Discourse on Alterity in Multicultural Context.
The Canadian Case.

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Abstract

O fficial discourse and policies on multiculturalism and on the use of languages do not inhibit individual interpretation of diversity, which is often unconscious. The existence of these policies contributes to changing mentalities in this regard. We cannot help but be pleased that the desire of living in harmony in a multicultural society translates into a set of laws and policies. However, the fear of the other, of the stranger, continues to operate at an unconscious level.

Our study deals with the discourse on alterity and the perception of difficulties in intercultural communication. It was led in Canada, France, Israel and India. The study is based on 80 semi-guided interviews with managers and employees. This article presents some results from Canadian data.

Keywords: Discourse on Alterity, Multiculralism, Inrecultural Communication

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Introduction

The Figure of the Outsider

The topic of the figure of the outsider was first broached in the field of psychoanalysis. In his essay *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919), Freud attempts to explain the feelings of both fear and attraction that are aroused by strangers. The ambivalent relationship with *unheimlich* (unknown) is symbolically linked to the unknown part of ourselves, a dark side that we ignore and are afraid to discover. The unknown (*unheimlich*) doesn't pose a threat as such, but it can. The outsider is perceived as a threatening figure to the symbiotic unity represented by one's mother tongue, mother and familiar environment (family home, living situation, and country). The outsider disrupts the established order of things, provoking unconscious fears: fear of losing one's identity, language and space where the outsider appears. On the other hand, the outsider also piques the curiosity, opens new horizons, and sparks self-questioning. Curiosity, as opposed to fear, is conducive to reflection.

In order to better understand the dynamics that create the figure of the outsider, no field that deals with the subject has been ignored. While the connection may seem surprising, we have studied the place of the outsider in erographic literature. Brulotte (1998) notes:

> *The awareness of diversity can make the other more attractive or, on the contrary, it can be reductive (as in racist discourse). Erographic literature never undermines the outsider. This literature is fundamentally xenophilous. […] By accepting the other's distinctiveness, by welcoming the outsider as an element of transformation of consciousness, […] erographic literature proposes, in an unexpected way, a fraternal and sororal vision of the outsider*
>
> (Brulotte, 1998 p. 105-106)

In erotic literature, the outsider is presented as a dynamic figure that symbolizes renewal, critical thinking, open-ness and non-conformism (Brulotte, 1998). Real life offers other such examples.

Culture and Interculturality

The figure of the outsider has interested researchers in different fields, and interculturality is becoming increase-ingly important in the acquisition of languages, sociolinguistics, psychology, and social and political sciences. Two aspects are prioritized: language and culture. While the concept of language is relatively well defined, that of culture is fragmented. Hall (1987) distinguishes between acquired culture and learned culture. The first is the result of an individual's first years of life, while the latter is shaped by explicit teachings. The word *culture* has many meanings: commonly used, the word refers to the varying realities of different peoples, countries, social groups, professions, business cultures, general cultures, etc. The fact that one can belong to different groups simultaneously (family, age, gender, ethnicity, religion, profession, region, country) makes *culture* more and more complex to define, if not impossible (Wieviorka, 2005, Vinsonneau, 1997). While each individual presents himself as a whole, he projects multiple and varied characteristics. This makes it risky to box him into fixed categories. Regardless of how it is defined, culture is dynamic. An individual's evolution happens according to different criteria and is linked to different life experiences. We cannot be sure that the terms *culture* or *cultural differences* as they are used in common language are understood the same way by everyone. Nevertheless, it has become banal to speak of cultural differences. In terms of linguistics, *cultural differences* and consequently *interculturality* essentially refers to situations where people of different ethnic origins or languages come into contact. This focus on differences overshadows commonalities and similarities, as is pointed out by

Lainé (2004): *we share common reactions with people from very different cultures from our own, and points of difference with people who are very close to us* (Lainé, 2004) Mistrust of outsiders, resistance to learning new languages and discriminatory behaviour are all part of the same dynamic that results from unconscious fears.

Before discussing our study, we feel it is important to define the terms *stereotype, prejudice* and *value.* An extension of our need to categorize what is real, a stereotype is a simplistic vision that is not based on understanding or experience. It represents being content with shortcuts in an attempt to understand something complex. Meier (2008) proposes the following definitions:

Stereotypes are based on the principle of cognitive economy (limited cognitive resources) that leads the individual to fall back on establishing categories. More specifically, stereotypes are instant beliefs [...] that are simplifying and therefore closer to caricatures[i]

(Meier, 2008 p. 88).

