

Playing with Words, Playing with Identities, Playing with Politics

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We were invited to discuss the stakes involved to communities, to smaller societies, in the handing down of culture during a time of globalization. But such a question depends on a preliminary assumption. What type of society, what type of culture will we talk about? The handing down of culture, even within what are called “smaller cultures,” can be seen very differently depending on, to use sociological jargon, the kinds of societal integration in that smaller culture. In brief, while hoping some light will be shed on that subject in this paper, the handing down of culture should be seen differently when one looks at an ethnic culture, a fragment of a wider culture built around the memory of recent immigration, or a national culture — i.e., the location of an autonomous cultural production pretending to emerge from a society having, or that should have, the attributes which are usually part of “larger” national cultures (history; literature; strong institutionalization, etc.). The stake of the handing down of culture is different here, less on conceptual grounds, but more from the context of the smaller culture. Let us mention here, without necessarily commenting on it, that the stakes of cultural reproduction are not the same when the culture in question — the smaller francophone culture — is largely a minority on this continent

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when compared to — the Anglophone culture — which is an integral part of our continental Anglo American civilization.

These questions of the ways of societal integration are thrown into relief when one pays attention to expressions used for naming oneself or being named. Let us recall, for example, that First Nations peoples were called in turn Savages, Indians and Indigenous. If the word Savage meant mostly the distance between the Amerindian and the European, between the Savage and the Civilized, the word Indian referred to a differentiated and a marginalized kind of social integration — the Indian was living on a reserve whereas the Savage lived in nature. Indigenous is a more autonomous assertion, more nationalistic of the Amerindian culture; this appellation is in agreement with the move toward autonomy by the Amerindian people.

English speaking Canadians were usually called, and called themselves, English, at a time when the reference to English dissociated them from Americans, whom they did not want to be like, or from Canadians who spoke French and were Roman Catholic; some time later they called themselves English Canadians, which defined them as one of the two founding nations of Canada, in reference to French Canadians from whom they wanted to be seen as different; now they call themselves Canadians, which negates the existence of English Canada — only French Canadians, we are told, persist in thinking that there is an English Canada. The non existence of an English Canada implies the existence of a Canadian identity (Canada without an hyphen); this identity aims at being the only possible Canadian identity (an inclusive one).

Following a different path, French speaking Canadians were first called Canadiens, which then meant their hegemonic character in the Canadian political space. Following the defeat of their national claim, around the 1840s, and the fact that they became a minority in the mid-nineteenth century, reveals the use of “French Canadian” as a pejorative title given first by Anglo Montrealers and later by Lord Durham to disparage their claim of a national character and to underline its ethnic character. The words “French Canadian,” which they will embrace later on, were used for more than a century, in a bi-national interpretation of Canada. Later on, in the 1960s, the majority of French Canadians, those from Québec, began to call themselves Québécois, which took into account a more political modality of integration to Québec than to French Canada, while asserting from now on the hegemony of French Canadian culture over the Québec culture. As English Canada today negates its existence in the name of a Canada

inclusive of its differences, French Canada — or one should say French Québec, since the name French Canada has again become a pejorative expression for the Franco Québecois, as it was earlier) — French Québec is negating in its turn its own hegemonic project under the cover of a Francophony inclusive of all cultures. Some even invite the Anglo Québecois and the Amerindians to be part of the founding group of a French Québec (provided, of course, that they learn its language).

Let us put a stop here to this short “Canadian” survey with words used by the Anglo Québecois to name themselves. At the beginning, they were English. Later on, they were English Canadians. Today, they hesitate between being simply Canadians, like the rest of Canadians speaking English, or Anglo Québecois. Québec nationalism would prefer to call them only Québecois, preserving their ethnic background only in their private lives or cultural community.

1. WHEN WORDS HESITATE, SO DOES IDENTITY

What about the Francophones who are a minority in Canada? I would like to show how the words used to name them are a symptom of the precariousness of their situation and how it makes their identity reference lack precision. I do not want to give a meaning that is exclusively negative to precariousness and indecision. It is true that this is a situation, whatever the main leaders of those communities might say in echo to federal politicians, in which the handing down of culture, in terms of cultural reproduction from one generation to the next, is not at all secured. I also use here the terms precariousness and indecision as a challenge to be taken on, a “slightness” to be changed into creativity (Paré, 1992). For rendering commonplace the power of such expressions, one can say that precariousness and indecision of identity references are, in a world of globalization, where cultural diversity is challenged, more often the standard situation rather than the exception.

When travelling across the identity vocabulary of French speaking Canada outside Québec (travelling across historical time but also across today’s identity space), I would like mostly to reveal two dimensions of their cultural position. A first one, more conceptual, is unfurled along the *nationalitary axis*: between ethnicity and nation; or to put it differently, between dimensions of their cultural reality which integrate them as fragments of a national culture different from their own culture — i.e., which makes them

ethnic — and other dimensions of their cultural reality which integrate them in a more global way, to a national reality. That axis raises the following question: are those communities ethnic communities or are they part of a national community?

