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**THE PURSUIT OF  
PROSPERITY IN A  
TRANSITION  
SOCIETY:  
THE CASE OF  
QUÉBEC IN THE  
XXth CENTURY**

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**The Pursuit of Prosperity in a  
Transition Society: The Case of  
Québec in the XXth Century**

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## **Abstract/Résumé**

All societies, and not just those emerging from Communist control, are “transition societies”. Thus lessons can be gained, and shared, by considering as wide a spectrum as possible of transitory experiences. In all cases, culture, as distinguished from politics and economics, plays an important role in the transition process. Quebec has undergone its own transition and, notwithstanding its status as a cultural enclave, its transition can be considered a successful one. This paper sets out to explore how Quebec achieved such a result.

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Toutes les sociétés, et pas seulement celles qui émergent du joug communiste, sont des “sociétés de transition”. De ce fait des leçons devraient être tirées, et partagées, à partir d’un éventail d’expériences de transition aussi large que possible. Dans tous les cas la culture, qui doit être distinguée de la politique et de l’économie, joue un rôle important dans le processus de transition. Le Québec a traversé sa propre transition et, nonobstant son statut d’enclave culturelle, cette transition peut être considérée comme un succès. Dans cet article nous explorons comment le Québec a su atteindre ce résultat.





All societies, and not just those emerging from Communist control, are “transition societies”. Thus lessons can be gained, and shared, by considering as wide a spectrum as possible of transitory experiences. In all cases, culture, as distinguished from politics and economics, plays an important role in the transition process.

By all accounts Québec should be a dismal failure, no different from many ethnocultural enclaves, Louisiana, Newfoundland and Kosovo for example, where slow-growth and even no-growth policies were, at one time or another, the cultural order of the day. But a short visit to Montréal will confirm it: over the years, Québec has retained and even consolidated its status as a cultural enclave, but has definitively not followed the program laid out for it by theoreticians of modernization and backwardness<sup>1</sup>. Its transition, although still incomplete – like all transition – has been a successful one. How did it achieve such a result ?

Our hypothesis is a simple one and is derived from a simple observation: maybe the worst is not always inevitable, culturally speaking at least. Could it be, then, that an apparently backward-looking cultural grid learned to re-invent itself and become an agent of change ? Could this phenomenon be also at work in the Czech Republic ?

### **Culture in a very small place**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, a number of American social scientists, many of them associated with the well-known Chicago School, came to the conclusion that French-speaking Québec was indeed the backward society of the future, a sign of things to come for those societies where industrialization and urbanization remained surface phenomena with very tenuous cultural footprints. In 1938, sociologist Horace Miner became fascinated with a small Québec village which, although located close to major urban centers, was insistently oblivious to change. Of course, he did not find what he was expecting to discover in lieu and place of progress, that is remnants of a feudal order, but came across sufficient elements of a rural-based “old regime” to identify what would become the official ideological program of traditional Québec: messianism, ruralism and agriculturalism. In 1943, Everett Hughes, also of the University of Chicago, published his *French Canada in Transition* which concluded that even in a large metropolis like Montréal, change was slow in coming especially for the French-

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<sup>1</sup> We are referring here to the “modernization and development” literature of the 1960s whose impact in Québec intellectual circles was determinant. See C. E. Black, *The Dynamics of Modernization*, New York, Harper, 1967 ; Karl Deutsch, “Social Mobilization and Political Development”, *American Political Science Review*, 55, 4 1961, 493-514 ; A.F.K. Organski, *The Stages of Political Development*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1965. The numerous attempts to apply this approach to Québec was reviewed early on in Gérard Bernier, “Le cas québécois et les théories du développement et de la dépendance”, in Edmond Orban (ed.), *La modernisation politique du Québec*, Montréal, Boréal, 1976, 19-54.

speaking population<sup>2</sup>. What especially attracted his attention was a tightly laid-out division of labour where each group, the Anglo managers, the American owners, the British financiers and the French workers all seemed happy.

A new ideal-type was even created, that of a folk-society, to describe a culture which, although it lacked a peasantry and had been urbanized for some time – Québec has had an urban majority since 1921– exhibited all the signs of a tradition-dominated society with its emphasis on kinship, matriarchal family structures, rural ways, religion and a general suspicion of all things new.

Although much criticized at the time for its incapacity to uncover “modernistic” elements behind the façade of tradition, this vision of a backward and priest-ridden Province remained dominant until a new model, that of a dynamic, change-oriented and prosperous society, succeeded in displacing it. Paradigms, it would seem, always come in pairs. Within a relatively short span, it has since been argued, Québec has gone from a pre-modern stage to a post-modern one, skipping altogether the modernity phase<sup>3</sup>. During the 1960s, this period of accelerated change allowed for rapid catching up with the rest of the continent. The “New” Québec, the Québec of the Quiet Revolution, was born.

This paper seeks to understand how this “great transformation” played itself out on the cultural scene. It identifies those elements in the cultural transformation of Québec that made socio-economic change possible. In short, how did Québec succeed in its “cultural adjustment program<sup>4</sup> . Culture, we will argue, is not only a matter of some importance, it can serve both as a preserver of the status quo but also as a catalyst which makes it possible to achieve economic growth while preserving a measure of equality and solidarity.

But to work in the field of culture is a dangerous enterprise fraught with civilizational battles and methodological traps. The only way to make progress in the still politically-incorrect field of “applied cultural studies” is to stay away from too many conceptual considerations on the proper definition of culture. None will be offered here except for the suggestion that culture is not only about values, norms and practices, but also about institutions.

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<sup>2</sup> See Horace Miner, *Saint-Denis, a French-Canadian Parish*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1939 ; Everett Hughes, *French-Canada in Transition*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1944.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, things are never that simple. Already in the mid-1940s Québec had a well-established university system, it had created Hydro-Québec, the future hydro-electric giant, it had adapted very well to the British criminal justice system, controlled its own mass-media system and had a host of entrepreneurs and industrialists.

<sup>4</sup> The expression is taken from Daniel Etounga Manguelles's work on cultural change in African countries as presented in his book *L'Afrique a-t-elle besoin d'un programme d'ajustement culturel ?* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 1992) summary of his argument can be found in “Does Africa Need a Cultural Adjustment Program?”, in Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington (eds), *Culture Matters*, New York, Basic Book, 2000, 65-79.

For some time to come, the operational study of culture will certainly derive more profit from systematic attempts to accumulate country-based evidence of causal relationships between cultural orientations and material (or lack of) progress than from attempts to sort them into a tightly fit and elegant “models” making use of a parsimonious number of well-controlled variables.

Furthermore, if the exercise is to be of any use, generalizations and collective personifications, as in “The Quebeckers”, “the Irish”, “Catalonia” or “Tunisia”, will have to be given a methodological safe-conduct. We will act as if countries had personalities and could be capable of the “vision thing”.

Finally, one has also to assume also that Québec is indeed a transition “success story”, a hypothesis that not everyone is willing to entertain. Indeed in all such cases there is a dominant research tradition, either of the neo-liberal variety or the structuro-marxist one, which insists in considering these so-called successes as abject failures due, depending on one’s own ideological slant, to ethnocentrist, statist, capitalistic, nationalist or neo-colonialist policies of all persuasion. All societies are more inclined to entertain what could go wrong rather than reflect on what they did right.

