

**The Strength of Perceived Vulnerability: The Persistence of Cultural
Insecurity in Quebec**
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In recent years the term ‘existential threat’ has become part of public discourse implying a threat that has implications beyond obvious material and human costs. The concept implies a threat to a collective, a community bound together by fate and in danger of extirpation by force, assimilation, or political marginalization. In recent years the concept is associated with Israel under the shadow of an Iranian nuclear weapon. Scholars have been employing the term (and variations of it) to explain the increase in global religiosity and the struggle over identity and collective security in Israel and Quebec.¹

This paper argues that the decision to cleave to one’s ethnic or national community is based on a primal need for collective psychological security. This impulse will be most salient when there are a substantial number of individuals in the community who feel insecure about the prospects of their community’s identity or future prospects. This argument departs from the ones posed by scholars who view nationalism as an instrumental phenomenon designed to leverage political, social or economic gains from the majority. In this paper, we argue that efforts to mollify Quebec’s anxiety about its collective identity and language will not likely succeed so long as a substantial number of Quebecers experience this collective insecurity. The implications are important and should concern policy makers. The first section looks at the concept of ‘cultural insecurity’. Then we present a survey of Quebec-Canada relations to make the argument that Quebecois nationalism is misunderstood by federalists. Anxieties about language, new immigration to Quebec, and the ever evolving process of collective identity construction all stem from a profound sense of cultural insecurity.

Drawing on Abulof’s ‘small peoples’ concept, this paper seeks to examine the political consequences of a persistent, strong sense of cultural insecurity held by a substantial portion of Quebecers. The concept of small, for Abulof, does not necessarily imply small population size, but rather the collective experience of feeling small or powerless against forces of modernity, globalization or assimilation. According to Abulof, small peoples "are thus characterized by heightened and historically prolonged uncertainty about the validity of their past-based ethnic identity and the viability of future-driven national policy."² One response to this anxiety is hypervigilance about threats to culture and public policy (language laws, for example) that reflects this concern. As Rousseau has stated, "One of the best precepts of good culture is to slow up everything as much as it is possible."³

Collective security:

¹ See Abulof, Uriel, "Small Peoples: The Existential Uncertainty of Ethnonational Communities", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 53, 2009 and Kinvall, Catarina. "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security" *Political Psychology* Vol. 25, No. 5, 2004

² Abulof, Uriel, "Small Peoples: The Existential Uncertainty of Ethnonational Communities", *International Studies Quarterly*, Volume 53, 2009, Page 232

³ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, *Emile* (United States: Basic Books, 1979), Translated by Allan Bloom, Page 232

Whether a community feels its cultural distinctiveness and shared future is secure is dependent on a number of variables. It is not simply a demographic question. Consider Sri Lanka's Sinhalese community which acts like an embattled minority. This perspective is shaped by Sri Lanka's proximity to the Hindu heartland to its north and the presence of a large Tamil minority, against whom a decades-long civil war was fought. Perception matters more than numbers, or inclusion in consociational or other sorts of power sharing arrangements. The global strength of a language is not critical either, since French, in this case, is a major global language and the official language of dozens of states around the world. French is also a hub language, acting as a lingua franca through which native speakers of smaller language groups communicate.

There is no point in trying to allay the fears of those experiencing anxiety about collective cultural security. It is embedded in the historical experience of the nation and one to which elites can point to as evidence of ever-present threat. Globalization can deepen such fears as states and markets are subjects of global trends and events. In such an environment religion and nationalism take on greater salience. This is, as Kinvall argues, because "nationalism and religion supply powerful stories and beliefs because of their ability to convey a picture of security, stability and simple answers".⁴ As Yugoslavia broke up around them ethnic communities, in the vortex of a storm of geopolitical change, embraced their *volk*, their leaders, leading to the catastrophe of 1992-5. Elites themselves embraced ethnic nationalism in part because socialism's apparent demise had left few options.⁵ Whether leaders like Milosevic were merely cynical opportunists misses an important point. No appeal to ethnic chauvinism, or fear of the other, could have resonated in these communities without a latent pool of cultural insecurity, and a lengthy history of struggle to which ethnic entrepreneurs could point.

To be sure not all nationalist movements are characterized by the salience of cultural insecurity. State nationalism is typically a patriotic in nature, celebrating the virtues and achievements of the state. Republican nationalisms (France, USA) officially resist ethnic definitions of citizenship and emphasize loyalty to the state regardless of one's ethnic origin. The historical process is one of reducing citizens to atomised parts of society and then reconstituting these individuals as part of a French or American polity. The task of these states, historically, has not been to defend embattled minorities, but to inculcate loyalty of citizens through collective enterprises such as war, the development of public administration, and the education system.

There are also nationalist movements based less on cultural concerns, but rather on grievances related to political marginalization and thwarted economic ambition. This is seen widely. In Scotland, the primary motive of Scottish separatists is not the protection of Scots Gaelic, or other aspects of Scottish distinctiveness, but rather the sense that Scotland is a permanent minority partner in a state which no longer has economic legitimacy.⁶ Scots see there

⁴ Kinvall, Catarina. "Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security" *Political Psychology* Vol. 25, No. 5, 2004, p. 742.

