

Tony Langlois

Canada: A Multicultural Model for Northern Ireland?

This article contrasts policy responses to cultural diversity which have been adopted in two very different geopolitical contexts. Although in both Canada and Northern Ireland, such policies are legitimised in discursive terms relating to cultural and political rights, both approaches have primarily arisen as pragmatic responses to competitive notions of nationhood. In both situations, the cultural rights of particular, powerful communities have been privileged in order to achieve cooperation between them. However, this support of what are essentially competing positions also risks undermining the authority of the political centre. Legal structures such as the Belfast Agreement and Canada's constitution, which bind competing interests in a single polity, have successfully addressed immediate issues, but have also contributed towards further complex situations, which, in the longer term, are difficult to reconcile. In this article I will focus on particular state policies relating to language and broadcasting, as, alongside education, these are key cultural domains for the construction of social identity.¹

Despite a lengthy and vociferous debate regarding the linguistic and sovereign rights of its citizens, Canada is widely regarded as a successful example of multicultural cooperation, if not quite unity. In fact, the initial reason for my own interest in Canadian multiculturalism arose from my employment with the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council in the late 1990s.² Canada was considered such a good model of accommodation of cultural difference that those working in the field of conflict resolution elsewhere in the world were expected to learn practical lessons there.³ Although Canada's national self-representation as a paradigm of multiculturalism may be somewhat aspirational, it is nonetheless true that Canada has managed, and even welcomed, its growing cultural diversity, aboriginal and linguistic secessionist movements with very little actual violence or civil disorder. By contrast, even in this current period of sustained 'peace', Northern Ireland is still plagued with a steady, if much lower level of violence and seasonal rioting, both of which receive at least the tacit approval of a significant proportion of the population.

Although the scale and intensity of conflict are clearly very different in the two contexts, it is nevertheless possible to identify a number of broadly common issues and dilemmas, which I shall use as the basis for

this article. Of central importance, both Canadian and Northern Irish regimes face the challenge of formulating a coherent and inclusive 'national' identity, which is acceptable to communities with highly divergent political aspirations. Consequently there is limited consensus on matters of sovereignty (though in both places this issue is actually dealt with in legislature) and it has proved difficult to develop the centralised language and education policies to which most nation states aspire, and even effectively to challenge the conflicting interpretations of history which sustain division at a cultural level. While Northern Ireland is slowly emerging from a long crisis, Canada is continually avoiding one, and political stability in each context has required particular pragmatic developments in cultural policy. In the body of this article I will look briefly at the historical development of each context in turn, then return for a broader discussion of the issues at stake.

The Foundations of Canadian Ethnopolitics

Modern Canadian biculturalism is the result of a deliberate effort to embrace diverse ethnopolitical interests in a single political entity. The original French- and English-speaking migrants emerged from distinct political, linguistic and religious spheres. Though both communities were pioneers to the 'New World', they were, from the outset, agents of competing European colonial interests. After the military defeat of the French at the battle of Quebec in 1759, these diverse interests were strategically united in response to the possibility of annexation by the United States. The provinces that constitute Canada have been only gradually confederated since 1867, most recently with Nunavut in 1999, in a piecemeal process, and, again, for primarily practical reasons. The relationship between the nation's cultural peripheries and centre continues to be negotiated in the face of both internal and external pressures.

Because, at its birth, Canada had an urgent need to forge a coalition of French- and English-speaking settlers, these were accorded a privileged status of 'Founding Peoples' and it was the cultural rights of those communities alone that were enshrined in the constitution of 1867. (The aboriginal communities of the continent were much later included as nation builders under the category of 'First Peoples', and then only when they began to have an impact as a distinct group upon mainstream politics.) English and French were established quite early on as the official languages of the state, and subsequent waves of migrants were not given

the same cultural status, essentially because they were numerically insignificant communities and had arrived *after* the constitution was written. This has set a precedent for the recognition of 'collective rights' in Canada, which is quite a different basis for citizenship than, for example, the focus on the rights of the individual, which is the basis of both the United States constitution and international human rights legislation.

Language Rights in Canada

Up until relatively recently, Anglo-French bilingual policies mapped onto other aspects of cultural demography. The original French-speaking community were predominantly Catholic while Anglophones were most likely to be Protestant (see Martin 1955; Siegfried 1966). Federal government support for education, the key institution for cultural formation, also followed this dual route for most of the country. Modern state schools are non-denominational, but the government remains constitutionally bound to support Catholic schooling even though it does not subsidise education for other religious denominations. This inconsistency has been a matter of public debate for some time.⁴ However, more recent migration patterns have brought both Catholics of non-Francophone origins *and* non-Catholic French speakers into the education system. This trend has increased demand for secularised French-language education while blurring this particular link between ethnicity and service provision (Beaujot 2003).

