The Liberal Contradictions of Quebec Nationalism

The nation-state is being challenged from above and below—from above by the globalizing forces of transnational capital seeking liberalized trade regimes, from below by the liberal democratic values of equality, freedom and justice. Quebec is the exemple par excellence of an ethnocultural collectivity that has sought to harness these tendencies in an effort to secure “adequate space for differentiated cultural autonomy.” Paradoxically, in doing so it may be sowing the seeds of its own destruction. This essay attempts to demonstrate that the dialectic between economic and political liberalization has reduced Quebec nationalism from substance to form, thus imperilling its very existence.

Ever since what many French-Canadians continue to refer to as “the Conquest” of 1759, French settlers north of the 49th parallel have had to reckon with varying degrees of Anglophone domination. Initially, that domination meant potential assimilation. Given the gradual erosion of French in the provinces of Manitoba and Ontario, this threat should not be taken lightly. To understand why that erosion was possible, it is important to know that in 1759, the French were concentrated almost exclusively along the St. Lawrence valley from where they subsequently emigrated elsewhere. This is also where the assimilationist policy of Empire loyalty adopted after the Conquest met the greatest resistance. Two hundred English families were no match for half a million Francophones. Faced with these odds, the British settled for “habitation.” The Quebec Act of 1774 was intended to facilitate coexistence with the nation canadienne-francaise on the sole British North American territory where the French outnumbered the English. It did so by recognizing three distinct societal pillars, namely, religion (Catholic vs. Protestant), language (French vs. English), and law (civil vs. common).

Concessions to Francophones along the St. Lawrence valley were made out of demographic necessity. Their cultural distinctiveness mattered little; all that mattered was that demographically the territory had proven ungovernable. The British hoped to remedy this political quagmire by granting Francophones limited cultural recognition. No analogous situation existed elsewhere in British North America. There would be two officially sanctioned public cultures. The dominant English one would sanction the territorially circumscribed French one, that would nonetheless have to accommodate the historically significant English minority on its territory. Immigrants were expected to conform to the dominant British culture. French Canadians were left to their own devices.

So, the future province of Quebec was the only territory where the English hegemons recognized Francophones’ cultural particularity. As Quebec was the only place where Francophones constituted a majority and where they had been granted the political concessions necessary to sustain all three
distinctive cultural pillars, its Francophone inhabitants justified their belief that the survival of French distinctness in North America depended solely on them. This period of survival is, therefore, marked by the "dialectic of opposition" that differentiated French Canadians from the British culture according to language, religion, and legal systems. But the success of this survival was contingent on cooperation with the dominants (although in Quebec, the (English) English. Ever since the Conquest, the French majority had been steadily declining. Survival hereafter meant virtual coexistence. Coexistence was ensured through a process of élite accommodation. The French were encouraged to "acquiesce" to the British in political and economic affairs. The "division of labour" resulted in political elites of both sub-national groups coupled to "maintain a system and cause it to function effectively." For this process to function, the elites must first be committed to the system and understand the dangers of its collapse. The French elites knew if the system collapsed, so would their culture. The British needed political stability and French support to fend off any potential incursion from south of the border. The elites must also be able to "deliver" the support of the populations they represented. The French population was, therefore, desirable under a system of élite accommodation. French-speaking Quebecers at the time can be characterized as deferential. This was not an issue for the British because they were all part of the Quebec élite anyway.

The Quebec Act facilitated elite accommodation. The clergy, in cooperation with the seigneurial class, retained control over Quebec's social life. The seigneurial system shaped the economy and social structure of New France, both before and after the Conquest of the colony by Great Britain. Under this system, land was granted to the seigneur, who in turn divided it into a number of smaller plots. These were rented out to individual farmers and their families—the habitants. The habitants paid rent to the seigneur and lived in the seigneur's property for several years. Yet, the system itself was cooperative and hierarchical, with the habitants clearly at the bottom of a formidable economic and social ladder.

It was argued that the preservation of this system after the acquisition of the colony by Britain contributed to a growing economic inequality between the British and the French. The system competed the habitants to pass on the fruits of their labor to the seigneur and the church. They were, therefore, unable to save any capital which would have allowed them (or their children) to acquire larger and more profitable farms or leave agriculture altogether and embark on independent business ventures. The seigneur and the clergy, on the other hand, were encouraged to "acquiesce" to the British in political and economic affairs, in return for the preservation of the rights and benefits, which they enjoyed under the seigneurial system.

