

Introduction

This paper would like to take a look across the Atlantic, to North America (United States (US) and Canada), to see what their national identity-building models have historically been and how they can contribute to the Idea of Europe and vice versa. It is customary to compare two main national identity-building models: A Liberal and Republican Model and a Communitarian Model. The former, marked by assimilation, builds on a shared political culture to create a civic identity or a “Nation of Citizens” – The Idea of America. The latter is marked by the idea of multiculturalism and seeks to create a “Family of Nations” – The Idea of Canada (BEKMANS 2018).

The Idea of America

The Preamble to the US Constitution establishes the intention of the Founding Fathers to create a common civic and political identity constructed upon Unity, Justice, Tranquility, Defense, Welfare, and Liberty (US Constitution: Pmb).¹ These universal values were to be expressed within the structure of a shared civic forum and civic involvement, or through what Jürgen Habermas termed “constitutional patriotism” (*Verfassungspatriotismus*) (HABERMAS 1996).

To summarize this model-goal, the US adopted as its motto for its Great Seal, “*E pluribus unum*” – “From many, one.” The “manyness” here does not suggest that it should be melted down into one, as in Israel Zangwill’s image of the melting pot (ZANGWILL 1914), but that, as the Great Seal’s sheaf of arrows suggests, that diversity is not an end in itself but the unity centered on the principles mentioned above (SONG 2009: 31).²

Nonetheless, the American history of racial and ethnic exclusions has undercut the universalist stance; for being an American has also meant sharing a national culture, one largely defined in racial (white), ethnic (Anglo-Saxon), and religious (Protestant)³ (WASP) terms (GLEASON 1980: 54–57). America accepts and recognizes the presence of minorities in its territory, but this tol-

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erance never goes as far as challenging the cultural and linguistic hegemony granted to the WASP majority/minority (RUGGLES 2019).⁴

What applies to minorities also pertains to immigrants. Although there has been debate regarding the use of the term “assimilation” versus “integration,” from a theoretical point of view, the idea of assimilation refers to «the total relinquishment of the immigrant’s culture of origin», whilst the term integration «admits the possibility of remaining attached to one’s original culture, whilst internalizing the behavioral standards of a particular society» (O’BRIEN 2016). Migrants to the US are expected to integrate into the culture of the (WASP) majority/minority, i.e. to learn the dominant language,⁵ respect the culture and values and to comply with the WASP majority/minority’s way of life, while in the private and semi-private sphere they are allowed the free expression of their religion, culture and language (O’BRIEN 2016).

The Idea of Canada

Canada was the first country in the world to officially adopt a multiculturalist policy with its motto “In Diversity, Unity”⁶ “*In varietate unitas*,” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1988: Pmb).⁶ This policy was launched by the famous and often-cited speech by the then Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau on October 8, 1971, with the aim of bringing Canadians together around a policy that could promote the value of difference (HAQUE 2012: 22, 227). His speech was a political response to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism Report that proposed a bilingual, bicultural Canada, based on the contribution of the francophone and anglophone equally founding populations (DUNTON and LAURENDEAU 1967: General Introduction, Book 1: The Official Lan-

guages). Trudeau, however, feared that the recognition of two founding nations, as especially viewed by the Quebecois, would lead to the division of the country and feed Quebecois sovereignist aspirations (ENGLISH 2006: 146).

In the Communitarian Model Trudeau saw a political strategy that could strengthen Canadian unity. Since in this model the State tries to treat *all* cultures present in its territory with the greatest impartiality as possible, this would imply, as a political policy, that not only anglophones and franco-phones but all cultures in the land and all immigrants to Canada would be encouraged to keep and maintain their own culture of origin, without this bringing their participation in Canadian society into question (DUNTON and LAURENDEAU 1967: General Introduction, Book 4: The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups; Government of Canada 2012).⁷

However, beginning in 1990s, in its battle to counter racism, the Canadian government realized that the celebration of difference was not enough to wipe out the obstacles to integration as well as Canadian unity and national identity-building. Since the end of the 1990’s, multiculturalism developed towards the promotion of «multiculturalism within a bilingual framework» (HAQUE 2012: 242). This “multiculturalism nationalism” seeks to promote an inclusive Canadian identity based on multiculturalism but also on the “Canadian values” of tolerance and diversity⁸ as well as the learning of English or French⁹ (Hutchinson 2017; Haque 2012: 4).