Paradoxically, cultural factors are often put forward to explain either the success or the failure of a given society. Québec is no exception, depending on whether you praise or blame Québec for having “contributed” the snowmobile and “poutine” to humanity<sup>5</sup>. Speaking of culture’s contribution to the new development paradigm, Michael Keating has remarked, that “there does appear to be something” there, but that the case-study method is perhaps not the best way to uncover what this ‘something’ is. His comments on the Irish case apply equally well to Québec:

There is the success story, in which people tell the researchers that the society is cohesive, cooperative and efficient. And has a strong sense of identity and social responsibility. Then there is the failure story, in which one is told that the people are too individualist, that there is no capacity for sustained action, and that there is a lack of entrepreneurial spirit. These stories are usually so similar as to appear rehearsed and one has the impression that respondents are merely rationalizing success or failure. This becomes even more apparent when old failures suddenly become successes and the same factors that explained failure are now adduced to explain success<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> “Poutine” – not to be confused with the President of the Russian Federation – is a mixture of gravy and melted-cheese which Quebeckers insist on putting on their French Fries, to the great puzzlement of Macdonald’s which had to sacrifice to cultural diversity and include this concoction in its offering.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Keating, “Governing Cities and Regions: Territorial Restructuring in a Global Age”, in Allen J. Scott (ed.), *Global City-Regions. Trends, Theory, Policy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, 380.

## The culture of backwardness

Making up less than 2 % of the North American population and 4 % of the world French-speaking one, surrounded by 310 millions English-speakers, the six million French speaking Quebecers now enjoy one of the world's highest standards of living. In the last forty years they have made up most of the economic gap separating them from other Canadians, especially those living in neighbouring Ontario, all the while preserving their language and even exporting their culture. Every night, Céline Dion and the *Cirque du soleil* provide an essential part of the entertainment found in by Las Vegas. In 2003-2004, a Québec film, *The Barbarian Invasions* won both Best Foreign Film at the Oscar Night and the prize for Best Scenario and Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival, not a small feat considering the "cultural" distance between the two events. On a per capita basis, Montréal has more university students than Boston and the Québec pharmaceutical, aeronautics and information technologies sector rank among the first five of North America.

This has not always been the case and for most of the past century, academics and intellectuals, in Chicago and elsewhere, were hard at work finding an explanation for a society that was clearly in the process of missing the development boat, progress and change. In this respect, the results of the 1931 census had an explosive impact on all of Québec society, erupting as they did in the middle of the Great Economic Depression. While the results of the previous census had been the subject of many positive interpretations (as Quebec was seen as finally catching up with the industrialization process, due in large part with the First World War), the 1931 results confirmed instead that this catching-up was essentially happening without the French-speaking population. For the first time since the beginning of the century, the trend towards ever more industrial employment seem less certain while French-speaking areas were seen as suffering more under unemployment and lower education levels than their English counterparts. Even urbanization appeared to be slowing down. By the mid-thirties it had become clear that Quebec's messianic status as North-America's only French and Catholic society was no protection against the tidal wave of a full-blown economic crisis. The dream of catching up suddenly appeared for what it was, a dream.

Culture was presented as one possible explanation for this sorry state of affairs. But it was not the only one<sup>7</sup>. As can be expected, the political explanation covered a lot of ground ranging from those who pointed out that the changing of colonial masters in

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<sup>7</sup> No attempt will be made to fully document these explanations, whose main interest now lies in their possible contribution to a comparative sociology of economic backwardness, non-development and marginality. On the Québec case, see René Durocher and Paul André Linteau, *Le retard du Québec et l'infériorité économique des Canadiens français*, Montréal, Boréal, 1971 and in English, Conrad Langlois, "Cultural Reasons Given for the French-Canadian Lag in Economic Progress", *Culture*, 21, 1960, 152-170.

1763 made it impossible for the emerging local bourgeoisie to have access to sufficient capital to profit from the Industrial Revolution, to those who claimed that the Québec case can be interpreted as a strictly colonial situation, a situation which perpetuated itself when Québec became a Province of Canada. Although it first appeared in the 1940s, this colonial and, later on, neo-colonial interpretation became very popular in the 1960s culminating with the celebrated book by Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America*<sup>8</sup>.

In contrast, more strictly economic explanations for Québec's backwardness insist on showing that the Québec case has little to do with politics or, for that matter, culture. For example, according to Albert Faucher and Maurice Lamontagne, Québec is but a straightforward regional application of the global evolution of the North American economy whose ups and downs depend exclusively, at least in the first few centuries, on world demand for its natural resources<sup>9</sup>. Other economic-based explanations stress the backwardness of early industrial agriculture, foreign ownership, isolation, lack of an industrial base and distorted industrialization<sup>10</sup>. Many of these explanations have no doubt been applied to other "new" societies of the Americas.

Cultural explanations, as mentioned above, were by far – if not the most successful ones – certainly the more perfidious as they infiltrated and coloured even the most structural or geographical explanations. For example, Louis Hartz, although not especially concerned with Québec, came to suggest that although geography, politics and the economy were indeed important to explain the divergent paths followed by the British, French, Portuguese and Spanish experiences in the Americas, one should also include in the explanatory mix the type of culture dominant in the metropolitan center at the time its American fragment took root<sup>11</sup>. The thesis of a cultural division of labour in the Michael Hechter tradition is another good example of cultural infiltration among more economic-oriented traditions<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Vallières, *White Niggers of America. The Precocious Autobiography of a Québec "Terrorist"*, New York, Monthly Press, 1971. The Black America-French Québec analogy was a staple of the 1960's as dependency theories swept the Province. It led to a curious debate pitching "left-wing" culturalists (Jules Savaria, "Le Québec est-il une société périphérique ?", *Sociologie et Société*, 7, 1 1975, 115-128) against "left-wing structuralists" (Michel Van Schendel, "Impérialisme et classe ouvrière au Québec", *Socialisme québécois*, 21-22, 1971, 156-209.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Faucher and Maurice Lamontagne, "History of Industrial Development", in Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin (eds.), *French Canadian Society*, Toronto, McClelland and Stewart, 1964, 257-271.

<sup>10</sup> John McCallum, *Unequal Beginning Agriculture and Economic Development in Québec and Ontario, Until 1870*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980 ; Maurice Saint-Germain, *Une économie à libérer*, Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1973 ; André Raynauld, *Croissance et structure économique de la Province de Québec*, Québec, ministère de l'Industrie et du Commerce, 1961.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Hartz, *The Founding of New Societies: Studies in the History of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*, New York, Harvest Books, 1969. Hartz's thesis has been developed (as well as criticized) in Gérard Bouchard, *Genèse des nations et culture du Nouveau Monde* (Montréal, Boréal, 2000) which puts the Québec case in its American (North and South) context.

<sup>12</sup> Hechter's thesis as it applies to Québec is discussed in "Internal Colonialism: The Case of Québec", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22, 1979, 293-318.

Whatever the precise nature of the causal pattern put forward, all such cultural interpretations dwell on one or other characteristic, or assumed characteristic, of the French and Catholic nature of Québec society. By the mid-1960s, no cultural stones had been left unturned in search of a plausible explanation not only for the economic but also the political, social and intellectual backwardness of a small society which certainly did not ask for so much attention. The list of contributory factors taken from the literature of the 1940s and 1950s is an impressive one, with Pierre Trudeau, the future Prime minister of Canada, having certainly contributed the most in a 1956 seminal article<sup>13</sup>. His arch-rival, René Lévesque, who in turn became Prime Minister of Québec in 1976, but was at the time an international correspondent for the CBC, also contributed to this analysis. Paradoxically, both men share an initial diagnosis of Québec as a culturally-deprived society under the control of the Church and traditional elites only to diverge later on as to their “solution”, political integration in Canada in one case, self-government in the other.

Keeping in mind Michael Keating’s caveats, the following list should shed some light on how imaginative any cultural grid can become when confronted with a sufficiently catastrophic situation.

#### CULTURAL FACTORS EXPLAINING THE ECONOMIC BACKWARDNESS OF QUÉBEC

Although they all have their own subset of specific reasons to explain Québec’s economic failure, all schools of thought, “progressive” and “conservative”, federalist and sovereignist, culturalists and structuralists share in their belief that certain cultural traits have contributed to this abysmal result:

- Catholicism and its insistence on the after-life
- Being French and thus with a “natural” distaste for private entrepreneurs
- An underdeveloped educational system
- An hierarchical society centered on tradition
- Neo-corporatist tendencies which help develop clan-like mentalities
- The cult of the leader and a “follow-the-leader mentality”
- An anti-materialistic outlook characteristic of all utopian societies

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<sup>13</sup> Published in English as Pierre Elliott Trudeau, *The Asbestos Strike*, James Lewis & Samuel, 1974.