⁵ Bozic-Roberson, Agneza. "Words Before the War: Milosevic's Use of Mass Media and Rhetoric to provoke Ethnopolitical Conflict in Former Yugoslavia" *East European Quarterly* Vol. 37:4, 395-408.

⁶ Hamilton, Paul. "Scotland's National Paradox: Explaining the Scottish National Party's Absent Ethnic Element," *The Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* Vol. 26: No. 1-2 1999 pp. 17-36.

oil-fuelled, export oriented economy distorted by English demographic and political hegemony.⁷ Only independence can remedy this intractable problem, says the Scottish National Party. Similarly, in Italy, the Northern League sees Padania-- Northern Italy-- as held back by southern Italy. Southern Italy is painted as corrupt and backward, with the north supporting it and failing to develop its full potential. This is not an argument about cultural insecurity.

There is nationalism motivated to a considerable degree by fears of cultural submergence. This is particularly true of the Basque Country, though less so in other parts of Spain. The phenomenon of 'ethnic democracies' is a response to perceived vulnerability.⁸ The Baltic successor states to the USSR, Croatia and Israel either have been, or remain, ethnic democracies. Ethnic democracies use legal and institutional means to ensure the hegemony of the titular ethnic group and discriminate against minorities. In the case of the European ethno-democracies, international pressure and the prospects of EU membership have tempered these practices, but Russians in the Baltics still face considerable discrimination as do minorities in Croatia. Israel is a *de facto* ethno-democracy because of its commitment to the idea of a Jewish Homeland.

In the case of ethnic democracies, statehood has been achieved, but anxiety remains. Justly or not, these states fear the minorities that have been marooned with their borders. Of course, there is great resentment too against Russians in the Baltics, in particular. Five wars and numerous terrorist attacks, along with the belligerence of neighbouring states, have sustained a fundamental fear for physical security in Israel. Statehood alone does not necessarily remedy cultural insecurity. We should not be surprised then, when institutional arrangements short of statehood, fail to extinguish nationalist movements within democracies, and the cultural insecurities that characterize these.

Quebec is an interesting case study for political scientists and policy makers. A casual observer might be forgiven for puzzlement over the paradox of Quebecois nationalism. Virtually every effort by the Canadian government to allay Quebecois fears about language, and every institutional provision for ensuring Quebec a say in Canadian politics has failed to remove the *raison d'être* for Quebec nationalism. Quebecers are engaged in a long historical process of identity formation which is challenged in recent years by new immigration. Moreover, some Quebecers fears of cultural submergence will not be allayed by secession either, as Quebec would still be subject to the relentless presence of English in North America. We now turn to an historical account of Canada-Quebec relations. This account will underscore the argument that cultural insecurity is very difficult to remedy, and that the history itself provides grounds for continued Quebecois mistrust of the federal government and Quebec's future in a united Canada.

⁷ Hamilton, Paul. 2004. "Converging Nationalisms: Québec, Scotland, and Wales in Comparative Perspective" *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* Vol. 10, No. 4 2004

⁸ Smootha, Sammy. "The Model of Ethnic democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State" *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 8, No. 4 2002, PP. 475-503.

Quebec: A Nation within a Nation?

Quebec is an important case study of cultural insecurity. From an early time, French Canadians saw themselves as a conquered people. The initial French settlers arrived in Quebec in 1608 and occupied the territory that would become Canada until defeat by the British in 1760. This led to a British Royal Proclamation creating Quebec as a colony within the British Empire in 1763.⁹ Following the Conquest, there remained a perception that Quebec society was threatened by the flood of British Loyalists from the United States.¹⁰

The desire for recognition in the face of conquest led to an attempt at an institutionalized response to early Quebec nationalism. The British Government allowed for one of its colonies to have certain collective rights, passing The Québec Act of 1774. Alain Gagnon writes that this “constitutes a fundamental moment whose repercussions continue to this day.”¹¹ The Act allowed for the use of civil law (as opposed to the common law of England), the continuation of the Roman Catholic Church’s importance and primacy in Quebec, and it promised an Assembly that would be run by Québécois, which was established in 1791.¹² This provides important foreshadowing of the events that would follow within the greater context of Canadian federalism and the way in which the state makes policy in favour of one linguistic group. The use of civil law differentiated it from the ‘Rest of Canada’; the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church foreshadows the internalization of the French language and the Assembly effectively pre-empts the decentralization of federalism that would occur throughout the twentieth century. *The Québec Act* provided the blueprint that would continue its influence far past the Constitutional documents that would follow. As Garth Stevenson has stated, “French Canadians have never fallen prey to the illusion, common among Anglophones, that 1867 was the actual beginning of Canadian history.”¹³

Following the adoption of *The Québec Act*, French Canadian nationalism further developed. Despite the powers granted under the *Act*, an English speaking minority would still dominate economically, leading to feelings of resentment. Nationalist leader Louis-Joseph Papineau and his *patriotes* led a rebellion in 1837-1838 against the British. While this rebellion would not be successful, this watershed moment would prove influential.¹⁴ The perception of unrest in French Canada led to the commission of Lord Durham, the Governor General of Canada, preparing a report for the British government. Durham wrote that “I should without hesitation recommend the immediate adoption of a general legislative union of all the British Provinces in North America...”¹⁵ Durham’s hope was that the French Canadians would eventually be assimilated.

