's country of origin or host country.

These models show, each in their own way, that national identity and the culture that is associated with it are flexible realities, constantly in transformation, their borders porous and shifting. In such a context, it appears difficult and dangerous to attempt to synthesize the identity of a whole society into a few traits that would define it. In Quebec for instance, the French language was long associated with a particular group, i.e. Quebecers of French Canadian origin; since Law 101, it has even become a marker of national identity. And yet, during the last thirty years (1977), we are participants in the "de-ethnicization" of this marker, with the children of immigrants of all origins being schooled in French and speaking the language while mastering their native language and English at the same time. In a similar vein, before the French language became the key element, Quebec identity was long associated with the Catholic Church.

It is essential to remember that common culture is not a given, but rather that it is constructed over the course of history. Anthropologist Raymond Massé described it thus: "It is a process of creating meaning, always in evolution, a fragmented product arising from the negotiations and the balance of power between collections of diverse knowledge and logic driven by groups with varying interests" (2000:18). Religious diversity must also be conceived of from this perspective. Religious belonging is not synonymous with national belonging;

it calls for an analysis of situations, even of interactions, of the contexts of which it is a part. Religion is certainly a private affair, but it inevitably penetrates the public sector as well.

#### 6. Resituating Quebec in today's globalized world

We are living a major turning point in the history of human societies that forces us to re-examine topics that we thought we had figured out. In countries with high immigration levels, the perceived threat of massive immigration is seen by the population as a breaking wave; this gives rise to the feeling of national identity and the desire to define and shape the country from within. The feeling of being French, English or German is obviously as old as are the countries, but something has changed in recent years. As Amartya Sen pointed out in *Identity and Violence* (2006), being proud of one's country of citizenship, be it the United Kingdom, France, India or Pakistan, is quite inoffensive; the danger comes, rather, from "unique identities", from the sacralisation of the nation that often leads to a nationalism as dangerous as it is exclusive. Some groups of immigrants are associated from the start with Islamic terrorists, most notably young Pakistanis living in England. Occidental societies welcoming these youths do not always make the effort to understand their anger, which is fed ceaselessly by the wars that the Western countries wage against Muslim populations around the world.

Massive migration into Canada and Quebec brings us automatically into the field of globalization. Several minority groups living in Québec have managed to keep distinct aspects of their culture, such as their language, making Montreal one of the most trilingual cities in the world, and religion, which is important to many of these immigrant groups.

Immigration specialists attempting to study the transformations of national identities in the context of globalization seem torn between two positions. They manifest, on the one hand, a growing interest for post-nationalism, intermixing, creolization, diaspora, the "death of ethnicities" and all that touches multiculturalism. We have entered, they insist, into the "brave new world" of globalization, which, like everyone else, they associate with transnational corporations, planetary economic markets, international monetary transfers, transnationalization of communication methods and the electronic highway, and deregulation. Yet, for anthropologists inspired by the works of cultural studies and post-colonial studies, the "borderland" is considered to be the paradigm of contemporary human condition itself and is made, we are told, of interstitiality and in-betweenness. Individuals would be reduced to living on the borders, primary groups of adherence would have come to be dissolved and anywhere we look, fluidity, heterogeneity and mixing alone would be reshaping national identities.

Studies show that, under the pretext of protecting national identity, there is a great risk of enclosing oneself within opaque borders that let little through of the differences associated with migrations and globalization. This risk increases proportionally with the distance that members of the host society establish in the daily life of immigrants; the concentration of neo-Quebecers in Montreal certainly had a role in amplifying the fears that spread to some rural areas of Québec, expressed in the debates around reasonable accommodation.

It seems essential to me to come back to the question of democracy and equal rights for all, if we are to think of accommodation in a way that is truly reasonable.

## 7. The unavoidable tensions of democracy

Democracy constitutes the core element in the new model for a pluralist society, which I believe is urgent to promote. It is the valve that stabilizes the whole system by letting out the excess steam that could cause it to burst. We know that democracy means equal rights for all citizens; we forget that it also means pluralism and the creation of spaces for the expression of differences. Democracy really exists when it is allowed to maintain, in the interest of all citizens, a balance between two social forces: on the one hand by preventing groups from detaching themselves from each other and by controlling the expression of differences in the public sphere, be it at times at the expense of internal solidarity within these groups; and on the other hand by favouring contacts between the closest groups in order for them to revitalize and inspire each other, for their mutual benefit and that of the whole society. It is the role of the state to facilitate the establishment of these ventilation valves for democracy, especially through media and news services that inform without over-dramatization, and that bring various subjects to attention without being demoralizing.

Plural democracy must be able to rely on the forces of communitarianism: our societies cannot ignore the adherence to specific communities that are of primary importance to immigrants. The different methods of action (customs) of these communities must be considered positive elements and constructive to the host society. How can we explain that a community can give, as much or more as can the host society, the feeling of identity, the sense of stability, and the power of cohesion to immigrants? What makes the immigrants' attraction to their own group so strong? The strength of community can no doubt be explained by the heterogeneous, diverse and plural character of the larger soci-

ety in which communities from all horizons coexist. The natural defence against "difference overload" is expressed when we seek out the company of those that are like us. The danger that appears then lies in reaffirming one's own culture by creating a refuge that is isolating within the host society.

The gathering of like people is a physical manifestation of fear of the other; this is a fear that can be found as much in citizens of the host society as in members of immigrant communities. And yet, the host society relies on everyone's input to be able to define itself and take on its new identity as a plural society. This can only happen if all parties find pleasure in the discovery of diversity.

In the nervous system of each group, there is the idea that the perpetuation of the group requires in a way an opposition against the other, a kind of rejection of diversity. By restraining or even abolishing the spaces that allow for the expression of differences within society, we risk weakening society itself. By asserting the sole legitimacy of the dominant codes (those of the host society), we remove all social pressures that allow different groups to live together in the tension that arise from their differences. One of the surprising effects of too much diversity (or the perception of too much diversity) consists of pitting communities against each other rather than bringing them together. By recognizing the right to be different, the host society can only come out strengthened. This phenomenon has been observed in many immigration situations; indeed, the first generation of immigrants tends to maintain a distance from the host society, sometimes to the point of retracting to the most traditional practises that exist in their country of origin. For the host society, the reaction to what is perceived as too much diversity leads to the reinforcement of the host society's identity and to asking immigrants to adjust to the central values of the society in which they have settled.

Ernest Renan once recommended, to people who wanted to know more about nationalism, to stay far away from sociologists, and, more precisely, ethnographers. These specialists of social studies are known to insist a lot more on the differences than on the similarities; we can, however, wonder if it is still astute to follow Renan's advice in our time of massive immigration. We must keep in mind that a nation-state is but a postulated unit, that it is a project as well as a heritage, and that this question of process and construction is continuously being asked: What makes society hold together? At what point does it risk rupturing? Renan has given us a few convincing answers to these questions. In his final analysis, Renan states, after all that has been said, it is grief, pain, or a collective suffering that makes a nation hold together, more than anything else. In other words, nations prosper best with strong enemies than with strong allies. They tend more to unite against than with them, and they define themselves overall by the weight of the past trauma they bear. For Renan, it is a collective pain that structures the imaginary of nations, and they maintain themselves as long as there is room for this pain, this lack, this incompleteness. This explains why Renan came to affirm that thinking nationally is a very different thing than thinking rationally, and that it is difficult for both to coexist. Immigrants realize quickly that it is difficult to draw a line between the national and the rational and that most countries that are immigration destinations tend to consider rational that which serves the national.

For Tagore, it is clear that a narcissistic and reactive nationalism, which pits a group's collective Self against the Other, against both the foreigner from within and from without, can go nowhere but toward the self-destruction of the society. In his famous lectures on nationalism, Tagore attempted to envision an India opening the way to a universal human community by opposing



aggressive patriotisms that pit nations against each other. His judgment is clear: people who spread "a vision of spiritual unity" of humanity will remain strong, while "those who constantly develop their instinct of war and intolerance of strangers" will disappear. Tagore's position was all the more courageous, as strict nationalisms were the dominant vocabulary of international politics. Tagore rejected colonialism because he considered it to be a typical product of egotistical national interests. He also understood that the new India would be better served by a revival of its cultural uniqueness rather than the pale imitation of existing Western models. "We cannot borrow other peoples' histories", he wrote.

The crucial test before us now is to develop a sense of citizenship. Debates should no longer rely on the dangers facing the Quebec identity. We now have to prove to ourselves that we can construct a nation-state that respects all of its citizens, whatever their origins. No longer should we speak in terms of majority versus minority, of citizens *de souche* versus others who came later. People of "old stock" and immigrants have equal rights as citizens in all domains, not depending on the happenstance of their birth. When Quebec is capable of such openness, we can say that it has become a democratic society in real, substantial terms. This will mean that we have liberated ourselves from our national resentment and that we have moved past the trauma of defeat in 1759. When that day arrives, a new alignment of strength will permit the construction of a truly pluralist Quebec. And if we attain this goal, we all will feel an authentic liberation.

The time has also come to envision a generous diversity that will not be prescribed by national borders or international laws, but rather by an opening to humanity, to that which is common to our shared existence as human beings. Pluralism may then exist with more ease in each nation. Our demands

on national society should be nourished by the vision of democratic and civic engagement, and be borne by plans to construct equal, yet still plural, nations. No doubt we will have to tend to combine the views of Renan and Tagore.

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By Faculty of Theology and  
Religious Studies Université de Montréal

## Welcoming Religious Diversity in Open Secularity

### Introduction

#### Faculty Presentation

Situated in the heart of metropolitan Montreal, which is known for its cultural, ethnic, and religious diversity, the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université de Montréal aims to integrate basic and applied research to study religions and the challenges they face in context. The Faculty invests in the study of both the Roman Catholic tradition, from which it springs, to that of other Christian denominations and other spiritual and religious traditions, combining intellectual rigour with respect for different worldviews and religious options.

Drawing on the social and behavioural sciences, the Faculty favours an interdisciplinary approach to theology and religious studies. Being sensitive to questions on religion's role in the public sphere, the Faculty created in 2003 a research chair on the links between *Religion, Culture, and Society*; being open to dialogue between religions and worldviews, it also created in 2004 the first *Islam, Pluralism, and Globalisation* research chair in Canada. Faculty members also contribute to interspiritual feminist dialogue, to dialogue between Jews and Christians, to the study of Islam, to the study of new religious movements, they examine the religious dimension of assisting men in some ethnocultural

This memorandum has been prepared by a team from FTRS comprised of Patrice Brodeur, Denise Couture, Jean Duhaime, Alain Gignac, Solange Lefebvre et Jean-François Roussel. It has been adopted by the assembly of teachers on November 7<sup>th</sup> 2007  
Editor's Note: this article was translated by Colleen Mason.

communities who experience difficulties and in the civil and school managing of the religious sphere. The Faculty participated in the debate on the role of religion in schools in 1999 – 2000 and, in different ways, the subsequent reforms of Law 118 adopted in 2000.

The Faculty trains competent interveners in sectors related to the great religious, ethical and spiritual issues of our times: the analysis of the religious phenomenon, spiritual care in the health field, social challenges, inter-religious dialogue and conflict resolution. It also offers classes to professionals being trained in other disciplines to allow them to integrate a religious and spiritual dimension into their work.

Since its founding in 1878 and especially since its arrival on the University campus in 1967, the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies constitutes an important pole of French-speaking theology in North America. It has contributed to the GREB (*Groupe de recherche en bioéthique*) since 1977, to the CERUM (*Centre d'étude des religions de l'Université de Montréal*) since 2000, and to the CETECQ (*Centre d'éthique et de théologie contextuelles québécoises*) since 2004 and it joined the CINR (*Centre d'informations sur les nouvelles religions*) in 2005. These partnerships have allowed the Faculty to help integrate knowledge and personal (including religious and interreligious) commitment.

### Subject and Structure of the Report

This report examines the terms of the current debate on accommodation practices linked to cultural differences: firstly, the perspective from which we construct a discourse about the Other; secondly, some implied meanings of everyday terms used to refer to religious people; thirdly, the problems linked to the individualization of religion and the subjectivizing of law; fourthly, the postulate that,

historically, Quebec is homogenous and Catholic.

Our report then presents a few observations on women's rights and the Muslim headscarf in Quebec secularity: after reaffirming the non-negotiable character of gender equality, we argue that asserting women's rights does not necessarily mean "leaving" religion; we also insist on the necessity to hear the diversity of different points of view, particularly the opinions of Muslim women in discussion of wearing the hijab or other visible religious symbols in the public space.

Finally, our report offers a few concrete suggestions: to increasingly count on the resources of religious groups in terms of consultation; to better inform the population on reasonable accommodation and to give concrete support when the population is made up of diverse religions; to wholeheartedly support the new Ethics and Religious Culture program.

We hope that it will help the Commission to carry out the mandate they were given at the center of an important difficult debate for the future of Quebec society.

## 1. Reflections on the Terms of the Debate

### 1.1 Representing and Listening to the Other

In the contemporary world, the increase of migrations, interpreted as an effect of neo-colonialism, has given rise to the development of postcolonialism as a method to analyze the Other (alterity). The postcolonial perspective makes distinctions between the First and the Third World not between countries in the North and in the South but within large cities and Western countries themselves, between the privileged and the marginalized or those completely or partially excluded.

It is interesting that the Bouchard-Taylor Commission chose to give particular importance to listening to the Other that is the Quebec majority of "French-Canadian origin." In the *Consultation Document*, the Commission wanted to hear from parts of the population that have "suffered from not genuinely or sufficiently expressing themselves" » (CCPARDC 2007:23) on intercultural harmonisation. The *Document* points out that "much has remained unsaid and a wellspring of disagreements, discontent, dissatisfaction, or even frustration has built up." » (CCPARDC 2007:23). The Commission wanted to understand this before proposing a model to live harmoniously.

French-speaking Quebecers are paradoxically differently situated at the level of post-colonial analysis: (1) they represent a majority in Quebec but at the same time a 2% French-speaking minority in North America (CCPARDC 2007:23); (2) they support a nationalistic project that includes rigorous protection of minorities; (3) their defence of their own culture puts the First Nations in a position of an excluded third party (the negation of the culture of the Other).

### 1.2 Designating religious people or practitioners

We are surprised with the development in Quebec in the last few years of harsh words used to describe religious people or practitioners: radicals, ultrareligious, fundamentalists, even extremists.<sup>1</sup> Doesn't this type of language contain within it a subtle disqualification of religion? It would be useful for the Commission's final report to make a distinction between the different qualifiers: the most commonly used legal term to designate a religious person who asks for reasonable accommodation is "orthodox." It seems appropriate in most cases where the question

of accommodation is a legal matter or one of other collaborative non-legal adjustments.

*Orthodoxy* evokes the norms established by a clergy or religious institution (*ortho* – right, correct; *doxa* – opinion). By extension, the term designates the religious attitude of voluntarily conforming to these norms. For example, in the case *Multani vs. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, the Supreme Court of Canada defines it as follows: "G and his father B are Sikh orthodox. G believes that his religion requires for him to always wear a kirpan, a religious object that resembles a dagger that must be made out of metal..."<sup>2</sup> In the same way in the case *Amselem c. Syndicat Northcrest*, the Court explained that the appellants were "Orthodox Jews installing sukkah on the balconies of the buildings of which they are co-owners, thus following their religious beliefs."<sup>3</sup> In both cases, the qualifier designates the believers who are voluntarily following the rules and precepts of their religion; following this definition, an *orthodox attitude* is considered to be either moderate or radical. When applied to a *religious group*, the adjective "orthodox" usually means someone who within a religious tradition aspires to conform in a better way to the original or historical form of this religion, which is considered to be an absolute norm.