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- Obsession with individualistic (or collectivist) achievement
  - A visceral incapacity to anticipate the future

#### CULTURAL FACTORS EXPLAINING THE LACK OF DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT IN QUÉBEC

One does not have to go back to the development-democracy controversy to realize that Québec has always had very little chance of ever evolving into a fully democratic polity. Among some of the negative factors present in Québec, one can mention:

- The feudal origin origins of the Québec “transplant” (New France)
- The “refusal” of Québec to join in the American Revolution and free itself from British domination
- A garrison-state mentality due to its minority status
- The continuous influence of the French centralist, Jacobin political tradition
- The absence of a home-grown tradition of self-government
- The importance of religion, especially Catholicism, with its instance on hierarchy and obedience.
- A patriarchal (or matriarchal) society where the family has always occupied a central role
- An elite-oriented society distrustful of electoral processes
- A “natural” propensity for corruption
- The absence of a tradition of popular revolt

#### CULTURAL FACTORS EXPLAINING THE LACK OF COMMITMENT TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN QUÉBEC

Catholic and patriarchal societies are not known for their favourable inclination towards social justice and solidarity. In addition Québec is said to have suffered from a mixture of specific ills, sometimes contradictory ones:

- A rigid class system and a preference for status over achievement
- A reliance on the State to “take care” of the poor
- A sense of resignation: there will always be poor people. It’s God’s will

- A Civil Code which considers women as second-rate citizens.
- A glorification of poverty as the most direct way to salvation
- Aversion to community solidarity, as in all hierarchical societies
- Too much solidarity, family and otherwise, as in all poor societies

#### CULTURAL FACTORS EXPLAINING THE LACK OF INTELLECTUAL CREATIVITY IN QUÉBEC

In terms of intellectual and artistic achievements, the picture of traditional Québec dominant in the literature of the period is somewhat different from the image of its economic, political or social achievements. Being both poor and French, a minority both in North America and in the French-speaking world, Québec was seen originally as destined to produce more (struggling) artists, more beautiful women, more intellectual ebullience and more *joie de vivre* than its neighbours. It had little prosperity to show for, but as such it was closer to God, or so it was repeated in Sunday sermons until the early 1960's

But by the late 1950s, these cultural traits began to be considered for what they were, stereotypes, leading the entire society down the path of intellectual sterility. Again culture was called upon to explain why Québec was lacking in creativity and inventiveness.

- Its late discovery of the value of education and its continuous poor performance on the educational front
- Its obsession with Paris and French intellectual circles
- Its rural origins and lack of an urban culture
- The stifling presence of the State and an over-reliance on state subsidies
- The absence of a tradition of private philanthropy
- Its obsession with Cartesian logic, which prevents innovation
- Its mistrust of “inventors” and of anyone who claims to be different
- A high degree of suspicion towards foreigners and the outside world
- The stifling presence of the Catholic Church and its outdated code of morality



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- A high degree of deference, a quality shared by all Canadians.

With such a heavy cultural baggage, certainly no different than what has been observed in many other societies, it is surprising that change could occur at all. To look back at the cultural components of Québec's backwardness also allows for a comparative vision, as many of these components, notably those associated with religion and ethnicity, are singled out as the most significant variables in almost every context. It would seem that being Catholic and Non-English, makes the task of modernization and prosperity a more difficult one.

### **Québec then and now: benchmarks for change**

Whatever the reasons, the overall situation of French Québec at mid-20<sup>th</sup> century was distressing. On most indicators, Québec lagged behind Ontario and even the rest of Canada. On those few indicators, "Rise in income since 1900", "Years of schooling", where the Québec score equalled that of Canada, this good result was due essentially to the above-average "performance" of Anglo-Québec which, although making up only 20 % of the Province's population, succeeded in lifting the overall average significantly, but only at the cost of a widening gap with the French majority. The social and educational performances of French Québec were particularly distressful.

- Between 1901 and 1951, Québec had the highest birthrate in Canada and Québec the highest percentage of population growth (except for the four Western Provinces which were just beginning to attract newcomers). In 1921, the average number of children per women (18 to 40) was still 5,3.
- Between 1901 and 1939, wages and salaries gained by Québec workers remained stable at 60 % of those of their Ontario counterparts, increasing to 69 % during the war years, only to fall once more to 60 % in 1950
- Mandatory schooling to the age of 14 was made official only in 1943, on average 20 years later than in the rest of Canada
- In 1951, Francophones made up 80 % of the total working population of Québec, but only 54 % of its civil engineers and 25 % of its chemical, structural and electrical ones.
- On most issues of social legislation, Québec went from one of the best records in 1900 to the worst fifty years later, no doubt the result of incredibly stingy government which did not hesitate to pass a law (in 1939) depriving unwed mothers and un-married couple of any form of public aid.

- In 1959, less than 50 % of the 14-17 age group went to school in Québec compared with more than 80 % in Ontario.
- In 1957, only 10 % of teachers in the French educational system had university degrees compared with 25 % in the rest of Canada and 33 % in the English educational system.

Nowhere was the situation of French Québec more troubling than in the workplace. In 1966, in a study done for the Royal Commission of Inquiry on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, a team of researchers came to the startling conclusion that with regard to total earnings, the performance of French-speakers relative to that of other ethnic groups, including newly arrived Italians, was so bad that it ranked second to last, surpassing only earnings of the Indian sub-group<sup>14</sup>. The impact of such findings equalled that of the 1931 census. Indeed it was said that in thirty years things had indeed gone from bad to worse for French Quebecers. In Montréal wages of those belonging to the British group were 32 % superior to those of the French group. Even worse, when controlling for education, type of work, age, sex, and a series of control variables, the difference did not disappear but stabilized at around 10 %.

Table 1 provides a good illustration of how much things changed in the following thirty years. In 1970, a unilingual Anglophone working in the Montréal region had an average weekly salary of 20 % more than his equivalent Francophone unilingual. His earnings were even superior by 11 % to a Francophone bilingual worker. The gap is especially significant inasmuch as the effect of age, educational level and type of employment was taken out.

Similar data not reported here indicate that in 1965 unilingual Anglophones were even making more money than their bilingual colleagues.

In 1995, the situation had been completely reversed with all bilingual workers receiving approximately the same premium for their language capacities while unilingual Anglophones were being penalized, albeit in a limited way, by their lack of skill in French. Clearly, these figures – and a host of others – indicate the end of what one sociologist called a “situation of mutually satisfying institutional self-segregation”

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<sup>14</sup> See Gérard Marion and Richard Béland, *La répartition des revenus selon les groupes ethniques au Canada*, Research Report for the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Ottawa, 1966. This “founding” document was followed by many others: François Vaillancourt and Christine Touchette, *Le statut du français sur le marché du travail de 1970 à 1995*, Toronto, C.D. Howe Institute 2001.

where both Anglophones and Francophones lived totally isolated in their respective worlds, each with its own values, standards and reward system<sup>15</sup>.

**Table 1 - Gap in average salary for men in the Montréal region according to the degree of English-French bilingualism, 1970-1995**

| Language status         | 1970   | 1990   | 1995   |
|-------------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Unilingual Anglophones  | + 20 % | + 3 %  | - 2 %  |
| Bilingual Anglophones   | + 25 % | + 3 %  | + 7 %  |
| Bilingual Francophones  | +11    | + 7 %  | + 6 %  |
| Unilingual Francophones | Base 0 | Base 0 | Base 0 |

Source: Nicole Béland and Pierre Roberge, "La fin de la discrimination salariale", in *L'Annuaire du Québec 2004*, Montréal, Fides, 2004, 255.