Although the ethnic and religious mix of French and English speakers has become more complex, the geographical spaces in which each language predominates have remained fairly static. This is in part due to the degree of cultural autonomy enjoyed by provincial governments. In Quebec, French is officially the first language, although there are anglophone residents and many would be able to communicate in both French and English. Following the adoption of a series of controversial language laws in Quebec (notably Bill 101 of 1977), French was assertively promoted in the province, to the extent that many monolingual anglophones migrated to other parts of Canada. Although English was taught in French-language schools, secondary education *in the medium of English* was provided only where this was the first language of the child's family (Liebersohn 1970). This was no longer a matter of free choice but followed instead the impetus of majority collective values of a particular region.

Quebec is also able to insist that all migrants (except those with refugee status) must become proficient in French, in order to maintain the distinctiveness of its regional culture.

In Ontario, as elsewhere in Canada, French is only the 'mother tongue' in clusters of communities spread out among the anglophone majority. An exception is large parts of New Brunswick, an officially bilingual province, reflecting the substantial Acadian element in its population. English speakers outside Quebec are much less likely to have good French, and although it has long been a serious aspiration of the Canadian government, true bilingualism among the population as a whole is relatively uncommon. While 16.3 per cent of Québécois are considered bilingual, the figure is a mere 6.4 per cent in largely anglophone British Columbia (Gratien 2001).

These statistics do not detract from considerable efforts, both practical and symbolic, that the federal government has made to encourage this ideal. Not only are both French and English compulsory subjects throughout the education system, but significant incentives also exist for adults to master a second language, particularly through immersion learning programmes. Many grades of public service employment require specific levels of proficiency in both English and French. Such regulations, incentives, and visible gestures such as bilingual signage, encourage an 'ambient' culture of bilingualism, which in itself has become emblematically 'Canadian'. As this characteristic distinguishes Canada from similar public manifestations of national culture in the United States, it may serve to signify 'Canadianness' to its citizens whether or not they actually speak French. However, the extent of bilingualism in practice inevitably varies regionally, from one government agency to another and even between groups of individuals working in the same office.

Employment requirements aside, adult training in English appeals more to recent francophone migrants to Quebec than to the 'founding peoples' communities (Rocher 2002; Trudeau 1968). Outside Quebec and local francophone strongholds, speaking French is a prerequisite for upward career mobility, so is most popular among middle-class families with an eye to their children's future, whether or not the language is spoken in everyday discourse. In short, the incentives to work towards bilingualism are pragmatic rather than patriotic.

Despite the federal government's even-handed provision of resources aimed at encouraging bilingualism, supported by both the Official Languages Acts of the 1980s and the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, many francophone *and* anglophone Canadians still nurse

the myth that their own linguistic community is relatively deprived outside the area of their regional political control (Rocher 2002). While such views are probably the result of decades of low-level mistrust and rivalry rather than of recent first-hand experiences, this resentment is mobilised in partisan discourses intent on strengthening the provincial periphery at the expense of the federal centre. Thus considerable tension exists between regional and national levels of government, and ethnolinguistic issues play a part in the discourses that maintain it.

Media, Inclusivity and Autonomy

As an inclusive gesture of bilingual identity, the national broadcast media operates a parallel system of radio and television services in both official languages. It may be of satisfaction to francophones to know that they could receive broadcast networks in their first tongue in the Rockies and Great Plains as well as by the shores of the St Lawrence river, however small the French-speaking population in those areas may be. This ubiquitous bilingual approach 'brands' Canada as a multicultural state, though it technically undermines Quebec's claim to be a culturally unique province. When the content of the two radio networks is compared, one finds that they really are largely autonomous. As with the content of daily French- and English-language newspapers (the circulation of which actually *does* reflect local demand rather than federal policy), the media personalities, cultural knowledge and political viewpoints do not have much in common. Rather than the media reflecting a single bilingual culture, they actually show two distinct popular, political and social cultures that co-exist in the same geographical space.