The *orthodox attitude* of an individual or expectations of an orthodox group are different from extreme or fanatical behaviour. Fundamentalism refers to pushing a doctrine to its limits with extreme consequences. According to Juergensmeyer, religious fundamentalism is about violent acts when "mysticism turns into combat." (JURGENSMEYER 2003). Rigal-Cellard describes extreme religious attitude that imply taking huge risks and going as far as to sacrifice one's own life, as was the case of missionary

<sup>1</sup> This development is taken from a text by S. Lefebvre (forth coming)

<sup>2</sup> *Multani vs. Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys*, 2006 CSC 6.

<sup>3</sup> *Syndicat Northcrest vs. Amselem*, 2004 CSC 47.

martyrs during the colonization of the New World (RIGAL-CELLARD 2005). In his view, fanaticism actually describes attitudes that turn into violence towards others and can be explicitly linked to an uncontrollable or threatening religious attitude.

Current religious accommodation requests of a religious nature that have recently come up in Quebec, generally seem to come from people with an orthodox, and not extremist or fanatical, attitude. Of course, the threat of extremism or fanaticism is always possible. Canadian History has seen its share of such attitudes. But using this term too loosely is to run the risk of crying wolf unnecessarily and to ignore real danger. We also run the risk, on the other end of the spectrum, of satirizing religious commitments to the point of disqualifying them, which would be an insult to democratic principles of freedom and responsibility.

Extremism and fanaticism should be taken seriously because both can be amalgamated with violent political struggles (which are nothing new) (VAILLANCOURT & CAMPOS 2006) But in the Amselem and Multani case, we are dealing with pious orthodox religious practices ready to challenge social order to maintain their faith but certainly not extremists or fanatics.

What is at issue in the confusion between orthodoxy, radicalism, extremism, and fanaticism? From the social and legal reaction standpoint, it seems as if the tolerance threshold is low when it comes to public religious expression. Wearing the kirpan in safe, well-defined conditions, as well as the building of a sukkah for sincere religious reasons for less than ten days of the year during Sukkot does not seem for us to pose excessive constraints for those organisations concerned. It would be interesting for everyone to question the socioreligious or ideological source of his or her viewpoints: is it a radical secular vision of society? Is a very

modern concept of religion as a privatized dimension or an irrational world that overrides others' rights? Is it a fear of the Other's religion? Is it confusion between extremisms and other forms of religious orthodoxy?

From these comments, that can apply to other current expressions,

- i) We recommend that the Commission consider the importance of choosing appropriate terms to qualify the practices or people whose religious orthodoxy does not mean in any way a fanatical or anti-social attitude.

### 1.3 Individualizing Religion and Subjectivizing Law

The logic of the political and legal management of our State brings together, on the one hand, an individual with a particular religious belief and, on the other hand, a body – the State or Court – that represents society. In accordance with Canadian legal logic and for fear of communitarianism, the communitarian framework is sidestepped as much as possible: thus an individual is considered religious as an individual and his community is given little or no consideration. Accommodation requests are therefore generally considered individual cases. By acting in such a way, government authorities leave aside a fundamental aspect of the religion: the community. Behind individuals with particular religious beliefs are communities or parts of communities (for example, mosques, evangelical communities, certain Catholic movements...)

The arguments of reasonable accommodation proponents are even less convincing when they fail to take this into account. Indeed, the general public infers too easily that wearing a religious symbol or asking for the secular elimination of these religious symbols is not *only* motivated by individual choice. And those who request reasonable accommodations do not generally feel that they are

only representing themselves: belonging to a communitarian tradition motivates their request. Canadian Law, in theory, does not accept the principal of collective rights and, as a consequence, claims to treat reasonable accommodation requests as individual cases. Does this claim withstand an analysis of the facts? Do the courts here believe in this guiding principle?<sup>4</sup>

Public opinion and the legal world in Quebec were shaken by the Amselem and Multani decisions, previously mentioned. The Amselem decision (about the sukkahs) marked a turning point in the Canadian legal vision of religious freedom, defining it in a purely subjective way. As a consequence, in different legal circles in public and quasi-public institutions, paying attention to dogma or doctrine and consulting with religious leaders has become useless

Yet, in the Multani decision (regarding the kirpan) this was not the case: the sincerity of the belief was evaluated after consulting with a Sikh chaplain and referring to the objective rules of Orthodox Sikhs. References to a religious group and its orthodoxy are therefore not excluded, even if they are neither the only factors taken into account nor the most deciding factors...<sup>5</sup>

It is important to note that, from a religious studies point of view, the Jewish sukkah and the Sikh kirpan are not unusual religious symbols, since they are recognized as being important to orthodox followers of these religions. The Amselem case is interesting because Judaism is a very decentralised religion: there are different groups and tendencies; there is no central authority, but the religion is constructed through debates between rabbis.

<sup>4</sup> In Quebec, article 43 of the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms stipulates that "Persons belonging to ethnic minorities have a right to maintain and develop their own cultural interests with the other members of their group." This seems to be the exception that confirms the rule, since it affirms individual freedom in relation to being part of a group.

<sup>5</sup> For the following paragraphs, see S. Lefebvre (forth coming).

However, Jews share the same heritage – the Torah and its precepts – even if they have different interpretations, which account for the many different schools (reform, conservative, reconstructionist, orthodox). For this reason, it is logical that in the last instance, the belief of a practicing orthodox Jew, and not Jewish orthodoxy, be upheld.

Moreover, the Supreme Court took the doctrine into consideration during the hearings and while deliberating, since building a sukkah to sleep and eat in during Sukkot is part of the large Jewish tradition, though not all Jews strictly follow this practice. Some Jewish families display a small symbolic sukkah in their home, without building an actual place to sleep and eat in.

But in examining the viewpoints of the four judges (out of nine) that were against the decision, the key question of dispute is not the building of a sukkah but rather where it is constructed, that is on respondent's balcony. They were giving the possibility to build one in their backyard. According to one of the dissenting judges:

Based on the evidence submitted and allowed, the appellants sincerely believe that, when it is possible, it is preferable to build one's own sukkah; however, it would not be a deviation from their religious precepts to accept another solution, as long as their fundamental obligation is respected, that is, to eat meals in the sukkah. We cannot therefore accept that the appellants sincerely believe, following the precepts of their religions that they cite, that they must have their own sukkah on their balcony. It is rather their right to eat or celebrate Sukkot in a sukkah that is protected by the freedom of religion in Article 3 of the Quebec Charter.

As we have mentioned, the most appropriate paradigm to describe the appellants' situation is that of an orthodox attitude, that is voluntary conformity to the rules and precepts of their religion, as they understand them. We

must ask ourselves up to what point is this strictly individual approach realistic when we know that the people involved are often immigrants still influenced by cultures where the individual is defined and understands himself only in reference to the community.

Concurrently to this subjectivizing of law, there is a large legal vacuum in Canada regarding issues of majority rights to preserve certain "reasonable" religious expressions. In this respect, Quebec law has been until now more zealous than others in defending individuals against the religion of the historical majority: in the case of praying in municipal assemblies for example, Ontario courts' decisions were less clear-cut than the Quebec Human Rights Tribunal.

Prior to the debates in Quebec, our society was not used to religious symbols such as the kirpan and the sukkah. From a legal standpoint, wearing the former and constructing the latter could be seen as being contrary to other laws, either the right to school safety in the first or the respect of co-owner contracts in the second. In both cases, the Supreme Court ruled that religious freedom is more fundamental. It does nevertheless limit wearing the kirpan by imposing different conditions that seem to answer the security question. There is currently a tendency, in both Quebec society and law, to question the validity of these decisions, for different reasons, for example the precedence of security and of contract, and the importance of objective religious obligations that do not constrain the members to these practices in every case.

From a religious studies viewpoint, the apparent contradiction is striking between, on the one hand, the affirmation of the minor importance of dogma, doctrine, and orthodoxy to evaluate the sincerity and seriousness of the belief and, on the other hand, the persistent reference to these in both decisions. This contradictory attitude seems

understandable. It reminds us that often the religions in question are fundamentally community-based<sup>6</sup>: an individual request springs from a tradition and a certain regulation of a religious group. What's more, basing religious obligation solely on the subjectivity and sincerity of a person, completely disregarding the beliefs and practices of the group they belong to, could put the law community in a bind. The courts' use of this shows that religious traditions prove to be an indispensable key in interpreting the sincerity of belief.

Given these observations,

ii) We recommend that the Commission reflect on the apparent contradiction in religious accommodation jurisprudence between

- the theoretical refusal or denial of mediation by a religious group
- and, in practice, consulting representatives and taking into account the standards, rules, or practices established by the group.

#### 1.4 Quebec, Historically Homogenous and Catholic?

In the debates on reasonable accommodation and, on a larger scale, immigration, there is frequent reference to the assumption of an almost exclusive socio-religious Franco-Catholic past in Quebec society. This assumption should be questioned. Indeed, though the socio-religious History of Quebec was

<sup>6</sup> Let's remember Durkheim's classic definition of religion: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, i.e. things set apart & forbidden -- beliefs and practices which unite in one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." (*Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse: le système totémique en Australie*, 5th edition, Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 2005, p. 65). This is echoed in Statistics Canada's definition: "Religion applies to the systems of faith and worship through which a person experiences a sense of spirituality or the sacred and in which a community of believers share sacraments, rituals and moral codes." (<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/concepts/definitions/religion-eng.htm>, visited May 24, 2007).

dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, it was also marked by religious diversity. The exploration of the north-eastern part of America was largely an interreligious and intercultural encounter with the First Nations. It is true that, in New France, the Catholic Church had a religious monopoly. However, a small Protestant population was tolerated and was beneficial for the commercial development and defence of the colony. With the British conquest, the Catholic Church's monopoly was abolished and in the decades that followed, Protestants and Jews moved to Quebec City, Trois-Rivières, and Montréal. The intensification of religious diversity linked to the British conquest was experienced as another symptom of invasion; this negative connotation seems to still influence certain current perceptions of religious and cultural diversity.

It is from within this context while still recognizing the dominant influence of Catholicism on Quebec culture, that one can say that the cultural and religious heritage of Quebec is not as Catholic as we tend to believe. Both younger and older generations should be taught this, to favour a more peaceful vision of current diversity.

Consequently,

iii) We would like the Commission to emphasize the necessity to make young people and the general population aware of:

- the multicultural and intercultural dimension of our History from its origins;
- the effects of ethnic and religious exclusion in Quebec and in Canada during different periods;
- the past and present initiatives that bring communities closer together.

## 2. Women's Rights and the Muslim headscarf in Secularity

### 2.1 In Favour of Open Secularity

An important aspect of the debate on religion's role in the public space concerns the concept of secularity, frequently brought up to counter to the obligation of reasonable accommodation and openly public religious expression. The current debate, however, shows different viewpoints on the subject of secularity, which has different modalities. For many people, secularity would mean limiting religion to the private sphere, that is to say, to one's home and place of worship. A secular society would not have any traces of religion in the public sphere. For others, secularity – the corollary of the neutrality of the State in religious matters – does not exclude the public show of religion under certain conditions. What can a university department of Theology and Religious Studies, that engages in interreligious and intercultural dialogue and that teaches the pluralism that results from it, can say about the subject?

Ever since the debate of the place of religion in schools, in 1999 – 2000, government institutions in Quebec have spoken openly about "open secularity," which has permitted moving beyond the alternative between confessionality and the end of religion in schools. (GTPRE 1999; CAR 2003; CAR 2006). Other governmental organizations speak of the "neutrality" of government institutions. (CRI 2004 : 44,76; CSF 1995 : 34; CSF 2007 : 16, 21, 28 etc.7; CAR 2003 : chap. I) On the other hand, the institutions, by reaching compromises with individuals, are inevitably dealing with religious identities, allegiances, beliefs, and practices. The *Conseil des relations interculturelles* expressed this well in 2004: "Secularity is in fact a corollary of rights and

<sup>7</sup> Where neutrality and secularity are seen as complementary principles.

freedoms. It does not mean that the various religions and beliefs should no longer have any legitimate place in the public space, any more than it could mean that manifestations of beliefs could be forbidden in the public space. Individuals, as bearers of beliefs and convictions, have the right, recognized by the Charters, to exercise their freedom of conscience and religion in the public space. Secularity therefore imposes itself upon institutions so that individuals may be able to fully enjoy their rights and their freedoms.”<sup>8</sup>

Committed to education and research relating to the religious sphere with direct link to people of diverse religions, we wholeheartedly adhere to this position: within the limits of respecting public order and recognized social norms, public display of religion is legitimate. Every worldview, religious or not, tends to objectivize itself into ethics. Every religion is transmitted through publicly visible symbolism. Imposing strict borders between someone's citizenship and their religious allegiance is an abstraction that threatens to have a violent effect on certain people. Certain religious precepts dealing with modesty vary from culture to culture. A radical view of secularity risks missing its goal to be inclusive and benefiting common citizenship.

In addition, doesn't the secularity of government institutions and their representatives in performing their civic duties imply the secularity of all public space? No modern democracy has thought of this. In this regard, it

is worth noting that Christian references (holidays, steeples, crucifix at the National Assembly) are more widely tolerated, among the public and in public speeches, than those of Muslims, Jews, or other religions, and this in the name of Quebec cultural and heritage. This goes back to, in all practical terms, to advocate the removal of religious symbols from public space, except certain Christian symbols and this, paradoxically, in the name of secularity!

As a university department focused on interreligious and intercultural dialogue to promote pluralistic ethics, we support the idea of secularity through the neutrality of government institutions, which does not exclude the religious expression of those who associate with them or of communities. Such secularity is in accordance with the current policy of the Conseil des relations interculturelles, the Comité sur les affaires religieuses and the Commission des droits de la personne. This secularity is based on well-identified, non-negotiable norms: first and foremost the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This secularity contains accommodation efforts within the limits of reasonable constraint for the parties involved. Favouring consistent social links, balancing dialogue and negotiation between people of different cultural heritage that make up contemporary Quebec society. We see this as the best way to prevent ghettoisation of subcultures that arise from marginal groups feeling excluded and to intervene in the case where these subcultures have developed.

Consequently,

iv) We recommend maintaining and reaffirming the “open” character of secularity in Quebec, regardless of the legal adjustments that might need to be made to

protect all the basic rights recognized by our governing charters.

## 2.2 Women's Rights and Religion

The question of accommodation gives rise to a passionate discussion about the relationship between women's rights and religion. Among the cases of “concerted adjustments” that provoked an outcry, are the three that follow:

- The Avenue du Parc YMCA (Montréal) frosted its windows at the request of their Hassidic Jew neighbours who wanted to prevent students of an adjacent school from viewing women in gym attire.
- The exclusion of fathers at a prenatal course in Montréal because of the participation of Sikh, Muslim, and Hindu women.
- The recommendation given to female police officers of the City of Montréal or female employees of the SAAQ to let their male colleagues serve Hassidic Jews.

The strong reaction against these adjustments shows that for part of the population agreements made with religious groups go too far when they question the principle of gender equality.

The issue is nothing new in Canada. The request to establish sharia tribunals in Ontario was rejected. In this case, a conflict broke out between two fundamental rights recognized by the charters: on the one hand, gender equality and, on the other hand, freedom of religion. The former was privileged at the latter's expense.

The discussion on reasonable accommodation and concerted adjustments in Quebec has reopened this question. Can we go beyond case-by-case decisions and adopt a consensual vision on how to manage tensions between women's rights and religious freedom? We believe this is possible and, to do

so, we propose to examine the problem from a feminist point of view.

The feminist approach is based on the hypothesis of systematic discrimination against women. This means that if one aspect of the problem of sexist injustice is resolved, another will unexpectedly appear. The idea of systematic discrimination puts feminism in a position of a constant struggle against the effects of a phallogocentric socio symbolique that is structurally determinate. This leads to analysis with other diverse oppression women are subjected to, including racism, heterosexism, and colonialism, etc.<sup>9</sup>

The principle of gender equality is recognized in international law and in Quebec and Canadian Charters. When we adopt a feminist stance, this principle does not mean equality has already been achieved, but rather it is an objective to reach through a struggle against systematic and multiple discriminations (juxtaposed or interrelated) experienced by women.

