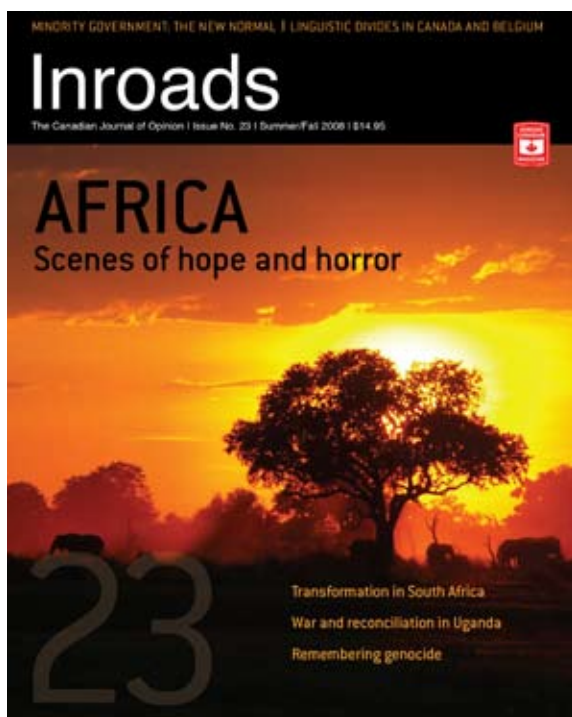


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DANGER

RISQUE DE CHUTE

Language: how well are we doing?

An introduction by John Richards

A country's census tells us something about its concerns. The U.S. census affords much data on black/white and Hispanic/white trends in per capita income, education levels, rates of single parenthood and incarceration. Canada's census affords detailed data on mother tongue (language first understood), language of use (language most used at home), linguistic transfer (switch in language of use) and so on.

Statistics Canada has now rolled out results from the 2006 census. In Quebec overall, French is sustaining its viability more or less. One must be less sanguine about Montreal. On Montreal Island, French speakers (by language of use) enjoy a precarious and declining majority status.

Linda Cardinal provides a tour d'horizon of trends across Canada. Charles Castonguay addresses a specific question: do mother-tongue francophones who come to Canada from outside the country or who migrate interprovincially from Quebec do much to sustain francophone minority communities outside Quebec? After careful analysis of their linguistic transfers, his blunt answer is: no, they don't. If our immigration policy is intended, in part, to sustain viable francophone communities, francophone immigrants should be encouraged to settle in Quebec or the "Bilingual Belt" in Acadia and eastern Ontario.

Johanne Poirier offers a cautionary tale. Like Canada, Belgium is a country whose founding social contract implies state support for more than one lingua franca. In Belgium, most national institutions have now divided on a linguistic basis. The result is very little French-Flemish bilingual interaction and a country whose national politics have become a hollow shell. The implicit question hovering over her article is: how do we Canadians maintain enough French-English interaction to avoid the fate of her country? Writing from Vancouver, a city where French-English bilingualism is rare – very rare – I am not reassured.

John Richards is co-publisher of Inroads

Linguistic peace: a time to take stock

The language situation in Canada and Quebec

by Linda Cardinal

Linda Cardinal is a professor in the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa and a member of the Inroads editorial board.

Statistics Canada's release of 2006 census data on language brought forth a number of reactions, particularly in Quebec. English-speaking Canada seems less given to linguistic anguish than French-speaking Canada, but it would be a mistake to underestimate its diversity of existing languages and potential interest in better understanding the language behaviour of immigrants.

Despite the occasional feverishness of the Canadian language debate, the game, since the publication of 2006 census data, has been to present the most reasonable or measured reading possible, especially as concerns the future of French in Quebec. Although this might appear normal, anyone acquainted with Statistics Canada's tendency to embellish the situation or not call a spade a spade should welcome such a reasoned debate. The release of census data coincides with the appearance of a number of studies undertaken by the Office Québécois de la Langue Française (OQLF) aimed at presenting a detailed picture of Quebecers' long-term language behaviour. These studies, coupled with Statistics Canada data, also make it possible to assess

the effectiveness of the paradigm that for more than 30 years has guided efforts at dealing with language in Quebec and in Canada as a whole. Thus, in the absence of a language crisis in the country, Canadians can measure the progress achieved, highlight the grey areas and identify zones for future intervention.

Understood this way, the current language debate is not an invitation to governments to retreat into indifference and leave citizens to try to figure out the situation. All states, even the most liberal – think of the United States – intervene in the field of language. Canada, for its part, recognizes that language is one of its fundamental characteristics and that it has obligations toward its two official languages, while encouraging the learning of other languages in line with its commitment to multiculturalism. This means that we must take seriously what the 2006 data and the various studies published so far have revealed about the Canadian linguistic landscape – with care, they can be useful in forming language policies.

A portrait of languages in Canada

What can we conclude about the state of official languages in the country? Is French doing well in Quebec? What about bilingualism and French in the rest of the country? What can we say about nonofficial languages in multicultural Canada?

Canada certainly has two official languages, French and English, and that doesn't seem likely to change soon. However, Statistics Canada's 2006 census data force us

to recognize two phenomena: the growth of inequality between the official language groups and the rise of nonofficial languages. French as a mother tongue continues to decline in Canada, falling from 23.5 per cent in 1996 to 22.1 per cent in 2006. English as a mother tongue has also shrunk, from 59.8 per cent in 1996 to 59.1 per cent in 2001 and 57.8 per cent in 2006. However, this situation does not generate language insecurity among the anglophone majority as it does among francophones.

At the same time, the number of allophones and other users of languages other than French and English has increased significantly. Of the 1.1 million immigrants who arrived in Canada from 2001 to 2006, 81 per cent have a mother tongue other than French or English – notably Chinese, Punjabi, Spanish, Arabic, Tagalog and Urdu. This growth and linguistic diversity makes itself felt particularly in metropolitan areas, especially Montreal, where 22 per cent of the population has a mother tongue other than French or English; Toronto, where allophones constitute 44 per cent; and Vancouver, where they represent 41 per cent. Italian, Arabic and Spanish are the leading languages among Montreal's allophones; Chinese, Italian and Punjabi dominate in Toronto; while in Vancouver it's Chinese, Punjabi and Tagalog. For the first time, we are seeing increased numbers of immigrants in middle-sized urban centres such as Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg.

Seen from another angle, 20 per cent of Canadians declare a nonofficial language as their mother tongue. Even if there appears to be more everyday use of nonofficial languages

English has continued to make appreciable gains in Canada since 1971, and the situation is not about to change. In spite of the diverse nature of anglophone Canada, on the linguistic level there is nevertheless a trend toward uniformity.

than in the past, considerable movement toward English can be foreseen. In 2006, 67 per cent of Canadians used English at home. It is a good bet that the children of parents who declared a nonofficial mother tongue will declare English as their mother tongue. Thus, despite a diminishing proportion of mother tongue anglophones, English has continued to make appreciable gains in Canada since 1971, and the situation is not about to change. In spite of the diverse nature of anglophone Canada, on the linguistic level there is nevertheless a trend toward uniformity. Furthermore, French-English bilingualism among anglophone Canadians is stagnating. While 17.4 per cent of Canadians are able to conduct a conversation in either French or English, only 7.5 per cent of anglophones outside Quebec and 5.6 per cent of allophones consider themselves bilingual.

In contrast, especially as a result of high rates of assimilation of francophones outside

Quebec, French is losing ground as a language of everyday use in Canada. In Ontario and New Brunswick, where there are still large concentrations of persons whose mother tongue is French, 41.8 per cent and 11.2 per cent of francophones respectively spoke English most often at home in 2006. Ontario francophones seem thus to have reached a critical point in their language behaviour, which is more like that of allophone immigrants or of francophones in other English Canadian provinces where assimilation reaches alarming proportions: 72 per cent in British Columbia and 69 per cent in Alberta.

Certainly, Statistics Canada takes care to indicate that mother-tongue abandonment, not to speak of assimilation, is not the whole story of language behaviour in minority settings. However, a subsequent study of official languages in minority environments entitled *Minorities Speak Up*¹ does not change the picture that English continues to nibble away at the “territoriality” of French outside Quebec, including in Ontario. In sum, French in contact with English appears to have a hard time resisting a transfer to the dominant language. Isolation seems to contribute to maintaining the vitality of French as an everyday language, but francophones outside Quebec do not all live in small, linguistically homogeneous communities. Charles Castonguay has shown how in Ottawa, where a large part of the Franco-Ontarian population is concentrated, assimilation, especially among youth, is a phenomenon contrary to the openness to both official languages that should prevail in Canada’s capital.²

The situation in Quebec

The language situation in Quebec deserves special attention. The 2006 census data show that, for the first time since 1931, the proportion of Quebecers who have French as their mother tongue has dropped below the threshold of 80 per cent. While these figures play on francophones' language insecurity, the data also show that 24 per cent of allophones in Quebec use French at home, compared to 20 per cent in 2001 and 17 per cent in 1996 – an encouraging progression.