Perhaps this linguistic example provides an illustration of how Canadian cultural diversity is managed more generally. Because of the size of the country, which encompasses several time zones as well as several climatic regions, it has been possible to manage many affairs on a local or provincial basis, leaving central government responsible for international relations, arbitration of disputes and areas of broad economic and social policy. As legislation intended to define the relationship between political centre and periphery is open to interpretation (see Rocher 2002), and as the role of regional representatives to the federal government is arguably rather weak (Kymlicka 2001), there exists considerable room for debate about the degree of autonomy which provinces should enjoy. Larger cities also exercise considerable legislative autonomy, while aboriginal reservations

and the new province of Nunavut (where Inuit peoples are in the majority) also enjoy laws and rights that are unique to their territory. Thus it is possible for local cultural as well as linguistic needs to be met at metropolitan or provincial levels so long as this does not contravene broad-based constitutional or other federal legislation. Human rights laws serve as a safety net for those who believe their rights are not being met domestically, and a government-backed agency, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, itself supports challenges made on this basis.

Although Canada enjoys a flexible system for maintaining a diverse coalition of regional and ethnic interests, it could be argued that it is founded upon legal distinctions made between *racial* rather than *ethnic* groups. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988) encourage participation by the full range of ethnic groups in public employment by affirmative action towards citizens who constitute 'visible minorities' – those considered to bear the brunt of racial discrimination. However, these 'visible minorities' are inevitably identified by physical characteristics and particular racial groups are identified in legislation. For example, blacks and Arabs are listed as 'visible minorities' while others (say, 'Greeks' or 'Latvians') are not. Consequently, if a white person went to live in Nunavut, where he or she would indeed be part of a racial and cultural minority, he or she would not be afforded 'visible minority' status because this is a fixed, legal category, not a relational one. In fact, neither would he or she be entitled to many of the traditional rights enjoyed by Inuit themselves, as they also constitute a legally defined racial category.

A Shift towards Individual Rights

These observations are not intended to criticise Canada's management of cultural diversity, as these policies have clearly been broadly effective. Despite inevitable tensions, regional and racial communities have so far adhered to a particular definition of collective identity for the greater benefit of participation in a stable and wealthy democratic state. One should note, however, that this outcome is a consequence of forging cultural policies on the basis of collective rather than individual rights.

The limitations of this approach become apparent when we consider developments in cosmopolitan cities such as Toronto, where a constant influx of new migrants from different parts of the world jostle for accommodation, employment and recognition of *their* own rights. For

various reasons some communities thrive more than others: a universal problem for those promoting a cohesive sense of national identity. Nevertheless, Toronto boasts a remarkably high proportion of interracial marriages, which probably says much about Canada's success in making multiculturalism an acceptable feature of its national discourse. Being numerically less significant, new immigrant communities will have more to gain by identifying themselves with a mainstream 'host' culture than would longer established groups, who are effectively in *competition* with the mainstream.

As inclusiveness itself has become part of state discourse, the defining characteristics of Canadian national identity are not immediately easy to locate. With large, identifiable communities, which are located in defined regions, specific cultural 'needs' are accommodated by provincial infrastructures and legislation. However, the mix of a multitude of minority identities in cities makes it very much harder to use racial or ethnic difference as a basis for defining *collective* rights. The way Canada has adapted to this situation has been to oblige individuals to 'self-identify' their ethnicity, thus allowing diversity to be recognised and monitored. This move towards individual identification is perhaps an acknowledgement of the limitations of the 'collective' model. It remains to be seen what will happen if, or when, these two philosophical approaches come into conflict with one another.

Northern Ireland

Canada's management of cultural diversity, though effective, is far from uncontroversial, particularly with regard to Quebec's aspirations for independence. In some respects, the province already functions as something of a state within a state, where identification with 'Canadian identity' and relations with federal government differ widely from the anglophone norm (Rocher 2002). Quebec's struggle to achieve further autonomy rarely descends to the level of violence, though political activists continue to pursue their aim with both passion and tenacity.

By contrast, Northern Ireland's ethnopolitical struggles have all too frequently resulted in violence, yet in some important regards both the causes of division and strategic attempts to resolve them justify comparison with the Canadian experience. As with the Quebec issue, the most intractable disputes in Northern Ireland concern the legitimacy of cultural and territorial boundaries. The formation of distinct communities around

linguistic, educational and religious differences has in both cases been both a touchstone of cultural pride for in-group members and a cause of division for the 'greater society' as a whole. In Northern Ireland, repeated attempts have been made to establish a local consensus government, but all have been foiled by the incompatible aspirations of politicians and their electorates and the tendency for links between political parties and paramilitary organisations to undermine mutual confidence.