A second dimension, which is more contextual, overlaps, not necessarily completely, and unfurls on the French Canadian axis, between Québec and the *Rest of Canada*, between its place as one of the fragments of the Canadian mosaic or as a minority extension of Québec's francophone culture. From this second axis a question arises: are those communities part of the "Canadian" semantic field, to which they are linked through their geopolitical placement, or of the Québec francophone field to which they are linked because they share the same national culture?

I am going to start this exploration with the expression *French Canadian*, because it precedes the others and still haunts francophones who live as minorities, although we tried to change that in the 1960s. Suggesting that francophones living as minorities have been French Canadians asserts two things when considered on two axes we have just defined.

First assertion. As French Canadians, the Francophone communities outside Québec historically have never been called ethnic communities, but were part of a national community, French Canada. This reference to nation is not a mere game, or an historically false pretense carried out by French Canadian leaders as an interpretation of the political pact of 1867. Let us recall it. Beyond the representation, always subjective, French Canada has really been an objective sociological reality, a peculiar modality of social integration that warrants being called a nation. As Fernand Dumont (1993) put it, French Canada has never been, strictly speaking, an ethnic group (as it is too often called in our day to assert more strongly its fading away) but a culture-nation, a grouping of human beings behaving at a second level of culture, with reference to history, literature and institutions, often within a State, and also sometimes within a Church. So, when francophones living as minorities identified themselves as French Canadians, they were effectively sharing a kind of national integration.

Second assertion. The French Canadian nation mentioned above extended itself far beyond the frontiers of the Province of Québec; it included all the French Canadians of Canada (including the Acadians and the French Canadians of the United States). In presenting themselves as French Canadians, francophones living as minorities did not see themselves as minorities and in consequence, did not live on a

daily basis as minorities and even less as ethnic groups. To live as French Canadians meant living in the universe and in the institutional practices of the French Canadian nation — its parishes, its clergy, its institutions — from Baie Sainte-Marie in Nova Scotia to Maillardville in British Columbia. To call oneself French Canadian meant asserting one's belonging to a common culture — *from coast to coast* — but also seeing its integration into Canadian society, not through the lens of a minority culture, but through that of a binational society.

The expression “Francophones outside Québec” took the place of the term French Canadians at the end of the sixties, to identify Francophones living with a minority status. This appellation came from the tearing down of French Canada. We shall not take a long look at the breakdown of French Canada at this point. Let us simply recall that processes of social change combined at that time to compel the French Canadian to acquire an institutional state base and, consequently, to become territorialized. It is in Québec, the historical heart of French Canada and the only place where that group was politically a majority, that were first found a territory and a state. But, all the francophone minorities of Canada were forced to undergo a process that compelled French Canadian institutions — schools, hospitals, colleges — to transit through the... provincial states. French Canada became fragmented into as many French Canadas as there are provincial political entities: Franco-Ontarians; Franco-Manitobans; the Acadians of New Brunswick and of Nova Scotia; Franco-Yukonese; etc.

The expression *Francophones outside Québec* contains simultaneously a denial of the tearing apart of French Canada (the Francophones outside Québec are part of the same national cultural universe as that of Québec, they are simply outside of Québec), as well as, in reference to Québec, something external, an acceptance from now on of the impossible character of that same French Canada. Let us remind ourselves that at the beginning of the 1960s the Government of Québec established a Service of “French Canada Outside the Frontiers.” In the expression francophones outside Québec, which is a logical step in the creation, French Canada has disappeared, and the francophones outside Québec are the orphans of a nation which is henceforth inaccessible. The expression francophones outside Québec is in fact a most revealing naming of identity paradoxes peculiar to francophone populations living in Canada in a minority situation. It reminds us simultaneously how these populations have found themselves out of the field of the national reference of the francophones living here (which has become the Québec reference), while sticking somewhere else. Of course, the provincial appellations — Acadians of..., Franco... Ontar-

ians... Manitobans, etc. indicate a sort of shifting from national ambitions to a new location of provincial identity. The example of Acadian nationalism in New Brunswick, which saw the birth, during the 1960s, of an autonomous Acadian party, which rallied the most dynamic elements of young nationalist Acadians, exemplifies that phenomenon. But it must be said that the new territories for unfolding national ambition — the provinces — were too far outside Québec for such an ambition. The idea of reproducing in each province the identity forms and the institutional networks of the former French Canada was an unobtainable goal. Detached from Québec, could the former French Canada outside its boundaries still be part of a nation, or was it just a sort of archipelago of ethnic communities?