At the same time, the language situation in Montreal, where the future balance of English and French is at stake, is worrying. The data reveal that the percentage of those in the metropolitan region whose mother tongue is French went down from 68.3 per cent in 2001 to 65.7 per cent in 2006, but that the everyday use of French rose slightly from 69.1 per cent to 70.9 per cent. This slight increase is associated with the greater presence of allophones in the metropolitan region, rising from 19 per cent in 2001 to 21.8 per cent in 2006. Certainly, English continues to have an undeniable attraction for immigrants, but they also contribute to the reinforcement of French, even though it is too soon to break out the champagne.

The situation is more precarious on Montreal Island compared to the metropolitan region as a whole. Less than half (49.8 per cent) of the island's population is of French mother tongue, compared to 53.2 per cent in 2001. In addition, French is declining as an everyday language: from 56.4 per cent in 2001 to 54.2 per cent in 2006. Under these

conditions, Montreal corresponds more to the prototype of a bilingual or multilingual city than a francophone metropolis, and (leaving out the suburbs for a moment) the loss of native francophones in Montreal gives the impression of a Quebec cut in two. With francophones on Montreal Island now in the minority, anguish and a certain mistrust of allophones can only increase. It is also worth noting that the number of persons in Gatineau with English as mother tongue grew from 9 per cent in 2001 to 12.6 per cent in 2006.

Data on the language of work, however, present a different picture for the future of French. The great majority of francophones in Canada report using French at work most often. In addition, francophones outside Quebec said they used French at work most often, in proportions that reached 93 per cent in New Brunswick and 71 per cent in Ontario. Furthermore, in Quebec, 65 per cent of allophones and 68 per cent of anglophones use French most often at work. In Montreal, the situation appears to be stable, even though 40 per cent of workers say they use English most often at work.

If these data serve to reassure francophones, they must be used with care, as they are very incomplete. Using a language more often than another at work is not synonymous with working in that language. To measure the situation well, additional studies of possible connections between the use of French or English at work and respondents' sphere of activity and level of schooling will be needed. Such studies will give us a better idea of the effects of globalization on the language of

work, but also of the effects of Bill 101, the Charter of the French Language.

To this effect, Statistics Canada's experts have suggested caution in interpreting the results, indicating that the contribution of *francotrope* immigrants to Quebec – allophones who speak Arabic, Romanian and Spanish – constitutes the main reason for the increase in French as the language of work. Thus, the effect of Bill 101 on the job market would be only indirect, even though the francization efforts of large companies – which according to Simon Langlois, chair of the Comité de Suivi de la Situation Linguistique of the OQLF, have borne fruit – need to be taken into account as well.³ It would be equally important to specify the context in which workers use French or English. Is it in communicating with the public, their colleagues or their boss? Data on language use at work open a new field of research which may teach us more about the language behaviour of Quebecers and Canadians in general.

What now?

The absence of a language or national-unity crisis in the country allows a less politicized reading than usual of the situation of official and unofficial languages. This relative linguistic peace should also push decision-makers to go beyond electoral concerns and think more about the effectiveness of the paradigms that underlie language legislation such as the federal Official Languages Act and Quebec's Bill 101. The Official Languages Act does not

appear to have a direct effect on the potential for French to blossom in Canada or on the openness of anglophones to the country's other official language. As for Bill 101, experts agree for the moment that the situation in Quebec is not catastrophic and efforts toward francization seem to be working, but that we must stay the course.

Canada and Quebec have approached language in different ways. Canada has favoured a personal approach to language arrangements founded on recognition of the rights of the individual. More precisely, in 1969 Canada adopted legislation proclaiming the equality of French and English, a concrete expression of its project of a bilingual nation-state founded on the recognition of the individual right to service in the official language of one's choice. Besides constitutional recognition of French and English in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms since 1982, the Canadian government adopted a new Official Languages Act in 1988. This legislation allows the government to take stronger action and intervene more broadly in fostering official-language minorities – including in areas of provincial jurisdiction – as well as giving federal civil servants the right to work in the official language of their choice.

In contrast, Quebec has favoured the principle of territoriality, aiming to strengthen the country's minority language within its territory. Quebec sees itself as a francophone state in North America and claims full recognition of this responsibility in or out of Canadian federalism. In 1974, it adopted Bill 22, making French the official language of Quebec. Under this legislation, French had to be used

In contrast, Quebec has favoured the principle of territoriality, aiming to strengthen the country's minority language within its territory.



in public signage, businesses were required to implement francization programs, children of immigrants had to go to French schools and the French text of laws was given priority. Bill 101, passed in 1977, further extended the scope of Bill 22 and other existing measures.

Up to now, the Canadian and Quebec approaches to language have coexisted despite the tension between them, notably in relation to language of education. Bill 101 constitutes a counterweight to the effects of the Official Languages Act in Quebec, where it promotes English. As well, the federal legislation has made possible the hiring of more francophones in Canada's civil service, thus putting an end to injustices built up over several decades.

However, the publication of recent statistical data reveals that the balance of power between the two paradigms is fragile and more targeted action by Ottawa is required. Instead of pitting Canadian bilingualism against Quebec unilingualism, Canada would benefit from reducing the irritants between the two approaches. By making a greater effort

to combine the advantages of both, it could create a more holistic model for language arrangements, better adapted to the linguistic needs of the country.

As an example, in December 2007 Ottawa launched consultations as it prepared to release a new action plan, as part of its efforts to help official-language minorities in the country develop and flourish. Ottawa has already invested substantially in the development of official-language minorities – around \$750 million was put into projects following the release of an initial action plan on official languages. However, its investments now need to be coupled with greater concern for concrete and sustainable results, a concern previous governments have lacked. The federal government could also ensure that its actions contribute to reinforcing the territoriality of French, especially in Ontario and New Brunswick where the future of French outside Quebec is at stake. Francophones in these regions should not only be proud to be bilingual – they should also be able to live in French.

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Taking an integrated approach, the federal government should further recognize that it has an important role to play in the area of personal bilingualism. Beyond the national unity debate, anglophone Canadians should further honour the French language. And they could take their cue from the Prime Minister, for whatever his severest critics may think, Stephen Harper is a model bilingual citizen! However, he needs to go further in redefining the Canadian linguistic pact as a collaborative bilingualism project rather than a competitive one. In the era of globalization, in both Quebec and the rest of the country we need citizens open to multilingualism – people who can act as conduits and travellers from one culture to another.

Thus the federal government could take the initiative in reviving interest in the learning of French in Canada. Canada is a fascinating laboratory for language coexistence. Although spoken by fewer people than English, French is, like English, a major international language. Ensuring a large number of French-English bilingual Canadians is part of the requirements for solidarity among Canadian citizens, akin to equalization in fiscal matters. Strengthening

our bilingual reputation also enhances our distinctiveness on the international scene.

More precisely, the Canadian government could foster language exchange within the public service, further encourage French immersion in bilingual universities and propose a bold exchange program between francophone and anglophone students. It should also favour the learning of third languages, especially those that are most widely spoken in the country, such as Spanish and Arabic in Quebec and Chinese in the rest of Canada. This way, it could reap greater benefit from Canada's ambient multilingualism and excellence in language learning, without calling into question its official languages.

Until now, the federal government has not thought seriously about how its actions could contribute more directly to perpetuating French in Quebec. Its recognition of Quebec as a nation in a united Canada, like its recognition of French as a founding language of the country, should contribute to guiding its actions in the domain of official language. An initial gesture, which would reassure Quebecers whose mother tongue is French, would be to recognize Bill 101 in the constitution.

For its part, how does Quebec see the future of its territorial model? If language transfers in Quebec toward French seem due more to immigration policies than to Bill 101, Quebecers might ask themselves whether Bill 101 could be applied more broadly so that the government's francization efforts could be better targeted. In a recent article, *Le Devoir* columnist Michel David wrote that the Quebec government was putting no language requirements on foreign investors, most of whom are

from China and the Middle East.⁴ In addition, for 30 years the government of Quebec, whatever party was in power, has refused for economic reasons to impose francization on businesses with 50 or fewer employees. However, experts consider that Quebec should insist on the francization of businesses with fewer than 50 employees, as they appear to employ large numbers of allophones. Most allophones and francophones accept the fact of living in a francophone society. They should therefore accept certain constraints.

The efforts of anglophone hardliners in Quebec to limit the direct effects of Bill 101 in the field of education should also stop, since they can only increase the language insecurity of francophones and send the wrong message to allophones. They also serve to perpetuate a siege mentality in the anglophone community that damages the credibility of the network of anglophone associations. More precisely, the recourse to the courts by some anglophones who exploit prejudices about the Quebec education system can only harm the linguistic balance. A better means must be found to encourage anglophones and francophones to work together on language learning instead of continuing to throw oil on the fire.

Premier Jean Charest's lack of leadership in this domain also contributes to undermining the situation. The proposal to teach English from Grade 1 that he implemented in 2005 only added to the discomfort, since it was a cosmetic change aimed at political advantage rather than the result of serious thinking about language learning in Quebec. However, in spite of their insecurity, francophone Quebecers never stop saying in every possible forum that

they want to learn more English to get better jobs. Even the Parti Québécois thinks francophones need to master English better.