Unlike the position of Québécois francophones, the two communities in Northern Ireland are more or less evenly matched numerically. The situation is further complicated by the fact that two larger contingent states are also deeply involved in 'managing' the conflict. Because of this, and the degree of intercommunal violence in recent memory, each community is able to consider itself both as a minority (with regard to one state or the other) and as a victim, thus legitimising various political or even violent acts as 'self-defence'.

However, before exploring comparable aspects of ethno-political management, some readers may find it helpful if I provide the briefest historical backdrop to the cultural dilemmas facing Northern Irish policy-makers.

Partition and Division

The province of Northern Ireland was created in 1921 when the Irish Republic gained formal independence from Great Britain. It was formed in order to protect the rights and interests of a population that differed in important respects from the rest of the island, being largely descended from seventeenth-century Protestant Scottish and English planters and supportive of the political union with the United Kingdom.⁵ The boundary of the province was so clearly linked to the demographic heartland of this ethnic group that only six of Ulster's nine counties were included in Northern Ireland, a fact that has made the common usage of 'Ulster' as a synonym for 'Northern Ireland' a matter of dispute. This political entity's few early concessions to inclusion of the Catholic minority were often boycotted by them in protest against the partition of the 'Island of Ireland' (McVeigh 1998). Tensions between this 'statelet' and its neighbours, and certainly within its borders, erupted into well-documented violence from the outset. After campaigns by Catholics for equal civil rights were harshly repressed in the 1970s, paramilitary groups sought to end (or

maintain) partition by force, resulting in nearly thirty years of bloody turmoil costing over 3,600 lives – a period referred to as 'the Troubles' (Fay, Morrissey and Smyth 1999).

The situation having resulted in military and political stalemate, a negotiated compromise deal, the Belfast (or 'Good Friday') Agreement was achieved and endorsed by referenda held in both Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic in 1998. The agreement established an inclusive local government and recognised the sovereignty of the United Kingdom until a referendum decides otherwise. Under the terms of the agreement paramilitary prisoners were released, British military presence was drastically scaled down and several important cross-border bodies for mutual cooperation with the Republic were established.

Compromise and Cultural Rights

The establishment of an elected Northern Ireland Assembly offered the first opportunity for regional local government since 1986 but demanded considerable compromise on behalf of its constituent parties. As life-long enemies could not work together without losing face with their electorate, the more extreme positions of each side made their cooperation conditional on the fulfilment of those aspects of the Agreement which would most humiliate the other. The general environment of mistrust gave strength to these elements, and allowed a series of crises to bring about the 'temporary' suspension of the Assembly in 2001. Devolved government was not restored until May 2007.

During the period of direct rule from London, many of the institutions set up as outworkings of the Belfast Agreement continued to function, among them programmes of financial support intended to promote an inclusive cultural development strategy.⁶ After decades of conflict, the 'cultures' of each group had become highly polarised. For example, in the 1950s, tastes in traditional music or local sports may have been broadly 'shared' by both sides of the ethnic divide, but this was certainly far from the case by the end of the Troubles (McNamee 1992). Participation in such cultural domains has become a fairly reliable marker, and even a self-conscious symbol, of ethnic background. Almost entirely segregated education systems at primary and secondary levels had produced generations of people who had very different understandings of history and very little contact with members of the 'other side' until adulthood. Nationalists had effectively appropriated the cultural trappings of 'Irishness',

conflating elements of religion, language, music, sport, and even a historical identification with victimhood, rendering it almost impossible for Protestants to find common ground. Popular Protestant organisations such as the Orange Order likewise promoted a conception of Britishness which no Catholic (nor, for that matter, most British people in the United Kingdom) could possibly share.

In response to this degree of cultural polarisation, government-led strategies for cultural development since the 1980s have tended to have three broad objectives. The first has been to afford recognition to cultural areas belonging to the most politically marginalised communities, in order to promote equal visibility and esteem.⁷ The second objective is to foster *mutual* understanding, recognition of and even participation in cultural traditions other than one's own. Although each case for funding is judged on its own merits, taking into account local and historical subtleties, it could also be argued that these two objectives are sometimes mutually incompatible. If a developing cultural movement receives financial or strategic support, in practice, to show how different it is from that of others, there is no inherent incentive to make it accessible to others. Outsiders may challenge its distinctiveness, question its authenticity or try to appropriate its traditions into their own culture. These developmental strategies are partly justified by a third objective, which is simply to increase the level and quality of engagement between marginal social groups and government (or government intermediaries). The reasoning here seems to be that groups antagonistic to the political mainstream will, given time, be less likely to bite the hand that feeds them.⁸ This assumption has been only partly borne out. In practice, Northern Ireland has received such generous funding for grass-roots social programmes over the last fifteen years that many groups consider financial support a right, paying mere lip-service to the more challenging 'cross-community' aspects of their projects. Both sides of the divide tend to consider that their own community has been the greater victim, and the knowledge that funding will keep coming regardless of its results does not necessarily challenge such attitudes.⁹

Parity of Esteem

After the Belfast Agreement, support for cultural development, though promoting mutual understanding and challenging division, was more than ever to affirm the value, and therefore the difference, of each 'tradition'.