It must be noted that in the current Quebec and Canadian context, there is a feminist backlash but also utilitarian appropriation of the gender equality discourse to serve different interests. The Federal Government cut off subsidies to Status of Women Canada under the pretence that the State should not fund pressure groups. It thus denied the systemic discrimination of women. Nevertheless, one of its main justifications of the war in Afghanistan is the protection of Afghan women. The government of Quebec has trouble responding to the twelve urgent requests that were made by a coalition of feminist groups. It announced, nevertheless, that it will immediately put into practice a recommendation from the Conseil du statut de la femme to modify the Quebec Charter in defence of gender equality within the

<sup>8</sup> Cf CRI 2004: 21. This position is in accordance with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, created by the United Nations in 1966, which was ratified by Canada: “Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice and teaching. [...] Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.” ([http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a\\_cpr.htm](http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/a_cpr.htm)).

<sup>9</sup> Key references on the subject can be found in H. Sumiko Hirata (2000). Voir également: K.-K. Bhavnani (2001); Denise Couture (2007); K. Pui-lan (2005).

framework of reasonable accommodation (CSF 2007).

During the Bouchard-Taylor Commission forums, many addressed gender equality as something that has been achieved after a difficult battle by female French-Canadian Quebecers, but that it is currently under threat by immigrants' religion and culture. Nevertheless, this equality is not "already there" (Christine Delphy). In addition, we find people – among French-speakers and first, second, or third generation immigrants – that refuse the feminist approach and others who fight against the systematic discrimination against women. The *Fédération des femmes du Québec* rightly recommends that the "principal of gender equality not serve, nor should it be used to justify racist speech with regard to immigrants and immigrants belonging to certain religious communities (Muslim and Jewish in particular)." (FFQ 2007 : 21<sup>10</sup>)

Quebec feminists have analysed these questions and some continue to do so. The work is not finished. On the specific question of reasonable accommodation, two important organisations, le Conseil du statut de la femme (CSF) and la *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ), respectively produced an *Avis adressé au Gouvernement du Québec* and a *Mémoire à la Commission sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles*. Both adopt the position that the right to equality between women and men is "non-negotiable." (FFQ 2007 : 20). The CSF request, in addition, the modification of the Quebec Charter to include its primacy respective to the freedom of religion, and it recommends integral secularity in the public service sector to protect women's rights. (CSF 2007 : 137)<sup>11</sup>

How should we interpret this feminist position that affirms the "non-negotiable"

character of the right to gender equality? To answer this, we have to take into account two other issues: firstly, feminist and post-colonial critique and, secondly, the tension between feminism and religious freedom.

From a feminist and postcolonialist viewpoint, emphasis is put on the right to gender equality and gives priority to women who are considered "other" in more ways than one of a set system (cross discrimination). In Quebec, these women are from the First Nations, refugees, and immigrants who are refused jobs that correspond to their training, or impoverished women or victims of violence.

A text by Johanne Chayer, "Il faut se souvenir" (We Must Remember), has been circulated on the Internet in the last few months. To our knowledge, it received a largely positive response. The text aimed to explain the rejection of "religious accommodations" by female French-Canadian Quebecers. The author writes:

Tolerance regarding religious symbols such as the veil, the kirpan, and the turban in day-care centres, in our schools, and in our institutions in general is sign of disrespect to past generations who worked so hard to end religion's hold on our lives." (CHAYER 2007)

We will return to the hijab issue. For now, note the suffering conveyed in this statement through the arduous history of liberation from Catholic authoritarianism. This must be recognised and honoured. But the link established between "tolerance" towards practices of "other ethnic groups" and "lack of respect" towards oneself and one's generation is not very convincing. On the contrary, it is urgent to stop defining oneself through constructing the other's identity; the Other who is not given the opportunity to express herself or himself.

The author explains, "I'm not racist" – an expression that was heard at different points during the Commission's forums. A clash of views is expressed in this sentence. Coming from a female French-Canadian Quebecer, this statement does not seem to be addressed first at immigrants, but rather it seems to respond in advance to the objection that we expect from English-speaking citizens: indeed, during the discussions on intercultural relationships, English-speakers sometimes place themselves in a position of superiority judging French-speakers as "more racist than they are" because of their nationalism. From the viewpoint of French-Canadian Quebecers, it seems to us that Ms. Chayer's sentences should be rewritten in order to continue to narrate in some other way the history of emancipation which is at the core of these relationships and to do so in solidarity with aboriginal, immigrant, and English-speaking groups. What about the adjective racist when it is tagged on persons? Racism, just like sexism or colonialism, is above all a socio-symbolic system of unfair relationship between humans that structure their identity. To oppose it consists in building transversal solidarity which can be used to fight against diverse forms of discrimination. There is a real need to rewrite Quebec identity narratives in order to favour such solidarity.

In recent discussions on accommodations and adjustments, the problem of women's rights and religion has maybe brought out another paradox of the French-speaking Quebecers' position: simultaneously in the majority and in the minority; on the one hand, a narrative of emancipation consolidate what becomes, on the other hand, a form of domination. Identity narratives of emancipation from the power of the Catholic Church before the Quiet Revolution were directly linked, in their discourse, to "other ethnic groups" in Quebec, on which we have projected the mirror of a problematic relationship to

religion which is peculiar to francophone Quebecers.

The *Conseil du Statut de la Femme* and the *Fédération des Femmes du Québec* uphold the right to gender equality as "non negotiable." The *Conseil du statut de la femme* explains:

In our opinion the accommodations granted should always take into account the right of human dignity of all students, both those who wear religious signs and those who are next to them. Taking into account 'equity' of 'possibilities and constraints of the environment' is clearly insufficient." (CSF 2007 : 130-131).

It must be noted, however, that the reasonable accommodation decisions made in Quebec have never relativized human dignity, which is also the origin of freedom of expression and religious freedom.

The principle of gender equality, because it involves *all* women, means that from a feminist perspective the fight is not only against *individual* discrimination, but also against *systemic* discrimination against women. In this way, the secularity of the State seems to guarantee the protection of women's rights. Quebec has already committed to go in this direction.

That said, we must overcome the prejudice that "leaving" a religion is necessary for women to be emancipated from masculine subordination. Some women are committed to liberation from within the framework of patriarchal religions and question the religious views of exclusion in their religious tradition: they consider themselves feminists *and* Christians, feminists *and* Jews, feminists *and* Muslims, and so on. This identification is important: it generates a deep criticism of religions which attempt to change them from within and aims at giving them back their own sense of justice in terms of their relations between women and man.

10 Recommendation 9.

11 Recommendations 1 and 4, p. 137.



The women's liberation movement from within religions is not well-organised, little known, and rarely makes headlines. One of the paradoxes of women's rights and religion is that women support an emancipation movement from within their own religion that they recognise as being patriarchal: their liberation does not mean leaving the religion.

Is this not the standard social position of women? Can't we admit that societies remain based on sexist structures? We must remember that gender equality is not a fait accompli but rather a project to be built through emancipation in action, hence both in the religious sphere as well as in society in general.

At the same time, over the past few decades, there has been a radicalisation of religious orthodoxy that can, in certain cases, lead to extremism or fanaticism. This phenomenon is particularly worrisome for women since it generates systems of thought and actions that make female subordination to men sacred. From a feminist perspective, these visions endanger not only women's participation in public life but also gender equality that constitutes one of the founding principals of democratic society. These discriminatory views cannot be accepted as ways to manage social relationships, and not because they are religious but simply because they explicitly justify exclusions that are incompatible with the nature of democracy itself.

Consequently, we formulate the following recommendation and two wishes:

- v) We recommend that, in managing intercultural harmonization in Quebec, the Commission reaffirm the structuring and non-negotiable character of gender equality.
- vi) By building a co-habitation model in Quebec, we hope that the Commission will favour identity narratives that build

social solidarity that transcend cultural and religious differences.

- vii) We hope that the Government promotes an anti-racist and anticolonialistic awareness campaign.

### 2.3 The Muslim Headscarf

Islam was the target at many hearings during the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. If the Muslim population represents only 1.5% of the total population of Quebec, where do these fears and stereotypes regarding Islam come from? Why do we point the finger so often at Muslims and at Muslim women in particular who wear a distinctive sign? Without trying to answer these questions in detail, we think we can prove that popular perceptions of Islam by non-Muslim Quebecers do not correspond to reality, in particular when it comes to the Muslim headscarf. This should cause the Government to seriously analyze the situation before making an administrative decision on the subject.

One of the most common stereotypes regarding Islam is the headscarf (or "veil") – which is seen as a sign of female subordination to man. First of all, "veil" is too vague a word to be useful. On the contrary, its fluid nature allows for all kinds of manipulation, ranging from political instrumentalisation (both from within and outside of Muslim communities) to the current media and popular fetishization in Quebec.

A quick look at the history and current views on the Muslim dress code for women shows surprising variety that eludes any generalization. Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been a development on three levels: scientific positivism, imported from the West, generated a new school of Islam that we shall call "Islamism"; the Western-Islamic alliance to control the economic interests linked to oil was strengthened; media manipulation increased. One of

the concrete effects of these three developments is that the term "hijab" has become an important issue in interpreting Islam, in both Islam-West relationships and also intra-Islamic relationships: one mirrors the other, creating a disastrous codependence for all. Women are primarily its victims and, until very recently, were the hostages of a patriarchal system of interpretation in the majority of Islamic cultures, a system that was joined by a Western imperialist culture that has not been able to free itself from its own patriarchal structures.

The hijab question is actually a false debate, and has nothing to do with tradition. Indeed, the term "hijab" appears only in eight verses of the Koran, with completely different connotations. It usually is used to mean scarf (= "veil")<sup>12</sup>:

And when you recite the Quran, We place between you and those who do not believe in the hereafter an invisible barrier. (17:45)

And mention Myriam in the Book when she drew aside from her family to an eastern place (19:16) So she took a veil (to screen herself) from them; then We sent to her Our spirit... (19:17)

Then he said: Surely I preferred the good things to the remembrance of my Lord - until the sun set and time for Asr prayer was over. (38:32)

And it is not for any mortal that Allah should speak to them, they could not bear to hear and they did not see. (42:51)

Nay! most surely they shall on that day be debarred from their Lord. (83:15)

But it also means "wall", curtain, or partition:

And between the two there shall be a veil... (7:46)

<sup>12</sup> The English translations can be found at: <http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/HolKora.html>

O you who believe! do not enter the houses of the Prophet unless permission is given to you for a meal... And when you ask of [their wives] any goods, ask of them from behind a curtain... (33:53)

And they say: Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and there is a heaviness in our ears, and a veil hangs between us and you, so work, we too are working. (41:5)

In no case does it mean the popular modern interpretation to cover one's head. Here are three verses in which the notion of needing to cover one's head and body is interpreted as an obligation:

And say to the believing women that they cast down their looks and guard their private parts and do not display their ornaments except what appears thereof, and let them wear their head-coverings over their bosoms, and not display their ornaments except to their husbands or their fathers, or the fathers of their husbands, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants not having need (of women), or the children who have not attained knowledge of what is hidden of women; and let them not strike their feet so that what they hide of their ornaments may be known; and turn to Allah all of you, O believers! so that you may be successful. (24:31)

And (as for) women advanced in years who do not hope for a marriage, it is no sin for them if they put off their clothes without displaying their ornaments; and if they restrain themselves it is better for them; and Allah is Hearing, Knowing. (24:60)

O Prophet! say to your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their overgarments; this will be more proper, that they may be known, and thus they will not be given trouble; and Allah is Forgiving, Merciful. (33:59)



Notice that the term "hijab" is not used in any of the three texts. The term was popularized over the centuries in Islam because it appears in hadith collections (words and deeds of prophet Muhammad). In spite of the ambiguity of the Koranic verses, it's with the help of the hadiths that the established consensus (*ijma'*) was to cover one's hair in Sunnism and Shiism. This practice existed long before the beginning of Islam. Hiding one's face was a sign of nobility for Persian women before the arrival of Islam. In the twelve century before the Common Era, King Tiglath-Pileser I (~ 1115-1077) made it mandatory for married women to wear a scarf when they left their houses. Helen of Troy also wore a veil to go out in public. Covering one's hair, therefore, has a long history, which is also true for some parts of the Arabian Peninsula, and covering one's face as well. Finally, it is interesting to note that it is forbidden for women to cover their faces during the pilgrimage to Mecca and, according to several schools of Islamic Law, women cannot hide their faces during daily mandatory prayers.

These comments add another dimension to some perceptions of the hijab in Quebec. In the text "Il faut se souvenir," previously mentioned, Johanne Chayer (2007) writes:

I am now the grandmother of four wonderful girls and I am afraid. [...] for us, wearing the veil in the Muslim culture is the most important demonstration of submission and that is what scares and shocks us because we remember. We remember that this symbol existed fifty years ago and we do not want to go back.

This statement plays the game of constructing the Other in the mirror. Muslim women had not yet spoken when this verdict was decided. It echoes the countless statements that interpret the Other in contrast of oneself, as if its semantics necessarily reflected the dominant culture.

The gap in perception and semantics suggest to not make hasty judgements about the veil and other visible religious dress or symbols. This is why we feel the Quebec government made a premature decision about the Muslim veil in the public space. A wide discussion is necessary on this subject that involves diverse social groups, and certainly Muslims; this discussion has not happened. The current challenge is to create the conditions for such a dialogue.

Consequently,

viii) We recommend that before taking any administrative decision regarding wearing the hidjab or more widely religious insignia in the public space, the Government insures that it has listened to and understood the point of view of the people directly concerned, thus, in the case of hidjab, that of woman who represents the various tendencies of the Muslim community.

### 3. Long-term possibilities

#### 3.1 Including a community-based framework

As we previously mentioned, in reference to the Amselmen and Multani decisions, there is an apparent contradiction of jurisprudence on religious accommodation between, on the one hand, the theoretical exclusion of community-based mediation and, on the other hand, the legal counsel of the established norms, rules, or practices of a religious group to evaluate the religious nature of the request. In our opinion, a community-based framework is a precious contribution to assess certain requests of reasonable accommodation. For theological and anthropological reasons but also pragmatic reasons, we encourage the recognition of this contribution, but with certain conditions.

The religious sphere is full of different schools and each evolves in a distinct fashion.

Political management of diversity should understand such evolution. Certainly, in the diversity of religious schools and tendencies, some are more or less in accordance with an egalitarian or democratic project for society. Yet, to go beyond a blanket of fear based on a lack of understanding, we do not see any other way than the one of a better understanding of communities here. Once again, this requires the help of specialists that institutions and individuals should have better access to. They can be a part of a contact network at the heart of diverse communities.

Faced with such a possibility, some could hastily remind us of the secular nature of State institutions, where religious communities have no legal authority or right to interfere. We agree with this principle, but we are not talking about giving here such power to religious communities. Between attributing significant political power to religious communities and its reduction to the rank of an aggregate of individuals each having their own particular ways there could be a place, during the mediation of an accommodation request, for consulting and making use of the expertise of members of these communities or of people who know them well.

The same goes for government institutions. We consider that adequate understanding of the evolution and internal dynamics of communities would allow for a better understanding of the issues at hand. Charles Taylor demonstrated that modern societies need to recognise minority cultures. This necessity also undoubtedly concerns the aspirations of certain religious groups whose visible expressions of their identity manifest in fact the desire to be socially recognised and accepted (TAYLOR 1994). We believe that it is important that this desire be welcomed and given legitimacy in a secular society open to cultural and religious diversity.