On the other hand, it has been argued that the continuation of the system facilitated the survival, under British rule, of a viable French-speaking community in British North America. Despite the changes brought by the military defeat of New France, the seigneurial system was able to continue to provide both the economic foundation for a distinctive Canadian way of life within the British colony. By the time the legal framework of the seigneurial system was abolished in 1854, the French-speaking population of Quebec had grown to a size that made cultural and linguistic assimilation difficult (if not impossible). In return, the religious and secular elites used their influence to support British imperialist control over the colony's political and economic affairs. Consequently, as the economic base of these figures shrank from the agricultural to the financial, mercantile, and manufacturing sectors, economic power came to reside in English financiers and merchants. The groundwork for the subsequent development of a much broader set of social and economic inequalities between the two language groups in Quebec had thus been created if nationalist conflict arises from issues of domination and distribution, then we would expect this historical record to have sown the prerequisites conditions for nationalist conflict to germinate.

Élite accommodation also ensured that Francophone Quebec was especially amenable to liberal ideas. "New France was settled at a time when feudal or collectivist and hierarchical views were dominant in France. Liberal political thought developed later in France, after emigration to New France had ceased," so, liberal ideas were never exported. Moreover, New France's conservative Catholics found that the conqueror's Protestant and liberal ideas were repugnant. Here the "dialectic of opposition" comes to the fore not only in terms of the three pillars but also in its political and economic conservatism.

Still, the ideas of economic liberalism gradually infiltrated Quebec through the British merchant community. Quebec's conservative Catholic, and rural society came into contact with secular capitalism. Possessing only limited political sovereignty, Quebec was ill-equipped to withstand the dissonant effects of a dynamic, technologically sophisticated liberal society. As a result, Quebec was able to protect its educational system from technological and liberal values, but was powerless to prevent the expansion of the North American economic system into the province.

To be sure, after the Conquest there arose among French Quebecers a petty bourgeoisie. It, however, did not manage to assert itself on the political scene and its efforts to garner extensive popular support were thwarted by the clergy. Still, economic capitalist imperatives in French Quebec surfaced during the 1830s and 1840s when the weak but nonetheless German-French business class helped finance the development of the railway. Similarly, this French-business class would around the turn of the twentieth century emerge as the most ardent supporter of reciprocity (known today as free trade) with the United States. Their influence, however, is evident in the fact that in both 1896 and 1911, the party advocating reciprocity did not carry the federal election.

Economic expansion is impregnated with cultural values. Spreading liberal capitalist ideology exerted pressure on Quebec to abandon feudalism and conservatism for a more timely alternative capable of ensuring the continued preservation of its cultural particularity. "One answer to this dilemma was to come in terms with the invaders: adopt liberal values and develop Quebec as a liberal society like the rest of North America." That meant adapting Francophone control over a private sector dominated by English Canadians and American capital. To this end, "it was necessary for French-Quebecers to utilize the instrument of the Quebec state, the only instrument in the early 1960s could be under French control." The carrier of Quebec nationalism thus shifted from Church to state. Quebec had never been an anti-state as it had been anti-federalist. For Quebec, Canada is a confederation (as the 1867 British North America Act intimates). Under that arrangement, Quebec would be free to leave. Ego, Quebec has always been anti-federalist. With the advent of the Quiet Revolution, however, Quebec's anti-federalism was trumped by statism. This paradigm shift from anti-federalism to statism exposes Quebec nationalism's nationalizing dimension. In the words of Reg Whitaker, "the Quiet Revolution was [...] the expression of a modernized and thus more positive and effective Quebec nationalism." Or as interpreted by David Kwisicki, "formerly a doctrine of conservatism [nationalism] became a doctrine of change and, in some cases, of revolution."

Nationalism, economic development, and the development of the state are, of course, all prominent features of modernization. Consequently, it should not come as a surprise that nationalism, economic development, and the state are tightly interwoven in Quebec. These categories cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation. In the end, Quebec is not all that special after all because a large part of this recent development simply reflects Quebec catching up to the rest of the country.

To catch up, Quebec was prepared to adopt a liberal ideology. At the same time, however, it had to contend with its long-standing Toryism. According to the Hartz-Horowitz fragment theory, one possible synthesis of Tory collectivism and liberal egalitarianism is socialism. Indeed, in its attempt to integrate more effectively into North American capitalism while employing the provincial state to protect its linguistic and cultural difference, Quebec developed its unique brand of social democracy. In Quebec's nationalist context, this is not surprising, given that socialism is one possible collectivist answer to the problem of modern industrial society. Communism and conservation are other possible collectivist responses but Quebec had just rejected the latter and the former would not have been a viable option in the North American liberal capitalist context. Still, Quebec's collectivist answer to modernity is first and foremost nationalism in nature. Socialism is a mere adjacent to nationalism.