⁹ “Interview with Robert Lahaise”, in *A History of Quebec Nationalism*, edited by Gilles Gougeon, (Canada: James Lorimer & Company Ltd, 1994 translation), Pages 4-5

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Gagnon, Alain G., “Québec-Canada’s Constitutional Dossier”, in *Québec: State and Society*, edited by Alain G. Gagnon, (Canada: Broadview Press Limited, 2004), Page 128

¹² The Quebec Act, 1774, www.solon.org

¹³ Stevenson, Garth, *Unfulfilled Union*, (Canada: Gage Educational Publishing Company, 1989), Third Edition, Page 95

¹⁴ Cook, Ramsay, *Canada, Quebec and the Uses of Nationalism*, (Canada: McLelland and Stewart Inc., 1995), Pages 87-88

¹⁵ Craig, Gerald M. Ed. , *Lord Durham’s Report* (Canada: McLelland and Stewart Inc., 1966), Page 167

Instead of adopting Durham's recommendation to kill early Quebec nationalism, the provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick would eventually unite as a federal state in 1867.¹⁶ The British North America Act set out a blueprint which saw a strong federal government, with some powers granted to the provinces. However, as Monahan notes, events that followed from the judiciary's interpretations of Sections 91 and 92¹⁷ saw "the enumerated powers of the provinces being interpreted as far broader than those of the federal government" which flowed from the court's tendency "to construe the provincial power over property and civil rights in section 92 (13) as being potentially unlimited in scope..."¹⁸ The utilization of this interpretation has allowed for an institutionalization of some characteristics of Quebec nationalism.

Following the constitutional interpretations, Quebec moved to assert itself more forcefully within the Canadian federation. The nationalist party, the *Union Nationale*, formed governments in Quebec from 1936-1939, returning to power in 1944 through to 1960.¹⁹ The *Union Nationale* was formed through the merger of the *L'Action Libérale Nationale*, led by Paul Gouin, and the provincial Conservatives, led by Maurice Duplessis. Influenced in large measure by the nationalist Honoré Mercier, Duplessis used his position of Premier to advance the nationalist cause in ways that would prove influential over time.²⁰

One of Duplessis' lasting legacies would be *The Tremblay Commission*, which explored the role of Quebec's culture within Canada. The report stated that "Because of the religion, culture and history of the majority of the population, the Province of Quebec is not a province like the others."²¹ Quebec, according to this definition, is a distinct entity, one that is based on a particular set of cultural values and institutions; this led, according to the *Report*, to "Quebec's special role within the Canadian Confederation, insofar as it constitutes the national focus of French-Canadian culture."²² The significance of a nationalist party that pushed for institutional recognition of culture highlights the perception that the culture is under attack; the Canadian state is not seen as sufficient in guarding the culture from insecurity, leading to an institutional response based in these fears.

The tenure of Maurice Duplessis was not an effective panacea to Quebec's cultural insecurity; despite the influence of Quebec nationalism and *The Tremblay Commission* which made a claim for cultural sovereignty in Quebec. The growth of an intellectual movement particularly at Laval University and the University of Montreal combined with the death of Duplessis provided an emergence for a different Quebec nationalism in a period that would become known as the "Quiet Revolution". This provided political ammunition for the Quebec Liberals, led by Jean Lesage. Lesage sought to further use the state as a way to give the

¹⁶ Quebec and Ontario was in a legislative Union, the Province of Canada, from 1841-1867; with this Act, they would again become semi-sovereign entities.

¹⁷ Respectively, powers granted to the federal and provincial governments.

¹⁸ This was also due in large measure to the role of Britain's Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, Canada's highest court until 1949; Monahan, Patrick, *Constitutional Law*, (Canada: Irwin Law, Inc., 2006), Third Edition, Page 111

¹⁹ Quinn, Herbert F., *The Union Nationale*, (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1963), Page 73

²⁰ *Ibid*, Pages 48-70

²¹ *The Tremblay Commission*, edited by David Kwavnick, (Canada: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1973), Page 45

²² *Ibid*, Page 209

Francophone majority a greater say, particularly in economic affairs. Using this new rhetoric advocating a more interventionist state for the interests of French-Canadians, Lesage led the Liberals to victory on June 22, 1960.²³

The Quebec Liberals became associated with political liberation, providing for a positive association with secular nationalism. Whereas the Quebec nationalists under Duplessis were Catholic and less apt to use the state for interventionist purposes, the Liberals that emerged during the Quiet Revolution were increasingly secular and more inclined to use the powers of the state. The Duplessis regime had been associated with Anglophone businessmen, both Canadian and American, and left most social responsibilities to the Church. The new intellectual movement was more interventionist and would wage a war against the upper classes and the federal state, including a young René Lévesque, who was an important actor in a strike against the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.²⁴ Thus, the Quebec nationalists of the 1960s would become associated with ridding remnants of English Canadian colonialism, and the end of what became termed as the *Grande Noirceur*.²⁵

