COMPARATIVE MULTICULTURALISM AND JUSTICE: A METHODOLOGICAL SUGGESTION

Paul Dumouchel[1]

This article argues that multiculturalism can take many different forms. To begin with, there are numerous and diverse historical paths which may explain why a society is multicultural, for example, colonial legacy, invasion, migration of workers, slavery, or the result of conflicts for independence from a previous empire. Hence, present day multiculturalism may correspond to a recent change or it may be a well-established situation in the history of the region. Comparative multiculturalism argues so on the importance of such differences. Furthermore, the term "multiculturalism" itself is used in at least three different ways: first, as a descriptive term referring to such social situation; second, as a term which refers to some policies adopted by states in response to such situation. However, only some policies count as multiculturalism. For example, apartheid and assimilation, which also are state policies directed towards multicultural situations, are not referred to as multiculturalism; finally, the term is also used to refer to some normative theory of justice which tries to determine what a proper multicultural policy should be and what the rights of diverse cultural minorities are. Comparative multiculturalism argues that we should be careful in deciphering which meaning is being used in the writings about multiculturalism.

Keywords: comparative multiculturalism, theory of justice, culture, reactive policy, repressive policy.

[1] Paul Dumouchel is Canadian and presently professor of philosophy at the Graduate School of Core Ethics and Frontier Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto (Japan). With Rieko Gotoh he co-edited *Against Injustice: The New Economics of Amartya Sen* (Cambridge University Press, 2009) and *Social Bonds as Freedom* (Berghahn Books, 2015). With Luisa Damiano he is co-author of *Vivre avec les robots* (Paris: Seuil, forthcoming 2016). His other recent books are *The Ambivalence of Scarcity and Other Essays* (Michigan State University Press, 2014), and *The Barren Sacrifice* (Michigan State University Press, 2015). Correspondence regarding this article must be sent to: dumouchp@ce.ritsumei.ac.jp

Comparative multiculturalism, as the name indicates, is first of all simply the idea of comparing different multicultural situations. Underlying this comparative approach are three different types of reason. The first one is the simple fact that there are many different forms and types of multiculturalism. When we discuss multiculturalism we often do as if multiculturalism were always and everywhere one and the same thing, that is to say, we act as if different multicultural situations were all, in some interesting and relevant way, similar. This supposition is in a sense implicit in the word itself. For what is the point of using the same word to describe or identify different objects if we do not believe that in some way these objects are sufficiently similar or alike? The very success of the term multiculturalism, as a word to describe forms of policies, sociological situations, or political problems, suggests the extent to which we take it for granted that there is such a thing as multiculturalism and that the word identifies a well-defined class of objects. However, I suspect that this is probably not the case. It is likely that between the different situations that we define as multicultural there is more that separate them than they have in common. Comparative multiculturalism begins with a doubt concerning the unity of what we mean by multiculturalism. The word "multiculturalism" as it is used denotes very different kinds of things, and comparative multiculturalism primarily constitutes an attempt to take this fact into account. In what follows, I will first review various aspects of this problem, and spell out in more details the multiplicity of meanings and uses of the term multiculturalism. Simultaneously I will try to show in what sense comparative multiculturalism can constitute an approach able to deal with this difficulty.

The plurality of meanings and uses of the term multiculturalism is related to two different questions. The first one concerns our language and the other concerns reality. First then is the fact that we use the terms "multicultural" and "multiculturalism" to denote or to refer to very different types of things. For example, "multicultural" or "multiculturalism" can be used to refer either to some social or historical situations or to identify a certain type of policies. Thus, when the American sociologist of Korean origin John Lie talks of multiculturalism in Japan in his book *Multiethnic Japan* (2001) he refers to a sociological phenomenon, the presence of different cultural groups within Japanese society. He simultaneously deplores the absence of multiculturalism, but understood this time as a policy designed to address this social phenomenon. Furthermore, the word "multiculturalism" can also be used to describe or to name a certain political ideal or norm of justice. This is the use of the term that we encounter in such authors as Charles Taylor and Will Kimlicka, for example.