Previously, the social vehicle for Quebecois nationalism had been the Church. With the Quiet Revolution, this collectivism came to be mediated by the state, as McRoberts suggested.
With the 1960s, [...] traditionism was definitely abandoned. Social and economic development was openly welcomed; rather than threatening the integrity of the nation, such development could enable it to reach new accomplishments. [...] The consuming goal of French-Canadian nationalism became ratrapiage, catching up to social and economic development elsewhere.22

The state was the sole tool available for this purpose: "The only Francophone capitalist even minimally capable of rivaling major North American corporations was the Quebec state."23 The state would thus take the lead in changing society by training French Quebecers for the modern ways, especially by setting up a formidable educational apparatus intended to make French, in Premier Jean Lesage's famous words, "la longue prioritaire." As early as the late 1970s, however, it became evident that the state, too, was limited in its capacity to mediate Quebec nationalism. But it took almost a decade for this paradigm shift to become fully apparent. In 1988 an allegedly social-democratic Parti québécois—a fickle coalition of social-democrats, liberals, and conservatives—championed the proposed Free Trade Agreement. It thereby actually supported the governing provincial Liberals! The National Assembly unanimously endorsed the deal. Such unequivocal Quebecois support for the FTA has been interpreted as the culmination of a gradual neo-liberal shift. According to Whitaker, French Quebecers had aspired to be maîtres chez nous. Initially, that required an interventionist state prepared either to nationalize industry or to co-opt government incentives that would promote local French ownership.4 Due to its inherent limitations, even étatisme would itself turn out to be merely a passing phase of Quebec nationalism. This is not to rule out that statute may one day stage a comeback—history can repeat itself with new twists. Now Quebec nationalism turned to the private sector. "The state's commitment to vitalizing the private sector, thus stimulating the growth of a Francophone business class, signalled a marked departure from previous state strategy."25 This paradigm shift is explicable only, as Alain-G. Gagnon and Mary Beth Montcalm already insisted a decade ago, in terms of economic nationalism—not in terms of social democracy.26 Once substantial control over the provincial economy had reverted to Francophones, the province would no longer content itself with promoting the transfer of ownership from Anglophones to Francophones, as exemplified by the Hydro-Québec flagship. Having failed to gain more political independence27 and having become cognizant of the intimate relation between economic autonomy and political sovereignty in the emerging global economy, Quebec now expanded its drive for economic independence from the English merchant community in the province to economic independence from Canada as a whole. More international trade was the means to this end.

With a good 80 percent of Quebec's exports already en route to the United States, further economic integration with the United States seemed to be the obvious starting point for Quebec's new drive towards increased economic independence. This explains Quebec's support for the FTA and its staunch support for the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1992.28 Once again, Quebec nationalism was switching careers. "Since the early 1990s Quebec has clearly become a society which is more market-oriented and less statist than English Canada—a complete reversal of the situation from 1960s."29 This new nationalist strategy explains why Premier Lucien Bouchard had no second thoughts about joining the Prime Minister's Team Canada international trade missions. In addition, Bouchard travelled widely with the primary purpose of promoting Quebec business.

Quebec also hopes to attract more foreign capital. Until recently, however, that was a tough assignment. Quebec was notorious for the highest per capita public debt in Canada and a statist legacy that left one in three Quebecers working in the public sector.30 Quebec was not the most economically vibrant jurisdiction in which to get established. To shed this image, the Quebec government followed the lead set by the U.S., Canadian, Alberta and Ontario governments. It proceeded to remove structural impediments. First and foremost, that meant dismantling Keynesian welfare-state economics in favour of neo-liberalism. This explains the Quebec government's recent confrontations with the public service sector and organized labour—hitherto the staunchest supporters of political separatism. The PQ government realized it would have to rein in public expenditures, as it translated into a balanced budget. Most noticeably, that meant restructuring its disposed subsidy to large provincial public services.

Surely, this was a controversial policy option for a party comprising a liberal-conservative coalitionialized by a sole raison d'être—sovereignty. Yet, the power base within this coalition has been shifting; as one commentator prophesied as early as 1984: "Social leadership, held for a decade by an intellectual bourgeoisie and those in the field of communication, is rapidly shifting to the business or economic bourgeoisie."31 It remains to be seen which of these will have power in Quebec: those who define political discourse with the government and whose ultimate objective is independence or those whose preoccupations are economic and thus are oriented towards investment and expansion of the Quebec market.

This power shift within the Parti québécois ranks explains why economic goals were prioritized over political ones during the Bouchard mandate. As it turns out, Bouchard had been determined to get public expenditures under control in order to make Quebec more attractive to foreign capital that he balanced the books one year ahead of schedule—a year earlier than Ontario, where restructuring had commenced prior to Quebec's Quebec nationalism is once again in transition to a new carrier—the global economy. Neo-liberal economics sponsored by a nationalist regime is the means to this end.