There is no doubt that the income gap has not only closed, but almost disappeared. No longer could Michèle Lalonde write her famous "Speak White" poem, no doubt the most celebrated poem in Québec history<sup>16</sup>. What remains unclear, though, is the impact of such catching up. Contrary to expectations the closure of the income gap has not led to a decrease in support for Québec sovereignty, no more so than the disappearance of the educational gap.

More aggregated data confirm that this economic catching up of Francophone workers vis-à-vis their Non-French counterparts has not been achieved through a lowering of everyone's standard of living. Real GNP per capita in Québec went up from 85 % of the national average in 1950 to approximately 95 % in 2000, while in Ontario it went down from 121 % to 116 %.

Real per capita disposable income in Québec is now 88 % of the Ontario one, compare with only 75 % at the end of the 1970s. Overall, and contrary to a popular impression, the Québec economy is closing the gap with that of Ontario, one of the fastest growing regions in North America. The problem, as suggested by economist Pierre Fortin, is not so much that Québec is falling behind – it is not –, but that the rate of catching up is so slow, less than 1,5 % per year over the last fifty years<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> Hubert Guindon was the first to suggest that the world observed by Miner and Hughes was about to crumble following what became known as the "Quiet Revolution". His major articles have been collected in *Québec Society: Modernity and Nationhood*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988. In 1959, Guindon was fired from the University of Montréal for having suggested, against the better advice of his Dean, that the Chicago vision of Québec was indeed the correct one.

<sup>16</sup> "Speak White. / Il est si beau de vous entendre / parler de Paradise Lost / ou du profil gracieux et anonyme qui tremble / dans les sonnets de Shakespeare / nous sommes un peuple inculte et bègue / mais nous ne sommes pas sourds au génie d'une langue / parlez avec l'accent de Milton et Byron et / Shelley et Keats. / Speak white..." 1974.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in the Montréal daily *Le Devoir*, (February 17th, 2000) at the time of temporary flere-up of the perennial debate as to whether or not Ontario and Toronto are doing better than Québec and Montréal.

In Québec infant mortality was still 6 % for boys and 5 % for girls in 1950, but only 0,6 % and 0,5 % in 2000. Within fifty years, Québec went from the worst to the best record among Canadian Provinces, with only Japan and the Scandinavian countries having lower rates<sup>18</sup>. As for the number of children per women of child-bearing age, it went from 4,0 in 1960 to approximately 1,5 since the beginning of the 1990s (more or less the same as in Ontario).

In education, the performance has been little short of phenomenal, with Québec students having the best high school graduation rates among all Canadian Provinces. The drop out rate for 19, 18 and 17 years olds has fallen dramatically in the last twenty years – again contrary to general belief – dropping from 42 %, 36 % and 26 % respectively for each of these age groups in 1979 to 19 %, 17 % and less than 10 % in 1999. In terms of achievement in mathematics, the performance of Francophone high school students is the highest in Canada and the probability of obtaining a secondary school diploma is now higher for Québec Francophone students than for all OECD countries (more on this later).

Clearly, between 1960 and 1980 Quebeckers must have done something right. Geography has necessarily contributed to this success, although it is difficult to see what meters of snow, two-week long summer and bugs the size of golf balls have had to offer. No doubt geo-political factors also explain much of this success. Living beside the world's largest market and strongest political power does not only bring disadvantages ; neither does the fact that Québec was “conquered” by the British and has never fully achieved self-government while coming close on a few occasions.

Luck (*le hasard, la chance*) is one of those factors rarely mentioned when explaining collective successes or failures. If Jacques Cartier had sailed only a few miles south, he would have landed in what has become Virginia. If the Dutch had not panicked at the sight of a few English ships, New York would have remained a largely Walloon and French-speaking city. If Protestants had been forced to exile themselves to New France (rather than prevented from doing so), French-speaking Quebeckers would all be rich and free-Masons!

As we have seen, cultural-based explanations for Québec's failures and successes come in many shapes and sizes. We will stress four: the instrumentalization of core cultural values, the emergence of state interventionism in a supporting role, the strategic use of nationalism and the emergence of a mass culture. All four can be said to form a **permanent accommodation system**.

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<sup>18</sup> The data is taken from various contributions in Victor Piché and Céline LeBourdais (eds.), *La démographie québécoise. Enjeux du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2003.

## The instrumentalization of core values

The Québec “cultural system” (norms, values, beliefs, institutions, practices) has been the object of much attention. One question has pre-empted all others: to what extent is the (French) Québec value system “different” from that of the (Anglophone) “Rest of Canada” ? Answers to this question have led to a host of others on the proximity of the Québec value system to its American counterpart and to the recent evolution – is there more or less convergence ? – of the values of Quebeckers, Canadians and Americans<sup>19</sup>.

For the moment, our concern is not so much with recent trends in the Québec cultural debate, but to gain an understanding of how this small enclave has managed to instrumentalize certain value-orientations initially in tune with conservative and traditional positions to make them into agents of change. Four such orientations, taken from Daniel Etounga Manguelle, will be considered.

### A MORE ACTIVE ORIENTATION TOWARDS “TIME” AND TRADITION

Time-oriented societies are deemed to be at a disadvantage compared with less time-dependant ones, where spatial categories are more important than temporal ones. In Africa, Manguelle reminds us, Africans have always had their own time. Anchored in their ancestral culture, Africans have convinced themselves that the past can only repeat itself, so much so that to worry about the future is but a loss of time and a dangerous illusion. And without a dynamic perception of the future there can be no foresight, no scenario building, no attempts to design policies which will affect the course of events. In such a cultural context, concludes Manguelle, there can be no singing of tomorrow, no possibility to bend it so as to make it happen.

Is such a negative vision necessarily the only one ? In other words: “Is time necessarily a tyranny ?” Can time be instrumentalized in such a way as to foster change and development ? Past and tradition can be made to serve political and economic interests, but what about time itself ?

The official motto of Québec is “Je me souviens” (*I remember* or, perhaps more appropriately, *Lest we forget*), a sentence found on all licence plates of the Province and imposed in 1976 by the newly elected Parti Québécois to replace one which existed since 1960: “La Belle Province” (*The beautiful Province*). Much can be said about this

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<sup>19</sup> While the World Values Surveys make little room for a distinct Québec value system (except in some of the analysis provided by Neil Nevitte), the Comparative Charting of Social Change Project has made Québec one of the key players of an international endeavour which included France, the United States, Russia, Spain, Bulgaria, Germany and Canada. See Simon Langlois *et al.*, *Recent Social Trends in Québec, 1960-1990*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995 ; Simon Langlois, Theodore Caplow, Wolfgang Glazer and Henri Mendras, *Convergence or Divergence*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994 ; Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference*, Peterborough, Broadview Press, 1996.

apparently anecdotal change including the passage from a feminine and seductive perspective (*Québec as a woman* as symbolized by the feminine in “La belle Province”) to a more active and certainly more individual tone as in the term “Je”<sup>20</sup>.

Obviously, Québec’s obsession with the Past has not deterred the Quebeckers from becoming equally obsessed with the future. Scenario-building, especially of the catastrophic variety, is Québec’s third national past-time (the first two being worrying about the weather and hockey). Demographic scenarios are regularly presented that identify the precise moment when Québec’s population will begin its absolute decline (2021 is now the reigning best estimate). This will be an important and no doubt traumatic event, the first such decline since 1608 and the founding of Québec City. Plans and counter-scenarios are being produced almost daily to counteract this trend.

The “past” not only serves to remind Quebeckers of their individuality and of their own personal responsibility towards history, it also serves to provide encouragement and support in the face of the one cataclysmic event in Québec history, the British Conquest of 1759. For example, the “I Remember” also applies to the attitude of French colonial authorities during the French Regime. Over the years, French Canadians and now Québécois have managed to convince themselves that the French, the “French-French” as they are often called, and not their own ancestors, lost the famous Battle of the Plains of Abraham. Paris is to blame for its poor military performance and for having “abandoned” its colony. In this sense, the 1759 defeat is that of Paris and not Québec City or Montréal<sup>21</sup>.