The second question is that of the heterogeneity of the thing itself. When we describe various situations as multiculturalism and regroup under that one term different social and historical circumstances, like those which exist in Canada, those we find in an Eastern European country like Bosnia, or the cultural diversity of China, are we really talking about the same thing? Is there any way in which describing these situations as multicultural is enlightening, useful, or appropriate? Does this description pick out something interesting and important about these situations, something that is common to all of them? Or is it more misleading than helpful? And if the class of multicultural situations is heterogeneous can some order be brought into this diversity? Is it possible to classify and to arrange multicultural situations in a scheme that would allow us to recognize some order within this multiplicity?

It should be noted that these two questions, the question of meaning and the question of fact, intersect. The way we think about multicultural situations, and especially the type of policy a country adopts towards the multicultural situation with which it is confronted has in turn an effect on the situation itself. For example, in Canada the extensive theoretical and political discussions that have taken place concerning the nature of multiculturalism have changed the Canadian multicultural situation; they have played a fundamental role in shaping the Canadian multicultural society and in making it what it is today. A further problem comes from the fact that multicultural situations and the problems related to them can be and often are described using other terms. Thus, instead of using multicultural we may speak of ethnic groups or of minorities or of cosmopolitanism. When we use those alternative terms we allegedly are putting the emphasis on different dimensions of the situation, but this precisely raises the question of knowing exactly which aspect of a multiethnic or minority group situation do we want to stress when we address the issue in terms of multiculturalism? Finally, what is culture? The term is notoriously ambiguous. It is an ill-defined category and furthermore one that is used in different ways by different disciplines. Yet if we cannot agree on a definition of culture, what do we mean when we speak of multiculturalism?

Multiculturalism: The Word

As indicated earlier, the word "multiculturalism" can be used in at least three different though related ways. First the word can be used to refer to a certain class of socio-historical situations, situations in which more than one cultural group cohabit in the same territory or polity. This use of the term is descriptive. Examples of multiculturalism understood in this way abound. They constitute the norm, rather

than rare accidents. Historically it is the modern nation-state with its supposedly homogeneous population that is a rare and unlikely phenomenon. As soon as we leave the world of hunter-gatherers, most polities are multicultural in that descriptive sense: they regroup individuals from different cultural and ethnic groups. This was the case, for example, of most political units in Europe during the middle age and up to the 19th century and it was also true of the great Empires of the Ancient and New Worlds. To speak of multiculturalism in this way does not imply that this situation is either good or bad. It simply indicates that such a situation is the case.

Whenever this is so, States or governments can take steps to deal with the situation. They can develop an official or implicit policy to respond to the cultural heterogeneity of their citizenry. This leads to the second sense of the term: multiculturalism as a policy. Overall, three broad types of responses are open to a State or government. First, it can simply ignore the situation and pretend that it does not exist. A State, at least officially at the level of its policies, can do as if it contained no cultural heterogeneity whatsoever even when that is not the case. Of course such policies can never be carried out in a perfectly successful way, and a State inevitably, sooner or later has to recognize, to some extent, that there are "foreigners in its midst." It usually will then react locally to emergencies, and only as they arise. Call this a *reactive policy*. Second, a State can actively repress minority groups and cultures, prohibit the teaching or public use of the language of the minority and ban its symbols from being publicly displayed. Call this a *repressive policy*. Finally, the third possibility of response is when a State develops a policy that actively encourages and supports the rights and interests of the different cultural groups. Only in this last case do we usually speak of multiculturalism understood as a type of policy.