Quebec nationalism has demonstrated its capacity to organize the carrier of the nationalist cause. After the Conquest, the Francophone elite was composed of the clergy and bourgeois elements. Under such circumstances, it would be a "cultural division of labour" between organized religion and politics that would emerge as the most promising arrangement for the preservation of the French-speaking minority. During this first nationalist epoch, the Church was best positioned as the carrier of Quebec nationalism. But even this conservative nationalism was not primarily political in nature. Indeed, its genuine nature was economic-nationalist because it was intended to preserve the elite arrangements in the province. This postulation is evidenced by the fact that the system's collapse coincides with the decline of the Roman Catholic church in Quebec, the institutional carrier of Quebec's conservative nationalism. La survivance—the survival of traditional economic arrangements—which in turn secured the survival of the French language (and not vice versa, as is commonly argued)—gave way to le ratrapiage with its new division of power, where the state replaced the Church as the institutional carrier of nationalism.

The logical result of such collectivism was a quasi-socialist state controlled by a young French managerial elite. The statist incarnation of nationalism, however, was merely an interlude before reverting to its original anti-federalist stance. The dominant political ideology, however, had changed. Neo-liberalism had filled the ideological void left by the collapse of religious conservatism. Quebec's shift from a non-materialistic to an increasingly materialistic culture and the popular support which the Bouchard government enjoyed seemed to suggest that Quebecers have espoused this new nationalism. In an effort to circumvent foreign economic domination, nationalism's initial reliance on individual entrepreneurialism as its carrier is now being complemented by offshore capital.

Quebec is now the new institutional carrier of nationalism: Quebécor, the world's largest printing company, engineering giant SNC Lavalin, Bombardier, the world's third-largest manufacturer of aircraft and the world's first company to support its transportation products with comprehensive contracting services. Vidéotron, the largest cable TV distributor in Quebec, the NASDAQ's Montreal branch (70% of French software is produced in Quebec), among others. Quebec will even go as far as privatizing the corporate symbol of its nationalist success—Hydro-Québec. These innovative enterprises, many of which probably owe their existence to Quebec nationalism's economic determinism, demonstrate the extent to which Quebec nationalism has wholly embraced globalization. Quebec obviously understands that in a globalizing world, it has to retain control of its economy in order to control its politics.
again found their culture in jeopardy. Only this time, the challenge was from within. By the mid-1970s, Quebec had the lowest birth rate in the industrialized world. But the apparent menace of this tendency was mitigated by the documented out-migration of non-French speakers. Why then are fewer Quebecers speaking French at home?

By the mid-1970s Canada and Quebec were discovering that their birth rate was too low to sustain their economic prosperity. Only aggressive immigration could remedy the situation. For Quebec, however, the stakes were higher than for the rest of Canada. While Canada was merely concerned about its national prosperity, Quebec had to prepare for the additional challenge of maintaining its cultural distinctiveness in the face of massive immigration. In Quebec, socio-economic development is intertwined with national identity. To maintain French as a "language of opportunity," Quebec would have to ensure that immigrants and their progeny settling in the province spoke French. Moreover, "in the North American context, the English language has an overwhelming presence. That is why Quebecers have concluded that bilingualism in Quebec would lead to the erosion and eventual demise of French." In Quebec, French schooling, therefore, persists from the Catholic to the secular cultural moment as a nation-building tool. Yet, after more than 200 years of isolationism, the second national moment witnesses the adoption of immigration as a nation-building tool.

The number of allophones—those reporting neither French nor English as their native tongue—has increased on the rise. Quebec is becoming increasingly cosmopolitan and pluralistic—further evidence of modernization. As a result of ever-increasing societal heterogeneity, Quebec's cultural content necessarily "thins." Effect, cultural rallying points have been replaced with a common language and a common ideology. Language and religion, therefore, are intertwined today as they have always been. The belief system simply changed from Catholicism to nationalism. This has been accomplished by transforming Quebec's nationalism.

Quebec has come to terms with cosmopolitanism by building pluralistic institutions. To articulate the nationalist project, these pluralistic institutions had to have a national character capable of mobilizing allophone speaking Quebecer for the nationalist cause. Quebec has succeeded in doing so. Joseph H. Carens believes that, with respect to pluralism, the fundamental contrast between traditional Quebec society which it says "advocates a uniform cultural and ideological model of all Quebecers" and modern Quebec which it says "has for more than 30 years resolutely styled itself as a pluralist society." People in Quebec are free to "choose their own lifestyles, opinions, values and allegiances to interest groups within the limits defined by the legal framework." Ethnic minorities, including recent immigrants, have "the right to maintain and develop their own cultural interests with the other members of their group." All this is compatible with the notion that immigrants have an obligation to adapt their cultures of origin and to adopt the culture of Quebec or that this sort of cultural transformation is a prerequisite for becoming full Quebecers. The principle of pluralism seems to rule out any strong version of cultural assimilation. This is not to deny that over time the pluralism of the majority may lead to assimilation, but at least assimilation is not a prerequisite. While assimilation may occur as a result of participation, assimilation is not a prerequisite for participation.