In Québec as in other post-cataclysmic societies, “Time” can serve as a refuge used to justify, or at least provide a satisfactory explanation of, past failures. Scapegoating is not without positive effects inasmuch as it serves to maintain the integrity of the group and offers its own self-vision as a coherent global society. For the greater part of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, the ideology of survival (“l’idéologie de la survivance”) played precisely that role. It no longer does as Quebeckers seems to be running out of scapegoats.

Today Québec’s past is in the midst of a reconstruction process, a process made necessary by new demands directed at this once ethnoculturally monolithic past. This process involves the creation of new mythologies based on “new” but equally selective memories taken from the past. For example, there is now a large “consensus” in Québec as to the fact that more than 80 % of French Canadians have “Indian” blood running

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<sup>20</sup> Much decried at the time in the Anglophone population, this switch is still being fought by some elements of the English-speaking population, many of whom object no doubt to the forced display of what they considered the equivalent of the Confederate flag. In a much-heralded act of symbolic resistance, some have resorted to hiding the incriminating sentence under the car dealership name where the “resistance car” was presumably bought.

<sup>21</sup> Except at the time of the 1998 World Cup there is no known case of Québécois rooting for the French.

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through their veins, a far cry from the assertion, still dominant in the 1950s, as to the ethnic “purity” of French Canadians. Even the vision of a traditionally anti-Semitic Québec is being replaced by that, equally mythical, of a pro-Jewish society, the first one to have witnessed the election of a Jewish member of Parliament. The fact that a large number of Quebeckers have Irish sounding names (Johnson, Ryan) is increasingly put forward as a sign that Québec has always been a tolerant and open society towards “strangers”. How long these new interpretations can be made to serve remains to be seen.

To a society like Québec, the past offers many advantages inasmuch as it can be deconstructed and reconstructed at will. History then becomes a genuine battlefield where divergent visions of the future can confront one another. After all, it is important to know for a fact if French-Canadians actually believed everything that they were told by the Church concerning material rewards, and to know what they actually did about it. Even nostalgic reconstruction of the past – New France as a Golden Age – can be made to serve a purpose, if only to suggest that things can indeed be different, as different as they once were.

History (and memory) makes for “good guys” and “bad guys”, an apparently dangerous output as it serves to maintain old animosities. True, these rivalries can lead to prolonged conflicts and often provide differences of opinion with an emotional surcharge which makes their resolution impossible. But even a cursory familiarity with Québec’s history, as with any national history, will confirm that there are indeed good guys and bad guys. To pretend the contrary is to deny the importance of political choices and prevent all ethical judgements. Second, old rivalries and deep differences can only be made to disappear at the cost of cultural relativism, which is another form of negationism. The routinization of such antagonisms is a more rewarding – and certainly less demanding – alternative as it allow all participants to proclaim how much things have changed. New myths can only be created on the basis of old ones.

#### A NON-SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE DIVINE ORDER

Can God, the Sacred and the Divine Order be also instrumentalized to contribute positively towards societal development and change ? A much tougher challenge, no doubt, than the mere mobilization of time and the past. After all, God cannot be moved that easily. This issue raises the parallel question of the role of the Church and of religion in the transformation of societies.

The religious orientation of “traditional” Québec society is one of those well-entrenched beliefs documented, if not imposed, largely from the outside and one that most

Quebeckers were happy to seize upon if only to be able to show how much things have changed in what used to be considered a “Priest-ridden society”. Periodically, historians try to set the record straight about the extent and the consequences of clericalism for Québec. As we suggested, these periodical questionings, whether they are concerned with the Church, social classes, ideologies, sport achievements, or even the British Crown, contribute much to the generalization of this critical posture without which progress is so difficult to achieve.

Following American historian Francis Parkman who first coined the expression, much of the early writing on the role of the Church in Québec talked not only of supremacy but of a genuine theocracy<sup>22</sup>. By the late 1960s, this exaggerated vision crumbled under the weight of its own pretences. For example, Jean-Pierre Wallot has revealed that the Gallican laws developed by the French monarch to assert its authority over the Church not only applied to New France but even found a fertile ground there for their implementation<sup>23</sup>. For most of the French Regime, the colonial Church was engaged in a losing battle to maintain minimal standards of public morality or to enforce an official ban on charivaris. In the end, the Church had to suppress most religious holidays lest they give rise to public disorders of a magnitude not even seen in France.

The Conquest of 1759 and the sudden departure of all French political and administrative elites contributed much to the Church becoming so dominant. The forced exile of many French priests after 1848 also solved the Québec Church’s major problem, that of recruitment, as French religious orders began a mass migration to Québec where they were welcomed by British authorities. From now on, the Catholic Church can be said to have played both the role of intermediary (“collaboration” is a word used by many) with the British authorities and of resistance to these same authorities when they were perceived as a threat to the survival of the French speaking (and Catholic) community. The fact that until recently most Francophones were Catholic while a majority of Protestants (or non-Catholics) were Anglophone also contributed to making religion and the Church a positive factor in the preservation of the French language and culture. The fact that a large majority of non-Francophone Catholics were Irish also helped, as French speaking Catholic bishops could easily convince British authorities that they had better keep the French language alive rather than risk seeing the French Catholic community fall under the influence of the Irish catholic hierarchy.

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<sup>22</sup> Parkman’s vision was made popular through Québec’s first English language history, that of Mason Wade whose *The French Canadians, 1760-1976* (Toronto, Macmillan, 1976 (first published in 1968) popularized many of the stereotypes then prevalent about Québec. For a similar interpretation, see Jean-Charles Falardeau, *The Role and Importance of the Church in French Canada*, in Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin (eds.), *op. cit.*, 342-357.

<sup>23</sup> See Jean-Pierre Wallot, “Religion and French Canadian Mores in the Early Nineteenth Century”, *Canadian Historical Review*, 52, 1, 1971, 51-94.



How was this domination of the Church accepted by the population ? As suggested by Colette Moreux, who contributed the “definitive” book on the Church during the transition of the 1960s, “ecclesiastical power was accepted to the extent it did not bother anyone”<sup>24</sup>. And when it did bother Quebeckers, we might add, it was too late. Québec’s declericalization process came without much of a bang.

For the better part of 150 years, roughly from 1760 to 1910, the Catholic Church provided Québec with a set of alternate elites that contributed both positively and negatively to the development of Québec. This is not to say that they were no costs to this contribution – the difficult emergence of a local bourgeoisie is one of them – but only that in the absence of an intellectual, urban, cosmopolitan elite, a religious-supported one is better than nothing. The list of those manifestations of modernity which in Québec can be traced back to a clerical origin is a long one indeed, including – not in any given order –: university education, science, astronomy, feminism (yes), cinema, opera and classical music, medicine, regional development, banking, trade-unionism<sup>25</sup>. Even in the area of economic development, the Church can be said to have made a positive contribution. According to William Ryan, Québec’s agriculture was saved from oblivion through the introduction of more scientific methods by a generation of priests turned entrepreneurs and agronomists<sup>26</sup>. The most celebrated among them, the famous Curé Labelle, was responsible for the establishment of more than 10 000 settlers in the Laurentian region. As suggested by Ryan, the Church’s major strength, its capacity to take credit for all positive things happening in Québec, soon became the source of all its problems as it also had to take the blame for all of the Province’s shortcomings.

Nowhere has this been more evident than in the area of education where the Church succeeded in gaining an absolute monopoly – from primary schools to university – but did not in the end have the human and financial resources to sustain what it considered “the best educational system in the world” in the face of a rapidly increasing population that insisted in remaining, under the Church’s initial guidance, dispersed over a wide territory. More than anything else, by 1960, the Church had made the demonstration, quite unwillingly, that only the State could run a large scale educational system.