The Lesage government would appropriate the state for purposes associated with cultural protection. The Departments of Education (education was previously religious domain) and Cultural Affairs were created for the first time in Quebec's history.²⁶ These key ministries would establish an institutional framework to promote the French-Canadian culture. Additionally, the Quebec Liberals would establish the *Caisse de depot et placement* to help establish Francophone business, and would nationalize private hydro-electric companies under the umbrella of Hydro-Québec²⁷. The goal of French-Canadians becoming "*maître chez nous*" as stated in Lesage's first Throne Speech²⁸ represent a significant moment for Quebec nationalism.

Despite the move away from the French-Canadian Catholic nationalism of Duplessis, the Liberals under Lesage were not the cure for cultural insecurity. The most significant proxy measure of the continued insecurity was the emergence of the Parti Québécois on the provincial scene. René Lévesque, who had been a Cabinet Minister under the Lesage Liberals, left the party in 1967 due to its unwillingness to look at Quebec sovereignty as an option for Quebec. Inspired in large measure by Charles de Gaulle's infamous "Vive le Québec libre!" remark (for which de Gaulle would receive a rebuke from Canadian Prime Minister Lester Pearson), Lévesque (despite misgivings about the RIN) worked to merge the two minor nationalist parties, *le Rassemblement pour l'indépendance nation al* and the *Ralliement national* into a new party, the *Parti Québécois*.²⁹

The rise of this new party proved to be important to the persistence of cultural insecurity. Despite attempts to placate this insecurity through Roman Catholicism under Duplessis and

²³ Gagnon, Alain G, and Mary Beth Montcalm, Quebec: Beyond the Quiet Revolution, (Canada: Nelson Canada, 1990), Pages 42-44

²⁴ Corbett, Edward M., Quebec Confronts Canada, (United States: John Hopkins Press, 1967), Pages 31-35

²⁵ "The Great Darkness"; this seems to refer specifically to the perception of Duplessis as a remnant of rural Catholicism and alleged corruption, as well as the lack of intellectual freedom that existed during his rule.

²⁶ Ibid, Page 45

²⁷ Ibid, Page 54

²⁸ Or "Masters in our own house", Ibid, Page 25

²⁹ Saywell, John, The Rise of the Parti Québécois 1967-1976, (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1977), Pages 9-22

through the appropriation of the state under Lesage, the French-Canadian³⁰ culture was not seen as being properly protected. Lévesque spoke of fears of a “deterioration in our relative population strength...the birth rate has decreased at a dizzying rate.”³¹ The PQ would become a major force starting in the 1970 election, winning 7 seats but 23% of the votes³², falling to 6 seats in the 1973 election but improving the popular vote to 30.3%.³³ In the 1976 election, the issue of cultural insecurity would rise to the forefront, with Lévesque’s *Parti Québécois* effectively tapping the mood of the province, winning 71 seats out of 110 and 41.4% of the popular vote.³⁴

The Liberal government of Robert Bourassa had attempted to placate the cultural insecurity of Quebec by implementing Bill 22, which allowed for education in both English and French; English was allowed if one could prove comprehension. Bill 22 further provided for French as the language of public administration, the official language of the state as it were. As well, this bill allowed for French to be spoken by both workers and management in the workplace. Finally, it would make French ‘omnipresent’ throughout upper management in big business.³⁵ This was not seen as sufficient, and the PQ proposed that only students with parents educated in English in Quebec would be able to attend schools in English.³⁶ This prevented those who were not English, but immigrants, from being able to attend English schools and would force them to learn French. With the expression of cultural insecurity found in the 1976 election, the *Parti Québécois* had political capital to attempt to secure and promote the French language.

The first major piece of legislation proposed by the *Parti Québécois* upon their ascendance to the legislature was Bill 1, which would further regulate big business to enhance the French language; this would be withdrawn in favour of the better known Bill 101, known as The Charter of the French Language.³⁷ The Charter would prove to be an important institutional response to Lévesque’s warnings about a declining population. The preamble states that “WHEREAS the French language, the distinctive language of a people that is in the majority French-speaking, is the instrument by which that people has articulated its identity.”³⁸ This legislation would further Bill 22’s process of making French the language of day-to-day interactions, subjecting municipalities, workers, providers of goods and services, civil administration, and public utilities to French use.³⁹ This piece of legislation signified an important instrument placating cultural insecurity in a liberal society that became more significant in events which followed.

³⁰ Or Québécois, as the term became the more generally accepted one during this time, continuing to this day.