Certainly, in the Canadian context, francophones should not have to face great difficulty in getting better jobs because they don't speak English. However, the time is past when francophones made a political choice not to learn English. Young people no longer have the complex their elders did, and don't feel oppressed by the English language. On the other hand, Quebecers don't need to hear, as they often do, that learning English will make them better citizens or that it's more important to master English than mathematics or the sciences. Unilingual anglophone Canadians rarely acknowledge that their lack of ability to speak other languages makes them less open to the rest of the world. Francophone Quebecers need, however, to read and write their language to international standards. Integrating too many anglicisms or idiosyncrasies into the language taught in school – and used in the media – is yet another way for French to disappear in North America.

Finally, the Quebec government should spare no effort in the area of teaching French to immigrants. If one thing came clear in the media coverage of the debate on reasonable accommodation, it is that Quebecers want to integrate immigrants linguistically more than to limit their liberty of religious and cultural expression. The more immigrants adopt French as their everyday language and send their children to French schools, the more French will become the next generation's mother tongue, even in Montreal. Middle-sized cities in English Canada – cities other

than Toronto and Vancouver – now have large immigrant populations. The same thing needs to happen in Quebec. Immigrants to Quebec should be encouraged to settle outside Montreal. If Montreal needs immigrants, the rest of Quebec should not be left out.

Toward a new paradigm?

The study of language statistics should not serve only to fuel debate among experts; it should also guide actual language policy pursued by governments. New factors such as labour mobility, weaker government intervention, the knowledge economy and innovation are all putting pressure on national or minority language arrangements and can create large imbalances in some parts of the world. For a number of years, the Quebec government refused to face these questions. However, the publication of the language data from the 2006 Canadian census revealed that language insecurity is still an important factor among many Quebecers whose mother tongue is French, even if progress has been made in the last 30 years in the francization of the workplace and of allophones.

The ever more pronounced weakness of French outside Quebec, the gains of English in public space in Canada and Quebec, the increasing number of immigrants whose mother tongue is not French and legislation that does not adequately contribute to the balance of

French and English in the country constitute new concerns and challenges that hint at the possibility of a paradigm shift in language arrangements in Canada and in Quebec. In this context, holistic action is needed that further recognizes the necessary territoriality of French so that its survival can be guaranteed. A good language policy should take account of this unavoidable phenomenon and always aim as much as possible to strengthen the concentration of languages on their territories. French being weaker than English, the federal government should not hesitate to declare zones where the use of French is unquestioned. For its part, Quebec should proceed along the same lines and further promote French in all sectors.

Notes

- ¹ Jean-Pierre Corbeil, Claude Grenier and Sylvie Lafrenière, *Minorities Speak Up: Results of the Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007).
- ² Charles Castonguay, “Démographie comparée des populations francophones du Nouveau-Brunswick et de l’Ontario,” in Simon Langlois and Jocelyn Létourneau, eds., *Aspects de la nouvelle francophonie canadienne* (Quebec City: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2004), pp. 215–30.
- ³ Simon Langlois, “Un portrait juste,” *La Presse*, March 6, 2008, p. A27.
- ⁴ Michel David, “Le prix à payer,” *Le Devoir*, January 26–27, 2008.

Francophone immigration beyond the Bilingual Belt

Wasting a precious resource

by Charles Castonguay

Charles Castonguay is an adjunct professor in the mathematics and statistics department at the University of Ottawa. The author wishes to acknowledge the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada research grant while preparing this paper.

* Throughout this article, the suffix *-phone* refers to mother tongue. A *francophone* is a person whose mother tongue is French, an *anglophone* is a person whose mother tongue is English and an *allophone* is a person whose mother tongue is any other language. By *French-speaking* I mean a person who reports speaking French most often at home at the time of the census. Similarly, an *English-speaking* person is one whose current main home language is English.

As a journalist, Graham Fraser could be fairly critical of Canada's language policy, but he did find bright spots. One of them was the idea of attracting francophone immigrants to bolster the francophone minorities outside Quebec.* He observed with satisfaction that the target set for this goal (following the 2003–2008 Action Plan for Canada's official languages, introduced by Stéphane Dion as a minister in the Chrétien government) had already been surpassed by 2004.¹

Now that he has taken on the role of Commissioner of Official Languages, Fraser continues to favour this idea. In his first annual report, he notes that Citizenship and Immigration Canada has now set the target of attracting between 8,000 and 10,000 French-speaking immigrants per year to francophone communities outside Quebec. This is a very tall order. Indeed, the Standing Committee on Official Languages has recommended a thorough reevaluation of the definitions and targets put forth in the 2006 Strategic Plan to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities.²

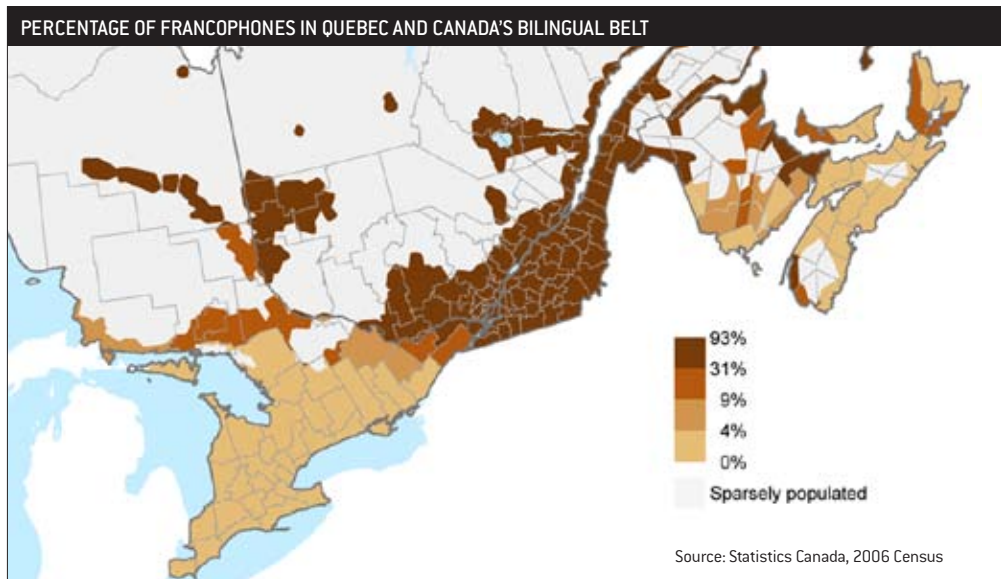
It is difficult to share Fraser’s enthusiasm if one takes a look at the analysis on which the policy was initially based, and at its likely contribution to the viability of francophone populations beyond Quebec and the “Bilingual Belt,” running roughly from Moncton to Sault Sainte-Marie.³ Keeping the minority numbers up through francophone immigration to massively English-speaking parts of Canada may in fact do more harm than good to the francophone population of Canada as a whole.

The reasoning underlying the policy

From the very beginning of her term of office, former Commissioner of Official Languages Dyane Adam insisted on using immigration to compensate for losses incurred by the francophone minorities through assimilation to English.⁴ The federal government followed suit in 2002 with a new Immigration and Refugee

Protection Act which stipulates that immigration must support the development of the official-language minorities. Citizenship and Immigration Canada subsequently launched its first Strategic Framework to Foster Immigration to Francophone Minority Communities outside Quebec in November 2003.

Examination of the two studies Adam used to justify her proposed policy raises doubts as to its soundness. Based on 1996 census data, the first study shows that adoption of English as main home language reaches 50 per cent among francophone immigrants after 10 years of residence outside Quebec, whether they hail from France or Africa. This is a higher anglicization rate than that of francophones outside Quebec who were born in Canada. The study also shows that Quebec’s share of francophone immigration was lower than the relative weight of Quebec’s francophone population within the total francophone



population of Canada.⁵ Right off the bat, then, if francophone immigrants outside Quebec assimilate more rapidly to English than native-born francophones while, at the same time, Quebec's francophone population doesn't receive its fair share of francophone immigrants, a policy encouraging even more francophones to immigrate outside Quebec doesn't look like such a good idea.

The second study deals with those having French as First Official Language Spoken (FOLS). Together with francophones, this census statistic includes allophones who report being able to speak French but not English. From this standpoint, in 1996 the proportion of immigrants among the French FOLS population was already as high in the rest of Canada (ROC) as it was in Quebec. The Commissioner preferred, however, to consider the share of immigrants in the French FOLS population and in the English FOLS population. But Quebec appears disadvantaged as compared to the ROC in this respect too. In Quebec, immigrants make up 27 per cent of the English FOLS population compared to only 5 per cent for the French FOLS population, while in the ROC, immigrants make up 19 per cent of the English FOLS population and 5 per cent of the French, a less disadvantageous ratio for French than in Quebec.⁶

Clearly, then, the basis for the current policy is questionable and calls for closer scrutiny. To this end I use custom cross-tabulations of 2001 and 2006 census data on mother tongue, language spoken most often at home (or main home language), age, immigration status and place of birth.⁷ Summary tables from the 2006 census are also of help, notably regarding main

language of work. Analysis of the data shows that an alternative immigration policy – to be introduced below – would in all likelihood contribute more effectively to the demographic vitality of French in Canada.

Francophone immigration inside and outside Quebec

No matter whether they have French as FOLS or not, the contribution of allophone immigrants to the French-speaking population in the ROC is negligible. Of the 1,372,000 allophone immigrants outside Quebec who had adopted either French or English as main home language in 2006, close to 1,365,000 had chosen English. A little fewer than 8,000 had chosen French. Whence our focus on francophone immigration.