In the 1960s, religion and the Church also played an important, if unwilling, role in the process of change. First, as was the case in most clerical societies, non-clerical elites

<sup>24</sup> Colette Moreux, *La fin d'une religion. Monographie d'une paroisse canadienne française*, Montréal, Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1969, 11.

<sup>25</sup> Female religious orders benefited from a mythical stature in Québec and no politician or historian would dare re-examine their role in the last three hundred years.

<sup>26</sup> Of course, no Francophone priest or member of the clergy would have dared take the chance of proposing such an interpretation. See Ryan’s *The Clergy and Economic Growth in Québec, 1896-1914*, Québec, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 1966.

and even anti-clerical ones (although not a very important phenomenon in Québec) emerged from clerical institutions such as classical colleges or teaching schools.

Second, we should also mention that the ease and swiftness with which Québec declericalize itself (roughly between 1961 and 1966) is an indication of how naked the King had indeed become. This rapid and easy transformation (parallel to what happened in Spain twenty years later) was not only beneficial in and of itself, but also offered some support to forces of change as it served to demonstrate that rapid and massive changes were indeed possible without fear of divine (or Vatican) retaliation. In 1960 when the newly elected government decided upon the creation of a Department of Education, the Québec Conference of (Catholic) Bishops strongly objected and threatened to simply boycott the new measure and resist any attempts to take crucifixes out of the schools (“Sortir le Petit-Jésus des écoles” was the much heralded rallying cry)<sup>27</sup>. By the time the Department was indeed established, at the end of 1964, it became clear that the thinly-disguised menace of the catholic hierarchy had no serious impact and the Church was allowed the face-saving mechanism of having two deputy-ministers, one for the catholic and the other for the protestant sector, included in the official organizational chart of the new department. This defeat with honour paved the way for the easy adoption of further laws concerning civil marriages, divorce and abortion. Eventually, Québec’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms was made to include provisions regarding discrimination for sexual orientation, the first such charter to specifically include gay and lesbian rights.

The fact that the changes proposed in the relationship between State and Religion were not that massive, but were the simple recognition of a de facto situation, has little bearing on the perceived importance of those changes. It also illustrates the extent to which change (like resistance) feeds upon itself especially if most of the change in question has already been implemented. Theater is always a part of any given societal transformation.

Was the Catholic hierarchy more tolerant and open-minded in Québec than elsewhere ? Probably not. What was different was that it was allowed an honourable and financially rewarding way out. In fact, when in the 1960s, the government decided to bring all religious schools and hospitals within the public domain – a de facto nationalization –, not only did it reimburse religious orders for their loss, but it also included them retroactively in the new pension scheme being set up at the time.

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<sup>27</sup> Contrary to general belief, the Protestant clerical hierarchy also objected to this change, but for fear of losing its linguistic prerogatives as most Protestant schools were also Anglophone ones. The English-speaking Catholic hierarchy, Irish for the most part, was perhaps the most vehement as they feared losing both their religious and linguistic identification.

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## ATTITUDE TOWARDS RISKS AND UNCERTAINTY

Various ethnocultural and minority groups have different attitudes towards risks and uncertainty. According to Daniel Etounga Manguelle, Africans are the ultimate risk averters and appear dominated by uncertainty which freezes them into inaction or submission. In Africa, risks are not to be averted, but simply avoided. In situations where one can lose everything, this refusal is certainly a rational attitude.

Surveys and stereotypes seem to indicate that Quebeckers (compared to Americans and Anglophone Canadians) are not risk-takers. This would explain the low level of entrepreneurship found in Québec as well as their tendency to oversubscribe to insurance of all sort. During the 1960s and 1970s, fear was indeed an important element of all electoral campaigns as federalist parties played, often successfully, on this risk aversion factor pointing out that a victory of the Parti Québécois would almost certainly mean a drop in one's standard of living, a collapse of personal liberties, rising unemployment, bankruptcy, etc. During the 1980 referendum campaign, it was argued that the value of an eventual Québec dollar would drop to 65 cents (US), precisely the level where the Canadian dollar has been unofficially pegged ever since.

But fear and risk aversion do not necessarily lead to inaction. Quebeckers like to think of themselves as genuine Normans (of the Normandy variety) and as such have the reputation of never wanting to put their eggs in the same proverbial basket. At all times they are said to insist on preserving their portfolio of options, political and others. Furthermore, not all changes involve action. Often, to not do anything can be interpreted as risk-taking activity, as in when the Québec electorate repeatedly refused to endorse changes to the Province's language laws even when threatened with rapid economic extinction. Threat is often counter productive, as in when the Québec government was threatened with serious reprisals when it decided (in 1962) to nationalize private hydro-electric companies, a move not too popular at the time of the Bay of Pigs fiasco and when Cuba, the Québec of the South, was doing the same thing. Of course, the fact that a consortium of American banks led by the Bank of Boston agreed to finance the entire operation rapidly defused the entire operation.

Aversion to uncertainty can also be mobilized in support of change and transformation as the cost of not changing is often deemed to be higher than that of change. The Québec obsession of being "left behind" (should it be by modernity, post-modernity, New Information Technologies, highway construction, Reality TV, open heart surgery, espresso coffee) has always served as an accelerator of change (even when not necessary).

In the same vein, insecurity does not necessarily lead to a garrison-state mentality. If you actually believe that “things will usually go wrong”, then you are likely not only to prepare for the worst but also to engage in constant self-criticism as to the best way, in terms of costs and benefits, of achieving certain results. True insecurity often leads to a nationalism of excuses, recriminations and self-justification, but it can also infuse this nationalism with a dose of realism and introspection. If you are indeed prone to believe that “it is indeed other people’s fault”, then you might also come to believe that these same people are right and have found a better way to do things. In short, nationalism can lead either to blindness or 20/20 vision.

In sum, there is risk-aversion and risk-aversion. Some aversion to risk is not only rational, it can also lead to new forms of cooperation and concertation. The extent to which the cooperative movement is developed in Québec is certainly a result of this aversion. To take chances is not always the best way to increase one’s reward.

#### INDIVIDUALISM AND COLLECTIVISM

Much has been said about the negative impact of “collectivism” and, by inference, the positive impact of individualism, as a cultural trait. From a logical viewpoint, these inferences leave much to be desired, as individualism is often made into a collective trait and collectivism evaluated as it relates to individuals. But let us assume that there is indeed a relationship between progress and development and those cultural systems which favour individual achievement. Isn’t this individualism at the source of the high level of US development ?

All surveys attempting to establish the major differences between the American, Canadian and Québec (French) value systems are clear on this issue: as a group Americans are more individualistic than Quebeckers, with Canadians (English) somewhere between the two, but somewhat closer to the Québec collectivist pole. On this point the anecdotal and “semi-scientific” evidence (an oxymoronic term if there ever was one) is impressive ranging from the importance of state expenditures in the GDP to the high degree of attachment of Quebeckers to their public health system. Quebeckers tend to ardently to praise their collective achievements and grow suspicious at the idea that one member of the group is raising his (or her) head above the fray. Popular folklore has it that if Quebeckers could only do like the English or the Jews and bask in the glory achieved by a few, then things would be different.

In the end, is not so much the relative strength of group or individual feelings that is important, but how much each is mobilized to serve the other. After thirty years of exchange and cohabitation, both individuals and the community appear to have made

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considerable progress. For example, without language policies, it is doubtful whether the new class of Francophone entrepreneurs, Québec Inc. as it is known, would have had the chance to emerge. Of course, this rise occurred at a cost, that of a temporary exodus of Anglo talents from Québec. But as one former “leader” of the Montréal Anglo community pointed out, the departure of thousands of unilingual Anglophones was adequately compensated by the increased bilingualisation of those who stayed behind<sup>28</sup>.