A first level of ambiguity in the use of the term "multiculturalism" comes from the fact that it can be used to refer either to a type of social situation or to a policy that is geared towards that situation. This ambiguity is increased or this leads to a second level of ambiguity because it is not all policies responding to multicultural situations that receive the name "multiculturalism," but only one type, policies that favor the rights and interests of diverse cultural groups.[2] Yet, even *reactive* and *repressive* policies also are multicultural policies, in the sense that they address the issue of multiculturalism.

In these two uses of the term "multiculturalism," either to refer to a class of socio-historical situations or to a type of policy, it is used in a descriptive way, though in

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[2] The difficulty is even more complicated because a State can adopt different policies towards different cultural groups and minorities. For example, it can adopt positive "multiculturalism" towards one group, a reactive policy toward another, and a repressive policy towards a third.

the second case because it is generally reserved for one type of multicultural policy only, the term does gain a normative connotation. Nonetheless, it remains that from a descriptive point of view, States where multicultural situations exist, either have, or do not have, a multicultural policy, and that either is or is not a good thing. The existence of such a policy is simply a fact that can be evaluated in different ways depending on circumstances.

A third level of ambiguity comes from the fact that the term is also used in a clearly normative way to refer to particular theories of justice that imply a moral and political ideal. Authors such as Will Kimlicka, Joeffrey Bhram Levey, Gurpreet Mahajan, Tariq Modood, Bikhu Parekh, Charles Taylor, or James Tully, among many others, understand the term "multiculturalism" as referring to a requirement of justice. Their claim is that, in a society where many different cultural groups coexist, justice demands that this cultural diversity be encouraged and that the various cultures be allowed to thrive and develop. What these authors call multiculturalism therefore is first of all [3] an arrangement which satisfies that requirement of justice, thus an arrangement that is conceived as a political or social theory of justice. This use of the term is clearly normative. "Multiculturalism" used in this way does not describe the world as it is, but indicates and argues about how it should be.

The first difficulty that this plurality of use, this triple ambiguity, creates is that when we speak of multiculturalism it is easy to confuse these three different meanings of the term and that authors do not generally clearly distinguish between them. In consequence, we sometimes go from multiculturalism in one sense, to multiculturalism in another without paying attention to the fact that in the first part of an argument the term is used descriptively and in the second, normatively. It is clear that three meanings of the term are closely related, but they are not identical. In fact, they correspond to three different types of questionings. Multiculturalism understood in the socio-historical sense corresponds to a set of anthropological, historical, and sociological questions concerning the causes, nature, stability, possible evolution, and consequences of situations where various cultural groups cohabit in the same State or territory. Multiculturalism understood as a policy corresponds to political questions concerning the various ways of dealing with multicultural situations. Finally, multiculturalism in the normative sense corresponds to ethical questions concerning issues of political and social justice. These three types of question are to some extent independent inasmuch as, for example, answering questions concerning multiculturalism as social

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[3] "First of all," because they also use the term in one or both of its other sense, without clearly distinguishing between them.

reality does not automatically resolve the political question of how a State should best deal with such a situation. Similarly the political answer leaves to some extent the normative question of justice open. The fact that, in a given circumstance, a policy is judged to be the best politically, does not entail that that policy is either fair or just. Nonetheless, these three types of questionings are not entirely independent. Clearly answers concerning the stability and possible evolution of multicultural situations are relevant to answering the political question. Furthermore, if for diverse reasons a positive "multicultural" policy is in this case politically impossible, this certainly has consequence for the normative question.