Finally, in the context that we have just mentioned, it would be in the best interest of the government and its institutions to be able to count on the collaboration of "moderate" leaders from different communities, whether it be for consultation or mediation purposes. In this respect, the Comité sur les affaires religieuses du Ministère de l'éducation du loisir et du sport, with its *Table de réflexion sur le fait religieux*, appears to us to be an inspiring model: we can imagine a similar body available to all government institutions dealing with religious diversity and accommodation requests.

Taking these consideration into account,

- ix) We suggest that the Government establish a network of resource contacts and key groups to consult with on matters of religious diversity and accommodation requests.
- x) We propose that the Government make sure that experts in religious diversity be available to both citizens and institutions who deal with ensuing situations.

#### 3.2 Provide Resources and Appropriate Support

The current debate in Quebec over the past few years continues to highlight the lack of sufficient information for the general public concerning the nature of reasonable accommodation. As the Commissioners know, the large majority of so-called reasonable accommodation cases in the public debate are in fact not their responsibility. Since 1995, a host of government agency opinions put reasonable accommodation into a legal framework, referring to an older jurisprudence that refers to both the fundamental rights defined by Quebec and Canada charters of rights as well as international commitments made by Canada with respect to human rights. It refers to "the obligation to take steps to help individuals who have specific needs in order to avoid that apparently neutral laws

result in compromising the implementation of any one's legal rights" (CDPDJ 1995: 11)<sup>13</sup> Seen from this angle many issues identify as reasonable accommodation are not of the latter's domain. We also know that the legal obligation of reasonable accommodation constitutes protection not only for religious groups but also for all citizens with specific needs, whether they are handicapped, family support, sick, etc. When it comes to the limits of reasonable accommodation,

(...) however, it is not a limitless obligation to submit unconditionally to every particular need, and still less to every intransigence. According to case-law, an accommodation must be "reasonable", in the sense that it must not place an undue hardship on the organization concerned. (CDPDJ 1995: 11)<sup>14</sup>

These aspects of reasonable accommodation are too often hidden from the public debate. As the debate grows, there is more and more misinformation: fear feeds on ignorance. We believe that the government could do much more to better educate the public about its policies and legal obligations, as it does on other topics. At present, from the government, we only know about the obligation of reasonable accommodation and its terms from the relatively voluminous opinions, which few citizens find the time to read.

<sup>13</sup> See also CAF 2003: 45 et CRI 2004. The last document discusses the "obligation to adapt a rule conceived for a majority, in order to respond to specific needs of certain people or of groups so that they may not be victims of discrimination linked to characteristics that differentiate them from the majority. This implies making exceptions to general rules or to modify them to address the needs of certain groups or people, respecting their right to equality."

<sup>14</sup> The advice of the *Comité sur les affaires religieuses* in 2006, *La laïcité scolaire au Québec: Un nécessaire changement de culture institutionnelle*, recommends putting into place "accommodations within the limits of the possibilities and constraints of the milieu," (p. 35). Reasonable accommodation practices "in addition, lead individuals to understand that no right is absolute and that living in society makes it necessary to agree to compose compatible with the missions, functions, and resources of public institutions." (CAR 2006: 30).

A reasonable accommodation outreach program is therefore necessary. But it will remain insufficient to calm the strong resistance that this practice finds in the population and its institutions. Reasonable accommodation has its own demands. The current dissatisfaction with regard to reasonable accommodation seems to come from a lack of paving the way to benefit people, and above all the institutions that have to handle the particular situations that arise. Inevitably, these particular situations should be taken on a case-by-case basis. Many people and institutions feel (with good reason) that they lack the legal and religious knowledge, and they are given few resources (information, consultants, mediation). It is necessary to increase government investments in this regard. People have already indicated the shortage of resources for immigrants. Another aspect of the problem is the existing resources to assist people and institutions with religious diversity. The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, as well as the Conseil des relations interculturelles are an indispensable contribution. But since these questions have gained such importance in the last decade, a larger investment is now needed.

The legal dimension is often brought up in connection with questions of adjustment and accommodation requests. Nevertheless, it is necessary to keep in mind that the majority of adjustment and accommodation requests that come up here and there are not presented in court, and it is even preferable that they not end up there. In this respect, being able to count on specialists before taking legal steps can only help to harmoniously resolve accommodation requests. Local institutions are currently left by themselves to deal with such requests. They should be able to count on a network of resource people to act as mediators in case of conflict before going to a legal step that no one wants.

The practice of a secularity that is open and tolerant to individual and community-based religious celebrations entails certain requirements in terms of concrete accommodation. Since the diversification of religious identity is a lasting tendency in Quebec today, information services, consulting, and negotiation accessible to both individual citizens and groups are necessary. Such services necessitate specific skills that should be the subject of university programs: in addition to programs in Applied Religious Studies, we could foresee a module on the religious sphere in programs linked to psychosocial work, education, nursing science, journalism, communication, etc.

This is why

- xi) We propose that the Government devise an outreach strategy across the province for public institutions (schools, hospitals, CLSCs, etc.) as well as the general public, concerning the nature and limits of reasonable accommodation.
- xii) We hope that the Commission will insist on the need to give Quebec society, at the regional level and institutional-level support favouring peaceful co-existence, information sessions, expert advice, and mediation linked to religious diversity and reasonable accommodation requests.
- xiii) We recommend that the Commission highlight the necessity for those likely to work in this field to gain solid training at the university level in intercultural and interreligious intervention and mediation.

### 3.3 Support the New Ethics and Religious Culture Program

A new Ethics and Religious Culture Program will begin in the entire primary and secondary school system in September 2008. In addition to giving Quebec students critical skills on ethics and values as well as an

understanding of religious phenomena in its diverse manifestations, this program plans to develop attitudes and capacity for dialogue in an open and respectful fashion, favouring the public good:

By integrating both ethics and religious culture into one program – two essentially distinct dimensions of social reality – but by referring to particularly sensitive zones of diversity, we hope to help students develop critical thinking skills for ethical questions and to understand religious experience by practicing, with an open-mind, a dialogue aiming at living together harmoniously.<sup>15</sup>

The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université de Montréal strongly supports the implantation of this new program, as it stated in a report to the Parliamentary Committee on Education on June 2, 2005<sup>16</sup> In our opinion, this program fits very well with the education and socialisation mission of primary and secondary school, in today's plural Quebec, while respecting the spirit of the Quebec and Canadian Charters. Given that the Commission's audiences were the occasion to question the government's decision on the subject, we invite the Commissioners to unequivocally support it.

Since the question of religious identity is at the heart of debates on the accommodations and integration of immigrants, a course in Ethics and Religious Culture throughout the student's education given by qualified teachers will be an important tool in the education.

<sup>15</sup> Training program for Québec primary schools. Approved by the ministre de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport July 13, 2007, p. 8. ([http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/ecn/pdf/EthiqueCultRel\\_Primaire.pdf](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/sections/ecn/pdf/EthiqueCultRel_Primaire.pdf) consulté le 31 oct. 2007). (Our translation)

<sup>16</sup> Report presented to the Commission permanente de l'éducation by the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies of the Université de Montréal, the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies at the Université de Laval and the Faculty of Theology, Ethics, and Philosophy at the Université de Sherbrooke on June 2, 2005. (see: [http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fin/37legislature/DEBATS/journal/cc/050602.htm#\\_Toc14295333](http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fin/37legislature/DEBATS/journal/cc/050602.htm#_Toc14295333), visited October 31, 2007).

tion of Quebec's future citizens. Religious phenomena will not be hidden as if it didn't exist anymore today or was relegated to forgotten history, as if it had not been an important aspect in Quebec's History; an Ethics and Religious culture class would treat the subject in a positive manner but also from a critical perspective. What's more, in a world that is becoming more and more complex, it is important to develop a capacity to reflect on the ethical issues that our society faces. Finally, by teaching students dialogue, the Ethics and Religious Culture program will allow them to participate in a well-informed way in social debates – the Commission emphasized the importance of this education.

On an administrative level, putting a common program in place represents a considerable challenge. But it guarantees stability since it becomes possible to plan and deploy the necessary strength without always having to divide the students into classes of faith-based, moral instruction or ethics classes. From the viewpoint of secondary school teachers, it offers long-term career possibilities in a discipline whose existence in school curriculum was only guaranteed a few decades ago, by the periodic recourse of derogation from Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

The Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies in close collaboration with the Faculty of Education Science and the Philosophy department, has developed a Bachelor's degree in teaching Ethics and Religious Culture in Secondary Schools, which has been offered at the Université de Montréal since fall 2006. This year (2007-2008), all the available spots were filled. The next generation is being trained in this sector.

The Faculty also contributes by offering related courses for primary school teacher training and is actively implicated, with other

partners, in appreciation training to update current teachers from the regions served by the Université de Montréal. In the latter two cases, in our opinion, the training requirements are too restrictive and the financial resources are clearly insufficient. These risk compromising the implantation of the new program, creating insecurity and dissatisfaction. We encourage the commissioners to direct the government's attention to this issue and ask for more adequate support for the individuals and institutions involved.

Based on these observations,

xiv) We recommend that the Government clearly reaffirm its wish to establish an Ethics and Religious Culture program beginning fall 2008 in the entire primary and secondary school system.

xv) We recommend that government authorities clearly define the minimum standards of initial training for primary school teachers to teach Ethics and religious culture.

xvi) We recommend that the Government reinforce, through increased funding in particular, its support of the update of practising teachers called to teach in the new Ethics and Religious culture program.

## Conclusion

The work of the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences offers an important opportunity to Quebec society to reflect on not only a specific legal issue, but also on questions of identity and on its capacity to integrate religious and cultural diversity. Our reflections submitted to the Commission lead us to wholeheartedly support secularity that is open and welcoming, that can allow for the public expression of this diversity. We believe that it is imperative, in this perspective to favour dialogue and mediation not

only between individuals but also between different community groups. We also feel it is necessary to promote the access to sufficient information, teach about diversity, in the framework of the school program of Ethics and Religious Culture in particular, and to provide the individuals and institutions involved the resources necessary to properly manage current pluralism. It is less of a question of resolving problems than of welcoming, without exclusion or discrimination, and channelling energy towards living together more peacefully; resources and energies of all people who support an original and generous democratic social project in which is now being elaborated on Quebec soil

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## Concerted Adjustments and Reasonable Accommodations: Ideas and Suggestions Presented to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission

*"To arrive at a true common security, it is  
necessary to invest in inter-group dialogue  
because it is increasingly easier to feel when  
our minority identities are victimized  
then when our majority identities are  
abusive. To invest in the inclusive  
construction  
of all identity groups for a truly sustainable  
society, both in Quebec  
and in the rest of the world, is the only means  
of transcending the victim-abuser dichotomy  
and of putting an end to the various  
cycles of violence."*

Patrice Brodeur

This testimony is the result of a close cooperation between several members of the team of the Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism, and Globalisation, presided by Patrice Brodeur Ph.D., in cooperation with: Moussa Abou Ramadan Ph.D., Samia Amor, Rokhsana Bahramitash Ph.D., Lassaad Ben Brahim, Karim Ben Driss Ph.D., Pamela Charabieh Ph.D., Lourdine Dumas, Louise Jalbert Ph.D., Meher Khatcherian, Mouloud Kébaché, Sébastien Legros, Shahrām Nahidi, Noomane Raboudi Ph.D., Fabien Torres, and Kornel Zathureczky Ph.D.

If Québécois Muslims make up hardly 1.5 to 2% of the population of Quebec, why do they attract so much attention in the Bouchard-Taylor Commission hearings? What does that say about Québec's society? Will short and long-term dangers emerge in the relations between Muslim and non-Muslim Quebecers? Our testimony aims to provide some answers to these complex questions followed by some recommendations elaborated by our small team of researchers within the Canada Research Chair on Islam, pluralism, and globalization at the University of Montreal. It consists of Muslims and non-Muslims living in Montreal, most of whom are Canadian citizens. It is our contribution to the deliberative process that the Bouchard-Taylor Commission offers to the population of Quebec.

This Commission aims at improving politicians' understanding of the present situation in terms of popular perceptions around concerted adjustments and reasonable accommodations. These politicians practice, during the time of their mandate, a capacity restricted to a precise geographical context, in this case a specific territory known as Quebec. This territory is seen by some as a province within a state called Canada and by others as a nation without complete independence, but with a certain degree of autonomy vis-à-vis Canada, to be respected by the rest of the international community. For several years, changes in the

Quebec immigration policies have fostered the latter option. But there are also a limited but increasing number of people who have lived in the territory of Quebec, sometimes for generations and sometimes for only a few months or years, who are not recognized in either one or the other of these two forms of the same nationalist ideological discourse. The idea of citizenship, even though it is central to a majority of the Quebec population in its articulation of participatory democracy within a "mature" nation-state, is not accepted by all inhabitants.

As the humane quality of any society is measured by its treatment of its minorities, whatever kind they may be, the great challenge of a commission such as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission remains how to enhance the understanding of politicians regarding the opinions and interests of both majority and minority groups in the society they are called to serve, in this case, on matters related to concerted adjustments and reasonable accommodations. How can they do this without excluding any member or particular part of the population to which the politicians have a direct political responsibility (citizens) or indirect (others, inside Quebec and beyond). This Commission is a profoundly democratic exercise. Yet, it can be easily manipulated both by participants (individual or collective), who can use it to promote their own public visibility and particular opinion, as well as by various types of media and political parties, which also seek to advance their own interests.

The decision by the co-chairmen Bouchard and Taylor to interpret broadly the mandate of the Commission is praiseworthy. Yet, in our opinion, it remains incomplete in two ways. First, the complex relations between indigenous communities and the majority group as well as other more recent minorities is left out. The same is true concerning relations between the majority Francophones and the minority Anglophones, not to mention other

linguistic minorities. Bouchard and Taylor's already broad interpretation of their mandate nevertheless reflects a form of exclusion of earlier history, a pattern they reproduce by not including these two identity dimensions in the public debates of their Commission. These exclusions will distort the outcome of the commission on the simple basis that not all identity groups within the entire Quebec population are included in their consultation process.

It is important for us to begin our brief to the Bouchard-Taylor Commission with these two cases of identity exclusions for two reasons. First, identity exclusions are the source of human conflicts. They reproduce behaviors that seek scapegoats to assure us, in our imagination, a false identity security. Second, if the central goal of this commission is to improve at its conclusion the collective security and the quality of life for all people, even if only temporarily, within a shared political space, it is necessary to assure itself that the processes and the results of this commission can reduce the exclusions, both real and perceived, that nourish the conflicts between human beings (for example, humans relationship with the environment). An inclusive participation is thus a necessity in the process of such a commission, beyond the notion of national citizenship, whatever may be its definition.

These processes of ethnic exclusion or inclusion are linked to histories that, very often but with greater or lesser differences, reproduce themselves from one generation to the next. The history of Quebec is not exempt of these processes. The construction of a "Québécois" identity is a very recent phenomenon in comparison to a "French-Canadian" identity, or a "French" identity or even a "Catholic French" identity, to name a few ethnic majority variants that have emerged since the end of the 17th century in the territory the majority inhabitants have come to call Quebec. It would be necessary

to examine more attentively these interactions between the majority ethnic identity constructions in relation to one another generally and in relation to the various minority groups such as indigenous groups (referred to as First Nations by many), English, Irish, Scot, Jews, Blacks, and more recently Muslims, to name but a few of the ethnic and/or religious minority groups that live in Quebec. These various forms of identity group relations demonstrate examples of, at the same time, open and productive inter-group behaviors as well as intolerant and at times sporadic violent ones. The history taught in our schools, depending on which generation we each belong to, may not have always reclaimed the complexity and the wealth of these accounts. These variants also explain why the current perceptions of this history vary enormously within the population of the Quebec as a whole. This situation is made ever more complex by the growing presence of immigrants who try to integrate themselves after school age, and for whom the education of the history of the Quebec remains limited to what is demanded of them to acquire Canadian citizenship. These courses may not include enough information on, for example, the religious inheritance of Quebec and the recent changes of the Quebecois society in regards to the secularization of its institutions, among others.