On average, immigrants are slightly less than 30 years old when they arrive in Canada. As a result, the contribution of francophone immigration can best be observed among the population of young francophone adults

Keeping the minority numbers up through francophone immigration to massively English-speaking parts of Canada may in fact do more harm than good to the francophone population of Canada as a whole.

aged 25 to 34. In 1971, the proportion of immigrants in this population was less than 3 per cent in Quebec and close to 4 per cent in the rest of Canada. By 2001, the corresponding figures were somewhat more than 3 per cent in Quebec and close to 6 per cent in the ROC. During these 30 years, the francophone population outside Quebec almost doubled its advantage over Quebec's in this respect.

Another approach is to see how many francophone immigrants settle inside and outside Quebec. Of the 47,600 francophones who reported that they had immigrated to Canada during 2001–2006, 80.4 per cent were enumerated in Quebec and 19.6 per cent in the ROC. Since Quebec's francophones currently weigh in at 85.8 per cent of the total francophone population of Canada, as far as its share of recent francophone immigration to Canada is concerned, Quebec thus appears shortchanged again. If all periods of immigration are combined, Quebec's share of the Canadian total of 211,000 francophone immigrants in 2006 is even smaller, at 76.4 per cent.

Whichever way one looks at the data, the ROC is already doing better than Quebec in terms of francophone immigration.

The demographic deficit

A population's intrinsic demographic viability can best be gauged by its reproduction ratio. This is calculated by dividing the number of children aged 0 to 4 by the number of adults in the five-year age group most likely to include the children's parents.⁸

According to this ratio, Canada's anglophone population has no problem reproducing itself. Anglicization of francophones and allophones, whose children are normally anglophones, almost fully makes up for inadequate anglophone fertility. The same is true of Quebec's anglophone population, whose reproduction ratio in 2006 is close to 1.

The reproduction ratio of Canada's francophone population is a different matter. In Quebec itself, the francization of allophones is too sparse to make up for the deficit incurred by inadequate francophone fertility. Outside Quebec, the anglicization of young francophone adults, who usually pass on English as mother tongue to their children, makes things even worse. Consequently the deficit between successive generations of francophones at the 2006 census is well over one third in New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba, and of the order of 50 per cent or more in the remaining provinces.⁹

Making up for the current intergenerational deficit of Canada's three major francophone populations would require some 5,000 additional francophone immigrants every five years in New Brunswick, more than 10,000 in Ontario and more than 70,000 in Quebec.

In terms of real numbers, making up for the current intergenerational deficit of Canada's three major francophone populations would require some 5,000 additional francophone immigrants every five years in New Brunswick, more than 10,000 in Ontario and more than 70,000 in Quebec. In view of these needs, francophone immigration to Canada is too precious to squander.

The impact of migration from Quebec and abroad

Certain provinces such as Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia often enjoy more favourable economic conditions than others. This attracts not only immigrants but a considerable number of francophones from Quebec as well, who help compensate for the francophone minorities' demographic deficits.

When they move, interprovincial migrants are only slightly younger on average than immigrants. Accordingly, I compare the

percentage of francophones in the ROC aged 25 to 34 who were born in their province with the percentage born in Quebec or abroad. Though the custom tabulation underlying Table 1 is drawn from the 2001 census, the situation it describes remains basically the same today.

Table 1 confirms the contribution of immigration to the francophone populations of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. But it also reveals that the contribution of Quebec francophones is much more significant in all of the provinces as well as in the Territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut combined). In particular, young adults born in Quebec account for one quarter of francophones aged 25 to 34 in Nova Scotia and Ontario, a plurality of those in Newfoundland and Alberta and an absolute majority in B.C.¹⁰ We also note that the francophone population in the Territories is essentially made up of transients: all francophones born in the Territories have left for elsewhere by the time they reach 25 to 34 years of age.

TABLE 1: FRANCOPHONES AGED 25–34 OUTSIDE QUEBEC BY PLACE OF BIRTH, 2001			
	BORN IN PROVINCE (%)	BORN IN QUEBEC (%)	BORN ABROAD (%)
Newfoundland	27	40	8
Prince Edward Island	57	11	4
Nova Scotia	52	25	4
New Brunswick	85	9	2
Ontario	64	24	7
Manitoba	76	10	3
Saskatchewan	58	15	6
Alberta	27	35	7
British Columbia	10	51	13
Territories	0	58	4

Source: 2001 census custom tabulation.

The situation is similar in the major urban areas outside Quebec which contain substantial francophone populations. The nine Census Metropolitan Areas (CMAs) listed in Table 2 together include 85 per cent of all francophones who recently immigrated to the ROC. The contribution of francophone immigrants is strong in the Toronto and Vancouver CMAs, substantial in Calgary and Ottawa and significant in Halifax and Edmonton. But migrants from Quebec are much more important everywhere. They represent a quarter or more of young francophone adults in Ottawa and Edmonton, a plurality in Toronto, Halifax and Calgary and an absolute majority in Vancouver.

The last two CMAs in Table 2 stand out in a special way. Only 13 per cent of young adult francophones in Calgary were born in Alberta and a mere 9 per cent of those in Vancouver were born in B.C. Such figures bear witness to the extremely high anglicization rates which prevail among francophone adults in these two provinces. This translates into intergenerational deficits of the order of two thirds for the francophone populations of both provinces, as

very few francophone parents in Alberta and B.C raise their children in French.

A flash in the pan

The extremely low reproduction ratios of the francophone populations in Alberta and B.C., in particular, may appear paradoxical at first glance. One could expect that a strong influx of new francophones from Quebec and abroad would considerably strengthen the overall francophone population's resistance to anglicization in these provinces. But such is not the case.

For a given francophone minority, assimilation to English among the native-born is generally considered to develop during adolescence; to be in full swing by early adulthood, when individuals leave home to live on their own; and to increase more slowly afterwards, so that further anglicization becomes just about negligible beyond the age of 40 or so.

This model must be delayed somewhat for immigrants and migrants from Quebec, who mostly arrive in the ROC as young adults.

TABLE 2: FRANCOPHONES AGED 25–34 BY PLACE OF BIRTH, CERTAIN METROPOLITAN AREAS OUTSIDE QUEBEC, 2001

	BORN IN PROVINCE (%)	BORN IN QUEBEC (%)	BORN ABROAD (%)
Halifax	22	44	5
Moncton	82	9	3
Ottawa	62	25	7
Sudbury	92	6	1
Toronto	32	38	21
Winnipeg	75	10	3
Edmonton	32	30	5
Calgary	13	44	10
Vancouver	9	52	19

Source: 2001 census custom tabulation.

Learning English or improving one's mastery of it, then modifying one's habits to the point of using English more often than French in the intimacy of one's home is a process that normally takes several years. To register the full power of attraction of English on immigrant and migrant populations, it is thus necessary to focus on a group that is sufficiently advanced in age.

For this reason, in Table 3 we use francophone adults aged 45 to 54 to compare the assimilating power of English among the native-born with that among migrants from Quebec and abroad. As Newfoundland, PEI and Saskatchewan each had fewer than a hundred francophone immigrants aged 45 to 54 in 2001, and not many more francophone migrants of the same age from Quebec, the comparisons made for these provinces must be considered as highly approximate. Table 3 is again derived from a 2001 census custom tabulation, but preliminary exploration of the 2006 data suggests that the situation described would not be significantly different in 2006.

Table 3 reveals that within a given province, the power of assimilation of English

is approximately of the same order among francophones from Quebec and abroad as among the native-born. So much so that with the exception of New Brunswick, anglicization rates of immigrants and Quebec migrants are as a rule higher than 50 per cent.¹¹ This means that right from the very first generation, francophones from Quebec and abroad contribute more to the ROC's English-speaking population than to its French-speaking population.

One may nevertheless note that in each of the four western provinces the anglicization rate is highest among the francophones born in that province, somewhat lower among francophones born in Quebec and a little lower still among francophones born abroad. Though Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario do not follow this rule, this may be due to the fact that a large share of francophones born in these three provinces live in rural areas where English is less invasive, whereas francophones from Quebec and abroad tend to settle in large urban centres where English holds sway.

It is worth clarifying this point by examining the situation in our nine CMAs where,

TABLE 3: ANGLICIZATION RATE OF FRANCOPHONES AGED 45–54 OUTSIDE QUEBEC BY PLACE OF BIRTH, 2001			
	BORN IN PROVINCE (%)	BORN IN QUEBEC (%)	BORN ABROAD (%)
Newfoundland	62	59	60
Prince Edward Island	66	63	43
Nova Scotia	45	63	61
New Brunswick	12	13	20
Ontario	47	44	53
Manitoba	67	56	46
Saskatchewan	87	81	53
Alberta	83	67	63
British Columbia	89	71	65

Source: 2001 census custom tabulation.

regardless of their origin, all francophones share a common linguistic environment. As Halifax, Moncton and Sudbury each had only about a hundred francophone immigrants aged 45 to 54 in 2001, anglicization rates for the latter in these three CMAs are highly approximate.

Table 4 shows that in general, within the same linguistic environment, anglicization is indeed highest among francophones born in the province concerned, lower among those born in Quebec and lower still among those born abroad.