In Québec, collective orientation has not meant uniformity or state control over private destinies – although there has been some of that – but mainly an increase in the number of collective public goods. Nowhere is this more so than in the case of language policies. For example, it should be remembered that the purpose of the Charter of the French language, Bill 101, is to create a new “public good”, French, to which all have equal access and which can serve as a sort of civic equalizer. The Charter is strictly a language law. It deals exclusively with the French language and has absolutely nothing to say about the ethnocultural group, the French-speaking Quebeckers or *Québécois* – who consider French an important trait of their identity. The Charter aims to increase the use of French and not to promote the economic or political well-being of one group over the others. It is about the “Francisation” of society and not its “Francophonisation”. In the end, the Charter is about increasing and not decreasing the amount of social and cultural capital available to all Quebeckers. Any given society is “richer” if it increases its overall social and cultural capacities.

This has clearly been Bill 101’s greatest achievement, as it has allowed a large proportion of immigrants to fully integrate in society. There is nothing like playing baseball in French to make young Vietnamese feel they are part of the collective “we” (“Nous”). The Charter, it should be said, treats all non-French languages and their communities equally, including English-speakers from abroad. In theory at least, Quebec Anglos are considered a minority to the same extent as Italians or Pakistanis. Even Americans, when they immigrate to Québec, need to send their children to French-speaking schools (if they choose to attend the public school system). This makes Québec the only territory in the World (with the probable exception of East-L.A.- where English-speakers can considered themselves as an “endangered species”, a situation of which the humour has not been lost on many young Anglos.

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<sup>28</sup> Technically speaking, there was no Anglo exodus as there had always been an important back and forth movement of the Montreal Anglo population between Québec and the rest of Canada. The impact of language laws is to be found somewhere else, in the dying out of the influx of Anglos.

## **Institutions: The State System as a central actor**

Culture is not only about values, beliefs, norms and orientations. It is also about institutions and their configuration. Property rights are usually singled out as the crucial institution. They serve to reduce transaction costs by making sure contracts will be respected. However, they are not the only social structure capable of providing the mixture of trust and confidence without which development remains elusive.

The emergence of a modern state sector was without any doubt the most important factor associated with what came to be known as the “Quiet Revolution” (1960-1975). Even among those who have come to decry the excessive predominance of the Québec State, or its appropriation by the bourgeoisie, no one will dispute the central role played by this unique “Regional State”.

Once again the numbers speak for themselves. Between 1960 and 1968, the provincial state budget went up from 750 million \$ (constant dollars) to 3,4 billion and the number of civil servants from 29 000 to more than 45 000. During the first decade, dozens of departments, councils, and boards of all kinds were set up including a Department of Education, of Natural resources, of Cultural Affairs, of Intergovernmental affairs, so that by 1970 the Québec provincial State (and government) had all the appearances of a medium size European State. In the 1980s, new departments were created, Environment, Social Affairs, Tourism, External Trade, Social Solidarity, Women’s Issues, “Indian” Affairs, and an extensive network of para-diplomatic representatives covering all continents.

During the 1960s, public employment went up from 4, 0 % to 11, 4 % of total Québec manpower, providing young Quebeckers with employment possibilities which their parents could never dream of. Today the Québec State is taken for granted and efforts are being directed at attempts to “re-engineer” it. Its importance was, and still remains, crucial. On a purely symbolic level, it allowed Québec and Quebeckers to move from the rather parochial status of Province – with all of its negative connotations – to that of a State (“un État”) which put Québec in a different category, that of Nation-States. Without a state of its own (albeit a non-sovereign one) Québec society would no doubt have melted away, or its nationalism evolved in the direction of exacerbated ethnicism, intolerant and suspicious, self-immolating and incapable of moving forward.

Québec has been particularly active in the arts and culture sector. It has shown itself capable of devising and enacting a wide range of cultural policies. Private funding for the arts is almost non-existent in Québec as most Toronto-based corporations and philanthropic institutions will choose to support Canadian cultural institutions.

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Established in 1960, the Québec Department of Cultural Affairs, later renamed Department of Culture, was the first such department in North America. In the late 1980s funding for the arts moved from the French model to the British “arms length” model but with an increased preoccupation – borrowed mostly from Scandinavia – with the financial status of artists.

Competition with the Federal State, anxious to show its support for French-speaking artists, has made it possible for the Quebec cultural community to obtain funding for a number of innovative projects. The *Cirque du Soleil*, the second largest “cultural” conglomerate in North-America, was literally created by the Québec State. Within twenty years, a literature, a dancing tradition, a theatre culture, a museology school, and a Québec “sound” emerged out of nowhere.

Artists have single-handedly transformed the symbolic and political landscape of Québec turning Montréal into a vibrant cultural capital. Without state subsidies and dozens of cultural White papers, Inquiry Commissions, Committees and Councils of all forms and shapes, Policies and Reviews, this cultural explosion would certainly not have been possible (because of the very restricted market) and could not have been sustained for 40 years.

Another orientation of the Québec State system is its entrepreneurial propensity. In the 1960s, large investment corporations, modeled on the Belgian *Société générale de financement*, were established, including the *Caisse de dépôt et de placement*, a financial body managing the savings of all public and semi-public institutions. The CDP has been criticized for its capitalist methods, taking a controlling interest in corporations almost overnight and taking risks that even venture capitalists were reluctant to accept. Later, a union-controlled venture capital fund, the Québec Solidarity Fund, was established with the support of tax exemptions and has since become one of Canada’s largest such funds.

Here again opinions vary as to the real benefits of this form of collective capitalism. There is little doubt that without the State, Québec would have evolved in the direction of a large-scale Newfoundland or Alabama, largely ignored by foreign investors, with few attractive business opportunities and a welfare mentality (with due apologies to both Alabama and Newfoundland). The recent decision by General Motors to close down Quebec’s only automotive plant has served to remind everyone how peripheral Québec is to the rest of North America. Without Québec Inc. there would simply be no aeronautic and biotech industries in Québec, no Hydro-Québec, no QuebecWorld and no Domtar. Compared to Catalonia, Québec has never developed an indigenous entrepreneurial class capable of moving out of, or adapting, the family business mode.

The State has made the economic modernization of Québec possible, but at a relatively high cost.

One important dimension of the Québec state system is the continuing importance of its neo-corporatist-like practices. In the European tradition neo-corporatism is reserved for those situations in which formal agreements are made between industrial and labour representatives under the auspices of the State. These agreements are only possible within a largely centralized system of labour relations and where agreements are usually enforced by the State. None of these conditions are present in Québec where labour agreements are reached (or not reached) at the local level and where the Québec state has none of the powers available to the French ministry of Labour.

Nevertheless, neo-corporatist types of “agreement” have been popular for the last 30 years and have proven useful in forcing and negotiating agreement on reluctant partners. The corporatist culture has had many incarnations and has succeeded in turning Quebec into a system of permanent negotiation. Again these agreements have been made possible by a mixture of state intervention, capitalist self-regulation and nationalist appeals (not to mention good luck).

For the last 30 years all Quebec governments have made use of the Socio-Economic Summit formula where “representatives” of all sectors of civil society are invited to publicly debate some pressing issue and come to a Gentleman’s agreement. In 1996, the left-wing and pro-sovereignist government succeeded in convincing the labour movement and representatives of the various employers’ associations and Business Councils to agree to a massive program of deficit reduction. In return for the adoption of a no-deficit law, the private sector agreed to a “temporary” tax-hike to contribute to an anti-poverty reduction package. Québec has been able to balance its budget for the past six years.

Can a program of massive cultural change be implemented without the help of the State ? Could a global reform of the educational system have achieved the same results, at a lower cost ? In Turkey, Tunisia, Singapore, Catalonia, the response appears to have been a resounding no. On that front at least, the Québec story is nothing original. .

### **Québec nationalism: its strategic use**

Québec nationalism as it has evolved since the mid-1950s is an important reason for the successes achieved by Québec in the political, economic, social and cultural realms. Of course, this statement will be strongly opposed by those who perceive any nationalism, but especially the nationalism-next-door, as the ultimate social disease.