³¹ Lévesque, René, *An Option for Quebec*, (Canada: McLelland and Stewart, 1967), English Translation, Page 92

³² The second highest in terms of popular support; Saywell, John, *The Rise of the Parti Québécois 1967-1976*, (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1977), Page 44

³³ Again, the second highest popular vote; *Ibid*, Page 97

³⁴ *Ibid*, Page 168

³⁵ Oakes, Leigh and Jane Warren, *Language, Citizenship and Identity in Quebec*, (Great Britain: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), Page 85

³⁶ Coleman, William D., *The Independence Movement in Quebec 1945-1980*, (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1984), Page 204

³⁷ Gagnon, Alain G, and Mary Beth Montcalm, *Quebec: Beyond the Quiet Revolution*, (Canada: Nelson Canada, 1990), Pages 182-183

³⁸ The Charter of The French Language, Preamble, canlii.org

³⁹ *Ibid*, Chapter 1

The Charter of the French Language proved controversial, and is in direct conflict with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.⁴⁰ The first instance of this conflict was a 1984 decision that struck down the section restricting English education to children whose parents attended English language schools in Quebec. *Attorney General (Quebec) v. Protestant School Boards* (1984) found that this restricted Section 23 Charter rights.⁴¹ This represents the way in which cultural insecurity conflicts with greater liberal norms within society. A balance of sorts would be achieved when it was decided that those that came from outside of Canada would have to educate their children in French; the extension of language rights for English schools only applied to those from other parts of Canada that had been educated in English.⁴² This openness to Anglophones in Quebec would be expanded, when the government of Robert Bourassa (who returned to office in 1985) would implement Bill 142, allowing for English delivery of social services provided by the state.⁴³ However, the issue of cultural insecurity had not been solved by The Charter of the French Language; thus, the appetite for extending rights to English speakers was non-existent among the general public.

The most significant event that would pit the Canadian Charter and Charter of the French Language against each other found itself in Quebec's sign laws regarding the use of English on commercial signs. The case of *Ford V Quebec* (1988) would serve as an important test for nationalism within Quebec. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that having French only signs in public violated both the Canadian and the Quebec Charters of Rights.⁴⁴ The issue of cultural insecurity was found to violate the newfound liberalism in Canada, leading to an important response. The Bourassa (Liberal) government invoked the Notwithstanding Clause (Section 33) of the Canadian Charter in order to overturn the Court's decision, thereby overriding the Section 2B and Section 15 Canadian Charter.⁴⁵ Two aspects of this are important; one is the way in which Quebec appropriated the state in the manner of what Smootha referred to as "ethnic democracy" in order to advance the cause of one specific group.⁴⁶ This would highlight an important institutionalization of cultural insecurity.

A second important aspect can be observed in this decision. The Parti Québécois had gained support for their party by appealing to the nationalist cause and the insecurities felt by Québécois. However, in this situation it was not the PQ that would respond to the issue, but the Liberals in Quebec. This highlights an important measure that would become an important facet of

⁴⁰ This document was adopted in 1982, enshrining liberal rights in Canada's constitution; particularly relevant is Section 23 on Minority Language rights; "The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms", The Department of Justice, Section 23

⁴¹ Kelly, James, "The Courts, The Charter, and Federalism" in Bakvis, Herman and Grace Skogstad, *Canadian Federalism*, (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2008) Pages 50-51

⁴² *Ibid*, Page 51

⁴³ Gagnon, Alain G, and Mary Beth Montcalm, *Quebec: Beyond the Quiet Revolution*, (Canada: Nelson Canada, 1990), Page 189

⁴⁴ Kelly, James, "The Courts, The Charter, and Federalism" in Bakvis, Herman and Grace Skogstad, *Canadian Federalism*, (Canada: Oxford University Press, 2008) Page 51

⁴⁵ Gagnon, Alain G, and Mary Beth Montcalm, *Quebec: Beyond the Quiet Revolution*, (Canada: Nelson Canada, 1990), Page 191

⁴⁶ Smootha, Sammy. "The Model of Ethnic Democracy: Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State" *Nations and Nationalism* Vol. 8, No. 4 2002, PP. 475-503.

Quebec politics. The issue of cultural insecurity had become so pervasive by this point that despite not supporting the sovereignty option for Quebec, the Quebec Liberals became nationalist in their own right, beginning in the 1950s. The willingness to embrace an illiberal piece of legislation highlights the non-partisan and influential aspect of cultural insecurity.

The Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords which attempted to include clauses affirming the “distinct” nature of Quebec failed, leading to a furthering of cultural insecurity. This culminated in a referendum on sovereignty in 1995, in which the federalist side one by a thin margin of 50.6% to 49.4%.⁴⁷ As a result of this, the attempts to placate cultural insecurity have since been attempted through the existing framework of Canadian federalism. The election of Jean Charest (who had previously been a Mulroney Cabinet Minister) to the Premier’s office in 2003 and the election of the Harper Conservatives in 2006 provide for a case study in which the doctrine of ‘open federalism’⁴⁸ could be adopted, at least in part. Upon his election, Charest opened up towards the federalist side of the Quebec debate, stating that “Quebec’s leadership will make Canada a stronger place.”⁴⁹ The post-referendum response to cultural insecurity was an attempt to create new options within the context of Canadian federalism which would be helped by the election of a Tory government in Ottawa.