On the one hand, this development should also allow Quebec's national minorities, the English in the First Nations, to participate more fully. On the other hand, the fact that the vernacular language is French will continue to dilute all national minorities whose primary language is English. Had Carens taken this into account, his assessment may not have been quite so optimistic. In fact, this is a crucial observation. While the number of "original" French Quebecers is declining, allophones and natives are actually gaining in relative population share.

Still, the underlying political values of democracy and pluralism are inclusive of any language group. Immigrants are not expected to share in these values because they are "social chutes," rather than respect for these values is the precondition for the maintenance of a morally legitimate [and therefore just] political order." In essence, Carens argues that Quebec's political commitments fall within the narrow bandwidth where regimes qualify as liberal. Quebec's political order is morally legitimate precisely because it has successfully created the necessary democratic and pluralist preconditions. Although these conditions may appear inclusive, their foundation may render them...
exclusive. The argument for these conditions commonly advances two normative claims: they cement social solidarity and they give rise to a civic form of national identity.

Yet, the latter situation is not necessarily superior to an ethnic one. Many contemporary nationalist projects aim to found the civic character of their nation on historical and cultural factors, thus coupling political participation with cultural belonging. In terms of political culture, this is problematic. Membership in the civic community is still anchored in ethnic foundations because, as Eric Hobsbawm notes, "history is the raw material for nationalistic or ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, as poppies are the raw material for heroin addiction." Such foundations actually give rise to troublesome complications when the time comes to integrate those who are not part of the founding historical and cultural framework into a given national apparently liberal-democratic order. Ethnic pluralism necessarily makes the content of any political culture controversial. Those alien to it will have difficulty adopting it unconditionally. This kind of political culture conceals a definite and rigid configuration, and it is not possible to achieve a clear and comprehensive participation of individuals who could not participate in its definition, either because they were historically excluded or because they arrived after its inception. Political culture can, therefore, only support a civic nationalism open to pluralism and form effective social bonds if by its very nature it is "un processus fluide dont nous ne savons prendre d'avance le cheminement et le terme". The process must be one through which all participants, without distinction, can contribute to a permanent and democratic evolution. The nature of the political culture of a genuine civic democracy must be such that the spirit of the laws is collectively available and historically unbroken.

Based on the evidence, it is thus to substantiate his argument, Quebec has successfully created the conditions necessary to foster a political culture shaped through such an open-ended and unconstrained process: "There is no requirement that immigrants prove their loyalty to Quebec by remaining an attachment to its symbols or an identification with its history, though Quebec seeks to promote both of these attitudes." Immigrants and historic minorities, such as aboriginals and English Quebeckers, are encouraged but not coerced to buy into societal symbols and collectively historical memory. However, the latter's cultural dimensions constitute a clear challenge to the social integration of immigrants and historic minorities. Having become cognizant of this impediment, the provincial government has endeavored to exercise historical and cultural constraints from Quebec's public culture. The sole constraint remaining is language. In Quebec, this constraint is formal, not substantive, and is therefore considerable. But it becomes compatible with liberal nationalism. Citizens are free to say whatever they choose, as long as they say it in French.

Ethnicity is increasingly replaced by language and the state as the points of convergence for a plurinationalist political identity: "Quebec modernized and became less distinct in its cultural identity at the mass level and more integrated into international popular culture, its political identity as a distinct nation solidified." In practice, this translates into language preservation for distinct societies, such as French Quebec, and distinct societies embedded in distinct societies, such as English in Quebec. In the end, only time will tell whether this formal commitment will suffice to sustain French Quebec culture. Still, "the project of maintaining the distinct society may well depend on their having a deeper, less instrumental commitment than that." Is Quebec nationalism really "thin" to such a degree that it may potentially become meaningless and unsustainable? While one could argue about this point at length, this question is really peripheral to the core issues at hand.

The two greatest existential challenges Quebec's de facto distinct society is facing are not really the result of its institutional commitment to language. In casting off the shackles of Francophone monism, Quebec's political culture is now amenable to unconstrained (re)negotiation by all members of Quebec society. With substantial impediments having been removed, Quebec's political culture is now openly negotiable. Language policy is severing its ties with the policy's customary historical and cultural justifications. Instead, Quebec's language policy now relies exclusively on a relativist substantiation, terms that make the justification for language policy inclusive even to those who do not share the historical and cultural constraints: the now historically unfortified, universally rationalization is that Quebec's political identity is unique because its language is different. The implied liberal value-judgement is that different is good. But for this strategy to work, there must be public legitimation.