The Agreement itself uses the term 'parity of esteem', a useful phrase for assuring wary participants that their cultural values will be respected, but one with some unfortunate implications. Protestant communities, which had made a wary and conditional commitment to the Agreement, soon expressed the greatest need for cultural development. Unable to identify themselves with the (internationally recognised) trappings of 'Irish culture', many Protestants were also doubtful that their identification with 'Britishness' would be reciprocated by the UK government in the long term. Many may even have wondered if their understanding of national identity even existed in the increasingly multicultural and secular Great Britain. Experiencing an uncomfortable 'identity vacuum', some elements of the Protestant community have instead emphasised historical connections to Scotland and to the United States rather than emphasising Irishness or Britishness (Nic Criath 2002; Wolff 2002).

Catholic communities have had other difficulties with the Belfast Agreement but have not suffered from a lack of sense of identity.¹⁰ Identifying with well-established markers of 'Irishness' has been relatively easy for Northern Catholics, supported as this has been by cross-border and international institutions and strong diasporic links. One outcome, then, of the 'parity of esteem' afforded to both communities has been a rapid growth of Protestant cultural development, funded by government sources, which seeks to mirror what is perceived as the Catholics' *politically* successful identification with 'Irishness'. Almost none of this development seeks to establish areas of common culture with Catholic neighbours. Instead it is focussed on such areas as Scottish traditional dancing, an 'Ulster-Scots' Orchestra, and several language and educational projects which emphasise the cultural difference of Protestants. In 2004, the government-funded Ulster-Scots Agency even produced a glamorous, and expensive, song and dance show, *On Eagle's Wing*, which presents a version of Ulster-Scots history aimed at the international stage. This project was expressly devised to promote awareness of the Ulster-Scots identity – and, by implication, its cultural rights – in precisely the way that the show *Riverdance* had succeeded for 'Irish' traditions a decade before.

It is clear that attempts to instal the concept of 'civic nationalism' will be unsuccessful if both communities use all available resources to distance themselves from one another. Another implication of this policy of cultural bifurcation has been that there is no space allotted to 'others'. In other words, the significant and growing Chinese, Indian and Islamic communities (and simply non-subscribing Europeans) were not part of the Belfast Agreement peace deal. Consequently they were not initially

considered for participation in the new inclusive police service, nor do they share the 'parity of esteem' enjoyed by the larger groups. Here at last we have a genuine parallel with the dilemmas facing the founders of the Canadian state.¹¹

Language Policy

In Canada it has been feasible to afford cultural and linguistic rights to geographically defined communities because of the sheer size of most of the provinces and (at least before modern telecommunications) their distance from the political centre. Northern Ireland is tiny in comparison, and for this reason alone it would be impractical to apply similar policies there. Although ethnic segregation has increased since the Belfast Agreement, most communities still exist in particular quarters of the same town or city, rather than in separate areas of local government jurisdiction. In the Irish Republic, the official status of the Irish language has been promoted in various ways, including dedicated broadcasting networks, the designation of Irish as a compulsory subject at school and for certain government jobs, and by means of designating discrete *gaeltacht*¹² regions where the language is privileged. However, in Northern Ireland the teaching of Irish is largely confined to Catholic schools, so becoming an immediate marker of cultural difference and therefore, of political identity. Organisations exist to promote more widespread use of Irish, and indeed to forge links with Gaelic speakers in Scotland, but the language has far too many political associations for these efforts to be genuinely popular (McCoy and Scott 2000).

One of the institutions set up through the Belfast Agreement was a cross-border language body, which was charged with the promotion of indigenous linguistic culture on both sides of the border. In practice, this institution has had more of an information-sharing than a proactive role, partly because the policies and objectives of the promoters of Irish in each jurisdiction have so far been very different. Due to its parity of esteem, 'Ulster-Scots' language enthusiasts also sit on this body, though matters of linguistic policy tend to be of minimal interest in the Irish Republic.