Prejudices should be seen [...] as judgments based on generalized evaluations that are forged quickly (pre-maturely), without empirical (experience) or rational (analytical) evidence [...] Prejudice is first and foremost an evaluation with a negative bias

(Meier, 2008 p. 89).

However, it is not rare to hear about positive prejudices when someone enthusiastically doles out advanced points to a country or its citizens. While the term *positive prejudice* exists in usage, it would be appropriate to distinguish between the positive prejudices that are not based on sufficient experience and *preferences* that are linked to personal taste. As for *value,* the term refers to a behavioural standard or to a state resulting from this standard, which rests on ethical, moral, spiritual or political considerations. Certain values are considered personally or socially preferable to others.

Issue

The intercultural workplace is a theatre of exchanges where each player acts and interacts according to his experience and cultural background (cf. Chevrier, 2003, 2008, Hofstede, 2001, Pesqueux, 2004, Hall, 1979, 1987) and vision of communication and ethics (Chevrier & Lavigne Delville, 2005, D'Iribarne, 2008, Davila-Gomez & Lotero Patiño, 2010, Dankova, 2012b, Darawong & Igel, 2017). Businesses are driven by economic objectives. In this context marked by profitability and competitiveness, the role of human capital is paramount. Ethics and equity in the management of human resources are undeniable values (cf. Kirton & Greene, 2010, Théry, 2002). A healthy work environment and the well-being of staff contribute to a greater commitment from the employees and, consequently, to the productivity and success of the business.

This study[ii] deals with the perception of difficulties in communication and of the ethical challenges faced by managers in an intercultural workplace. It was led in Canada, France, Israel and India. Great cultural diversity is a common point of these four countries, that are sufficiently far away from each other geographically and different culturally. We consider this to be an advantage that allows us to better understand the diversity of opinions and experiences of the respondents.

France (67 million inhabitants in 2018) is a multicultural society attracting many immigrants. According to the INSEE (The National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies), 11.6% are foreing-born. In France, collecting information about ethic origins is not allowed in statistic studies. The report Cerquiglini (1999) mentions 75 languages spoken in France, but the number is higher now depending on methodology chosen and changes in the society.

India with 1.3 billion inhabitants is a complex society with ethnic, religious and linguistic

diversity and various social and cultural practices. The majority of the population of India belongs to castes and caste like groups. Gaps and differences in Indian society are immense. "While the national census does not recognize racial or ethnic groups, it is estimated that there are more than 2000 ethnic groups in India" (US Department of State, 2012). A survey realized in 2013 (Singh, 2013) reports that 780 languages and 66 different alphabets are used in India. According to the definition of "language" vs "dialect" and the methodology, different sources provide different data regarding the number of the languages.

The Israeli population (about 8 855 000 inhabitants in 2018) is a linguistically and culturally diverse society. 74.5% are Jews of all backgrounds, 20.9% are Arab of any religion. The Law of Return grants all Jews and people of Jewish descent the right to citizenship. The Jewish people in Israel come from different backgrounds. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, about 73% are Israeli-born, 18% are immigrants from North America and Europe and almost 9% are from Africa and Asia. Jewish people from the former Soviet Union and Europe, plus Israeli-born descendants and Ashkenazi Jews, account for 50% of Jews in Israel.

Canada (37 million inhabitants in 2018) promotes immigration for demographic and economic reasons. In 2016, Canada welcomed more than 296 000 permanent residents. More than 62 000 people were admitted to Canada as resettled refugees. Only in 2016, Canada issued over 286 000 work permits to temporary workers. According to 2016 Census, 21.9% of the population is now foreign-born, and about 60% of new immigrants come from Asia, particularly China and India. Visible minority population represents 22.35. More than 200 languages were reported in the 2011 Census of Population as a home language or mother tongue.

The study is based on semi-guided interviews with managers and employees who have work experience in an inter-cultural environment abroad or in their country of origin. The 80 individual inter-views took place in one of four languages (French, English, Spanish, or Russian) using the same questionnaires: one aimed at managers and one at employees (cf. *Annex*). The respondents were asked to answer questions and to add comments or examples. Many topics were raised: difficulties experienced during exchanges and proposed solutions to overcome them, methods of communication favoured by the business, conflict management, group work, the question of language in the workplace, ethical challenges, the place of religion, ideas to improve intercultural communication, etc. Most of the respondents speak three languages, while others are multi-lingual. The mastery of different languages was a criterion for participants in this study. No time limit was imposed and the interviews lasted 20 to 40 minutes. All of the interviews were fully transcribed and analyzed according to the qualitative method, resulting in a vast amount of data. For this article, we will limit ourselves to the aspects linked to migration, more specifically in the Canadian context.