The crux of this dilemma is demographic. Immigration and historical minorities are the key players to watch. The magnitude of the language issue "will increase as the proportion of immigrants in Quebec's population increases, which will it if the [current immigration] policies persist." For "in integrating immigrants, Quebec is transforming not only their identity but its own as well." Obviously Quebec favours French-speaking immigrants. In fact though, only about 40% speak French. Only a little more than half of them actually have French as their primary language. Although virtually all immigrants end up having to send their children to French language schools, these numbers show that immigrants' attachment to that language may be transient. What is more, they are fully aware of the degree to which their economic destiny is tied in with the English language. Due to the ongoing out-migration of native English-speaking Quebecers, the proportion of French-speaking Quebecers has actually been rising steadily for decades. At the same time though, the proportion of Quebecers who use English as their primary language at home is steadily declining. The inference to draw is that a majority of immigrants tend to have a private preference, English over French. One must add the rising proportion of foreigners in Quebec, who currently comprise about 1% of the population, viz. the all of whom speak English.

The current birth to immigration ratio continues, immigrants and aboriginals will sooner or later outnumber the Francophone Quebeckers. Given Quebec's inclusive political culture and a historical language and cultural struggle which these immigrants are no longer coerced to appreciate, it is quite plausible that they may set out to undermine the official status of French in Quebec.

Quebec's recourse to neo-liberalism renders this scenario even more serious. Most immigrants—and many local Francophones for that matter—prioritize economic and social goods--a good income, reliable health care and an affordable post-secondary education--over political goods, such as language protection. Three out of every four immigrants to Quebec settle in metropolitan Montreal. The region produces half of Quebec's GDP. French is the official language of business in Quebec but already a majority of Montrealers are de facto bilingual because it knows that functional bilingualism is the key to economic success in that city. It is functional bilingualism which is disproportionately high among younger Quebeckers. Yet, it is not an even functional bilingualism but the simple capacity to communicate in English that matters. English remains the language of business.

The pressure is compounded by neo-liberal policies designed to promote Quebec's integration into the global economy. The impact of English as the official language of international business is twofold. First, even wholly Francophone enterprises have to conduct their international business in English. This trend is exacerbated by Quebec's geostategic situation and the high-tech revolution in communications. While the multilingual nature of Europe may be more conducive to respecting communication in a language other than English, Quebec's obvious targets for greater integration are the notoriously bilingual Americans.

The centripetal English pressure, too, is bound to increase as the new neo-liberal nationalism sets course for increased foreign investment. Business realized as a result of the solicitation of offshore capital will reluctantly submit to Quebec's linguistic restrictions and is likely to assume the first opportunity that would enable it to liberate itself from these restrictions. Linguistic restrictions on business can cut into efficiency and profit. In this light, one could reasonably speculate that an immigrant lobby against obligatory schooling in French might really receive financial backing from apparently disinterested corporations—assuming these corporations do not rely on government contracts. So, Quebec's neo-liberal course is bound to exert increased English pressure on Francophone Quebec. Quebeckers need to conduct international business in English and more international business on Quebec soil invariable also means more English in Quebec. Whether the pressure of English as a language of business will actually undermine the predominant status of French in the province remains to be seen. The Quebec government seems convinced that the current regulations effectively counteract that linguistic pressure. They may not suffice, however, as the current neo-liberal version of Quebec nationalism causes further linguistic imbalance.
In at least one area, integrationism is already on a collision course with Québec's cultural protectionism. When in the 1970s the provincial government encountered the limitations of the state as a vehicle for Québec nationalism and realized that the nationalist project could continue to unfold only if the carrier of nationalism shifted to the entrepreneurial and corporate sector, Québec promoted entrepreneurial initiative with even heavier government subsidies. While the global trend has been towards decreased government subsidies, the most recent systematic study suggests that Québec has continued to expand them. As Québec seeks to integrate globally and compete internationally, these elaborate subsidies will probably come under fire. In the integrationist economic climate, subsidies are generally deemed an unfair advantage. If Québec stays its integrationist course, it will have to scale back its subsidies. On the one hand, conglomerates are hesitant to invest in a jurisdiction where domestic business is deemed to have an unfair advantage. On the other hand, we can expect Québec's subsidies to be challenged before international trade dispute resolution tribunals. Such tribunals are unlikely to consider the preservation of linguistic and cultural distinctiveness a legitimate justification for domestic subsidies. All along, Québec depends on these subsidies to perpetuate the maîtres chez nous mantra.