Broadcasting

The geographically small size of Northern Ireland has also meant that the mainstream local media are generally shared by both communities. However, its proximity to both Great Britain and the Irish Republic has meant that broadcast and print media from both states are readily accessed. As in Great Britain, however, the BBC and regional independent franchises provide dedicated coverage of local issues, and these do most to reflect the views and tastes of the province. The BBC goes to painstaking lengths to display its even-handedness. For example, the very name of the city of Derry leaves no fence to sit on: Catholics/Nationalists call it Derry, Protestants/Unionists call it Londonderry. During local broadcasts the BBC insists upon alternating use of the two names, and this bilateral approach is extended to most other areas of its output. Programming in the Irish language has been a regular feature of early-evening BBC radio broadcasting (McCloone 1996), and Ulster-Scots features have also appeared more recently. Much the same attitude to community-specific music programmes has also been adopted, in keeping with the BBC's plans to further devolve regional services, though it must be noted that the bulk of radio and TV output reflects mainstream tastes that do not differ significantly from those in either Great Britain or the Irish Republic.

Where distinct differences are most likely to be found are at the micro-level of broadcasting. Temporary radio licences are granted each year to community organisations, who use them as part of festivals with a very local focus. Both the *Féile an Phobail* (West Belfast Festival) and the Shankill Festival take place during the summer at periods which, in the past, had seen acts of public disorder in the commemoration of significant political events. Considerable public money has been invested in both events, in order to channel these energies into more creative directions. During the period of each festival, radio licences are granted to their organisers, and the content of these broadcasts tend to exhibit a considerably more partisan perspective on local cultural politics than other broadcasters.

Conclusion

All nation states – or even political entities which function 'as' states – face the challenge of maintaining a credible sense of collective culture, which can be shared with the majority of 'the nation' through its various

institutions. This has to be carried out despite, or through the accommodation of, both alternative ideas of nationhood that emerge from within that society and international affiliations (such as the European Union, the North American Free Trade Agreements, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, etc.) which to some extent compromise the autonomy of the state. In ordinary peacetime circumstances, democracies will ideally adjust to these pressures relatively smoothly by reflecting, in their governments, the ethnopolitical constituency of their electorate and also their views on external relations.

In both Northern Ireland and Canada these issues are most keenly felt because the ethnopolitical divide between major constituencies is so stark that compromise is unsatisfactory for all parties. In Canada, however, such divides can be defined geographically as well as culturally, and this has enabled the devolution of regional autonomy to assuage some, though certainly not all, of the aspirations of national minorities. A similar approach can be observed in Scotland and Wales vis à vis the UK, and in Catalonia's relationship with Spain (Belier and Wilson 2000). By contrast, Northern Ireland's constituent communities do not seek political autonomy, but full incorporation in neighbouring states, aspirations which are clearly mutually incompatible. Here, political autonomy, and the development of a collective sense of identity within the contentious region, is the compromise, one that has been accepted somewhat provisionally by both sides. Therefore, while the political 'centre' may be relatively distant and weak in Canada, compared to other countries, it barely exists in Northern Ireland, beyond the enormous bureaucracy that maintains its public institutions in lieu of a functioning democracy.

Despite these significant differences, Canada and Northern Ireland have adopted similar approaches to managing internal cultural division. Both have attempted to sideline intractable political positions by adopting *international* human rights as the basis for future legislation and public enquiries – thus referring disputes to 'neutral' legal experts rather than to (partisan) politicians. Directing such issues to supranational levels of decision-making is cumbersome and time-consuming, but gains some legitimacy from the fact that national minorities themselves claim rights in these terms.

Secondly, both have made substantial efforts to afford recognition to the *cultures* of each constituency, rather than to their political aspirations. Strenuous efforts in both Canada and Northern Ireland to assimilate diverse 'traditions' into a collective 'national' culture – through creative museum curatorship, education programmes, festivals, and public funding

programmes – have been only partially successful. However sincere and well-intentioned these efforts may be, while communities passionately aspire to belong to different nations they will remain suspicious of any attempt to downgrade potent manifestations of political identity into mere symbols of 'heritage'.

The Belfast Agreement might be seen to begin where the Canadian Constitution started in 1867, by setting out the collective rights of two communities of 'founding peoples' in a context of political necessity. Each community may have its own reason for participating, while the rights of 'other', less politically significant groups, are little more than an afterthought. The Canadian example shows that such expediency may well be justifiable in its context, and in any case the main parties have not been able to agree significant changes to the constitution. However, over time its implications have become more complex and some issues can only be appropriately managed at local and supranational levels of legislation.