This is understandable. As a rule, francophones born in the ROC are exposed to English just about from birth. In contrast, francophones from Quebec have usually spent the first 20 years or so of their lives in a predominantly French-speaking environment. Upon immigrating, francophones from abroad are, on average, a little older still than migrants from Quebec, so that before arriving in the ROC they have normally lived for a few additional years in an environment where French is even less challenged by English than in Quebec.

The expectations raised at the outset of this section are thus to a certain extent borne out. Immigrants and migrants from Quebec do lower somewhat the anglicization rates of the francophone minorities outside Quebec. However, immersion in an English-speaking environment very quickly takes its toll: by the age of 45, francophones from Quebec and abroad contribute more to the English-speaking population than to the French-speaking population in the CMAs beyond the Bilingual Belt. In this regard, Moncton, Ottawa and Sudbury are the only large urban centres where francophone newcomers are more than just a flash in the pan.

Francophone versus allophone behaviour

Comparing the language behaviour of francophone and allophone immigrants in a common environment is also revealing.¹²

In the three Bilingual Belt CMAs, the anglicization rate of francophone immigrants is much lower in 2006 than that of allophone immigrants. But the rates for both types

TABLE 4: ANGLICIZATION RATE OF FRANCOPHONES AGED 45–54 BY PLACE OF BIRTH

	BORN IN PROVINCE (%)	BORN IN QUEBEC (%)	BORN ABROAD (%)
Halifax	89	63	49
Moncton	25	23	20
Ottawa	33	31	32
Sudbury	48	36	37
Toronto	78	62	59
Winnipeg	69	57	52
Edmonton	86	63	54
Calgary	90	73	68
Vancouver	85	68	61

Source: 2001 census custom tabulation.

of immigrants are identical in Halifax and Winnipeg, while the anglicization rate for francophone immigrants is some 10 points higher than that for allophone immigrants in Edmonton, 15 points higher in Toronto, 20 points higher in Calgary and 25 points higher in Vancouver (2001 data point to the same striking conclusion).

However one looks at things, if the contribution of immigration to the francophone populations outside Quebec is to be optimized, the Bilingual Belt stands out as the obvious destination to favour. Like allophones, francophones who immigrate beyond the Belt are evidently more bent on bettering their lot by shifting to English than on bolstering the foundering demographics of the flimsier French-speaking minorities.

Second-generation francophones

In its presentation of the 2006 census data, Statistics Canada has introduced a “generation status” variable based on the place of birth of respondents’ parents.¹³ The results allow us to investigate language behaviour among second-generation francophones – francophones born in Canada but with at least one parent born abroad.

Second-generation francophones in the ROC generally experience English immersion, so to speak, from birth. Since the anglicization rates of first-generation francophones (francophone immigrants) outside Quebec quickly become almost as high as those of native-born francophones, the anglicization rates of second-generation francophones can be expected to be no different from those of

third- (or higher-) generation francophones, that is, francophones born in Canada with both parents born in Canada.

Once again, this can best be tested within a common linguistic environment. Our nine CMAs together contain over half of all second-generation francophones outside Quebec. Anglicization rates for second- and third-generation francophones turn out to be essentially identical in all of them except Ottawa, where the anglicization rate for the second-generation francophones is 10 points higher than for third-generation francophones. As expected, then, by the second generation no trace is left of the slightly greater resistance to anglicization observed among first-generation (immigrant) francophones.

As with the immigrant generation, in the three Bilingual Belt CMAs the anglicization rates of second-generation francophones are much lower than those of second-generation allophones. But in the other six CMAs, the anglicization rates of second-generation francophones and allophones are generally identical. The anglicization rate among second-generation francophones aged 15 years or more in Toronto, for example, was 71 per cent, as compared to 74 per cent among second-generation allophones. In Vancouver, it was 74 per cent among francophones and 73 per cent among allophones.

Combining this information with the results of the previous section, we may conclude that in terms of language behaviour at home, first- and second-generation francophones outside the Bilingual Belt are, at the very least, just as prone as first- and second-generation allophones to assimilate to English.

Language of work in the ROC

The almost universal use of English as language of work is no doubt the principal reason for such widespread adoption of English as main home language among immigrant and second-generation francophones in urban centres beyond the Bilingual Belt. According to the 2006 census, French was the main language of work of only 1 per cent of all workers in the Halifax and Winnipeg CMAs, and of less than 0.5 per cent of workers in Toronto, Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver.¹⁴

Table 5 documents the widespread use of English as main language of work among employed francophones in particular CMAs. Together, our nine CMAs include three quarters of all immigrant francophone workers outside Quebec in 2006 and 85 per cent of those who immigrated to the ROC during 2001–2006. The scanty number of francophone immigrants in Halifax, Moncton and Sudbury again makes the results for these three CMAs highly approximate.

The use of English as main language of work by francophone workers is the rule even in the Bilingual Belt CMAs. The only exception is for immigrant workers in Sudbury. This may well be due to sampling error, as there were only 180 immigrant francophone workers in Sudbury in 2006. In CMAs outside the Belt, English is the main language of work among the great majority of francophone workers, immigrants and nonimmigrants alike. No wonder, then, that anglicization rates quickly become so high among immigrants and migrants from Quebec in these urban centres.

In almost all of the CMAs in Table 5, the use of English as main language of work is nonetheless somewhat less frequent (and the use of French correspondingly somewhat more frequent) among francophone immigrants than among native-born francophones. This may be because some potential immigrant francophone workers have simply not yet mastered English well enough to find a job, and so are not yet accounted for in Table 5.

TABLE 5: PROPORTION OF FRANCOPHONE WORKERS USING ENGLISH AS MAIN LANGUAGE OF WORK, CERTAIN METROPOLITAN AREAS OUTSIDE QUEBEC, 2006

	TOTAL (%)	NON-IMMIGRANTS (%)	IMMIGRANTS (%)
Halifax	86	86	79
Moncton	52	52	52
Ottawa	63	63	57
Sudbury	77	77	41
Toronto	84	86	80
Winnipeg	79	79	65
Edmonton	90	90	91
Calgary	91	91	89
Vancouver	88	89	86

Source: 2006 census summary table 97-555-XCB2006033.

Also, immigrant francophones can often be more proficient in French than Canadian-born francophones in the ROC, and thus win preference for jobs where a thorough mastery of French is essential, such as in media or teaching professions. Whatever may be the case, it remains that beyond the Bilingual Belt, French is rarely the main language of work among francophone immigrants.

Sense of belonging

Shortly after the 2006 census, Statistics Canada carried out a survey on the linguistic vitality of anglophones in Quebec and francophones in the rest of Canada. The results regarding sense of belonging are perhaps the most telling of the many aspects investigated. Respondents were asked with which language group they identify the most: “to the francophone group only”, “mainly to the francophone group”, “to both groups equally”, “mainly to the anglophone group” or “only to the anglophone group.”

The results for the ROC depict the same situation as the census data on home language and language of work. Francophones in New Brunswick identified much more strongly with the francophone group than with the anglophone group, especially in the north and the southeast (including Moncton) – the Bilingual Belt portion of the province. In Ontario, francophones in the east (including Ottawa) and the northeast (including Sudbury) – again, regions within the Belt – also identified mainly with the francophone group, albeit to a lesser degree than francophones in New Brunswick.¹⁵

Elsewhere in Ontario (including Toronto), as well as in Nova Scotia and Manitoba, francophones identified somewhat more with the anglophone group than with the francophone group. Francophones in the remaining western provinces clearly identified themselves more strongly with the anglophone group, while francophones’ sense of belonging was about equally split between the anglophone and francophone groups in the remaining Maritime provinces.

In sum, a distinctly francophone identity remains well rooted solely in the Bilingual Belt portions of the ROC. Their francophone populations are the only ones to offer a sound enough stock upon which francophone immigration can be viably grafted.

How to best manage a scarce resource

Actually, the picture was clear right from the start, at the time the reality of the Bilingual Belt was first recognized. It has simply become clearer with the passage of time and the accumulation of evidence. Outside Quebec, it is just within the Bilingual Belt regions of New Brunswick and Ontario that the retention of French as main home language remains reasonably high, that francophones retain a sufficiently distinct identity and that French still pays off enough in the workplace.

The national unity imperative has no doubt clouded perception of this reality. Saving face vis-à-vis public opinion in Quebec by keeping francophone numbers afloat at all cost in the ROC has led, among other things, to the giddy concept of “sustainable assimilation,” that is,

“the rate of assimilation compatible with a sustainable minority community.”¹⁶ Presumably, even an assimilation rate of 90 per cent can be “sustained” if a sufficiently large stream of francophone immigrants is steadily poured into the linguistic melting pot. The problem with a contrivance of this kind is that it does nothing to enhance the long-term viability of French in Canada. The contribution of immigration to the francophone populations beyond the Bilingual Belt is ephemeral.