These various levels and contents of historic knowledge are also influenced by various ideological identities that also shape every person's perception of reality. The nationalist, liberalist, neo-liberalist, socialist, etc ideologies exemplifies the main ideologies among various currents of the Quebec population. In their often conflicting relations, these ideologies form the background to the interactions between diverse ethnic discourses, all of which are marked differently by Quebec immigration policies. These ideologies are now changing rapidly in the

face of the many challenges linked to globalization, in particular regarding the increase in economic competitiveness and the survival of several minority cultures. The Bouchard-Taylor commission is thus part of a much wider dynamic within the western world where there is an increasing need to redefine national identities in the face of challenges to integrate various types of identities, which vary somewhat for each country. These challenges are the consequences of a period of colonialism, certain dimensions of which continue in the current global economic dynamics. Our perceptions of identity relations in Quebec are thus not isolated from all these complex phenomena that influence our wider ideological and other identity perceptions. As far as some of our identities perceive these changes as a promise for a better long-term quality of life, an open attitude to other groups is more easily achieved in discourses, even though this attitude may not always be reflected in everyday behavior. If these changes are a source of destabilization and more fierce competition than ever, it is normal that it will be met by a hardening in the discourses about others, even if the everyday behavior of human relationships can be more open than foreseen. In both cases, and with all their variants, it is thus important to note the interdependence between identities and ideologies.

But it is also important to add their multiple relations to the feelings that influence the various ways to talk about these identities and ideologies. Whether these identities are perceived to be safe or in danger of extinction, the feelings that infiltrate their articulations can very often undermine the very terrain of dialogue where different perceptions of a given issue ought to be shared for better understanding it. These completely normal feelings are not to be rejected at once; they are important indicators of the well-being, or ill-being, of individual persons, identity groups, and societies. What makes at the same

time the strength and weakness of emotions is their communicative character and ease of manipulation. These emotions are often the reflection of the state of mind of both individuals as well as of identity groups of any kind. They accompany our perceptions of reality, themselves the result of identity transmission, often multigenerational. If our feelings and perceptions of reality produce identity exclusions in one way or another, it is evident that the cycle of identity insecurities will continue, with all the human stories of conflicts we know. But these exclusions are sometimes hidden behind superficial and paternalistic discourses of inclusion, as these references to integration that only serve to veil the desire to see the other comply with an image that are considered acceptable from the point of view of the majority standard of social behavior, even at the cost of contradictions in the spheres of freedom of expression, conscience, and religion, as well as of various clothing practices that do not impinge on the freedom of others. These contradictions are major sources of negative emotions that greatly undermine identities on all sides. To reduce this reproductive cycle of insecure identities, a short analysis of identity behaviour is necessary in order to make the link between multiple identities and power dynamics, which are explanatory sources of both our conflicts and their solutions.

Each human being consists of a relation to oneself that seeks the integration of several identities, many of which are constantly changing. These identities are, by definition, always collective. What makes the situation confusing is that we often use the term "identity" or "the quest for my identity" in the singular, as if the identity could only be one. What makes each person unique in his identity is both the nature of its multiple identities at any point in time and the result of the on-going integration process of these multiple identities that allow each person to connect to other humans through vari-

ous networks of complex shared identities. Our second observation is that these inter-human relations always occur within relationships that reflect both power dynamics as well as hierarchies of identity. In other words, anyone who lives in Quebec today is made up of a large number of identities that allows him or her to interact with a large number of different people. Thus, a person can not be reduced to any one of its many identities, whether it be his or her gender, social class, skin color, education, profession, neighbourhood, ethnicity, etc., or worldview, be it religious or humanist, whatever may be each person's definition of each one of these terms. It is therefore important, in this case in particular, not to reduce Muslims to a single identity group, as it is as diverse as any other group identity. But it is also equally important to respect the choices made by each person to define his or herself as he or she sees fit. This freedom is an important value in Quebec, and it is therefore important to respect even when it comes to those who choose to define themselves in ways that may seem to go against our own values. We must take the time to ask before judging, to listen before taking a position. This is not to say that we advocate a kind of ethical relativism; on the contrary, but rather to take the time to understand others better before making decisions that often lack sufficient respect and knowledge. This lack of respect for others' freedom of self-definition and of collective self-management in order to participate in their own ways to a shared society contributes significantly to verbal exclusions first, which later can lead to physical exclusions, the primary sources of social violence.

The great danger presently is that the high degree of ignorance and the relative fear about Islam lead many people today to promote an exclusion of certain Muslim behaviours perceived, rightly or wrongly, as going against the normative values of

Quebec society. This exclusion carries with it a disintegrating boomerang effect. The more discourses of exclusion against Muslims (or any other group identity) increase, the more likely it will be for many Muslims to identify more strongly with their Muslim identity, part of which will develop into a mutually exclusive Muslim identity in relation to the majority French-Canadian humanist identity. Indeed, exclusive discourses promote a vicious circle of increasingly larger identity tensions. The following words from one of our research team members speak eloquently about this problem:

Today there exists in the Muslim community a deep sense of injustice. Muslims in Quebec have the feeling that the victimisation dynamics is being reversed. In fact the Muslim community is subject to several kinds of discrimination, particularly in employment. In addition to such discrimination, openly islamophobic attitudes are becoming more visible in political and mediatic circles in Quebec. With the debate on reasonable accommodations, Quebec Muslims feel they are blamed for being a danger to Quebec society when they perceive themselves in fact to be victims. Every day, they live injustices of all kinds just because they are Muslims. They feel that many reproach them for being Muslims as if being Muslim is almost synonymous with crime. Before coming, they were told that religious freedom is guaranteed and that tensions between communities are not tolerated. The current situation is very different from the image that the immigration authorities have given of Quebec and Canada. They feel that the political class, by direct or indirect support of the media, is moving Quebec public opinion against them, which further exacerbates their difficulty to integrate and flourish.

So, the more one judges the other negatively, the more one contributes to ensuring that what one fears actually becomes a real-

ity. Another member of our research team expressed this point very clearly thus:

Identity withdrawals terrorize me personally because they open the door to intolerance and to the construction of otherness as enemy. All these elements eliminate the possibility of dialogue between cultures in Quebec and weaken the foundations of their peaceful coexistence. They provide legitimacy to all forms of violent communication. In this way, we will play exactly the game of fundamentalism that we are trying to counter. Extremist islamists have always instrumentalized the culturalist discourse held by some Westerners in order to spread their ideology and to bring together with them diverse Muslim populations (moderate in most cases). Fortunately the presence of extremist Islamism in Quebec is negligible. But if the culturalist dimensions of the current debate continue to grow, there is a real risk that this discourse, so far marginal, will gain ground, especially with the injustices and the discrimination faced by youth in the Muslim community.

It is therefore vital to reduce discourses of exclusion towards Muslims in Quebec, as we must do for all identity groups. Not to intervene at this level in the name of freedom of expression paves the way to what often follows: one moves from words to violent action. This monitoring of words of violent exclusions is the responsibility of every person devoted to promoting a genuine and inclusive social peace. In the words of another member of our research team:

Like many Quebecers, I am wary of extremism of all kinds. Religious or other forms of claims, whether it be the wearing of the scarf for politico-religious purposes or the assertion of its place in the public sphere on accommodation grounds, or any of the feminist, secularist, catholicist, francophilist, or xenophobic sectarian reactions disturb me enormously. I find it particularly unfortunate that religion is used for political purposes at a moment in



history when we had the chance to rediscover together this wonderful heritage of humanity that has taken such beautiful colors over time and across civilizations. I would like the internal foundations of religions to fertilize secularity in order to "re-enchanted" it. It refers to the spiritual depth more than the outward religious appearances, the inner meaning rather than the outer letter of the words. Secularism should be, it seems to me, a common basis for all human beings to defend as much as possible the right of work, housing, education, security, and protection for the weakest in any society.<sup>1</sup>

Building an inclusive society while respecting our differences requires that open secularity be the collective basis in Quebec. But it must always be interpreted with flexibility according to the specific needs of the many local applications, and always within the limits of the charters of rights and freedoms that already exist in Quebec and Canada, as well as the broader set of international conventions and declarations.

If the vicious circle of exclusive discourses is a genuine danger, the reverse is equally true. Inclusive discourses promote a virtuous circle towards greater harmonization of identity needs of each and every group. Whether these discourses of inclusion are in fact more numerous than exclusive ones remains to be verified sociologically. What matters, meanwhile, is to impress upon the political class that we can not wait for statistics on this subject to take a clear stance today in favour of inclusive discourses. This proactive strategy of prevention costs the state in the long term much less than having to intervene during or after violent unrests.

A member of our team makes the following analysis that shows that the gap between the

ideal that Quebec society seeks to promote and the flaws in its implementation:

Currently, Quebec's society is defined, and wants to continue to define itself as a society that is: (1) on the ideological front, liberal, democratic, pacifist, open minded and generous towards the Other; (2) on the political front, a liberal democracy, inclusive of differences and maintaining international relations that are not conflictual; (3) on the ethical front, carrying principles based on the values of equality of all individuals, equality of opportunities, of respect, of justice and of equity. But flaws appear in the realization of this ideal. (a) At the level of individual equality as human beings, many studies on the integration of immigrants and empirical observations demonstrate that this principle is often set aside in many ways: the value of the experience of the Others, of their human and social competencies and worldviews, of their cultural, religious, social, educational, etc. references. (b) In terms of equal opportunities, many of these same studies show deficiencies that result in serious discrimination in employment, housing, and within schools (contemptuous attitudes of teachers, classification of students a priori on their level or ability according to their ethnic or national origins, a priori on parents, wrong academic orientations). (c) At the level of respect for others, studies show the persistence of an attitude often devaluing members of non-Western societies. (d) At the level of justice and fairness to all, these values are inevitably affected by deficiencies in the ethical principles of social equality and respect. These fault lines appear when differentiated interpretations and judgments are made on attitudes, behaviours and motivations of people on the basis of their origin as well as philosophical or religious outlook.

In brief, it is important to make a link between, on the one hand, the ideals of a society and its weaknesses, and, on the other, the identity dynamics of inclusion or exclusion. In the case of the vicious circle of exclu-

sive discourses, which often corresponds to the flaws mentioned above, there develops a co-dependency dynamic that is very harmful to any society. This co-dependency, especially in regard to the dichotomized image of the West "versus" Islam, exists currently in Quebec largely because of its existence on a much greater scale in international relations between most Western countries, including Canada, and most Muslim-majority countries. There is also a co-dependency between perceptions within Quebec and the rest of western countries. It must also be noted that the hardening in the current debates and their excessive media exposure reveal ideological tendencies that are not necessarily experienced when encounter the Others face to face. In daily encounters between Quebecers of all kinds, when their various identities intermingle in common work and shared spaces, for example, when young mothers meet in school yards where children spontaneously and openly play with each other, more similarities than differences often emerge. In these shared experiences on a daily basis, we tend to recognize more than to ignore each other.

This leads us to the second case, the virtuous circle of inclusive discourses, which corresponds to the ideal that the majority Quebecers want to promote both in Quebec and elsewhere in the world. This virtuous circle promotes new dynamics of interdependence that can transform societies towards a real pluralism in everyday life. It must emerge within the multiple places of natural human interactions between people of different backgrounds who have the same economic, familial, social as well as environmental concerns, to name but a few. At the international level, the United Nations' Alliance of Civilizations was established three years ago to work in this direction. In Quebec, the Bouchard-Taylor Commission could play such a role. We are now at a crossroads between two paths: choosing

to promote the vicious circle of exclusive discourses, or choosing virtuous circle of inclusive ones.

### Recommendations for a more inclusive and sustainable common future:

The following eleven recommendations aim to translate our conceptual analysis of the contemporary challenges in Quebec and beyond into possible solutions on the ground.

- 1) Our recommendations are first directed at our politicians, but also at current and future leaders in all sectors of society so that they speak clearly and act on the basis of a clear choice for the inclusion of all identity groups, better known as the «promotion of diversity.» Only a full inclusion can promote genuine pluralism in the political, social, and economic management of Quebecois society. This choice is not only imperative in view of the role of immigrants from an economic perspective, but also for the development of the interrelationships with other political and identity realities, both inside and outside the borders of Quebec. This choice is also vital to address inequalities in unemployment rates, for example, between different immigrant communities such as Muslims and Blacks. The integration difficulties that these two groups face, for example, are only a reflection of the long inability by the majority ethno-linguistic group to manage their differences with First Nations for nearly four hundred years. Taking the time to look at the impact of history on the present and to better understand the reproduction of mechanisms of power dynamics between majorities and minorities over the past centuries, remains a long-term goal at the heart of our recommendations.

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: we wish to draw attention to the fundamental distinction between secularity ("laïcité ouverte" or sacred secularity) and the ideological notion of secularism (materialism) with which it is often confused.



- 2) A dialogue on the ideological values underlying decision-making processes of our society is of great urgency because those values influence our conduct, with all the challenges that our world faces today in regard to both the inter-human relations as well as between humans and other species living on our planet Earth. Let not the current disproportionate focus on Muslims in Quebec turn them into scapegoats, possibly making a distant intolerant past resurface. It must be firmly rejected. Let us also not utilize any scapegoating to mask the real social challenges we all face together in Quebec and elsewhere on planet Earth. The quality of our physical and social environment depends on it, especially for future generations.
- 3) One way to capture the genuine social and environmental challenges both in Québec and elsewhere is to design and develop spaces and inter-identity organizations that allow for more inclusive collective decision making and position taking where the needs are most urgent, as in the area of equal access to employment, equal representation in the media, of equity in our identity relations in transnational cooperation, and of transforming all our human activities in sustainable behaviours both economically and spiritually.
- 4) The management of identity pluralism within and across our interdependent communities requires that we do not set up any identity above others, but that we make sure that all are protected for their long term survival. This must be done through interactive processes that aim at minimizing negative impact on any identity group. In situations that may seem contradictory, we must focus on mechanisms for dialogical encounter so that the processes of decision making remain always rooted in the best possible understanding of the needs and particularities of the specific people and groups

involved. The more these processes are informal (concerted adjustments), the more they avoid legalization of social relations (reasonable accommodations) that are always more expensive, take more time, raise more negative emotions, and become more easily manipulated by some media and politicians, which does little to help bring resolution or transformation to conflicts that are more humane and respectful of our different identities that are the source of dynamism in any pluralistic society.

- 5) Open secularity remains one of the best approaches to harmonize social differences in Quebec. The school must remain non-confessional, i.e. the general practice of religion is done outside the school unless a collective need for a mandatory prayer is felt in the pursuit of a well thought-out and sustained religious identity. Nothing prevents, however, the creation of moments of personal reflection that each student may fill in his or her own way inside the school. Indeed, these benefits have been proven when it comes to the sound management of the challenging classroom dynamics.
- 6) The program on Ethics and Religious Culture that will start in Québec in September 2008 will be a golden opportunity to teach diversity and to enrich the foundations of spirituality that converge with the construction of a common pluralist ethics that respects the self and others. It will also develop competencies in various forms of dialogue, which will greatly help social harmony in the long term. These courses will be particularly useful for understanding many religious minority groups in Quebec, such as Muslims and others. The fact that they are treated like many other religious minorities in Quebec will also help to promote integration of all minority religious communities in Quebec and prevent the Muslims and,

to a lesser extent, the Sikhs from being the subject of disproportionate attention.