There was such a certified fact — the acceptance of its minority status — in the creation in 1991 of the most important organization speaking in the name of Francophone communities living in the situation of minorities: the *Fédération des communautés francophones et acadiennes du Canada* (FCFAC). The expression *Francophone communities of Canada*, plural, does not effectively resonate as a self affirming principle, as French Canada did, or a lack thereof, as did the expression *outside of Québec*. Of course, one could think of this expression as more inclusive and that the Francophones living in a situation of minorities wish to manifest the link uniting them — the French language. Some others will see in that appellation an opening to the henceforth plural and cosmopolitan nature of the identity, against one anchored in a single culture in a given territory. But that plural Francophony no longer has, in that expression, collective dimensions, which is a good thing for the cosmopolitan tenants, but which can be hardly acceptable to those who persist in finding it legitimate — and there are still Franco Canadians of this breed — to pretend that certain identities are comprised of historical communities, in order to be societies.

On the axis from ethnicity to nation, the plural identity is closer to ethnicity than to nation; on the axis of Québec and Canada, it asserts itself irremediably as fragments of Canadian society. This is why one can understand how FCFAC could issue, some time ago, a report by experts, which suggested that francophone communities stop asking for bilingualism on the basis of national duality, a reality which is no longer understood by the younger generation, but on the value that bilingualism could add in the new global economy (PGF Consultants, 1998). This was seen differently when it was understood that it meant treating the French language as a question of value added, and not as a founding element of a national duality, and that under that heading it was more efficient to invest in the Spanish or Chinese languages.

All that is to recall that if Francophone elements living as minorities wish to fully assume their status of minorities within Canadian society (a kind of integration that is closer to ethnic integration than to national integration), several elements of those communities are putting forward the national adventure of the French fact in this country. This was the case already in 1991, when the name of the Federation was changed, from *the Francophones... outside of Québec* to *Francophone Communities of Canada*. The Acadians stated that they did not want to be included in the appellation *Francophone Communities* – plural – *of Canada*, as they were the bearers of a national tradition.

The expression Francophone Communities of Canada has different variables. There is, for example, the *Minority Francophonies of Canada*, which I have used as a title of a study on those matters: *Francophonies minoritaires au Canada: l'état des lieux* (Thériault, Ed., 1999). It is not however said, in such an expression, if the minority refers to the National Francophone minority, the old French Canada... outside the borders (an idea more of nationalitary) or to a minority within English speaking Canada (a more ethnicist conception). We find the same type of ambiguity in the programme of the present colloquium: *official linguistic minorities*. As there are two official linguistic minorities in Canada, one would think that those minorities refer to two majorities, one English-speaking, the other one French-speaking (that was surely the intention of the legislator who invented those expressions). As a Francophone in English Canada, I am part of a minority within English Canada just as I am an integral part of the other majority – the English and French languages being on the same official footing in Canada. That is even clearer for the official linguistic minority, the Anglophones of Québec; the latter is a minority in Québec but part of a majority in the totality of Canada. However, the organizers of this colloquium have brought us together, as if the status of “minorities,” Francophones outside Québec and Anglophones outside English Canada, were prevailing upon our cultural group of reference. However, the stake of cultural renewal for minority francophones can be understood as a regional question of cultural renewal within the francophone space in America, of which Québec is the hearth. I have always thought that my studies on francophone minorities are more a part of Québec sociology than that of English Canada. Put differently, I could have presented my paper at this colloquium in workshops on the subject of variables in Québec culture and in others on being a minority in English Canada. In the same way, my colleague from the English minority in Québec would not have been displeased, I presume, to have been included in a workshop dealing with English Canadians living... outside of Canada. At the very least, such an appellation seems to me as good as the term Anglo-Quebecker.

I will end with a last development within the Francophone collectivities living as minorities, which will remind us of the ambivalence of the situation in which that group finds itself. We hear the leaders of those communities talking more and more of a *Canadian Francophony* (I suspect that this expression has been given to them by Heritage Canada). Here is an expression, one might think, which can avoid the trap of the minority label and its ethnic parallel. Here is an expression which, less loaded with meaning than that of “French Canada,” would be more acceptable in acknowledging the diverse accents within one of the two national linguistic groups. But it must be said that a Canadian Francophony which does not include Québec, as if it were already sovereign, is in fact a confirmation of the minority status of those groups. But there is something more. In the recent document *Dialogue* of the FCFAC, the working group established by that representative body of those communities invited Québec (francophone I assume) to become part of the Canadian Francophony. We find in this wish and its appellation all the ambivalence of the Canadian Francophony living as a minority: its refusal to be a minority and its difficulty in redefining, after the death of French Canada, its relationship with an irreducible autonomous Québec. Asking Québec to be part of the Canadian Francophony is trying to replay the adventure of French Canada without taking into account the requirement of seeing Québec as a distinct society because of its Francophone majority. The contrary should have been asserted: in order that French Canada be reborn, Francophony must position itself in reference to the Québec fact, otherwise it is doomed to remain a cultural minority, which is something it won't accept. To maintain the ambition of being a national culture, Francophones outside of Québec must accept, in fact, their role as Quebeckers outside the borders.

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