The sense of openness that had led Brian Mulroney to attempt a constitutional deal would be transferred to his Conservative successor as Prime Minister, Stephen Harper. During the 2005-2006 federal election campaign, Harper would give a speech in Quebec City calling for a renewed federalism and allowing for Quebec to have a seat at UNESCO. This openness led a small electoral victory, with the Tories going from zero to ten seats in Quebec.⁵⁰ This policy would go seemingly hand-in-hand with earlier nationalist aspirations such as *The Tremblay Report*, which had called for Quebec to have its own say over cultural issues. This utilized the jurisdictional separation of powers that emerged over the twentieth century to help placate a dispute; Quebec would be given a say in cultural matters in the context of international relations, a normally exclusive federal area of policy. The policy would be given effect on May 5, 2006, with an announcement that Quebec would join UNESCO as an associate member, a deal heralded by Charest as the start of a “new era.”⁵¹

Despite this attempt to form a post-separatist vision of Quebec nationalism, the issue of cultural insecurity remained an important psychological issue to the general public. Despite the importance of language, the more pervasive element of cultural insecurity is the processing of Othering⁵². This issue came to the forefront around the same time as the issue of “open

⁴⁷ An earlier referendum held in 1980 had been less close, 60% to 40%; the closeness of the 1995 referendum seems to emphasize the continuing insecurity felt by Québécois; Gagnon, Alain G., “Québec-Canada’s Constitutional Dossier”, in *Québec: State and Society*, edited by Alain G. Gagnon, (Canada: Broadview Press Limited, 2004), Page 143

⁴⁸ This doctrine is one in which the lines of Constitutional powers would be blurred; in this example, culture is a provincial responsibility while international affairs in the prerogative of the federal government.

⁴⁹ Quebec Votes 2003, CBC News, <http://www.cbc.ca/quebecvotes2003/>

⁵⁰ UNESCO is the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization; MacDonald, L. Ian, “Stephen Harper’s Quebec”, *The National Post*, January 31, 2006

⁵¹ “Harper Announces UNESCO Deal With Quebec”, CTV News, May 5, 2006

⁵² By Othering, I mean the existentialist concept in which some are perceived as outside of the nation.

federalism”, in what became known as the “reasonable accommodation” debate. Due to a number of controversies revolving around citizens of groups not of traditional Quebec citizenry⁵³ the Quebec government of Charest asked Professors Gerard Bouchard and Charles Taylor to delve into the issue. Bouchard and Taylor, in their 2008 Report, found that the period from March 2006 to June 2007 had become “noteworthy for the proliferation of cases or affairs reported in the media.”⁵⁴ The issue became most salient when the small town of Hérouxville called for the ban on female circumcision, stoning of women, and a ban of the Sikh Kirpan, despite only having one immigrant family within the town’s borders.⁵⁵ This would be what Bouchard and Taylor would refer to as “A crisis of perception”⁵⁶ that would serve as a reminder that cultural insecurity is a pervasive and all encompassing issue.

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission found that the issue would be most salient for those that spoke French predominantly, with 71.7% finding “our society overly tolerant of accommodation.”⁵⁷ By commissioning Taylor and Bouchard, the Charest government had tacitly admitted that the issue of cultural insecurity was one that was very real and had not been dealt with adequately by successive governments, be they federalist, sovereigntist, or in between. Most telling in the staying power of the historical nature of Quebec’s cultural insecurity can be seen in the most obvious rejection of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission. The Report would make ten recommendations, with the fourth being the removal of the Crucifix from the wall of the National Assembly.⁵⁸ Immediately following this, Jean Charest would move a motion to reject this recommendation outright, which passed unanimously in the National Assembly.⁵⁹ Despite the increased secularization of Quebec, particularly following the Quiet Revolution, the attachment to a semblance of historical religion seems to be an issue not up for debate, despite the liberal norms that would be associated with such a move.

What remains is that the issue of cultural insecurity has not been resolved in Quebec, despite centuries of institutional responses. George Grant’s note of de Gaulle as the last successful conservative nationalist leader is followed by the realization that with liberal norms spreading, “the particularities of France cannot hope to exist.”⁶⁰ Quebec has attempted many different institutional responses to its internal nationalism. Attempts at appropriating culture, appropriating

⁵³ The early immigrants to Quebec had been Irish and Italian, populations that tended to bring Catholicism with them. This shows that despite the growth in secularism, many in Quebec still identify as Roman Catholic and appear uncomfortable with religious minorities,

⁵⁴ Bouchard, Gerard, and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A time for Reconciliation*, Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques D’accommodement Reliées Aux Differences Culturelles, Page 15

⁵⁵ “No Stoning, Canada migrants told,” BBC News, January 31, 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6316151.stm>

⁵⁶ Bouchard, Gerard, and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future: A time for Reconciliation*, Commission de Consultation sur les Pratiques D’accommodement Reliées Aux Differences Culturelles, Page 15

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, Page 22

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, Page 60

⁵⁹ “Let’s Move on, says Quebec Accommodation Commission”, CBC News, May 22, 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/montreal/story/2008/05/22/qc-accommodation.html>