The idea of comparative multiculturalism is first of all to explore systematically the relationships between these three types of questionings and to see how the three meanings of the term "multiculturalism" relate to each other. This consists in part in a conceptual analysis. How do the different meanings of the term interact? Is there a core concept of multiculturalism that underlies all three? Which is the most fundamental sense of the term? Is multiculturalism first of all a certain type of situations, a type of policy, or a political ideal? However, understanding how these different meanings of the term are related is also inseparable from empirical, sociological, and historical studies. Even if, as suggested earlier, multicultural situations have been very frequent in history, the issue of multiculturalism, as a political question and as a normative ideal, is a relatively recent one. Multiculturalism, politically and normatively understood, only became an important question in mainstream political theory, at least formulated in that way, that is, as multiculturalism, in the last thirty, or at most forty years. It is, therefore, important to understand how and why this has happened. In what social and political context did this issue become important? It is also fundamental to know if it is the social and historical question that fueled the political and normative questions, or if, to the contrary, it is the normative issue that led to a renewal of the social questions and a reappraisal of existing policies? The first set of issues to be addressed by comparative multiculturalism is that of the conceptual relations between the different meanings of the term and of the historical relation between its different uses, as well as the relations between the different types questioning that underlie these uses.

Multiculturalism: An Attempt at Classification

A second set of question concerns the heterogeneity of multicultural situations. That is to say, is there really anything that is profoundly or interestingly similar between different multicultural situations? Of course, there is a sense in which the

evident answer to that question is "yes." All these situations are characterized by the coexistence of different cultural groups within the same polity or territory. However, the real sense of the question is whether this similarity is more important than the many differences that can exist between various multicultural situations. For example, multicultural situations can result from a recent afflux of migrant workers, as in the case of North Africans in France and Turks in Germany. It can also be a leftover from past imperial and colonial situations, as is the case in South Africa, Canada, or New Zealand where multiculturalism is the result both of past immigration and past colonial rule. What is suddenly discovered as "multiculturalism" can also be the continuation of the long-term cohabitation of different groups on the same territory, as is the case in Bosnia, Macedonia, or Belgium. Multiculturalism can furthermore be the result of a recent drive towards national or regional autonomy. This, for example, seems to have been the case of Ukraine during the 19th century. Before that time, Ukrainians apparently did not seem to see themselves as very different from Russians and considered they spoke varieties of the same language. The Ukrainian drive to nationhood in the 19th century led to Ukraine gaining a "multicultural" status during the Soviet era, then to the creation of two different countries and today to a war…

What is the relevance of such differences for multiculturalism understood as a normative theory of justice? Is recent multiculturalism that results from economic migration sufficiently similar to long standing multicultural situation to be analyzed fruitfully in the same way and justify the same claim or are they so different that it would be better to consider them completely separate types of situations? Or is it the case that these historical differences have no incidence on the normative issue? Underlying comparative multiculturalism is the idea that to be able to answer such questions we must compare many different examples and types of multicultural situations.

In what follows I will present a tentative classification of multicultural situations. This classification rests on two criteria. The first is etiological or causal, if you prefer it is a historical criterion. This criterion is interested in how the multicultural situation came about, in what its causes are. The second criterion is political. It takes into account the type of political response that is offered to the multicultural situation, because, as suggested earlier, the political response is to some extent constitutive of the situation itself. Using these two criteria it is possible to identify at least six broad types of multicultural situation/types: (a) national, (b) imperial-assimilatory, (c) imperial-unequal, (d) egalitarian, (e) colonial, and (f) economic multiculturalism.

The American melting pot is probably the best known example of national multiculturalism, but so is the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism. National multiculturalism is typical of countries that have been built on immigration. It is characterized by what are often called hyphenated identities, Italian-American, Korean-American, etc. Agents identify themselves politically as American and culturally as Italian, Greek, Pakistani, Cuban, or whatever their origin happens to be. Central to national multiculturalism is the fact that it considers culture as a private affair. Hyphenated identities are not public political identities but private individual identities. It may be argued that hyphenated identities really are group identities, but this is only true in as much as these groups are viewed as voluntary associations. Hyphenated identities, unlike other types of cultural identities, can be freely abandoned or chosen. For example, a Chinese-American cannot change who her parents are, nor can she easily modify her physical characteristics, but she can certainly abandon that cultural identity and become more of a WASP (White-Anglo-Saxon-Protestant) than any descendant of the Founding Fathers. National multiculturalism is essentially an individualistic form of multiculturalism and politically it is nationalistic rather than multicultural. It is made possible by a shared political culture—i.e., in being American or Canadian—one in which the diversity of the cultural or ethnic origin of the citizenry constitutes an important element. Some may argue that national multiculturalism is not a form of multiculturalism at all because it reduces the cultural origin of individuals to a private affair that is only politically relevant at the level of the nation state, but not at the level of the group and because it does not recognize any real minority rights. However such an argument only makes sense within the context of a normative theory of multiculturalism. Countries such as Canada, the United States, and to some extent Australia and New Zealand are examples of situations where many minorities cohabit. National multiculturalism as a policy has proven in these case to be an excellent way to create solidarity and national commitment in a population of diverse ethnic and cultural origins.[4]