- 7) The question of clothing must be managed at the level of each school or school board, where decisions regarding clothing are generally made. In the same way that a student without a hijab should not be imposed wearing it in a Muslim school in Quebec simply for reasons of homogenizing the local school dress code, the inverse is also true: a Muslim student who may wish to wear the hijab in a public (or non-Muslim private) school should not be imposed not to wear it. It is simply a question of freedom of choice, either of the parent or pupil, both being respected when following the normal practice of parents to request permission whenever anything different from normative school behaviour is needed during the school year. For reasons of right to freedom of individual choice practiced in many other areas of social life, we must avoid falling into inconsistencies that would lead to double standards when it comes to wearing the hijab, if compared to other dress requirements of other minority groups in Quebec, whatever our personal views may be regarding the social significance of the hijab in particular, so mediated in recent years. This mediation is not without links to patriarchal and paternalistic dimensions still alive in Quebec.
- 8) With regard to days off, the establishment of a bank of religious holy days (holidays) by an interreligious body with consultative status before any governmental agency seems an easy way to start. It would then be necessary to legislate on a specific maximum number of leave days to be taken by each worker in Quebec, according to their respective beliefs. The choice would then be up to authorities in each company to oversee the selection of these days well in advance in order to plan for necessary replacements if needed.

- 9) The question of reasonable accommodations should return to its point of origin: the issue of discrimination linked to rights and freedom. The main issue is that of religious freedom, i.e. the possibility to practice any religion without being harassed, which does not mean one can practice anywhere and in any circumstance. It seems that the time has come to formalize groups with different religious identities so that each community can determine what is essential and what is incidental to the practice of religious customs in Quebec. Even if these bodies could never impose themselves on the religious freedom of every person, they could serve as a guide to the choices of individuals as well as a reference for collective behaviour when it comes to governmental policy affecting religious people.
- 10) Since there is no official representation of Islam to indicate what the religious references and adjustments need to be here in Quebec in order to allow the fulfilment of social and work obligations while still respecting a committed practice of religion, these references often reflect the places and groups to which each Muslim community refers. The interpretation of religious obligations and how to fulfill them may vary significantly from one community to another in addition to variations between each individual's understanding. One issue that was raised throughout the debate on reasonable accommodations comes with the interpretation of the charter from individual requests that may become standards when they are judicialized. These individual requests are rarely based on a broader reflexion as to whether to accommodate them or not under fundamental religious principles or according to principles based on open secularity that should practice its own principles of openness within limits. There is also no systematic evaluation of

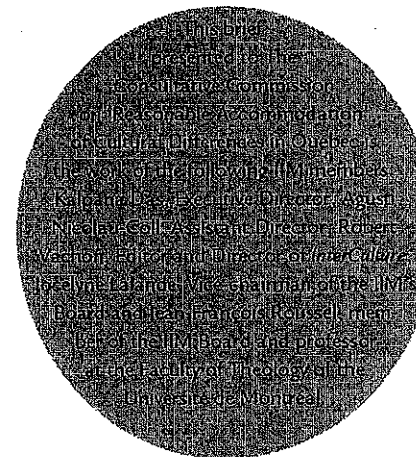
alternative solutions that could allow for a common welfare. In this context, the charter can be instrumentalized for the profit of those who want to assert their difference and make it official. In this case, two main options arise: 1) that of an advisory reference with consultative status with any governmental department, that would focus on delimiting religious obligations and opportunities to adapt these obligations in the context of life in Quebec, according to the specific environment where each problem arises; and 2) that of making available to persons or bodies requesting it, persons trained in mediation on religious issues interfacing with multiple social realities. Muslim reality should find a space within these two axes. It may be important to bring back today's debate, which becomes at times an ideological debate on Islam from very partial perspectives, to a practical level that is concerned with a society that is both secular and strongly attached to universal humanist values that are based on common rights and freedom, and at the same time committed to certain values that are sometimes deeply rooted in different religious traditions including Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, as well as indigenous, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, etc.. In terms of values and ethics, are there really any large differences between religions and secular humanism?

- 11) The Muslim headscarf has become an issue in the present debate, even though this headscarf has never been worn as a result of a compromise or a reasonable accommodation. Prior to being taken hostage by one side or another, the headscarf was not a great spat in Quebec and it was possible for Muslim women to wear it or not according to their personal religious belief or cultural habits. It went unnoticed most of the time, especially in this part of Quebec (Greater Montreal) where the

diversity of ways to dress or undress is a reflection of a great freedom of expression as well as of the multiple identity markers especially noticeable among young people as part of their process of defining their own self-affirmation. Drawing undue attention to the Muslim headscarf is only creating a social problem our society would be better without. For women who wear it for modesty reasons, it draws unwelcome attention to them when they simply seek to be as unobtrusive as possible in their dress, whether because of religious or cultural habits, as the two are often difficult to distinguish (how does the expression of such discreetness can come to be perceived as offensive to another culture or to be imposing on it?). Among the women who possibly wear it out of submission to their father, their husband or their extended family, it is certainly not by pulling their headscarves off that we will free them; we will simply move the location of domination to another site and make them perhaps even more problematic. Finally, for those who wear it out of feminism or the need to display their religion, the current debate is often an opportunity to affirm, show off, and/or hold on even more strongly to one's headscarf. Anyway, this debate ends up being in itself very problematic. It is therefore desirable that the results of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission distance themselves from this debate, which, in part, has found a symbol in the wearing or removing of the headscarf that adds unnecessarily to the already sufficiently complex question of concerted adjustments.

*By Intercultural Institute of Montreal*

## A Pluralistic Quebec in the Light of an Intercultural Practice



### Introduction

This brief aims at proposing a view, other than an institutional one, on the pluralistic society of Quebec, and on the relations of reciprocal influence and conviviality within its population, which have moulded and continue to mould the pluralistic culture of Quebec. We would like a voice to be heard, one that is often marginalised by official, institutional, political and ideological views, and to share here the knowledge and experiences of daily life, within very diverse communities with whom we are in contact since the foundation of our organization.

Our aim is not to oppose the concept of reasonable accommodation, a primarily legal model, for the «management of diversity» in our society. However, we are inviting the Commission to consider the fact that social relations are not only based on a social contract managed by the State: we also need to listen to the knowledge and practices that have been in operation for many decades initiated by community-based organizations. In keeping with this vision, our preferred approach has been to enrich community life through intercultural education to dialogue and mutual understanding. The citizens involved in this approach, are themselves the creators of knowledge and networks that transcend what is «manageable», all the while enriching the fabric of our society, in the measure in which we are able to maintain links between these different

levels of socio-cultural reality. Through this memorandum to the Commission, we wish to contribute to the search for paths towards real collaboration between all levels of society, and towards the creation of alternatives acceptable to all.

This brief presents a vision of Quebec as a pluralistic society, as well as an approach to interculturality as a way of living together in this society. This vision and approach are drawn from an experience of action, reflection, and research which have spanned over four decades at the Intercultural Institute of Montreal (IIM).

In the first part, we shall draw a portrait of the diverse innovative programs and activities offered at our Institute in the field of intercultural relations within Quebec, in Canada, and on the international level. We shall then try to present a different view on the issue of the cultural and religious diversity of Quebec by highlighting dimensions that are too little explored or neglected in the present debate. Finally, we shall present a brief exposé of the vision of pluralism and interculturality that has been developed within our organisation, followed by some concrete propositions as orientations for society.

## 1. A presentation on IIM

### 1.1 Its foundation

IIM was founded in 1963, in Montreal, under the name «Centre Monchanin», by a Québécois of French-Canadian origin, Father Jacques Langlais. Its motto was: «The time has come for the feast of nations». Initially a centre that fostered exchange and understanding between «two solitudes», the francophone and the anglophone, it soon became an interpersonal, intercultural meeting and dialogue centre for young and adult Quebecers of all religious and cultural backgrounds.

It is important to note that the mission of our organization, which has been called the Intercultural Institute of Montreal since 1990, was linked to a profound awareness of the pluralism inherent to all of Reality, and to all human societies. The pluralism of Reality, as understood here, is the sense that the diversity present in nature and in human cultures is a given. Our conviction has always been that the transformation of society is only possible through a synergic process that originates from people, expands to communities and finally affects the whole structure of a society. IIM operates neither as a service organization for immigrants, nor as a lobby group for immigrant rights, but rather as an organization for social education fostering interculturalization of our society.

### 1.2 A short overview of IIM's philosophy and action

Since its foundation, each decade has been marked by a new development. Such has been IIM's tradition, constantly sustained by the initial intuition of the pluralism of Reality and by the intercultural imperative; a tradition of adaptation and adjustment to the changing tendencies and needs of the social, political and cultural environment; a tradition consistently responding to the challenges posed by the powerful forces of globalization.

Although the international dimension has always been present in our vision and action, it was during the 80's that the international context became the basis for the framework in the elaboration of our philosophy and our intercultural practices. The confrontation of cultures in international affairs; the colonial history and its vestiges; the stratification of Northern and Southern cultures on a cultural scale (as being modern/non modern or civilized/primitive), were seen as crucial elements in our efforts to theorize interculturality. As a result, applying an intercultural approach to the fields of development and international cooperation, of human rights, and

of international aid, became an essential part of our work.

### 1.3 Characteristics of IIM's programs and approach

IIM has always sought to offer proposals, not to erect rigid opposition to the dominant approach, but towards the introduction of alternatives as regards pluralistic societies throughout the world. We offer a series of programs and services in a spirit of cooperation. Since its foundation to this very day, our programs have run a long and innovative course. The evolution of our programs and services were marked by the following characteristics:

**The 60's:** The intercultural socialization of youth and adults with the background of different life-styles and different cultural and religious origins; the experience of culture-learning and of intercultural/interreligious dialogue; the establishment of an information and documentation service on cultures and religions; intercultural studies and the founding of the international journal *InterCulture*.

**The 70's:** The development of closer links with Indigenous Nations, the creation of programs to support and sensitize the public to the way of life of First Nations, to the socio-political issues with respect to their self-determination; the introduction of a program of intercultural education for children and workshops of cultural sensitization for teachers; intercultural consultation and reference services; the promotion of the rights of minority cultures.

**The 80's:** Intercultural forums on social topics of the day; training in intercultural relation and communication: 45 to 60 hours training programs for professionals in education, social and health services in many institutions and community organizations; training programs for agents of inter-

national development and cooperation, and for agents of human rights.

**The 90's:** Setting up an International Network for Cultural Alternatives to Development (INCAD): promoting movements of regeneration of local communities and of their systems of knowledge throughout the world; establishing a data base on local and indigenous knowledge systems; research-action projects on specific issues, with regard to groups such as youth, elders, and immigrant families within ethno-cultural communities of Quebec; and, more recently, on interculturality within community development and social action.

**2000 to today:** Since 2001, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have incited us to reorient our reflection and action, with regard to interreligious dialogue. Hence, we have constituted an Interreligious Committee for social action. Within the framework of this Interreligious Committee and in collaboration with the Chair of Religion, Culture and Society at the University of Montreal, we have developed an action project within the school milieu on the theme: «Youth, Identity and Religiousness: the role of the school». Participants in this project comprise students from the secondary IV and V, parents, teachers and spiritual animators. In 2007, we held the Colloquium, in collaboration with the Chair on Interuniversity research Group on diversity in Quebec (CRIDAQ), at the University of Quebec in Montreal, «Pluralism here and elsewhere» in order to deepen our reflection on the diversity in our society from an intercultural perspective.

## 2. Who is a 'Québécois'? A look at Quebec's diversity

### 2.1 Forgotten «roots»: the Native heritage

With due respect to the constraints of the Commission to abstain from issues pertaining to the governance of Native nations, our reflection situates itself at the level of identity and our close relationships with the aboriginal peoples of this land. For, it is impossible for us to ignore our troublesome forgetfulness and omission of the influences of indigenous heritage on the identity of so-called "old stock" francophone Québécois.

There once was an old Indian lady from Saskatchewan<sup>1</sup> who decided one day to narrate her life, starting with these words: «Oh! You know, in those days, there were only Indians and Canajohans, the Whites came much after». Such a testimony needs no commentary, it reminds us of a reality about which we cannot insist enough. (MORISSET 1992 : 7)

We call ourselves 'Québécois' and we are proud of it, but do we know that this name, derived from the Algonquian *Kébec*? In fact, this Algonquian name means «a strait, a narrow area, an escarpment» to signify «the place of the city where the St-Laurence River is narrow» (REY 2005 : 2286). That is not the only lapse of memory in the construction of the 'Québécois' cultural identity. Even if we often find much evidence of this indigenous presence in Quebec's toponymy, it seems to be related more, in our memories, to vestiges of a foregone past than to a «founding» heritage of our identity.

Should we not question ourselves with respect to this occultation of this first intercultural encounter? Do we not have something to learn here about our incapacity to understand First Nations in terms of their own world-views and their cultures? The indigenous peoples use Western language to

express their world-views. How is it that the Westerner practically never uses the indigenous language in order to make himself understood by indigenous peoples?

Can one construct a solid 'Québécois' identity by omitting a part of its origins and foundations? We cannot better express the reality of this aboriginal, biological and cultural heritage, than Pierre Lévesque (2002 : 6-8), in the following excerpts from his book *Myths and Realities* of indigenous peoples :

Far from living in rather unenviable conditions and from desiring to integrate and assimilate to the French colony, the Indigenous people, quite to the contrary, have fascinated the Europeans. Mixed marriages, for example, at a certain time, took place rather to the detriment of French society. It is easier, Mother Marie de l'Incarnation would say, to make an Indian out of a Frenchman, than vice-versa.

[...] In many ways, the influence was reciprocal, and undoubtedly this mutual influence has contributed significantly to the birth of a truly Canadian identity, distinct from the Metropolitan French. [...] Exploration, the discovery of the land and of its resources, could not have taken place without the contribution First Nations.

This past and present omission of the reality of the first inhabitants of the territory, and of their definite influence in the construction of the identity of the 'old stock' Québécois, even if it can be explained as Denys Delage shows (2002 : 6-8), by relating the history of North American colonization, is nonetheless inexcusable.

The fragility of identity, as an explanation for all the fear and insecurity often justifying withdrawal within themselves, happens to be a reality that is rather well shared among non-Natives. This cannot be overcome by refusal and denial of facts. The development of healthy intercultural relations with Indigenous peoples cannot take place with-

out correcting the ignorance and misunderstanding of the people of Quebec about the history of their contributions and without transforming the negative and folkloric images that we have of them.

The acknowledgement of their contribution must enter our lives as an unavoidable reference. It requires of us to open our eyes to our own historical reality. It implies change in our representation of ourselves and of the indigenous peoples, changes that are rooted in that reality. In that perspective, it behoves us to give to indigenous peoples the place and visibility that belong to them as persons and as communities. In whichever way we may be able to support their aspirations to recovery (MORENCY & KISTABISH 2002 : 14-17) from the intergenerational and multigenerational<sup>1</sup> trauma, and to the revitalisation of their cultures, we will also be contributing to the regeneration of our own.

Since the 1970's, IIM's experience with the different First Nations of Quebec has been enriched by establishing close contacts, by listening and showing respect, which made it possible over the years for IIM to weave a relationship of confidence with them. In their eyes the IIM became a trustworthy interlocutor. We refer here to the cultural sensitization sessions offered for the last 30 years, at the IIM and in secondary schools and CEGEPs, to initiate better relations with indigenous peoples. Most recently the "summer school" program of the IIM offers an opportunity to participants to immerse themselves in indigenous cultures and to develop attitudes conducive to dialogue. This ongoing dialogue with the indigenous and the Inuit nations, was also published in the book entitled *Nations Autochtones en*

<sup>1</sup> "The intergenerational or multigenerational traumas are present when the effects of the traumas are not resolved during the life of a generation. When traumas are ignored and nothing has been done to solve them, these traumas shall be transmitted from one generation to the next. What we learn as being normal when children, we transmit to our own children. [...]" (FAC 2000 : 9)

*Amérique du Nord* written in collaboration by Ntsuk<sup>2</sup> and Robert Vachon (1983).