⁶⁰ Grant, George, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism*, (Canada: McLelland and Stewart Limited, 1970), Carleton Library Edition, Page 67

the state to promote Francophone ownership of business, the success of the Parti Québécois as a defender of Quebec, The Charter of the French Language, the use the Notwithstanding Clause, the rejection of the referendums on sovereignty, and recent attempts at ‘open federalism’ and ‘reasonable accommodation’ have not provided security. A recent poll has highlighted this; it found that despite falling levels of support for separation from Canada, the federalist option has not been held in high regard. The survey highlighted the fact that despite all of these attempts to gain cultural security, 57% of those surveyed think that the French language is in more peril than 30 years ago.⁶¹ This survey serves as a reminder of the salience of cultural insecurity, despite appropriation of the state by nationalist forces.

The pervasiveness of cultural insecurity can be seen in recent events. Attempts to re-create the Plains of Abraham battle in 2009, for example, stoked a nationalist backlash surrounding the feeling of Conquest. Despite the fact that this happened 250 years ago, this gives credence to Abulof’s assertion about the doubt of past identity. The re-enactment was cancelled due to fears surrounding violence and nationalist protest.⁶² The strength of nationalism leads to a feeling that the Conquest is an affront to all in the social contract.

Another recent event that highlights the affronts to the social contract can be seen with controversies surrounding the Montreal Canadiens choice of Brian Gionta as their captain in 2010. The Canadiens are not owned by the state; nor are they of any intrinsic value to the Québec nation. However, the appearance of Gionta, an American, onto such an important role was met with much controversy. Despite his skills as a hockey player, local media in Québec focused on his inability to speak French. This issue had also haunted his predecessor, Saka Koivu. Gionta made concessions, expressing admiration for the local culture and making a commitment to attempt to learn the language.⁶³ The need to affirm the French language, even in private enterprise, further shows the entrenchment of nationalism as the official credo of the state.

Despite all of the gains mentioned above, the feeling amongst the populace is less than optimistic. The entrenchment of embedded liberalism has led to a furthering of insecurity. Attempts at appropriating culture, appropriating the state to promote Francophone ownership of business, the success of the Parti Québécois as a defender of Quebec, The Charter of the French Language, the use the Notwithstanding Clause, the rejection of the referendums on sovereignty, and recent attempts at ‘open federalism’ and ‘reasonable accommodation’ have not provided security. A recent poll has highlighted this; it found that despite falling levels of support for separation from Canada, the federalist option has not been held in high regard. The survey highlighted the fact that despite all of these attempts to gain cultural security, 57% of those surveyed think that the French language is in more peril than 30 years ago.⁶⁴ This survey serves as a reminder of the salience of cultural insecurity, despite appropriation of the state by nationalist forces.

⁶¹ “Survey: 30 Years after the 1980 Referendum, Quebecers Believe the Issue is Outmoded,” The Federal Idea: A Quebec Think Tank on Federalism, May 18, 2010

⁶² “Plains of Abraham re-enactment cancelled”, The Toronto Star, February 17, 2009

⁶³ “Gionta named Canadiens’ 28th Captain”, The Associated Press, September 29, 2010

⁶⁴ “Survey: 30 Years after the 1980 Referendum, Quebecers Believe the Issue is Outmoded,” The Federal Idea: A Quebec Think Tank on Federalism, May 18, 2010

Despite the fact that all immigrants now attend French schools, as opposed to the past when immigrants attended English Protestant schools,⁶⁵ all is not perceived as well. A recent court ruling stated that Québec must allow those that wish to send their children to private English schools must be allowed. With this, they could then transfer their children to public schools to skirt around Bill 101. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled that legislation blocking this was unconstitutional. Attempts to comply with the liberalism of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in the face of the general will have led to a severe backlash. Protests have been organized and debate in the National Assembly became so heated that the legislature had to be shut down. PQ leader Pauline Marois argues that the Liberals “bowed to pressure from the Anglophone lobby” and education critic Benoit Charette states that the Liberal government is “on its knees before the Supreme Court.”⁶⁶ The legacy of the Charter and apparent incompatibility between the liberalism of Canada and nationalism of Québec drive a further wedge between the solitudes.

Conclusion

The tendency toward decentralization and asymmetrical federalism in Canada has not appeased Quebecois nationalists. This is to be expected since the aim of the PQ is to achieve sovereignty. Anything less is unsatisfactory. But beyond the nationalist political project, there remains also a pervasive sense that the French language is under threat in North America and all the substantive and symbolic measures taken by successive Canadian governments have failed to remedy this concern. The reason for this is that contemporary public policy and institutional reform cannot easily erase historic facts, social trends, and the perception that the Quebecois are threatened as a distinctive community.

Quebec’s history is marked by the urgency of survival in the aftermath of conquest, effective estrangement from post-1789 France, and the assimilative measures attempted by Britain in the century following the Conquest. These efforts persuaded the Canadiens to turn inward, toward the church and indigenous elites to preserve the basic foundation of Canadian identity. This achievement, cultural survival, shaped the development of Quebec society.