Discussion

Even though Canadians often hear that Canada needs immigrants, and despite the arrival of a large number of immigrants – the reason behind the need – the immigration process, the selection criteria of immigrants, the motivations of immigrants and the costs associated with immigration remain largely unknown to the local population. Our immigrant respondents empha-sized that this lack of knowledge prevents people from understanding the contribution immigrants make to the Canadian economy. Immigrants are often perceived as profiteers benefitting from advantages, which damages the quality of the exchanges between immigrants and Canadian-born citizens. A Maghrebian teacher laments:

They [Canadians] don't want anything to do with us, no matter what we do. We will

never be as good as them. In their minds, I will always be an Arab, a terrorist, a man who beats his wife... But still, my diplomas are French, my wife is highly qualified and she's the one who scolds me (laughs)...

A distorted perception of immigrants can sometimes lead to absurdities (see also Dankova 2012a). In 2007, a small village in Quebec became known worldwide for its "code of living" which states that the municipality forbids the beating, excising or burning of women. In anticipation of immigrants making their way to that part of the world, the code praises the residents of the village: *They* [the immigrants] *know that we are welcoming, tolerant and respectful of their differences because we believe in multi-culturalism, which is a source of richness for a country, a province, and a region* (Municipality of Hérouxville, 2007). In the section entitled "Qui sommes nous?" (Who Are We?), the guide attempts to present the Hérouxville population in a simplistic fashion: *Children must not wear any kind of weapon, or anything resembling a weapon, whether it is symbolic or not. They can also sing and clap, play sports or play in groups.* We may ask ourselves whether the authors are alluding to countries where it is expressly forbidden for children to *play in groups*. The authors seem to ignore the fact that in Canada, toys that look like weapons are not forbidden. The perception of what is *traditional*, according to the guide, also poses a problem, such as in the following statement: *many schools have a cafeteria where meals made up of traditional foods are served*[iii]. Pepperoni pizza, hot-dogs and other such foods have never been considered to be traditional Canadian cuisine. The guide bears witness to a deeply ingrained identity problem which is expressed by the desire to define oneself and be recognized, and by the lack of knowledge of social practices and values that many human beings have in common. The last paragraph entitled *Autre point* (Another Point) states: *In the countryside, a few wayside crosses bear witness to our history and heritage and must be considered as such*[iv]. Are we to conclude that the past can be summed up by wayside crosses? The guide offers no other examples of heritage to be taken into consideration upon arriving in Hérouxville.

Another municipality followed suit. In 2011, Quebec's ministry of immigration and cultural communities (Ministère de l'immigration et des communautés culturelles) and the City of Gatineau published a statement of values aimed at helping immigrants integrate entitled *Énoncé de valeurs : des clés pour mon intégration à Gatineau* (Statement of values: the keys to my integration in Gatineau). Chapter 12 of the document deals with hygiene, cleanliness and quality of life, and includes the following warning:

Therefore, citizens will pay special attention to neatness and personal hygiene (!) and to the cleanliness of public and private spaces. Respecting other people's quality of life extends to bothersome or damaging factors such as noise and different smells from factories or motors, as well as strong cooking odours (!).

What perception should an immigrant have of these documents? What conclusions should he or she draw?

Our respondents often spoke of ethno-centrism, which oscillates between pater-nalist attitudes toward citizens of "poor" countries (a Colombian doctorate is not as valued as an American doctorate; is a Pakistani programmer as good as a Canadian one?) and reactions marked by passive aggressiveness, for example, a French person, whose language rights are being respected, expresses himself with ease, argues and affirms himself before a francophone Canadian eaten away by linguistic insecurity and in a full-on identity crisis since his existence is threatened in the largely Anglophone context. Face to face with this French person who is seen as a threat, the Canadian francophone shuts down. An identity problem also exists in English Canada. Canada is a

young country trying to define itself: the chief of state is still the Queen of England and Canada's economic and foreign policies are greatly dependent on the United States. Linguistic and political tensions between Francophones and Anglophones run high. Immigrants arriving in a "bilingual" country expect bilingualism to be widespread. An Israeli immigrant had this to share:

> Canada's linguistic issue is far from being resolved. I speak many languages. My colleagues are surprised, not to say shocked, by the fact that I speak Arabic. As for me, I just can't understand, and I think I will never understand, how a francophone senior manager who was born and has lived in Canada for 50 years can still barely string together a sentence in English. How can this person be so hermetically closed to the world that surrounds him?