The Canadian policy of affording special status to racial groups, though at the same time a logical development of the recognition of collective rights and a readjustment of the 'two communities' model, would hardly be applicable to Northern Ireland. If fully and properly implemented, the comprehensive legislation that already exists to protect individuals from discrimination in the workplace and from hate crimes should be sufficient to guarantee equality. Debates about the *ethnic* identity of the local population are quite tortuous enough without attaching inalienable rights to biological distinctions. While Northern Ireland does already boast an ethnically segregated education system (there is only a small integrated sector), this has not yet succeeded in reassuring the two larger communities that their cultures are equally valued by the state. In Canada, a steady influx of new immigrant groups have been content to reside in the country without demanding specific cultural rights. Their priority is to establish home and livelihood, so securing a better future for their children. The Troubles, and, for Europe, relative poverty, have meant that Northern Irish communities have remained ethnically and religiously very static compared to other European regions, though there are signs that this situation is changing rather quickly.

Over the last decade, a Northern Irish Commission on Human Rights has been working on a charter which aims to address local concerns more specifically than they are already covered in UK and European legislation. However, it has yet to establish a real consensus on many matters and the generalisations at which it has so far arrived have yet to be tested in

the courts for clarification. While the liberal principles of multiculturalism will certainly be afforded lip-service in Northern Ireland, such concepts as 'ethnicity', 'human rights' and even 'diversity' itself are very often employed to claim a privileged position. In both public and private discourses 'communities' commonly denigrate each other's cultural values and practices.

To make the most realistic comparison between Canada and Northern Ireland one might best look at the scale of Europe, where an even greater linguistic diversity is managed within a common political and cultural umbrella. The EU policy of promoting regional cultural distinctiveness, particularly of language, encourages local rather than national identification, within an 'umbrella' identity of European citizenship (Belier and Wilson 2000). The project of constructing a coherent sense of European identity involves much the same debate about rights, duties and relationships on macro- and micro-levels of identification that we observe in Canadian multiculturalism, and shares its relatively weak political centre. In principle, a shared, committed sense of European citizenship, and an appreciation of its benefits, may eventually render the issues of sovereignty in Northern Ireland less problematic (Anderson 1998). In practice, the Canadian example suggests that this outcome is rather unlikely, particularly as the European Union is itself a highly contentious 'work in progress'.¹³

To conclude, despite considerable areas of difficulty, Canada has achieved a balance between local autonomy and regional minorities, which offers recognition and political autonomy on the basis of collective and universal rights. Whether or not similar policies and practices might be useful in Northern Ireland, Canadians have achieved at least some degree of consensus on national identity, which is almost non-existent on the other side of the Atlantic. While I believe it would be reckless to 'ringfence' cultural rights for already deeply divided communities, as Canadians have, it may still be possible to actively promote an 'umbrella' level of Northern Irish identity that neither favours nor threatens local diversity. Such a project would require considerable commitment and long-term planning at the regional political level. In the foreseeable future the degree of consensus necessary for such leadership to emerge seems unlikely.

References

- Anderson, J., 'Integrating Europe, Integrating Ireland: The Socio-economic Dynamics', in J. Anderson and J. Goodman (eds), *Dis/Agreeing Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 73–88.

- Beaujot, R., 'Effect of Immigration on the Canadian Population', Discussion Paper 03-03, Population Studies Centre, University of Western Ontario (2003), <http://www.ssc.uwo.ca/sociology/popstudies/dp/dp03-03.pdf>, accessed 12 October 2007.
- Belier, I. and T.M. Wilson (eds), *An Anthropology of the European Union* (Oxford: Berg, 2000).
- Fay, M.-T., M. Morrissey and M. Smyth, *Northern Ireland's Troubles* (London: Pluto Press, 1999).
- Gratien, A., *La Francophonie Canadienne* (Sudbury: Prise de Parole, 2001).
- Kymlicka, W., *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Lieberson, S., *Language and Ethnic Relations in Canada* (New York: John Wiley & Son, 1970).
- Martin, C., *Foundations of Canadian Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955).
- McCloone, M. (ed.), *Broadcasting in a Divided Society* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1996).
- McNamee, P. (ed.), *Traditional Music: Whose Music?* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1992).
- McCoy, G. and M. Scott (eds), *Aithne na nGael/Gaelic Identities* (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 2000).
- McVeigh, R., 'The British/Irish "Peace Process" and the "Colonial Legacy"', in J. Anderson and J. Goodman (eds), *Dis/Agreeing Ireland* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 27–53.
- Nic Criath, M., *Plural Identities – Singular Narratives* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).
- Rocher, F., 'The Evolving Parameters of Quebec Nationalism', *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 4:1 (2002), 74–96.
- Siegfried, A., *The Race Question in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland, 1966). Originally published as *La Canada, Les Deux Races: Problèmes Politiques Contemporains* (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1906).
- Taylor, C., 'The Politics of Recognition', in A. Gutman (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 25–74.
- Trudeau, P.E., *Federalism and the French Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968).
- Wolff, S., 'Conflict Management in Northern Ireland', *International Journal on Multicultural Societies*, 4.1 (2002), 41–73.