Nor should the needs of Quebec be ignored. As we have seen, Quebec is not receiving its fair share of francophone immigration to Canada. And Quebec francophones have just been jolted by a sharp drop during 2001–2006 in their share of the population in the Montreal CMA as well as in the entire province.¹⁷

This is not merely due to allophone immigration. Anglophone immigration to Quebec has helped the anglophone and English-speaking shares of Quebec’s population remain stable during 2001–2006, giving English the edge over French in both respects. Despite Quebec’s continued efforts to recruit more francophone immigrants, the recent contribution of immigration to the province’s anglophone minority was, proportionally speaking, more than double its contribution to the francophone majority.¹⁸

In stark contrast to the situation for French in the ROC, net francization of anglophone immigrants in La Belle Province is nonexistent, so that anglophone immigration contributes in full measure to the English-speaking population of Quebec as well. Indeed, the 2001–2006 growth rates of the anglophone and English-speaking populations alike were

higher in Montreal and in the province than those of the francophone and French-speaking populations. Given the new state of affairs, it is conceivable that more may be done to foster Canadian unity by encouraging francophone immigration to Quebec rather than to massively English-speaking destinations in the ROC.

The overarching objective of any policy on francophone immigration should be to sustain a viable francophone population in Canada as a whole. Since francophone immigrants are in relatively rare supply, they should be guided toward the francophone populations that have the highest linguistic vitality but, at the same time, face the greatest intergenerational deficits in terms of real numbers. This means toward Quebec and the Bilingual Belt portions of New Brunswick and Ontario.

In his recent round of consultations, Bernard Lord failed to address this issue.¹⁹ The cosmetic use of francophone immigration to maintain the illusion of viable francophone minorities coast to coast to coast nonetheless boils down to wasting a precious resource. Canadian language policy needs to face up to reality.

Notes

- ¹ Graham Fraser, *Sorry, I Don’t Speak French: Confronting the Canadian Crisis That Won’t Go Away* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2006), p. 255.
- ² Graham Fraser, *Annual Report 2006–2007* (Ottawa: Commissioner of Official Languages, 2007), p. 14; Standing Committee on Official Languages, *Communities Speak Out: Hear Our Voice. The Vitality of Official Language*

Minority Communities (Ottawa, 2007), pp. 82–89.

- ³ More precisely, beyond Quebec the Bilingual Belt includes all counties in northern and south-eastern New Brunswick and in eastern and northeastern Ontario in which francophones make up ten per cent of the population or more. See Richard J. Joy, *Languages in Conflict: The Canadian Experience* (Ottawa: Author, 1967 and Toronto: McLelland and Stewart, 1972).
- ⁴ Dyane Adam, *Annual Report 1999–2000 and Annual Report 2000–2001* (Ottawa: Commissioner of Official Languages, 2000 and 2001), pp. 5 and 58–61 respectively.
- ⁵ Jack Jedwab, *Immigration and the Vitality of Canada's Official Language Communities: Policy, Demography and Identity* (Ottawa: Commissioner of Official Languages, 2002), pp. 47, 22.
- ⁶ Carsten Quell, *Official Languages and Immigration: Obstacles and Opportunities for Immigrants and Communities* (Ottawa: Commissioner of Official Languages, 2002), pp. 5–6, 60; Dyane Adam, “L’immigration et la francophonie canadienne,” *Francophonies d’Amérique*, Vol. 16 (2003), pp. 27–35.
- ⁷ Such detailed information is necessarily derived from the 20 per cent sample data. Sampling error makes the results highly approximate for small populations.
- ⁸ Women tend to bear children relatively late in life nowadays, so that for the 2006 census data the five-year age group from 28 to 32 best approximates the parents’ age group.
- ⁹ A deficit between successive generations occurs when the reproduction ratio is less than 1. For example, the reproduction ratio of Ontario’s francophone population in 2006 is 0.63. Its intergenerational deficit is consequently 0.37, or 37 per cent.
- ¹⁰ Francophones born elsewhere in Canada make up the missing percentages in Table 1. For example, 31 per cent of francophones aged 25 to 34 in Alberta were born in Canada but not in Alberta or Quebec.
- ¹¹ The anglicization rate equals the net number of francophones aged 45–54 who have adopted English as main home language (the number of francophones who have adopted English minus the number of anglophones who have adopted French), divided by the total number of francophones aged 45–54.
- ¹² The necessary data for immigrants aged 15 or more at the latest census are supplied by the 2006 census summary table 97-555-XCB 2006042, available for free on Statistics Canada’s website.
- ¹³ See 2006 census summary table 97-555-XCB 2006042.
- ¹⁴ Figures in this section are based on the 2006 census summary table 97-555-XCB2006033.
- ¹⁵ Jean-Pierre Corbeil, Claude Grenier and Sylvie Lafrenière, *Minorities Speak Up: Results of the Survey on the Vitality of Official-Language Minorities* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 2007), pp. 11–13 and 99–100.
- ¹⁶ Michael O’Keefe, *Francophone Minorities: Assimilation and Community Vitality* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 1998), p. 44.
- ¹⁷ Statistics Canada, *The Evolving Linguistic Portrait, 2006 Census* (Ottawa, 2007), pp. 20–23.
- ¹⁸ The 2006 census enumerated 38,300 francophones and 9,200 anglophones in Quebec who had immigrated during 2001–2006. This is a ratio of just over four to one. But the ratio between Quebec’s francophone and anglophone populations is close to ten to one. Whence an advantage in relative terms of well over two to one for anglophone immigration to Quebec over francophone immigration.
- ¹⁹ Bernard Lord, *Report on the Government of Canada’s Consultations on Linguistic Duality and Official Languages* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 2008).

Belgium: less than the sum of its parts?

by Johanne Poirier

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A part from chocolate and beer, one of the major products exported from Belgium over the last two decades has been its constitutional model. It has not been copied elsewhere, at least not in its entirety (“Thank God,” some would say), but it has been studied in nearly every international circle concerned with institutional solutions for ethnically and linguistically complex societies, especially ones emerging from conflict. Bosniaks, Sri Lankans, Cypriots, Northern Irish, Sudanese, Israelis and Palestinians have all tried to understand how a society that is so profoundly divided, from a cultural and linguistic perspective, could replace the threat of violence with political dialogue and compromise.

Over the last five years or so, however, Belgium has moved from a model to be studied to a counterexample to be avoided. Defenders of federalism now mention Belgium with a hushed tone of embarrassment, as a sort of pathological *cas d’espèce*. What happened? And what can we learn from this evolution?

This is not the place to explain the mind-boggling constitutional framework Belgium has adopted over the last 35 years. Suffice it to say that Belgians – who invented

surrealism and the *bande dessinée* – have shown a degree of constitutional creativity that is the delight of professors of comparative federalism and the nightmare of Belgian citizens, often unable to navigate their own system. For years, there was a tradeoff between political transparency and political compromises among the various components of the country. It sort of worked. Yet, the legendary capacity of Belgians to reach baroque political and constitutional compromises may now be stretched to its limits.

It took over nine months, following the June 2007 Belgian federal elections, for five political parties to agree on a minimum platform and form a coalition government.¹ During the political paralysis, many feared that the country was on the brink of coming apart, whether deliberately or through a lack of will to reach new compromises. A number of committed federalists, while continuing to oppose the breakup of the country, abandoned their former reluctance to mention this eventuality. They deplored it, but acknowledged its likelihood. For many, it was a question of time (two, five, ten, fifteen years?). At this point, midway between the June 2007 elections and the next round of regional elections in 2009, it is difficult to assess whether the federation is in palliative care, in remission or just recovering from one of its many constitutional-reform-inducing crises.

The current problem in Belgium does not lie with its federal structure per se (though, as with any constitutional setup, it could be improved). It lies, rather, with constitutional arrangements and political developments that preceded the federalization process, which

culminated in Belgium's becoming officially federal in 1993. Belgians have superimposed a federal structure on preexisting constitutional compromises between Flemings and French speakers, which has led to a deeply polarized political and social landscape. The polarizing effect of institutions, along with Belgium's key role in the European Union, provide much of the context for the Belgian drama. From all this, we can draw some limited lessons for other divided societies.

Institutions that crystallize divisions

Several features of the Belgian constitutional and political landscape help explain the high degree of polarization between the two main cultural/language groups: the Flemish (around 6 million) and the French speakers (around 4 million). This is not to suggest that institutions are the sole culprit, but they do contribute to the constant pitting of one group against the other.



Even moderate candidates will radicalize their speech if they require votes from only one segment of the population. Pre-election partisan oratory games are divisive, and nearly always pit the Dutch-speaking north against the French-speaking south.

Linguistically divided political parties

Starting in the late 1960s, every political party has split along linguistic lines. There is a French-speaking and a Dutch-speaking Liberal party. The same with the Socialists, Christian Democrats, etc. No single politician, including the prime minister, seeks votes on both sides of the linguistic border. All must be candidates in single-language lists.

This has had the effect of polarizing political rhetoric, often to a disconcerting degree. Even moderate candidates will radicalize their speech if they require votes from only one segment of the population. Pre-election partisan oratory games are divisive, and nearly always pit the Dutch-speaking north against the French-speaking south. It is often easy to blame the “Other” in such a context. Burundi, which was under Belgian rule from 1919 to 1962, learned a thing or two from its old colonial power²: no Burundian political party can run only Tutsi or only Hutu candidates.

A purely proportional electoral system and the need for coalition governments

Belgium has a purely proportional electoral system (as opposed to the mixed system in place in Scotland or Germany for example).