Linguistic segregation has certainly proven itself: the two linguistic communities ignore one another, the culture of the indigenous population is occulted, while the culture of those newly arrived is not well known. Some of our respondents mentioned the fact that their colleagues expect a unilateral effort, as in, it is up to immigrants to integrate: "they are in Canada now". Clearly, immigrants need to make an effort. However, immigrants and a number of Canadian respondents emphasized the importance of getting to know each other mutually. This mutual discovery is also valid for those in a position of authority. Language is a part of this process: employees and managers of foreign origin believe that managers at the helm of a multicultural team must show their interest in the languages spoken by their employees. What's more, certain large multinational companies have put into place a practice that is very positive for employees' self-esteem: each company draws up a list of the languages spoken by its employees. This is done not only for purely professional reasons, but also

to highlight the linguistic and cultural richness of the business and to contribute to the awareness of this diversity.

Participants often mentioned how little their local colleagues know about the world, which they perceive as a serious disadvantage. A monochrome frame of reference does little to help get to know the Other. In the North American context, *strangeness* and the differences shown by foreign television series and films are often suppressed at the border. In the absence of landmarks and familiar faces, the American public is considered to be less than receptive to foreign realities and to unpredictable film endings. Remakes of films are not without their financial interests, of course, but the limitation imposed on the distribution of foreign films cannot only be explained by the economic protectionism of the local film industry: the outside world and the outsider's way of thinking and acting don't have a place in American movie theatres and homes. Thanks to the alibi of strangeness being not easily available, the public is conditioned, controlled and weaned with local products. So where, or how, and at what time do we learn about difference? An employee from Quebec, Canada, compares the experience of her generation with that of the younger generation:

> *We grew up with White Quebecers for classmates. When we turned 18, we panicked any time we saw a Black person. Today, there are Rachids and Fatimas in classrooms. Kids haven't only been around White Quebecers. They are really lucky to have seen other cultures, to have gone to the homes of families who eat different foods. They are better citizens of the world, and more open-minded.*

A Chilean employee retorts:

> It would be interesting to sit some of my colleagues down in front of a world map, because they wouldn't be able to locate

Senegal or Chile. It's sad, but that's how it is. It must be difficult because as it stands, it is already hard for them to talk to each other, but then to open themselves up to other customs is really not easy. One of my colleagues asked me if I had clothes back in Chile!! I live in Ottawa and I work for a Federal department... What do you want me to say?!

The respondents, who all have valuable work experience in a multicultural context, dissociated conflicts from the ethnic origins of the people involved. In speaking of the difficulties experienced at work, the respondents from the four countries evoked the same difficulties: stereotypes and prejudices, close-minded-ness due to lack of knowledge about other cultures, the rarity or absence of personal contact with immigrants, and lack of professional recognition. Communication difficulties are explained not in terms of origin, but by factors such as unacceptable behaviours, lack of education or social etiquette. We did not ask any questions about relationships with people of different religions. Respondents did not mention difficulties linked to religion. A few people noted the importance of not emphasizing religious differences. We conclude that religion is not of great importance to the respondents. We also don't exclude the politically correct behaviours that the subject requires.

The immigrant respondents often mentioned the lack of sincerity in exchanges with Canadian-born citizens. A young employee of French origin shares:

When I started working here in Canada, the boss told me that I could arrive between 7:30am and 9:30am, as long as I did my eight hours a day. In the beginning, I arrived quite early, and as time went on, I came in later, but I worked for eight hours. Generally, things were going well, and my colleagues were nice to me. One day, my boss called me in to tell

me that my colleagues had complained about my varying arrival times. When I left his office, I asked them: why didn't anyone say anything to me? The answer was: he's the boss. It's not our job to tell you anything whatsoever. This incident destroyed my trust in my colleagues...

Immigrants who are used to sincere and spontaneous exchanges suffer under the crushing weight of *political correctness*. A foreign-born manager confided:

In Canada, you can't take a single step without tripping over a policy or a rule. I've worked all over the world with people of all different origins, of all races and all religions. I never had any difficulties and I pretty much scoff at political correctness. If I feel like telling a joke, I tell it. People laugh. It's the White people who'll say to me: "Hey! Watch what you're saying".