Notes

1. See also the works of Kymlicka (2001) and Taylor (1994) for more thorough investigations of cultural rights and multicultural issues.
2. The Community Relations Council for Northern Ireland (CRC) is a charitable

organisation which, over the last decade, has channelled British government, European Union and North American funds into cultural projects which promote reconciliation and/or mutual understanding between conflicting communities in Northern Ireland.

3. My research visit took place in September 2001 as part of an international exchange programme organised by the INCORE (Institute for the study of Conflict Resolution and Ethnicity) unit of the University of Ulster. My study visit to Toronto and Ottawa included meetings with many public servants, campaigners and academics, and I am grateful for the assistance of Heritage Canada in making this dialogue possible.
4. The terms of this debate are spelled out by lobbying organisations such as the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition on Equity in Education, as well as by single-faith groups.
5. Today, the terms 'Protestant', 'Unionist' and 'Loyalist' are frequently used interchangeably to describe the same population, though they are often distinguished by members of that community. Correspondingly, 'Nationalist', 'Catholic' and 'Republican' are used similarly, despite the quite different characteristics they describe. In practice these terms *can* be considered as interchangeable in the sense that they are badges of ethnicity and accurately define political electorates. Voting across ethnic divides is minimal, to the detriment of parties identifying with a 'middle ground'.
6. The British and Irish governments, as the sponsors of the 'peace process' have been the largest contributors to these developments, but agencies from the United States have also been significantly involved, as has the European Union, whose various 'Peace and Reconciliation' funding programmes have been a mainstay of the social and cultural development in Northern Ireland.
7. Annual reports of the Community Relations Council show that the 'underdog' in the 1980s was clearly considered to be the Catholic/Nationalist community. Since the Belfast Agreement funding has been focused much more on engaging with Protestants. Both communities tend to consider *themselves* as marginalised, a view that is used to justify sectarian aggression and sporadic riotous acts.
8. Much the same reasoning has gone into the structure of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Although it forms part of the British Labour government's policy of devolution of responsibility to local assemblies, the Northern Irish body has considerably more elected members per head of the population than those of Scotland and Wales.
9. The performance evaluation of community relations projects is complex and largely unsatisfactory. Government institutions justify expenditure in terms of a focus on the most disadvantaged areas/communities – measured by a system called the Noble Index. While long-established conflict resolution organisations do address divisive subjects, they tend to 'preach to the converted' rather than to highly politicised marginal communities. Local

political representatives lobby funding organisations on behalf of their own electorate, while the civil service, loth to make 'political' decisions, monitors expenditure and levels of participation rather than outcomes in community relations terms.

10. To many Republicans, the legitimisation of a local government rather than an all-Ireland solution was a considerable compromise on their ideals, and this has led to the splintering of both armed and political groupings. Both moderate nationalists and mainstream republicans tend to regard this agreement as an interim arrangement which will, in time, lead to increased integration with the Irish Republic.
11. The 'Equality Unit' of the 'Office of the First and Deputy First Minister' (run by British ministers during the suspension of the regional assembly) has established a fund for support of ethnic minority groups, and the recent growth of racist incidents has prompted genuine support from local authorities. However, these issues tend to be of little interest to most local politicians and the rights of minorities are protected by separate race legislation, not constitutionally.
12. *Gaeltacht* is the name given by the Irish government to specified regions where the Irish language predominates as the mother tongue. Legislation defines and protects these areas as special linguistic pockets, and many learners of Irish spend time in the *gaeltacht* to benefit from living among native speakers.
13. At the time of writing, of course, continued European Union expansion appears to have provoked a grass-roots resistance to further centralisation at the expense of the state.