This leads to a particularly fragmented political landscape and reinforces the division of each party along language lines. Any federal coalition requires at least four parties: two Flemish and two French-speaking. Today, Flanders is increasingly right of centre and autonomy-seeking while Wallonia and Brussels remain left of centre and opposed to significant further devolution to the constitutive units. In this context, putting together any coalition is extremely difficult.³

Polarized and reductive political debates

In Belgium, just about every public policy issue is analyzed through the prism of north-south opposition. In the French-language press and political discourse, the Flemish are often portrayed as right-wing xenophobes who have forgotten that until the 1950s financial transfers flowed from Wallonia to Flanders. In the Flemish debate, French speakers are frequently described as lazy, clinging to an obsolete socialist dream and dependent on financial transfers that now flow from the richer Flanders to Brussels and Wallonia.

This is not to deny that there are significant cultural and political differences among the Flemish, the Walloons and the inhabitants of Brussels (most of whom do not

consider themselves to be either one). This is the whole point of institutional solutions to allow distinct policies in different contexts, and the very purpose of a federal system. Nor is this to deny that there are financial transfers, which raise issues of fairness, balance, fiscal responsibility and solidarity (as in any federal or quasi-federal system). It could be argued that, given the demographics of the country, opposition between north and south is largely unavoidable. Contrasts are par for the course in such a divided society, particularly one with a federal architecture. The main problem is that no one at the centre can counter this polarization, or cultivate a balanced view.

A weak federal government

Many divisions in central institutions themselves contribute to polarization. Since the 1970s, central institutions have been divided along linguistic lines. This division is among the compromises negotiated in the transition from a unitary state dominated by a French-speaking minority to one in which the Flemish majority gained significant power. These solutions are typical of consensus democracy in nonfederal countries. Some constitutional reforms, for example, require not only a two-thirds overall majority but also a simple majority in each of the so-called “language groups” in Parliament. The result is that every parliamentarian is “linguistically labelled.” Similarly, the constitution requires that the federal government be composed of an equal number of Flemish and French-speaking ministers.

These measures provide strong protection for the French-speaking minority (about 38 per cent of the population). But coupled with a relatively decentralized federal system, these “parity-based arrangements” now also contribute to overall polarization. They crystallise “mono-identities” and encourage radical political rhetoric.

Once a coalition government is actually in place, any significant reform in policy areas that have so far remained federal (such as justice, police, social insurance, large chunks of industrial and employment policy) is almost always out of reach. This fuels centrifugal tendencies by policy reformers, even those whose main concern is (or was) not initially “nationalist” or “autonomist.” The previous (Flemish) federal minister of social affairs, adhering to a Blairist Third Way approach, sought more “active” employment policies. This was strongly opposed by French-speaking members of the federal coalition, particularly the Socialists, who view unemployment insurance not as a conditional privilege but as a social right. Unable to achieve reforms at the centre, the Flemish federal minister joined the Flemish government and then pleaded for a “regionalization” of employment policy, so that reforms could at least be introduced in Flanders.

Any federal solution, whether it is a formal federal system or some other kind of unity/diversity arrangement, requires a balance between autonomy and common action. Belgium has come a long way toward autonomy. This part of the deal does not work too badly. Regions and Communities (the two forms of constitutive units in this original federation)

function relatively effectively. The centre, however, is weak. In fact, one reason Belgium managed without a real federal government for over nine months is precisely that a large number of public policies are managed at the decentralized level and do not require the constant compromises inherent in central institutions. The federal government has become less and less significant in public life.

A divided civil society

A federal structure with significant powers granted to federated units, coupled with the rigid rules governing decision-making at the centre, has reduced common spaces of socialization. Flemish and French-speaking kids attend different schools – and study Belgian history from divergent angles. Flemish and French-speaking academics work more with their counterparts in Holland and France and with the rest of Europe than with each other. People do not read the same papers, listen to the same radio or watch the same TV programs. Eyes are turned to England and Holland in the north and often glued to France in the south. Knowledge of Dutch is slowly increasing among French speakers, whose bilingualism remains astoundingly limited. Meanwhile, knowledge of French in the Flemish community, which was high, is decreasing. Trade unions may be the last bastion of “federal” organizations (though they do have linguistic divides below the surface). With a few exceptions, cultural activities and even sports are divided along language lines.

What has Europe got to do with it?

Brussels, the capital of Belgium, is the only officially bilingual region of the country. It is also hugely multicultural,⁴ primarily French-speaking and geographically an enclave within Flanders. At one time, Flemish dialects were dominant in Brussels, but state institutions located in the capital functioned only in French. This circumstance, combined with the international appeal of the French language in the 19th and early 20th centuries, led to its becoming a largely francophone city.⁵ This has created resentment on the part of Flemish nationalists who regard themselves as having “lost” Brussels. They would not easily “give up” the city in the event of secession. French speakers in Brussels, for their part, do not wish to be absorbed by Flanders if Belgium were to vanish. Brussels is the treasured property that keeps the fighting couple hanging on (for just a little longer ...).

Brussels is also the capital of Europe.⁶ An option that keeps cropping up is to transform Brussels into some form of international city-state, or a European district along the lines of Washington, D.C. That is one way of disposing of an obstacle to divorce: make sure the other partner does not get it and give it to someone else! However, it is doubtful that the European Union would wish to administer a city, at least beyond the limits of the European Quarter in which its main institutions are located. Why would 27 countries want to deal with local schools, garbage collection or building permits?

Does the European Union make it easier, or more difficult, to achieve independent status

for Belgium's units? Again, no answer is fully compelling. On the one hand, transition costs would arguably be limited. Were Flanders to be admitted to the EU (and that is likely), the euro and common monetary policy would soften the landing. Furthermore, it is estimated that 80 per cent of Belgian legislation is already affected by EU norms. Continuity would be the rule. Some maintain that if Flanders were to declare its independence, international recognition would quickly follow. This belief is based on the rapid recognition given to Kosovo by many European countries, and by the barely contested declaration of independence of Montenegro before that. By contrast to North America, Europe has been the theatre of significant restructuring over the last 20 years. The appearance of yet one more country would not be earth-shattering.

On the other hand, it is one thing for France or Britain to recognize the fragmentation of former Yugoslavia, and quite another to see a close neighbour and founding member of the EU fall apart. Fears of the slippery slope abound (what next? Catalonia? Scotland? the Basque Country? Padania?). And what message is being sent when it is the rich and powerful that skip ship, partly to escape financial transfers inherent in their current constitutional setup?⁷

Pragmatic Flemings (and that tends to be a cultural trait among them) would rather renegotiate from within Belgium, gradually depriving federal authorities of most of their powers. This "empty-shell" strategy is far less likely to irk important trading partners. Why rock the boat when you can have similar

People do not read the same papers, listen to the same radio or watch the same TV programs. Eyes are turned to England and Holland in the north and often glued to France in the south.

results without provoking major diplomatic reactions?

It may be quite surprising to Canadians but, despite the significant likelihood of Belgium's disintegration, secession is hardly ever promoted directly. There is no official program for an independent Flanders, no equivalent to Jacques Parizeau's financial strategies for the economic transition toward statehood. How can the end of Belgium be so plausible, and yet so little advocated?

Part of the answer lies in the fact that the main separatist party is xenophobic and extremely right-wing. Many Flemish nationalists do not want to associate with the *Vlams Belang*.⁸ Beyond this fear of bad company, Francophones are often left wondering, "What will they want next?" This is reminiscent of the scepticism with which English-speaking Canadians from the 1960s onward posed the question "What does Quebec want?" For their part, Belgian French speakers have a tendency to dramatize every Flemish claim for more autonomy as excessive, navel-gazing,

petty. Echoes of the Canadian *dialogues de sourds* ...

There is, of course, a major difference between the Canadian and the Belgian centrifugal dramas. The power balance between those who seek greater autonomy and those who resist is reversed. In Belgium, the resistance to change on the part of the francophone minority may become anathema to the rich majority who may simply no longer want to play the game. Hence we increasingly hear, from both sides of the country, “Not necessarily divorce, but divorce if necessary.” In the end, secession, or some form of weakly agreed breakup of the country, may occur, but it will occur less through political design than through accident or lassitude.

Something that is *not* heard, or even hinted at, is a desire by neighbouring countries to recoup some territory (Flanders being annexed by Holland, or Wallonia by France, or the small German-speaking area by Germany). There is a marginal “*rattachiste*” movement in Wallonia, which promotes this reconnection with the mother country. It finds no echo in France, and Germany would likely react negatively to such a move. There is no equivalent movement in Flanders: while sharing a language, the Flemish (of Catholic culture) and the Dutch (primarily Protestant) tolerate each other, but do not share fraternal feelings. In the event of Belgium’s breakup, the 70,000 German-speakers are more likely to seek a special arrangement with independent Wallonia, or with neighbouring Luxembourg, than with Germany. The last option would likely lead to their losing significant autonomy.

Lessons of the Belgian experience

While no longer the beacon of political accommodation that it was once held to be, Belgium should not be removed from the radar of comparative studies. The Belgian experience offers important lessons to divided societies, especially those composed of two main cultural, language or religious groups. Let me briefly outline three.