Another aspect highlighted by immigrant managers and employees concerns the fact that the smallest work incident in Canada can lead to legal action. We cannot deny the importance of offering a healthy work environment that is exempt from any violence and harassment whatsoever. However, the fear of conflicts or of direct confrontation, even done with respect, and the poor quality of inter-personal exchanges often lead to insidious behaviour and to the temptation to resolve problems by lodging a complaint. Immigrants are not prepared for this way of proceeding, which is not specifically aimed at them. In the professional workforce, complaints and accusations, often pointless, multiply. The journalist S. Baillargeon gives some examples:

The devil is in the details, as have shown certain recent decisions of the Quebec Press Council. In one case, a columnist of the Journal de Montréal, Richard Martineau, is blamed for having obviously used irony in a

figure of speech. In another, professor and columnist Christian Dufour gets away with comparing student spokesperson Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois to a woman beater

(Le Devoir, 22.10.2012).

Moreover, a linguistics professor was reprimanded for having used a dictionary to clarify the meaning of a word to some people and for having used sarcasm. There is no shortage of other more and more imaginative examples.

Conclusion

Management in an intercultural environment is only effective when an individual is considered from a holistic point of view, as a whole, and with all of his characteristics taken into consideration.

To accept cultural diversity in the workplace, cultural diversity must first be understood. A simple wish to do so is not always sufficient: this understanding takes time, effort and profound exchanges. The respondents insisted on the necessity of establishing relationships with colleagues and managers that go above and beyond a strictly professional framework. Chevrier & Lavigne Delville (2005) also highlight the importance of establishing friendships in an intercultural workplace:

The personal knowledge of the other renders it possible to make arrangements by mutual agreement that work without the interested parties understanding the reasons of this intercultural compatibility

(Chevrier & Lavigne Delville, 2005 p. 18).

The managers and employees who participated in our study are in agreement that a manager must like people, be open-minded, manifest empathy towards others, communicate clearly and give lots of feedback, listen, and recognize and value the contribution of each member of the team. The frequency of personal contacts with different people, the mastery of languages and the understanding of the other and of the outside world allows one to fight prejudices and stereotypes.

The question of identity remains open. If there is a lack of maturity with regard to identity, the arrival of foreigners will always be perceived as a threat to one's own survival. Brodeur (2008) notes:

[...] Should we not first fight the insecurity vis-à-vis the other that is at the heart of the process of building identity? [...] It seems that it is the need for a scapegoat that reproduces itself from generation to generation, like an invisible solution to the challenge of taking a stand in the construction of one's identity in relation to the other, using judgments of superficial value (we are superior or inferior to the other, in fact, to different others)

(Brodeur, 2008 p. 21).

The immigrant is powerless in the role we give him. He does not seek to enter into a therapeutic relationship to ease the fears aroused by his presence. It is up to each individual to take responsibility and open himself up in order to live with the other and let the Other live.

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ANNEX

Interview questions for managers:

1. What is your mother tongue?
2. What language do you use the most? If you use more than one language, please indicate them in order of use?
3. Have you worked or lived in another country? If so, which one(s)? For how long?
4. What difficulties do you think managers encounter while communicating with employees of different origins?
5. What difficulties do you think managers encounter while communicating with employees of different language?
6. What aspects of personal interactions do you think managers find the most difficult to deal with?
7. What are the strategies that you use in order to overcome these difficulties?
8. What skills (abilities) allow you to intervene in order to improve intercultural communication?
9. What are the ethical challenges that managers must face within intercultural communication?
10. Do you have any other comments?

Interview questions for non-managers:

1. What is your mother tongue?
2. What language do you use the most? If you use more than one language, please indicate them in order of use?
3. Have you worked or lived in another country? Which one(s)? For how long?
4. What difficulties do you encounter while communicating with your manager or colleagues of different origins?
5. Do you think that speaking the language of others puts you at a disadvantage? Yes/No? Why?
6. What aspects of personal interactions do you think are the most difficult to deal with?
7. What strategies do you think would help managers overcome these difficulties?
8. What skills (abilities) do you think would allow managers to intervene in order to improve the intercultural communication?
9. What are the ethical challenges that managers must face within intercultural communication?
10. Do you have any other comments?