The Idea of North America and the Idea of Europe

The national identity-building models implemented in North America have been shaken since the 1960s in the US and since the 1990s in Canada by

events that have led to their respective development. In the US the policy of integration has come to be recognized as a process of equal opportunities, associated with cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, while at the same time rejecting an outright policy of multiculturalism that might lead to the entrenchment of these diverse cultural identities (CHOQUET 2017: 3). The Canadian model has also developed: «Canada has moved on from the promotion of the immigrants' culture of origin to programs that foster equal opportunities, dialogue and a feeling of belonging to society» (CHOQUET 2017: 3).

What emerges from the strengths and weaknesses of these two major North American models is the need of a third model that truly, equally and inclusively, embraces all the elements of these two paradigms –the Idea of North America.

The Constructivist Identity-Building Model argues that cultural as well as civic and political exchanges and collaboration are crucial in national identity-building (BECKMANS 2018). It is based on the concept of «unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation» that changes efforts from «unity based on a mere tolerance of differences towards a more complex unity based on an understanding that difference enriches human interactions» (LALONDE 1994). It seeks to create a shared public sphere as a “Space of Encounters” (EUROACTIV 2018).

An Idea of North America that embraces this model sees the incessant national identity-building coming from a constant civic, political, cultural, and religious dialogue and cooperation (Beckmans 2018). Like any identity, national identities have constant elements but also many elements in flux that interact and need to be adapted to different realities.

The Liberal and Republican Model is the predominant model currently governing the Idea of Europe (Wilson and VAN DER DUSSEN 1995: 64). European institutions seek to create, beyond the economic realm, a common political culture, a common civic identity, constructed on the advancement and

safeguarding of “human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities” (European Union 2004: Art. 3). The weakness of this Idea of Europe, which shares many of the characteristics of the Idea of America but made much more complicated by the presence of extremely strong ethnic, social, political, racial, religious, cultural, and linguistic identities, is that it strictly reduces them to the private sphere (CRS 2018). It emphasizes more the “united” versus the “in diversity” of the Idea of Europe’s motto “United in Diversity”/ “*In Varietate Concordia*” (Eurominority 2004).

Moreover, with regards to the extending and enforcement of this common European identity, the common practice has been a top-down strategy. This has resulted in the relative failure of Europeans to identify whole-heartedly with the European project.

Nonetheless, European identity-building has been a historical result of mixing different elements coming from different sources, in a process of appropriation and changing its methodology for dialogue in its encounter and confrontation with otherness (DAINOTTO 2007; BRAGUE 2002; DELANTY 2006). The Founding Fathers did not «want an armchair Europe, but a Europe where people meet and work together, little countries and big ones» (VAILLANT and MAUROT 2019).

The Idea of North America would help the Idea of Europe transform the European continent into a “Space of Encounters” that encourages and supports dialogue at all levels versus a top-down process (Euroactiv 2011). This could be accomplished by emphasizing the principles of subsidiarity, participation and democracy at all levels of the EU (political unity), strengthening the European dimension of education as well as inclusive of the contribution of different cultures to European identity building (cosmopolitan culture), and applying the principles of social justice, solidarity, and universal destination of goods to counteract social and economic differences (social unity) (BEKEMANS 2018).

Conclusion

The Idea of North America is a theoretical one so that which was said to construct a unifying and sustainable all-encompassing Idea of Europe, a Europe that is a “Space of Encounters;” would have to be embedded in the Idea of America and the Idea of Canada. Contemporarily, both Europe and North America must consider and work towards, in a globalized and globalizing world, the building of a «worldwide community of human beings» or the Idea of the Global Village (MCLUHAN 1962, 1964; GIDDENS 2007).

Only if solidarity guides all those taking part in the shaping of a «new era of development that is innovative, interconnected, sustainable, environmentally respectful and inclusive of all peoples and all individuals» (FRANCIS 2017; HOLLINGER 2006), will the US, Canada and Europe truly build regions that live up to the full meaning and implications of their mottos of «*Et pluribus unum*», «*In varietate unitas*», and «*In varietate concordia*».

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NOTES

¹ «We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America» (US Constitution 1787: Pmb1).

² This is very different from the French adoption, and other countries, of the Liberal and Republican Model where «the French Revolution triggered a process of political, cultural and linguistic unification and complete assimilation» (Choquet 2017: 1).

³ Some argue that America is now dominated by a «post-ethnic, post-Protestant WASPs. And they’re now more powerful than the old WASP elite once was» (Reno 2016).