Québec is in a precarious position. On the one hand, it solemnizes marriage vows between nationalism and globalization in a persistent effort to ensure the economic autonomy that will allow it to continue to be the only political autonomy necessary to protect cultural distinctiveness. At the same time, demographics force Québec to devise a strategy to reinforce its declining French population base, a strategy that has been accompanied by the construction of pluralistic institutions that foster a liberal-democratic public culture accessible to all and mingle with all. On the other hand, the same policies devised to preserve and foster Québec's distinctively French societal culture may carry the seeds of their own destruction. The rise of political society concerned exclusively with perpetuating a consensus around a political, economic and social modus vivendi risks re-legitimizing a political community to oblivion.

Québec may succeed if it fortifies extra-linguistic ties that bind. Actually, it may just need to reincarnate them. After Québec's cultural and economic conservatism had been eroded, social solidarity was built around social-democratic institutions. The solidarity previously preached by the Church was now intrinsic to the institutions of the welfare state. Quebecers were prepared to make sacrifices for one another, sacrifices that manifested themselves in a large extent in the social goods provided by the expanding institutions of the welfare state. With the rise of the Quiet Revolution, the public service in Québec acquired a nation-building role. Ironically, neo-liberalism in Québec has diminished precisely those nation-building institutions that reinforce Québec nationalism. Québec's societal distinctiveness may depend on resurrecting those public sector nation-building institutions while necessarily continuing to invest in the social nation-building tool of education, which is furthermore essential to perpetuating the current entrepreneurial brand of Québec nationalism and the political nation-building tool of language, in addition to continued global economic integration. With the demographic time-bomb ticking away, this is a formidable challenge.

There is some cause for optimism. Without much external help, Québec has preserved its linguistic distinctiveness for more than 200 years. At lightning speed it caught up economically to the rest of Canada and the world. It is seeking to turn the roaring lion of globalization into a serving lamb while bolstering its liberal regime. Precedent seems to suggest that once it realizes the perils associated with neo-liberalism, it may, out of necessity, once again prove capable of further transforming Québec nationalism. One wild card over which it has little control and that may end up spoiling the nationalist scenario is the unfolding communications revolution. Moreover, the form Québec nationalism takes is controlled by elites. For the current entrepreneurial elite, however, economic, and even social goods, take precedent over political ones; so, the Francophone entrepreneurial class, which Québec has been grooming to protect cultural particularity, seems to have other priorities—profit over language.

After ineffective efforts to regenerate its status in the Canadian federation and thwarted fluctuations with accession, the locus of Québec's independence has shifted from politics to economics. The coincident thrust towards increased global integration is welcomed by a provincial government seeking to dissociate economically from the remainder of the Federation. Québec nationalism is thus opportunely profiting from globalization. So, Québec nationalism is not just an "atavistic" reaction to globalization. Québec is attempting counter-intuitively to turn nationalism and globalization into a positive sun game while creating a "morally permissible alternative.""76

Today's Québec is arguably more politically liberal than ever. In Québec, there is an observable trend towards increased liberalization, both political and economic. And there is no evidence that this trend is about to stagnate, let alone recede. Just like Québec society is irreversibly cosmopolitan, Québec politics are irreversibly liberal. Québec is no longer inward-looking and narrow, it does not rival globalization, nor does it favour violence,71 disdain basic civil liberties, or have serious reservations about political equality. Québec is pluralistic, it has embraced globalization, it has responded violent nationalist struggle, civil liberties have been enlarged, and political equality expanded.72 While voter participation in the rest of the world is at all-time lows, voter participation in Québec is reaching unprecedented highs.73 Such broad participation is indicative of Québec's attempt to base membership in its political society on a liberal-democratic rights-based rather than a primordial ethnic culture. The political culture Quebeckers share is highly conducive to inclusive deliberation about the common will, a will that now has the realizable potential to be genuinely common since its liberation from historical contingency. This same political culture, coupled with Québec's liberal political liberalism and social pluralism, creates a high level of individual autonomy. These liberal-democratic conditions are unique: so, the evidence in Québec falsifies any theory on the apparent counter-democratic impact of nationalism and globalization. Québec's crusade to protect its unique political identity is ongoing, only now on the liberal-democratic battlefield. Contrary to what one might expect, in Québec these two phenomena have created a society mediated by pluralistic institutions that attempt to mitigate ethnic considerations for membership in the community.74 Nationalism need not be atavistic. As a matter of fact, most current nationalist movements predicate globalization. Yet, domination and distribution are the crux of the tense relation between globalization and nationalism.75 In order to retain political autonomy, nationalism needs to embrace globalization in order to avoid foreign economic domination. But Québec also exemplifies that the impact of this process need not be counter-democratic. As part of the larger modernizing process, it is likely to foster liberal-pluralistic values as it has in Québec.