Thanks to these relationships, IIM has been able to maintain communication between the government or its institutions and the traditionalist Natives, among others, during the dramatic events in Akwesasne and Oka. In this last case, a bicultural committee of about 15 participants, was set up with people from the Kahnawake and Kanasatake Mohawks and francophone Quebecois from the towns of Oka and Châteauguay, in view of renewing dialogue and working towards resolving the crisis. The resulting reflection was published in four issues of the Journal *InterCulture* between 1991 and 1993 (VACHON 1991, 1992, 1993). The work of this committee identified elements of misunderstanding through an approach of intercultural dialogue. In this case, it made it possible for the participants to focus on an important source of misunderstanding resides in their different visions of relationship to the earth. While the Québécois are in a relation of ownership with regard to the land, the Mohawks see themselves rather as its protectors, which explains, in part, the conflicts related to self-determination and land-claims. It is our understanding that such a practice, based on continued, prolonged and equality-based dialogue, could spread if there are places with appropriate means that could exist more and more to facilitate this kind of encounter.

In 2007, during the colloquium «Pluralism here and elsewhere» organized by IIM, Michael Rice from the Mohawk Nation, approached the discussion on reasonable accommodation by mentioning that Native people have been accommodating others for centuries. He quoted Chief Canassatego's speech in 1774 on education, and the Seneca chief Red Jacket, that reflect efforts on the part of indigenous Nations to accommodate European cultures, without losing their identity. Mr. Rice asked if something

could not be learnt from these experiences of First Nations, by Quebec and Canada, to welcome new immigrants. And he ended with the following words «If we wish to realize a reasonable accommodation with others, we must plant the tree of peace in our hearts, minds and spirits».

## 2.2 The diversity of the Francophone majority group

### a) Three sociocultural poles of reference

The public debate with regard to reasonable accommodation was initiated by groups of so-called «old stock francophone». Also, the most opinions and briefs to the Commission, were presented by persons and organizations coming from this group.

The majority group, all the while sharing a common origin, presents a socio-cultural diversity that we must take into consideration in order to better understand the different positions concerning questions of cultural diversity.

Three socio-cultural poles of reference can be identified among the Francophone majority: the French-Canadian pole, the Quiet Revolution pole and the pole of globalization and diversity.

### b) The three poles of reference with regard to cultural diversity

#### i) The French-Canadian group

In spite of the changes that took place during the "Quiet Revolution" in Quebec, a non-negligible portion of the francophone Quebecers «of the old stock» has continued to identify themselves as French-Canadian, notably pertaining to the Catholic religious dimension. It is found mainly in the non-metropolitan regions but also present in certain social strata of the metropolitan areas. Here are some of its characteristics:

- An acute sense of historical memory;
- An important attachment to the Catholic religious tradition, which has been one of the major elements of the configuration of the French-Canadian identity;
- An attachment to a more «traditional» system of values, as much at the ethical and moral levels, as at the social, economic and political levels;
- A more communitarian social outlook, without diminishing the value accorded to individuals and their sense of initiative.

French Canada, especially after the Patriots Revolt of 1837-38, has constructed for itself an identity, which is quite homogeneous, articulated around the Catholic faith and the French language. This can help us understand some of their reactions to and perceptions of cultural diversity:

- The expression of a malaise towards the cultural diversity, can be viewed as a step toward a loss of values specific to French Canadian identity, and "Quiet Revolution" represents the first phase. The following sentence illustrates this fear quite well: «They have obliged us to remove the crucifix from the schools and now the immigrants want to impose their religion on us».
- Immigration is perceived as a danger for this already fragile cultural identity, even if, de facto, the immigrant acts more as a mirror than a real cause;
- The fact that many immigrants share their religious and spiritual values is barely noticed.

#### ii) The pole of the Quiet Revolution

The Quiet Revolution was primarily a reaction against the socio-political, religious and cultural reality of the Duplessis era, which has been qualified as «the Great Darkness».

This revolution enabled Quebec to enter the modern era, provoking profound changes, notably the emancipation from the ecclesiastical Catholic hold on society and the way of understanding and doing politics. Some of its associated characteristics:

- An acute sense of rupture with the past, seen mainly as highly positive. Hence, a certain void at the level of identity, since all possible references to the past are perceived to be negative;
- A militant secularism (laïcité), often verges on anti-clericalism, in reaction to ecclesiastical power which has dominated Quebec society for over a 100 years. Religion is considered to be a private affair, not a public or collective one.
- An attachment to a more «modern» system of values where individual autonomy is a central element, while maintaining the framework of a certain collective solidarity where the political has ascendancy over the communal. The latter is no longer organized along religious lines but rather according to State's parameters, to a point where some have asserted that the State has become the new Church and «Statism» the new religion.

This sentiment of liberation associated with the Quiet Revolution, cannot be neglected when we try to understand the reactions in toward the cultural diversity, which is perceived as:

- A reality which would contribute to the weakening of the national identity of the Quebecois people, and would call into question the value system that has resulted from the Quiet Revolution, mainly secularism (laïcité) and gender equality;
- An enrichment for Quebec, on condition that the system of values brought in by Quiet Revolution is not jeopardized.

### iii) The pole of globalization and diversity

The Quebec of globalization and of cultural diversity concerns a portion of the younger generation, especially those living in metropolitan areas. It comprises predominantly of the francophones «of the old stock», and children born of immigrant parents. They have not known a French-Canadian Quebec, and have not experienced the key moments of the Quiet Revolution all the while growing up within the heart of the impact brought by these changes, which, in their eyes, are taken for granted. This group seems to us to be defined by certain specific traits:

- These young people are seeking their roots and history, which have not always been transmitted, due to the rupture experienced by their parents caused by the Quiet Revolution, and for others, by the experiences of their parents' immigration;
- Simultaneously, these individuals express an interest in other cultures, and a certain cosmopolitanism which connects them with world-space;
- Depending on their generational and cultural belonging, these youth attach themselves to various value systems, and consider the issue of values as one of a personal research and construction, rather than assuming that it is a de facto transmission.

The reactions to cultural diversity within this group could be summarized as follows:

- The promotion of cultural diversity is viewed as an ever-flowing spring of richness for society, thanks to daily proximity with persons of different cultural origins; it is also a shield against intolerance towards cultural communities and immigrants, which could give rise to an exacerbated national consciousness.

- There is a certain lack of understanding of the difficulties in reconciling cultural diversity with the historical imprints of these different poles.

These dimensions, added to the Native heritage, form a complex construction of a multi-layered identity of which the three poles can never be closed compartments, or realities independent from each other, but rather creative polarities of meaning to which certain people attach themselves in an inclusive way while others unceasingly transit between these different realities. Each pole, bringing its own elements, influences the way of understanding and of positioning oneself in the face of cultural diversity. It is obvious, that it is immigration and the encounter with an 'Other' which brings us back to «who we are», and creates an opportunity for *intra*-cultural dialogue, which is indispensable for *inter*-cultural dialogue.

### 2.3 Immigration as a source of diversity

In the context of an immigration, which is increasingly important and diversified, identifying the Quebec nation with the majority ethnic group and with the Anglo-Saxon group gives the impression that they are the only Quebecers. While acknowledging their historical precedence, one must not forget that 'the old stock Quebecers' are not only those of these two ethnic groups, but also those belonging to the ethnic groups of Black, Jewish, Chinese, Japanese, Irish and other origins. They have immigrated at different times and different contexts, and have long been settled in Quebec. Moreover, the internal diversity of the majority group, can also found within each and every immigrant and ethno-cultural community. There are among other things, differences of language, religions, socio-economic status, regional origin, acculturation linked to colonialism and to western modernization, trajectory of migration, or the differences related to the

context of the host society at the time of their arrival.

The plurality of national identity is accentuated in contact with immigrants. This contact invites Quebecers to be perspicacious and to become aware of their national identity as being a pluralistic one. Given the cultural pluralism, past and present, of Quebec, it would be preferable to maintain an intercultural perspective. Thus, the search for modalities for *a living together* could be undertaken in the light of the many world-views that are present in Quebec, which will enrich the western and modern tradition of the French speaking Québécois society.

Despite the appearances of the present debate, it seems to us that this is the horizon towards which Quebec aspires, having recognized the UNESCO universal declaration on cultural diversity adopted in Paris, on November 2<sup>nd</sup> 2001<sup>2</sup>.

*Article I- Cultural diversity, mankind's common heritage.*

*Culture takes on different forms through time and space. This diversity embodies an originality and plurality of identities, which characterize the groups and societies that compose humankind. The cultural diversity is, as the source for exchange, innovation and creativity, as necessary for humankind as biodiversity in the realm of life. In that sense, it constitutes the common patrimony of humankind and must be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of the present and future generations".*

Within this vision of pluralism, we believe that Quebec is called upon to recognize not only the ethnic groups, but the cultures that compose it, as constitutive dimensions of its national identity. It is important that Quebec develops a national identity based on a relationship to cultural diversity that is specific to its own context and also develops

political, economic and social institutions, which reflect this pluralistic constitution.

The Quebec nation is heir to the many civilizations and the many visions that constitute it. Hence it is normal that these cultures enlighten its national vision and nurture its daily life, not only for local colour, but all through to its fundamental aspirations. It would be fitting that we accept and invite all the citizens of Quebec to found the pluralistic Québécois nation, as being full-fledged Quebecers, and not only considered as manpower and collaborators in a project belonging to another people.

The argument of the majority could not justify that a person be considered a second-class citizen because he/she belongs to a minority group, interesting only in terms of demographic statistics. If we conceive of the Quebec nation as being within a horizon of dynamic pluralism, it is now that it is being founded by all the cultures that compose it. What is important is that we do not repeat the injustices of the past towards the First Nations, the Blacks, the Jews and all those who have since immigrated, and that new immigrants be informed about the aboriginal heritage and the inherent diversity in Quebec.

### 2.4 The diversity and persistence of religion in Quebec: realities and concepts

#### a) Religion in 'Québécois' Culture

Immigration brings Quebecers into contact with newcomers for whom religion is not necessarily separated from public life. Faced with these new arrivals, it is customary to insist on the secular nature of contemporary Quebec, where religion has shifted from the rank of an unquestioned and constraining social norm, to that of individual choice. This is a common assumption of citizens

who declare themselves opposed to accommodations in religious matters.

Quebec culture has apparently nothing religious left about it, except history and accompanying artefacts: religious buildings, the crucifix in the National Assembly, the Mount Royal Cross, names of localities, etc. Religion is considered a thing of the past, in the process of disappearing as a factor that nurtures the local culture. However, a non-negligible part of the 'Québécois' population of European origins, without necessarily rejecting the project of a lay society, remains attached to their religion, most often Christian, as well as to the fundamental values that it has transmitted. This does not prevent any transformation either of what is religious, or of forms of religious socialization. Two instances of this transformation are the massive abandonment of regular «religious practice», and the existence of new forms of religiousness that are more or less marginal from a demographic viewpoint, but which mark more and more the Quebec's socio-religious imagination: «new religious movements», New Age, «holistic» spiritualities, interest in Buddhism, etc. As a whole, people are less practicing than before, and little drawn to identify with Catholicism, the 'Québécois' continue massively to nurture spiritual interests that affect their behaviour both in private and public life.

To sum up, religion does not disappear from public life but the modalities of its presence may transform themselves. Even in the context of a State laicism, its effects are felt collectively. Thus, it seems to us necessary to acknowledge the positive effects of religions on the lives of the people, even in a secular State, without denying the risks linked to fundamentalism and sectarianism. Religions are generally sources of cultural and ethical enrichment. In the name of their religion, innumerable people live under a code of ethics: of hope, respect, integrity,

<sup>2</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/0012/00127160m.pdf>



community and extra-communal solidarity, and they transmit these values to the young. It is important to welcome this luminous and constructive side of religions, and also the enduring character of their presence in Quebec, which strongly invites us to cultivate tolerance and dialogue. Furthermore, it is one of the postulates of the program of Ethics and Religious Culture, which will be operational in Quebec schools, starting in September 2008. In our view, these postulates merit clear affirmation, in order to counter the perception that religion is mere a cultural vestige of the past and/or as an individual choice.

### **b) Religion in the «public spaces»**

We can observe that during the hearings of the present Commission, a particular tendency is emerging, which indicates that we can anticipate a massive support for laicism by the people and the organizations consulted. It is a modern concept adopted by broad segments of Quebec society, results from a history of the secularization of thought, and from a gradual disfranchisement with regard to religious powers. Thus, laicism appears in keeping with the specific evolution of Quebec society.

Furthermore, immigration brings other visions of the world, where the culture is not always asserted independently from the religion, and they often find their roots in original mythological and philosophical dimensions. The intercultural practice of IIM, has accustomed us to living with the coexistence of different, and sometimes antagonistic, founding myths. It has convinced us of the impossibility of reaching a hermeneutic horizon overhanging all particular world-views, and in which every one could feel completely at ease. We must insist on this point, contrary to the a lay pretension that we can be equally hospitable to all citizens, as long as they rally to common values. And this is without taking into consideration

the practical consequences of sidelining their religious allegiances to the limits of the intimate, the familial or to their place of worship. For some, coming from other cultures, religion cannot but overflow these boundaries, and to them this is culturally meaningful and socially structuring.

In the present situation, the debate is about «religion in the public spaces» and about modalities of 'Québécois' laicism. These terms may seem self-evident, but they must be put into perspective. First of all, the notion of public space seems to us to be rather vague. Isn't the place of worship public? And what about the facade of a place of worship, with its symbols, inscriptions, bells, the crowd at the time of worship? What becomes of community space within that public space? On the other hand, does a private enterprise belong or not to a public space? A recent episode has sparked reactions, which equated a commercial sugar shack with a public space, requiring the same insistence on laicism as if it were a civic space, for example, a public school or a CLSC (Local Community Health Centre). As one can see, there are differences regarding the notion of «public space», and these are never discussed in the social debate that has been going on for some years in Quebec.

As for «religion» in the public space, to what point is it reasonable to expect a person who spends his life at work, at school, at the hospital, in public transportation or in any other public place, to detach one's religious allegiance, devotion, morality, or rules of modesty, all of which permeate the tissue of one's identity, as much as the norms of sexual equality, personal enhancement, or freedom of speech would be crucial to French or English Quebecers. Don't the private and the public correspond to each other? Is it realistic to imagine an impermeable wall between them?

Is it possible to ask an immigrant to renounce part of his/herself in order to blend into a majority? We know of some groups of immigrants or ethno-cultural communities that find it difficult to live according to such expectations, and this in spite of their utmost effort to adapt. It is important to be aware of this fact. In short, nothing should forbid a religious person to continue to be so in a public space, primarily of course, within his/her own profound convictions, but also in manifesting it publicly.

## **3. An alternative vision of pluralism and interculturality**

### **3.1 The statist and institutional perspective on interculturality**

Generally, the vision of the cultural diversity of institutions is associated with the problem of immigration and integration of immigrants. For more than 20 years, the different levels of government and institutions have set up concerted policies and plans of action with regard to the growing diversity in Quebec. In order to deal with the problem of integrating immigrants, we have had the varied perspectives of Canadian multiculturalism, 'Québécois' interculturalism, and the anti-racist approach. Undoubtedly society has made some inroads in its efforts and ways to welcome immigrants, thanks to initiatives taken by government institutions to provide more appropriate instruments to public organizations and institutions, in order to facilitate their integration.

Today, people are talking about interculturality in terms of «managing diversity», and of «reasonable accommodation» as a tool or mechanism to manage and integrate immigrants, which is the object of the present consultation. However, the notion of integration remains rather ambiguous and oftentimes takes on, in social practices, the meaning of normalization or homogenisation of minority cultures, in conformity

with the norms and normative values of the culture of the majority. This results in a feeling of insecurity both within the majority and the minority groups. The first group feels invaded by the growing diversity and the second group fears assimilation to the precepts of the dominant cultural group.