Québec “nationalism” was born in the mid-1840’s and was associated, at first, with the preservation of the French language, the promotion of a rural way of life, the preservation of Catholicism, as well as a host of “traditional” values: anti-industrialism, anti-unionism, the sanctity of the family, submission to authority, etc. This form of nationalism with its messianistic, anti-English and self-depreciating overtones remained dominant until the mid-1950s. The preservation of the integrity of the Nation and its traditional ways occasionally led to outbursts of anti-semitism and right-wing xenophobia. Both in 1914 and 1939, nationalist leaders refused to fight “British” wars and on the whole remained outside party politics.

In 1966, a new political party, the *National Independence Rally*, gained close to 9 % of the vote in those ridings where it chose to offer candidates, on a platform of social justice, independence, nationalization and assorted “progressive” policies. Four years later, the party had become the official Opposition and eventually gained control, under the name *Parti Québécois*, of the Provincial Government in 1976. Neo-nationalism was born.

Since then, questions have abounded as to the “real nature” of a form of nationalism that seems to have escaped all attempts at easy explanation. The same questions that greeted the electoral coming of age of this neo-nationalism in the mid-sixties continue to dominate Québec’s political science. Why did Québec turn to nationalism as economic conditions were improving and as the persistent income gaps with Anglophones were closing rapidly ? Is it not the case that nationalism is the result of economic dériviation ? Why did Québec youth rally massively to the nationalist position as their level of educational attainment increased and as professional opportunities opened up for them ? Isn’t nationalism the result of ignorance and frustration ? How can one explain the center-left and progressive leanings of this neo-nationalism ? Is it not the case that nationalism always leads to right-wing extremism ?

Every few years, Québec nationalism and its programmatic centerpiece, political sovereignty, as well as its institutional incarnation, the *Parti Québécois*, are pronounced close to disappearance. The latest such pronouncement came in December 2003 when the Liberal Party of Canada chose Paul Martin, another French-speaking Canadian, to succeed Jean Chrétien as Canada’s Prime Minister. The days of the *Bloc Québécois*, the federal wing of the *Parti Québécois*, were supposedly counted as this new popular leader would no doubt use the next federal election, or so it was thought, to put the final nail into the “Separatist Coffin”. Elections were finally held in late June of the following year and the *Bloc* scored its best performance since its creation in 1992.

Among nationalist leaders similar pronouncements are made regarding the imminent final victory of the independence option. What makes Quebec nationalism so interesting and “productive” (in terms of its contribution to cultural adjustment) is its staying power and its capacity to adapt.

The long-running debate as to the primeval or socioeconomic nature of nationalism (Gellner, Smith versus Deutsch and Nairn) tells us little about how nationalism can be made to contribute to cultural adjustment. A strategic vision of nationalism is, we suggest, more useful<sup>29</sup>.

Nationalism and its search for a proper nation-state have provided Québec with a “Final Frontier”, a goal, something to strive for. Wanting to become a nation-state is what all nationalists everywhere and for all times have tried to achieve. Why do alpinists climb mountains? Because they’re there. So it is with nations. In this sense, nationalism provides for normalcy. Being nationalist is following the other’s example. In the absence of violent repression or demographic degradation, ethnic groups will “naturally” gravitate towards the status of nations and eventually nation-states (not unlike democracy which, contrary to popular beliefs, is the easy way out of political organization).

Nationalism is also a great organizer. It provides a code. It helps make sense of what has happened, what is happening and what will happen. It reassures that there is indeed an order to things and that you are part of it. Nationalism is efficient. It reduces “transaction costs”, especially its linguistic and ethnic variety, and increases in-group trust without which “good governance” is impossible. In the so-called global age this is particularly important. It provides a given group with a comparative advantage.

Nationalism in its political incarnation imposes “realism”. For example, Québec has had to “accommodate” itself to its self-proclaimed membership in the North Atlantic and North American political communities. There are certain things one cannot do and others which must be done if one is hoping to become a sovereign state. Coming to terms with indigenous nations is one of these. Promoting free trade and NAFTA is another.

Patriotism, with its “my country right or wrong” mentality, provides little room for self-criticism and self-analysis. Michael Moore is both a rare and puzzling exception. Nationalism strives on self-doubt (“If something could have gone wrong, it has”) and

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<sup>29</sup> The author has developed this concept in “Globalization in a Very Small Place: From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism in Québec”, in Michael Keating (ed.), *Minority Nationalism and the Changing International Order*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, 179-201.

self-criticism. What L. Pye has called the confucio-calvinist sense of uncertainty in the face of salvation imposes the constant reconsideration of one's collective model. As shown in Quebec politics of the last 20 years, praise for the Québec model is always accompanied by a recurrent questioning of this model, its hidden costs. Strategic nationalism implies that there is indeed a way to build a better mouse-trap and that a group, your group, will find it (of course this does not apply to either Americans or to the French who have always known better from the start).

But ethnocultural nationalism, even of the strategic variety, is not without "dangers". What has "saved" Quebec nationalism from itself is its entrance in the political and electoral realm. The Parti Québécois must convince those who it considered the cause of Québec's problems to vote P.Q., a none too easy proposition. As a result, Québec nationalism has evolved into a more civic form of nationalism with its pro-inclusion "We are all Quebecers" rather than the original more exclusive "Le Québec aux Québécois" ("Quebec for Quebecers"). Few are actually duped by this civic posturing, but theatre is also part of democracy and without make-believe the latter would certainly collapse under the weight of its own contradictions.

At the core of this civic nationalism one finds a stated preference for inclusion, tolerance and openness – the easy way of dealing with others – as well as the belief that appeals to the Nation only make sense if they are accompanied by propositions concerning the effective entrenchment of differences, symbolic and other, in a non-Jacobin form of political organization. As a result, nationalism can lead to more rather than less citizenship, a citizenship which is not limited to formal political rights but that also includes obligations as part of the "citizenship deal", as well less tangible rights such as the right to one's own history and the right to share in a "new" history.

A successful civic nationalism, one which maintains both its civic inclusive nature and achieves political self-government, acts as a great equalizer. It creates a new "group", a new "we" – as in "We the people" – which subdues previous differences. It creates a new time frame. In an independent Québec, one former Prime Minister suggested, all citizens would be of "Canadian" origin.

### **Mass culture and mass consumption as transition contributors**

Without a well-developed cultural sector, including both "high culture" and entertainment industries, there is no hope of ever attaining and sustaining the economic take-off stage so much sought after by politicians and economists alike. If given the choice, one should always choose a literary tradition of one's own over a new integrated

steel complex, a national craze over poetry over an indigenous car industry and a national billboard system over agricultural subsidies.

Of course, the ideal is to have all of the above, but as the Québec case makes clear, if one has to start somewhere, the arts and cultural industries in general offer a more profitable starting point than the reverse. *Made in Québec* cultural industries now bring in more revenues than were ever projected by grandiose plans for a steel industry, for an automobile complex and for an asbestos-driven industrial sector. Today all of these have disappeared while France is complaining about the perverse effect of its recent policy of imposing Francophone quotas on its airwaves, the invasion of Québec performers who “control” the entertainment industry in much the same way as English groups did in the United States in the 1970s.

Mass culture is rarely offered as a possible contributor to a successful transition, whether from a-modern to modern societies or communist to liberal ones. At best, it is seen as a by-product – and often a negative one at that – of such a transition. We choose to argue that without mass culture and especially mass consumption (*consommation de masse*), there is little chance for the three sets of variables previously identified – instrumentalization of culture, an active state system and a civic nationalism – to effectively act as catalysts of change. Civic nationalism, to use this example, will remain an intellectual construct, with little effectiveness on the ground, if it is devoid of “feelings” and sentiments. Popular culture, with its reliance on pop stars, mythological television heroes, and sports rivalries contributes to the emergence of civilized passions.

The same could be said for mass consumption and for its much-maligned central activity, shopping. But this is another question, which merits more than simply a passing conclusion.