Quebecois national identity has passed through stages. The first was isolationist and conservative. A product of the policy of *la survivance*. Erk observes that this policy crystallized politically in the form of the *Union nationale* under Maurice Duplessis with its slogan: “la foi, la langue, la race”.⁶⁷ This period would itself yield to what is now known as the Quiet Revolution a period of rapid modernization marked by urbanization, industrialization, the rise of the Quebec state, and a relative decline in the power of the church and agricultural elites. What remained, however, were the primacy of the language and a sense of unity as a community that had survived conquest, assimilation, and colonization. Where the French Canadian goal was survival through isolation, the Quiet Revolution saw the emergence of a new middle class prepared to assertively

⁶⁵ McAndrew, Marie, “Immigration, Pluralism, and Education”, in Québec: State and Society, Pages 307-308

⁶⁶ Séguin, Rhéal “PQ fumes as Jean Charest shuts down debate on language bill”, The Globe and Mail, October 9, 2010

⁶⁷ Erk, Jan. Is Nationalism left or right? Critical junctures in Quebecois nationalism” Nations and Nationalism Vol. 16, No. 3, 2010, p. 432.

protect the rights and interests of francophone Quebecers. Still, one can see the formative impact of history in this nationalist's advice to fellow nationalists:

Let us not look for alibis to justify our old fears; let us interpret the new darkness rather as a call to new challenges: All little nations who want to live must inevitably face them in this age of globalization. Challenges that we will rise to, with the courage that we had in the past, in that darkest night of our survivance.⁶⁸

Despite the modernizing tendencies of the Quebecois nationalist movement, there remains a core sense of anxiety about the precarious position of francophone Quebec. Quebec, like so many western societies, experienced a pronounced decline in birth rates by the 1960s. This is a common phenomenon associated with universal higher education and the emancipation of women. Nationalists have always fretted about demography and this has emerged from time to time in Quebecois nationalist discourse. Previously, we made the case that demography was less important than perceptions of vulnerability. The declining birth rate noted in Quebec is considered a normal part of post-industrial development, but for Quebec nationalists, this has been a concern. The trend begins at the start of the 20th century, this along with immigration from southern Europe and Francophone workers seeking opportunities in the US, gave nationalists cause for concern.⁶⁹

The necessity of population stability to maintain economic growth has forced Quebec to welcome more immigrants. This is a net benefit to Quebec, but also creates a degree of anxiety about the perceived gap between the values of newcomers and those of the native population. This concern is heightened by the sources of immigrants today.⁷⁰ In 1966 75.3% of immigrants to Quebec came from Europe. In 2004 the figure was 27.7 % with the vast majority of migrants coming from Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean/Latin America. While many immigrants from the developing world are francophones, there is a concern about their political and social values, especially Muslim migrants. As mentioned previously, the Hérouxville Declaration, and the subsequent commission that explored Quebecers ambivalence about immigration, are expressions of anxiety about Quebec identity.⁷¹ This public soul searching exercise is especially interesting because of the sheer number of controversies over reasonable accommodation that has come to light in Quebec in recent years. Part of the reason for the frequency of such controversies is the

⁶⁸ S. Cantin cited in Adams, P.C. "The September 11 attacks as viewed from Quebec: the small nation code in geopolitical discourse" *Political Geography* Vol. 23, 2004, p. 774.

⁶⁹ Gassage, Peter and Danielle Gauvreau. "Demography and Discourse in Transition: Quebec Fertility at the Turn of the Twentieth Century" *The History of the Family* Vol. 4, No. 4 1999 p.379.

⁷⁰ All figures from C. Blad and P. Couton "The Rise of an Intercultural Nation: Immigration, Diversity and Nationhood in Quebec" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* Vol. 35, No. 4 April 2009. P. 655

⁷¹ This is not the exclusive concern of avowed nationalists. Some observers credit the success of the ADQ in the 2007 provincial election to its attention to reasonable accommodation. See Belanger, Eric. "The 2007 Provincial Election in Quebec" *Canadian Political Science Review* 2:1 2008.

decline in religiosity among native born Quebecers. This is a consequence of the decline of the Catholic Church with the Quiet Revolution and serves as a highly salient cleavage between natives and newcomers.⁷² This divide in religiosity highlights difference, and heightens concerns about the strength of the values underpinning Quebec public life.

Global trends, demography, and the ongoing constitutional impasse in Canada all serve to feed a sense of cultural insecurity among Quebecers. This anxiety is shaped by historical events and sustained by the sense that Quebec is a community whose values and culture are under perpetual threat. This is not an exclusive preoccupation of nationalists and it isn't obvious that sovereignty would allay these concerns since many of the trends that feed cultural insecurity are independent of Quebec's constitutional relationship with Canada. Of course, missteps by Canada (repatriation of the Constitution, Meech Lake, for example) do not help allay Quebec's concerns about its cultural security.

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⁷² Brodeur, Bernard. "Preserving the Religious Tradition in Quebec" *Canadian Parliamentary Review* 2006, pp. 14-16.

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