Keeping these facts in mind, shouldn't there be a critical revision of the impacts these institutional approaches to the issue of diversity? To what point can the state, in a perspective of management of the population, and of social relations based on political and economic interests, be the lone insurer of social cohesion and harmony? Will such a framework help to develop conditions and measures that would foster a dialogue between the different cultural components of the Quebec society?

### **3.2 An alternative perspective of interculturality**

The alternative perspective proposed in this brief rests on the premise that citizens are knowledgeable subjects, and that they themselves construct their knowledge. Hence, we encourage an effort to *decenter* from the statist vision of cultural diversity and to situate oneself more at the existential level of the daily life of citizens. Instead of proposing a pre-determined model of conviviality, we suggest a start from what is actually being lived and elaborate a model of conviviality, by engaging ourselves in a dialogue on the lived experiences of people and the diverse communities that compose our society. We are of the opinion that the transformation of societies necessitates a synergy, which starts at the level of people, expands to communities and reaches society and its institutions.

The vision of pluralism that is put forward in this brief rests on the acknowledgment of the reality of a diversity that has always existed in Quebec. That acknowledgement also means the acceptance of the historical precedence of



the nations, peoples, and cultures that have been present at different eras of our history. Our view of pluralism is based on a perspective of the horizontality of the relationships between diverse group in their living spaces or community. This framework encourages a dialogue, between equals, and this is in itself an important way of strengthening community living.

How do we understand the notion of interculturality, beyond the assertions of respect or tolerance of the other?

Interculturality means an interaction between two or many cultural universes in a very complex process of closeness and of distancing, or exchange and questioning at the personal, community, and structural levels (society and its institutions), and at the deeper level of our world-views. (DAS 1994 : 18)

Claude Clanet (1990), professor of psychology at l'Université de Mirail, Toulouse, adds: «this interaction presupposes a reciprocal exchange, and a guarantee for the continuity of identity (even transformed) of the partners».

Moreover, interculturality implies a process of continuous dialogue, sustained both by intra and intercultural dynamics, i.e. alternately centring on the realities of the Self and a dialogue within the community to which one belongs, and a decentration from the Self in order to access the universe of the other. It is the dynamics of this process which brings us to rediscover «ourselves» and at the same time opens the possibilities for understanding the *other*. Our view on interculturality goes beyond defending sociopolitical and economic rights of immigrants: it seeks to include the psychosocial dimensions involved in the process of encountering the *other*, which allows persons and communities from diverse origins to build a living-together. Fear of the unknown, the feeling of being threatened by the *other*, and with-

drawal, and all human mechanisms of self-defence, are at the same time real obstacles in intercultural relations. These dimensions, however, go beyond the purview of management through legalistic measures.

Whether in civil society, or in situations of daily life, people continuously develop knowledge and know-how in all areas of human activity. Our hope is that the Commission encourages the different levels of our society, namely the political society (the State and its institutions), the civil society and the communities to engage in the process of collaboration, by *decentering* from the purely managerial and governance perspective. And this collaboration needs to be framed on the basis of horizontality of relationship between groups.

#### 4. Guidelines for intercultural conviviality

So far in this brief we have raised issues regarding the terms of ongoing debate about the «public spaces». From an anthropological viewpoint, these terms seem to be inconsistent with the world-views other than Western and modern. But we have also stated that we do not believe in the possibility of a single conceptual horizon, which could do justice to all world-views.

It is our wish to contribute to the reflection of the present Commission, from a horizon, which is other than political and legalistic: that of the living reality of intercultural and inter-religious relations in Quebec, as we have observed for the last 40 years. However, given the origin and the state of the Commission's work, we must take into account the political and legal issues, within the framework of the debate now taking place, on being 'Québécois', Canadian, modern and Western. In order to foster a vision of a pluralistic Quebec and in order to be respectful of Quebec's culture, we must recognize a certain discomfort and try to

respond to the conceptual context in which this debate is taking place.

We believe that focussing the debate around reasonable accommodation presents major difficulties because in this perspective diversity is perceived and approached as a problem that is related to immigration. But if we displace our view on the reality of Quebec society, we come to discover that it has been founded on diversity, and we can make the following observations:

- Québécois society is not homogenous and its diversity is, above all, a reality of daily life, which is not in itself an object of management.
- The Quebec's history and identity have been shaped by diversity and it will continue to be so in the future, probably in an even more radical way.
- In general people of Quebec are not sensitized to certain dimensions of this diversity marked, by indigenous heritage, by internal diversity of the francophone majority «of the old stock», as well as by the visible differences of the present sources of immigration.
- The contribution of different communities in the construction of identities, and their knowledge of living together, has marked Quebec's pluralism. The community sectors need to be recognized as places that create links, knowledge and living spaces. They also as equal partners in creating relationships between the different levels of society. Respecting differences is a right for which the responsibility must be assumed by all Quebecers.
- Horizontal partnership is between the different political, civic and community levels, is indispensable in order to build a convivial living. But, we must face the fact, that, since 1994, successive government administrations in Quebec, have significantly reduced their financial assis-

tance to organizations who work towards settlement of newcomers, for example, French-language programs, and programs for integration of immigrants into Quebec society. Some of these organizations also dedicate their life's work to training the staff of different institutions and community organizations. They provide the most valuable support to different communities out in the front line in spite of their precarious financial situations.

- Spirituality, in its broader sense, is part of the identity of the 'Québécois' of «the old stock». This incites us to be receptive to the project of an «open laicism»<sup>3</sup> for all civic institutions as a point of departure towards a dialogue between the culture of laicism, the different religious traditions, and the diverse expressions of spirituality. A form of laicism which would hinder religious expression, whether individual or communal, in the public place, would risk producing an inverse effect to what is being sought i.e. the full and total participation of all in society. It seems to us, that this kind of laicism would risk sending to many people the wrong messages. For those who practice religions that do not separate culture and religion, they cannot find a just place in Quebec society. And for others who continue to maintain their religious particularities, they are not considered to be full citizens, with all the risks of isolation, even of discrimination that this entails.

<sup>3</sup> According to the consultative government organisations, such as the Council for the Status of Women, the Council for intercultural relations, the Committee on religious affairs and the Commission for Human Rights, a Québécois laicism aims at a religiously neutral management of civic institutions, which authorizes, however, individual religious expression, the public space included; and this can be done verbally, ritually, or by the wearing of a religious symbol (and as long as the person concerned is not exercising a civic function, according to some). This laicism would be in conformity with Québécois civic values: equality of citizens irrespective of their religious particularities, acknowledgment of the diversity of cultures and religions, and awareness about living together. With regard to the public education, this laicism is qualified in recent years, as open laicism.

- Reasonable accommodation is another problematic aspect of this public debate on cultural and religious diversity. Intercultural negotiation has proven to be a delicate exercise, sometimes destabilizing, and which requires special competences. Competences regarding the knowledge of cultures and their respective evolution; skills to deal with the affective dimensions of interculturality; the abilities to do management of differences and communication; and finally, the capacity to deal with legal guidelines that will define the boundaries for what is reasonable and what is not reasonable accommodation. In our view we need to go beyond the mediation of conflicts and implement resources for intercultural dialogue and mediation, in the schools, in health and social services, in private enterprises, in community organizations, among others. Cultural diversity is an enduring fact and calls for instituting lasting measures to compose with it competently.

### Conclusion

The recognition of the diversity within us, intra and intercultural, and the impressive strength for adjustment of the first peoples since the arrival of the French in North America, can also be a source of inspiration for all of us. All Quebecers are called upon to assume their responsibilities to compose with diversity and to build a society together.

It is basically a matter of underscoring the spirit of this land of Quebec, as a living spirit which nurtures us and which allows us to share a past (our roots), a present (of living daily together) and a future (our dreams). The search for a horizon of convergence between the different cultures of Quebec is in itself a transformative process which could facilitate constant adjustments to the reality that is always pluralist, and contribute to the development of a 'Québécois' society

founded on its unique relationship to diversity.

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The publications presented in this section focus on the theme: articulating pluralism in our contemporary societies. Two of them do so through the issue of reasonable accommodation in Quebec, one by offering instruments applicable in various fields; the second by exploring the question of religious accommodation in the school environment. A third text brings a renewed perspective to the notion of a common public culture, which was part of the debate in the mid 90s in Quebec, raising the possibility of the coexistence of different public common cultures in the same social space.

A fourth publication presents a new vision of Canada, forcefully asserting that it never has been a country of British, French or European inspiration, but rather of an indigenous essence. The last of these texts questions the nature of America (referring to the USA), casting a critical eye on this country which has instituted a world (dis)order, that, in spite of its grandiose democratic principles and values, its civic prosperity and civil rights, ignores its own cultural diversity.

Jean-Sébastien IMBEAUT,  
Marie McANDREW,  
Micheline MILOT, Paul EID (dir.)

*L'accommodement raisonnable et la  
diversité religieuse à l'école publique,  
Normes et pratiques*

Montreal, Éditions Fides, 2008, 300p.

The place of religious diversity in educational norms and practices has been the object of much debate in Quebec, particularly in 2007. It is in this context that the Canadian Research Chair on education and ethnic relations, and the "Religion and ethnicity" pole of the Center for Ethnic Studies of Montreal universities, took the initiative in organizing study days on this issue.

This publication compiles most of the presentations heard during these proceedings. They come from academics, decision-makers, practitioners and representatives from community organizations. The book is divided into 5 major chapters, allowing the reader a comprehensive view of multiple facets pertaining to the issue:

- Schools and pluralism: the institutional and legal context.
- Reasonable accommodation: asset or obstacle in the school's achievement of its mandates.
- Current debates and emerging issues.
- Reasonable accommodation and debates on the integration of immigrants: pitfalls to avoid.

Miriam JÉZÉQUEL (dir.)

*Les accommodements raisonnables: quoi,  
comment, jusqu' où? Des outils pour tous.*

Cowansville, Editions Yvon Blais, 2007. 406p.

The notion of reasonable accommodation has drawn much ink recently. But beyond the biases and a few highly publicized cases, how does our society and legal system accommodate its citizens? Inasmuch that reasonable accommodation should unite a society rather than divide it, what place do we wish to give in our society, to religion, to cultural diversity, to handicapped people, to the family? Such are the topics discussed in the texts of this collective study.

Stephan GERVAIS,  
Dimitrios KARMIS et  
Diane LAMOUREUX (dir.)

*Du tricoté serré au métissé serré?  
La culture publique commune au  
Québec en débats*

Ste-Foy, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008.360 p.

Can one propose a common public culture without being a sovereign State? What are the modalities of such a "culture"? What institutions favor it or pose obstacles to it? Does it symbolize certain problems? In what measure is this notion hospitable to diversity? Can many public cultures coexist within the same State?

This book on common public culture offers supplementary reflections prefacing practices of reasonable accommodations in Quebec. Thanks to the illuminating essays by each author, conditions of collective life in Quebec- in brief, what unites the Quebecois - are debated in depth. It is a book that will prove useful for reflection on citizenship, besides offering rich, diversified, and fertile observations for whoever is interested in "living together" in democracies characterized by the affirmation and acknowledgement of differences.

Contributors to this publication: Pierre Bosset, André Burelle, Michel Coutu, Stephan Gervais, Dimitrios Karmis, Will Kymlicka, Micheline Labelle, Ivan Lamonde, Diane Lamoureux, Georges Leroux, Jocelyne Maclure, Carmen Mata Barreiro, Maryse Potvin, Francois Rocher, Michel Seymour.

John RALSTON SAUL

*A Fair Country.  
Telling Truths About Canada*

Vancouver, Viking Canada 2008

*We are not a civilization of British or French  
or European inspiration. We never have been*

In this startlingly original vision of Canada, renowned thinker John Ralston Saul argues passionately that Canada is a Métis nation, heavily influenced and shaped by Aboriginal ideas. First, he says, we are far more Aboriginal than European. That we strangely fail to recognize this holds our country back. Our taste for negotiation over violence, our comfort with a constant tension between individuals and groups, our gut belief in egalitarianism - all of these come from our Aboriginal roots. The power of diversity in Canada has a long history, stretching back four centuries to the Aboriginal idea of the inclusive circle.

Second, Saul argues that the famous phrase *peace, order and good government* that supposedly defines Canada is a distortion of the country's true nature. Every historic statement, constitution or major document before the BNA Act referred to *peace, welfare and good government*. As he demonstrates, this was never a mere formula. The well-being of the citizen was the intent.

Operating under mythologies that take neither of these truths into account, our elites - whether political, administrative or business - have become increasingly ineffective, slipping back into colonial insecurity and afraid to advance Canada's interests.

To unleash our energy, we must embrace our Aboriginal and egalitarian nature. This will give us the strength to transform the weakness of our elites.

Brilliantly conceived, witty, and persuasively argued, *A Fair Country* will forever change how Canadians see themselves and their country.

Ronald WRIGHT

*What is America?*

Alfred A. Knopf: Canada, 2008

From the #1 bestselling author of a *Short History of Progress and Stolen Continents*, another surprising, stimulating, and essential analysis of our troubled age.

The United States is now the world's lone superpower; a new empire whose deeds could make or break this century. The American Way has Americanized the globe—from Britain to Beijing. But is America what it thinks it is? Is America what the world has long believed it to be? How did a small frontier society, in a mere two centuries, become the facto ruler of the world? Why are America's great achievements—in democracy, prosperity and civil rights—often at risk from sinister forces within itself?

Ronald Wright explains how America is more truly American than we know: a uniquely vigorous and rapacious organism arising from the conquest that began with Columbus and begat the modern age. Brimming with insight into history and human behaviour, and written in Wright's muscular, witty style, *What Is America?* shows how the new world created the modern world, and now threatens to undo it.

Although the United States regards itself as the most advanced country on Earth, Ronald Wright reveals how it is also deeply archaic: a stronghold of religious extremism, militarism, and so-called modern beliefs—in limitless growth, endless progress, unfettered capitalism and a universal mission—that have fallen under suspicion elsewhere, following two World Wars and the reckless looting of our planet.

Fresh, passionate and thoroughly documented, *What is America?* is an indispensable reference for anyone who seeks to understand our times, our neighbours and ourselves.

## InterCulture

InterCulture intends to contribute to the discovery and emergence of viable alternative approaches to the fundamental problems of contemporary Man, in both theory and practice. Its approach is meant to be integral, which means:

- Intercultural: approaching Reality and human living in light of the diverse cultural traditions of today, and not solely in terms of modern culture;
- Inter and trans-disciplinary: calling on many 'scientific' disciplines, but also on other traditions of knowledge and wisdom (ethno-sciences) as well as on vernacular and popular knowledge;
- Dia-logical: based on the non-duality between *mythos* and *logos*, *theoria* and *praxis*, science and wisdom, wisdom and love. "Wisdom emerges when the love of knowledge and the knowledge of love coalesce" (Raimon Panikkar).

### Intercultural Institute of Montreal

The Intercultural Institute of Montreal (formerly Monchanin Cross-Cultural Centre) is an institute for intercultural education, training, and research, dedicated to the promotion of cultural pluralism and of a new social harmony. Its fundamental research focuses on social critique and exploration of viable alternative responses to the contemporary crises. Its activities, which draw inspiration and sustenance from this research, aim at a cultural and social mutation—radical change—through a gradual process of learning: *theoria* and *praxis*. Its research and action have, from the very start, been undertaken in light of diverse contemporary cultures. It attempts to meet the challenges of our times by promoting cultural identities, their interaction in creative tension and thus their eventual emancipation from the final and most subtle colonialism: hegemony by the mind. The Institute's cross-cultural research and action is carried out through its programs in the three following modules: research and action, teaching and training in interculturalism, intercultural resources and services.

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