Empires constitute by definition multicultural situations. An empire is a political arrangement where members of one ethnic and cultural group dominate over individuals who are deemed to belong to different ethnic, national or cultural groups. However, imperial powers can adopt toward dominated cultures and peoples different policies. One is a policy of assimilation. I call this the imperial-assimilatory type: the historical criterion is conquest, the policy assimilatory. Such a policy does not

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[4] W. Norman. (2000). Justice and stability in the multicultural state Lessons from theory and practice in Canada. In M. Elbaz, & D. Helly (Eds.), *Mondialisation, citoyenneté et multiculturalisme* Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval.

recognize any value to the conquered culture and aims to the contrary at replacing it. This corresponds pretty well to the attitude of Japan after the annexation of Korea and at some point in history such was also the policy of Britain towards Ireland and later toward French Canada. Even though policies of assimilation aim at destroying the multicultural dimension of the situation, it is notorious that historically policies of assimilation have often failed. Assimilation policies therefore define perhaps an unstable type, of nonetheless sometimes long lived multicultural situations.

Another possible attitude towards dominated cultures is that which the British Government usually adopted towards the various parts of its empire: what has been called Indirect Rule. That is to say: governing the empire with the help of the various local élites. (Note that that was already the strategy adopted by the Roman Republic in relation to its conquest in the Italian peninsula and later by the Empire.) Thus Britain and other imperial powers often consolidated their rule by sharing the government of overseas possessions with the traditional local political class and leaving them a lot of cultural leeway in terms of law, customs and religion. This is also, to some extent, how the Ottoman Empire functioned through the system of millet that allowed every minority to preserve its own laws and customs as long as it paid a monetary and military tribute to the Empire.[5] Such imperial policies can lead to a form of multiculturalism that is characterized by the lack of equality between the different cultures and may be called unequal multiculturalism. For example in 19th century Canada it was better to be British than Irish, better to be Irish than French and better to be French than to come from one of the First Nations. Indirect Rule entails some measure of protection and preservation of local culture, but cultural policies will generally tend to reflect the power relationships that exist within the Empire. It is likely that historically imperial multiculturalism in one of these two forms has been the most important and frequent type of multiculturalism but, with the rise of nationalism throughout the 19th & the beginning of the 20th centuries and the (perhaps temporary) disappearance of empires during the second half of that latter century, it not clear what importance imperial multiculturalism still has today.

Closely related to imperial multiculturalism are what may be called egalitarian multiculturalism and colonial multiculturalism. Both forms usually correspond to possible evolutions of what used to be imperial situations, as is, for example, the case with the bilingual bicultural policy of the Canadian government. From the mid-nineteen century on at least the claim of two equal nations in one country played a

[5] J. P. Derriennic. (1995). La vengeance de l'empire ottoman. In F. Blais, G. Laforest, & D. Lamoureux (Eds.), *Libéralismes et nationalismes* (pp. 195-210). Québec: Presses de l'université Laval.