⁴ As of 2017, «the proportion of Americans who are non-Hispanic white is 60.6% of the overall US population. The US federal government defines a person as white if he or she identifies as being only white and non-Hispanic. However, the proportion of whites in the US population started to decline in 1950. It fell to gradually over the years, eventually reaching just over 60% in 2018 – the lowest percentage ever recorded. Although the majority of the US population today is still white, nonwhites account for more than half of the populations of Hawaii, the District of Columbia, California, New Mexico, Texas and Nevada. And, in the next 10 to 15 years, these half dozen “majority-minority” states will likely be joined by as many as eight other states where whites now make up less than 60% of the population» (RUGGLES 2019).

⁵ While the US doesn’t have an official language at the federal level, 31 states have made English their official language. Only one state is officially bilingual — Hawaii claims English and Hawaiian Pidgin English as their two official state languages (Kaur 2018).

⁶ “WHEREAS the Constitution of Canada provides that every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and benefit of the law without discrimination and that everyone has the freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, opinion, expression, peaceful assembly and association and guarantees those rights and freedoms equally to male and female persons” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act 1988: Pmb1).

⁷ An overarching theme in the brief of the Canada Ethnic Press Federation was that the “Unity of Canada transcends every other consideration... At the same time, it emphasizes that the very diversity within that unity gives it strength and makes it exemplary” (Canada Ethnic Press Federation 1964: 19).

⁸ What can be considered by all as uniquely “Canadian values” is a hotly debated topic amongst Canadians citizens, politicians, and scholars alike. According to Don Hutchinson (2017) even the most commonly shared value of tolerance can be used and has been used to include as well as exclude, to be used in a “Canadian” or “anti-Canadian” way (Government of Canada 1982; WALZER 1999). According to Balibar, language, on the other hand, or as in the case of Canada, English and French, «can

give a unifying meaning to the continuing co-existence of different peoples and cultures within a single nation» (BALIBAR 1991:97). Still, Canada faces the same issue as the US in that its multiculturalism will still be defined by the dominant anglophone and francophone «culture tolerating and choosing to accept, or not, other cultures» (LEE 2003: 111).

⁹ Please see Eve Haque’s *Multiculturalism Within a Bilingual Framework: Language, Race, and Belonging in*

Canada where she argues that “‘multiculturalism within a bilingual framework’ has resulted in a hierarchicalization of languages and cultures in Canada that is essentially “racial ordering” where language gradually came to be regarded as a fundamental cultural element for the anglophone and francophone founding races, while private and peripheral for other ethnic groups,” especially for Indigenous groups ■

L’elezione alla presidenza degli Stati Uniti di Donald Trump, e l’arrivo al potere in diversi paesi, tra i quali l’Italia, di partiti nazional populistici, hanno ricondotto al centro della politica internazionale il nazionalismo, nella versione contemporanea di “sovranoismo”. Si afferma che, avendo ricevuto il mandato a governare da un popolo, per esso ed esso solo debbano operare, ad esso e ad esso solo rispondano. Da qui la legittimazione a porre la tutela del cosiddetto “interesse nazionale” in cima ad ogni e qualunque azione di governo, e a considerare la nazione l’unico soggetto meritevole di tutela anche a scapito di eventuali rivendicazioni di altre nazioni.

Errori dagli effetti letali

Ci sono, nelle enunciazioni nazionaliste e populiste, grossolani errori, derivati non si sa se da malafede o ignoranza.

Ad esempio quando si pretende di parlare e agire in nome del popolo e della

Dal Popolo/Nazione al Populismo/Nazionalismo in Europa

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nazione, come fanno Donald Trump (che ha preso circa 3 milioni di voti popolari meno della rivale Clinton ed è stato eletto con 304 dei 538 voti dei grandi elettori) e Matteo Salvini (ministro dell’Interno grazie al supporto del 17,37% dell’elettorato), senza praticare quel governo di tutti che tiene rispettosamente conto *anche* delle opposizioni. Queste, per essere minoranze non è che cessino di rappresentare fette di popolo.

Ad esempio quando si ritiene che la nazione sia variabile indipendente dal sistema internazionale costituito da stati e altri soggetti (organizzazioni internazionali o sovranazionali come Onu e Ue, i comitati sportivi transnazionali, le

multinazionali economiche, organizzazioni transnazionali e universali religiose, e così via), sciolta da obblighi e doveri fissati dal diritto naturale e da quello pattizio come i trattati internazionali. È esattamente il contrario: si è stato nazionale o plurinazionale solo e in quanto si sia riconosciuti come tali da un sistema internazionale al quale si risponde dei propri comportamenti tanto che in caso di loro illegittimità risultano condannabili e di conseguenza reprimibili. Sono molti i popoli non costituiti in nazioni, e tante le nazioni non riconosciute come stati. E ci sono nazioni che furono stati e non lo sono più, e viceversa. A decidere della loro soggettività fu sempre il sistema internazionale.