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3 The political instability looming south of the 49th parallel coupled with military forces that were already stretched thin made stability along the St. Lawrence valley a strategic priority. In other words, in the Québec Act the British were not at all acting out of the moral goodness of their heart.
4 This explains why the same courtesy was not extended to the natives. At the time, the entire native population on the future territory of Canada is estimated to have numbered million. That is, all the natives scattered across the large territory were as numerous as the French in the comparatively densely populated St. Lawrence valley. And a majority of First Nations already supported the British, not the French, so there was no need to reach a settlement.
6 While precise census figures are not available, we do know that by 1837, one Québec resident in four was English-speaking, a very impressive increase from the 200 English families reported in 1674. Ostensibly, the French elite realized soon after the Conquest that their cultural survival hinged on cooperation with the British.

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At the time, the Canadien average was 25% and the North American average 15%.


For the definitive study of French-English relations between 1760 and 1791, see Michel Brunet, French Canada and the Early Decades of British Rule (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1963).


Young, "Cultural Diversity," p. 4.

Ibid.

Quebec’s birth rate is now less than half of what it was prior to 1960 and its growth rate is not even 1% per annum. Between 1972 and 1984, this effect was compounded by a francophone exodus from Quebec, which led to a further decline in Quebec’s francophone population. André Bernard, La vie politique au Québec et au Canada (Saint-Foy: Les Presses de l’Université du Québec, 1997), pp. 47-48.


Gary Caldwell, Immigration Incorporation in Montreal in the Seventies (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1994).


Ibid., p. 158, emphasis is mine.

Ibid., p. 160.


Ibid., p. 82.


Ibid., p. 113.
Les bases plurielles des nationalismes périphériques: le cas de la Catalogne

Cet article souhaite contribuer à une meilleure compréhension de l'apparition et du développement du mouvement nationaliste catalan, dans le nord-est de l'Espagne, à la charnière des 19e et 20e siècles. Une réflexion théorique sur le phénomène des mouvements nationalistes et particulièrement des nationalismes «périphériques» sera confrontée à un regard socio-historique comparatif des cas catalan et «castillano-espagnois». On tentera notamment, à l'aide d'inductions prudentes, d'identifier des facteurs qui semblent favoriser ou défavoriser l'apparition des nationalismes «régionaux» contre l'État.

Nous verrons que divers modes par lesquels les structures sociales du monde moderne se sont développées ont mené à des variations culturelles régionales en Europe aux 17e-19e siècles. Une analyse de l'évolution des structures politiques et des groupes socio-économiques en Espagne suggère que la «culture publique partagée» émergente était, en Catalogne, beaucoup plus influencée par les valeurs bourgeoises et par l'idéal de la productivité que dans les autres régions d'Espagne. Si des différences culturelles n'auraient pu à elles seules susciter l'apparition de mouvements politiques (nationalistes ou autres), ces différences sont significatives en ce qu'elles se font l'écho, dans la réalité sensible, aux projets mobilisateurs nationalistes qui animent à ce moment les élites industrielles catalanes frustrées. Il en sera indiscutable que les mouvements nationalistes périphériques tirent leur force de la résistance qui existe entre les réalités socio-culturelles de la population, d'une part, et les constructions symboliques des groupes nationalistes, d'autre part.

Des pistes de recherche: la nation selon les théories nationalistes, modernistes et postmodernistes. Les mouvements nationalistes ont des fondements divers, mais partagent néanmoins des caractéristiques communes. Partout où il y a du nationalisme, les gens ont le sentiment d'appartenir à une communauté culturelle élargie recouvrant un territoire de taille considérable; un patriotisme abstrait a remplacé les patriotism locaux. Les «nations», «imagées» ou non, sont avérées capables de générer de puissants processus mobilisateurs. Par ailleurs, les références nationales, intensifiées profondément par une grande partie de la population, ont une influence indirecte sur plusieurs autres mouvements sociaux.

Étant donné l'omniprésence et la persistance du phénomène national, il n'est somme toute pas étonnant que des chercheurs des sciences sociales et historiques s'y soient penchés à nouveau de façon sérieuse depuis le début des années 1980. Ce renouvellement de la réflexion et de la recherche nous procure d'année en année une meilleure compréhension du phénomène national, qui ait longtemps été occulté par des problématiques plus materialistes au sein des sciences sociales.

Des acteurs nationalistes ont été parmi les premiers théoriciens de la nation. Ils présentent le plus souvent, depuis le 19e siècle et encore aujourd'hui, une vision «éssentialisante» de la nation. Les nations actuelles ne seraient que des versions modernes de nations éternelles, existant depuis la nuit des temps. Ils mettent souvent l'accent sur des traits culturels ou ethniques particuliers, tels la langue, la tradition ou l'héritage comme étant le ciment qui unit la nation. L'apparition de mouvements nationalistes est décrite comme un «réveil», comme une prise de conscience de la part des individus de leur culture (voire de leur nature) préexistante.