central role in the Canada's march toward independence from British rule. Other examples of egalitarian multiculturalism are Belgium and Switzerland. Contrary to national multiculturalism, egalitarian multiculturalism does not reduce culture to a private affair. To the opposite, it constructs around institutions whose specific goal is to protect the cultural differences between the various cultural groups that make up the polity and to promote cultural equality. It is interesting that in egalitarian multiculturalism, some cultural groups, especially minority groups, are often subject to what may be called a "national temptation": the feeling that the evolution towards political autonomy is not yet complete and that national independence remains the final objective. A feeling that is often fueled by the belief, whether true or false, that the central clause of cultural equality is not being respected. This is typically the case of separatist movements in both Quebec and in Flemish speaking Belgium.

Colonial multiculturalism also evolves from imperial situations, but from situations where the hierarchical difference between the cultures in presence were judged important and especially situations where there were great differences of political power between the groups. A clear example of colonial multiculturalism is the situation of First Nations in Canada. They demand and are given special rights on the basis of their cultural difference, but these rights do not make them equal partners within the Canadian Confederation, contrary to the case of French Canadians under the bilingual bicultural policy of the Federal government. Rather these rights confine them to the role and status of minorities that have special privileges, advantages, obligations, and handicaps that are not common to all citizens. Colonial multiculturalism thus retains the lack of equality typical of imperial unequal multiculturalism and usually continues to carry on what may be seen as a form of indirect rule. That is to say it maintains the inequality between groups by co-opting the local élites.

The last form of multiculturalism in our typology is what may be called economic multiculturalism. Good examples of this are the situation of North Africans in France or that of the Turkish minority in Germany and in Austria and that of many Latin American immigrants in the United States. These people are economic migrants. They come looking for work, a better income, a better life for their children. They also often send part of their income back to their country of origin if their family has remained there. At the individual subjective level the problem that often arises is: To what extent should these migrants integrate the polity and culture of their adoptive country? At the collective or group level the problem arises demographically. Once migrants have reached a certain number, they inevitably change the local social and

cultural landscape. They inevitably create cultural and ethnic diversity. Economic multiculturalism is a policy of dealing with the problems this situation creates as they arise rather than planning ahead and evolving a principled policy. In that sense it is essentially a reactive policy. Economic multiculturalism can be seen as a failure of national multiculturalism. It reveals a country's inability to privatize cultural origin by developing a shared political culture that is irrespective of an individual's ethnic or cultural background. Economic multiculturalism also corresponds to the refusal of a central element of both egalitarian and of colonial multiculturalism the attempt to distribute cultural rights and to give at least partial protection to the various cultural minorities. That is to say, even if colonial multiculturalism is unfair in its treatment of cultural minorities, at least it recognizes their existence and importance.

These six different forms of multiculturalism should be seen as ideal types rather than real situations. In consequence, in real life, as the examples chosen clearly show, they should not be considered exclusive from one another. That is to say, existing multicultural situations are often better explained in reference to more than one type. For example, the multicultural policy of the Canadian Federal government is understood and lived in English Canada as a form of national multiculturalism, as a national ideology. French Canada views it as an (imperfect) form of egalitarian multiculturalism, while the First Nations experience it as colonial multiculturalism. Similarly the situation of North Africans in France is best seen as a mix of economic and colonial multiculturalism. On the one hand the French government refuses to give particular rights to Muslim students for reasons of republican equality, which constitutes a politically motivated refusal to take into account cultural difference. However on the other hand, unlike Catholicism, Protestantism, or Judaism, Islam is not a religion that is recognized in the State's Constitution. In consequence, Muslims do not have access to subsidized religious schools and the imposed official equality is lived by members of the minority group as a form of discrimination.

Given this tentative classification of multicultural situation the next step would be to identify examples that correspond to the different categories. Then through a process of going back and forth from the examples to the classification and vice versa we could both refine the classification and get a better understanding of the different examples. Once that is done, the goal would then be to compare among themselves different examples of multiculturalism both within one category and across categories.

The Vocabulary of Multiculturalism

A third avenue of research is what may be called the "vocabulary of multiculturalism." As suggested earlier, multiculturalism is to a large extent a recent issue. What is new are not so much the questions or problems that are fundamental in discussions concerning multiculturalism, but the fact that we now discuss them in those terms, in the language of cultural rights and identity. What I mean is that the questions of minority rights or the problems related to the coexistence of many ethnic groups within one political association are ancient. They have been addressed many times. What is new is that they are now conceived and presented in terms of multiculturalism rather than, let us say, in terms of equality and discrimination. It is not that these two categories, equality and discrimination, have disappeared from the political and moral landscapes, but they are now judged insufficient by themselves and we are urged to also take into account, for example, cultural rights and identity. This is what is new: the introduction of the vocabulary of multiculturalism.

This raises the question of how this transformation happened. What caused this change in our moral and political vocabulary? Why did we suddenly abandon certain ways of framing age old issues in favor of a new one? Once again there are two different, yet complementary, ways of answering this question. One is theoretical. We should look at the changes that took place in political theory and philosophy, but also in sociology and anthropology, and that led to the "discovery" of multiculturalism. For example, in political philosophy it is clear that the question of multiculturalism has been deeply influenced by an easily recognizable set of themes: the communautarian critique of liberal social justice, the politics of recognition, gay and feminist critique of mainstream political theory, the question of identity and discussions surrounding minority rights. However, the question of how multiculturalism became a central political issue, and why perhaps it is today disappearing in favor of the issue of religion, can and should also be addressed from the point of view of the transformation of the world in which we live. As Donald Horowitz said, in the preface to the second edition of his book *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (2000): "There can be no doubts that events have driven scholarship." Similarly the rise of multiculturalism as a central issue in political thinking coincided with many important transformations on the world scene.

First, it is perhaps not entirely an accident that multiculturalism became an issue, at the same time as the development and acceleration of globalization led to an important augmentation in economic migration. Secondly, the development of multinational institutions such as the European Union (EU) and the North American Free Trade

Agreement (NAFTA) have also been concomitant with the rise of multiculturalism as a fundamental issue. In this case also the connection between theory and practice is readily visible. In Europe, in Catalonia for example, the discourse of multiculturalism has played a fundamental role in the efforts of local groups at redefining their position in the changing political context created by the multinational institution which the European community constitutes. Finally, in countries such as Canada, it is clear that the theoretical development of multiculturalism has been "event driven" both through the allocation of research funds and the influence of the official state ideology that to a large extent has forced everyone to frame inter-communal issues in those terms.

Conclusion

It is clear that comparative multiculturalism is more than a mere methodological suggestion but actually constitutes an ambitious research project that aims at taking into account every important aspect of multiculturalism: the diversity of the phenomenon, its various meaning, its history as a political and a research theme. What constitutes the fundamental strategy and the central attitude of this research project can be summarized in one word: skepticism. First of all, it recommends epistemological prudence, concerning the use of the category of multiculturalism. Its numerous meanings and inherent ambiguity make it difficult to handle, so to speak, and are prone to creating misunderstandings. A rigorous approach to questions of multiculturalism should always be attentive to these semantic difficulties. Secondly, it also recommends political skepticism. The category of multiculturalism is so intimately linked with ongoing political debates that its place in scientific discourse is more that of an object to be explained, than that of an explanatory term. Finally, comparative multiculturalism recommends skepticism concerning the value of the category of multiculturalism itself. It is not clear that the term multiculturalism picks out a well-defined class of objects, of social and political situations. It is not clear that it constitutes a good tool to address questions and problems related to the coexistence of many groups within one polity.

In short, comparative multiculturalism illustrates the fact that the question of multiculturalism in our societies is too important to be ignored, but it also acknowledges that the category of multiculturalism is too ambiguous and politically implicated to be trusted entirely.