First, conflict-resolution solutions that are effective at a particular time may need revisiting after a few decades. In the Belgian context, reform of the political and electoral system would be first on my list. This, of course, is hugely challenging, given the weight of history, vested interests and the gradual conversion of political compromises into myths and taboos.⁹

Second, various institutional measures – including vetoes, guaranteed rights of participation, autonomy – may be crucial to reverse past injustice or to guarantee the vitality of a minority. However, minority-protection measures which have the effect of fostering and strengthening “mono-identities” are likely to create greater divisions in the future.

Third, it is crucial that increased autonomy for a minority group or a federated entity be accompanied by bridge-building measures. Increased autonomy for components of a divided society can resolve tensions by removing the need for constant compromise. Increased autonomy can also contribute to a sense of security in communities – be they numerical minorities or previously oppressed or marginalized majority groups. But building autonomy without bridges, particularly if the

“centre” is itself fragmented, can be a recipe for more conflict. These bridges can range from exchanges of students or civil servants to institutionalized cooperative organs. When divisions are largely based on language, learning each other’s language – while never enough – will have symbolic as well as communicative impact.

Belgium remains a relatively rich country, steeped in the rule of law and largely allergic to violence. In different contemporary post-conflict contexts, however, Belgian solutions could be explosive. Some Belgian institutions are truly innovative and can represent effective medicine in conflict-prone societies. But their cumulative effect, without due concern for dialogue-building measures on a large scale, could end up killing the patient.

Notes

- ¹ In the meantime, the previous coalition and prime minister remained in place to deal with “current affairs.” Hence, the country was not truly without a government, but without one which could, well, govern, rather than simply attend to bare essentials.
- ² Officially, Belgium had a “mandate” from the League of Nations and then from the United Nations to govern Burundi (and Rwanda). For our purposes, the colonial analogy will do.
- ³ The coalition government which finally emerged nine months after the June 2007 election is composed of the Flemish Liberals (VLD), the French-speaking Liberals (MR), the Flemish Christian Democrats (CD&V), the French-speaking “Humanists” (successors to the Christian Democrats, CDH) and the French-speaking Socialists (PS). The Flemish Socialists refused to join the coalition.

A wide coalition was required to allow for a new round of constitutional decentralization (which requires a two-thirds majority in Parliament). Every Flemish party insisted on the necessity of such reforms.

- ⁴ Recent statistics show that half the children born in Brussels have non-Belgian mothers.
- ⁵ It is estimated that around 80 to 90 per cent of Bruxellois use French as the common language of communication. As a result of a complex political compromise dating from the early 1960s, the census must *not*, by law, contain questions concerning the use of language. It is ironic, of course, that a state architecture built almost entirely on linguistic divisions ignores the sociodemographics of language.
- ⁶ Unofficially, that is. Legally, it is only the “seat” of its main institutions.
- ⁷ The irony may be that were it to become independent, Flanders, as one the richest regions of Europe, would likely have to increase its EU contributions to eastern Europe. What Wallonia would no longer get through intra-Belgium transfers, Romania might receive. Whether this would be more palatable to the Flemish, given the lack of historical resentment toward the Romanians, is an open question.
- ⁸ “Flemish interest.” This may explain why, in the wake of the last federal election, no party supported a motion introduced by the *Vlams Belang* calling for a referendum on Flemish independence.
- ⁹ That being said, a proposal for the creation of a limited “national” riding is gaining official support. It would allow for 15 of the 150 members of the Lower House to be elected by voters across the country (they would thus require support from both Flemings and French speakers). While the 10 per cent mark is low, it is believed (or hoped!) that the political and moral weight of candidates for this riding would serve as a bridge-building measure.

Thinking North America

by Philip Resnick

It was the Spanish part of the invention of America that liberated Western man from the fetters of a prison-like conception of his physical world, and it was the English part that liberated him from subordination to a Europe-centred conception of his historical world. In these two great liberations lies the hidden and true significance of American history.

— Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America*¹

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hat exactly does it mean to be a North American? Europeans have been engaged in a long-running debate about the meaning and nature of Europe, not only in the last 50 or 60 years with the emergence of the European Union but for many centuries before. Does it make sense to engage similarly with the question of North America’s identity?

Globalization has spawned a series of continental economic blocs. The European Economic Community, from which the European Union has evolved, was the first to emerge. It has been followed by the ASEAN grouping in Southeast Asia; the Canada–U.S. Free Trade Agreement

(FTA), subsequently extended to Mexico through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); and Mercosur in the southern cone of South America.

The FTA and NAFTA have brought in their wake a strengthening of economic integration within North America. To be sure, American investment in both Canada and Mexico goes back to the second half of the 19th century. But capital flows – in some cases into as well as out of the United States – have grown by leaps and bounds over the past two decades. The movement of population, both across the U.S.’s border with Canada and much more strikingly across its border with Mexico, has catapulted dramatically. In the Canadian case, the main original influx of settlers on the English Canadian side came from inhabitants of the Thirteen Colonies fleeing the American Revolution. Subsequently, the balance of population exchange has tended to favour the United States over Canada, but with significant numbers moving in each direction. In the Mexican case, growing migration to the United States, especially in recent decades, has helped fuel American economic prosperity while simultaneously provoking a polarizing debate about the consequences of that migration for American national identity.

At the same time, 9/11 and its aftermath have raised questions of security to a continent-wide level – as manifested, for example, in the Security and Prosperity Partnership first proposed by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives in 2004 – while simultaneously provoking vigorous opposition from those concerned about both civil liberties and national sovereignty. Political leaders have

Native symbols and names may dot the landscape of North America, but in reality, indigenous peoples in all three countries have yet to come into their own.

paid greater symbolic attention to North America, with three-way summits and bilateral exchanges of visits (e.g., between Canadian and Mexican heads of government) happening far more frequently than before. This suggests the need to take North America seriously as a subject of reflection – and not only from the economic or security point of view.

Commonalities

Let me turn to the question of possible commonalities among the three North American countries. The question has been rarely posed in terms of North America per se, but it has been evoked on a number of occasions where the Americas as a whole are concerned. Back in 1932, Herbert Bolton gave his presidential address to the American Historical Association – meeting in Toronto, interestingly enough – on the topic, “Do the Americas Have a Common History?” The theme sparked a vigorous debate over the following two decades, with most commentators rejecting the argument that there was a common cultural, economic or political pattern to the development of the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parts of

the Americas on the one hand and the largely English-speaking parts on the other.²

But this did not put paid to the discussion. In the 1990s, J.H. Elliott, a leading British scholar of Spain and the Spanish Empire, argued that despite obvious differences, there were certain commonalities to the New World societies that came to be created in the Americas in the aftermath of European conquest and settlement.³ I tend to agree with Elliott. But I am not interested in tackling as vast a subject as the Americas as a whole, and will confine myself instead to North America. What then might Mexico, the United States and Canada possibly have in common?

Geography is a point of departure. The most striking common characteristic of the three countries in this regard is that each spans the continent from sea to sea: Canada and the United States from the Atlantic to the Pacific and Mexico from the Caribbean to the Pacific. The myth of western settlement and the western frontier looms large in both Canada and the United States. Mountain ranges give a common stamp to North America: the American cordillera chain, including the Rockies in Canada and the United States and the Sierra Madre in Mexico, runs down the western part of the continent, while in the east the Appalachians span the U.S.–Canada border and almost touch the mountains of the Canadian Shield.

Each country was originally populated by indigenous peoples, and in all three societies the coming of Europeans had a devastating impact on these peoples, who were wiped out or marginalized as the case might be. The colonies or states that sprang up on their

soil were ruled either directly from Europe or, following the achievement of independence, by the European settlers who had been left behind. The Native presence may be particularly important in Mexico, with the notion of *mestizaje* and of the forging of a cosmic race, first advanced in the 1920s by José Vasconcelos, the well-known writer who was briefly Minister of Education.⁴ Native symbols and names may dot the landscape of North America, but in reality, indigenous peoples in all three countries have yet to come into their own.

Religion was also European in its origins – Christianity in its Protestant and Catholic variants. Yet something very peculiar has happened to Christianity in the New World, especially evident in the United States and Mexico. At the very beginning (1630) in Massachusetts, Governor John Winthrop saw America as a shining “city upon a hill,” creating the New Jerusalem that the Old World had shunned. There followed the Great Awakening of the early 18th century, the religiosity that accompanied the United States from its creation through the Civil War and beyond, the frequent innovation associated with new sects like the Seventh Day Adventists and the Mormons, and the wholesale Americanization not only of Protestantism in its various guises but of Catholicism and Judaism as well. Well might de Tocqueville observe, “I think I can see the whole destiny of America contained in the first Puritan who landed on those shores.”⁵

In Mexico, the syncretism associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe, first sighted in the 16th century by an indigenous inhabitant, would bear fruit through the centuries that

followed so that various political movements would wrap themselves in her name. By the end of the 20th century her cult was so powerful that she was elevated to the status of the patron saint of all the Americas by Pope John Paul II. Old World religions, much like old wines, would come to assume somewhat altered identities in New World bottles.

The same was true for languages. In Noah Webster's *Dictionary of the American Language*, published a few decades after the American Revolution, the English of the old mother country gave way to a much simplified spelling and significant linguistic innovation. Canadian English, for its part, would be greatly influenced by northern American influence through the Loyalists who settled the eastern parts of the country and would be permanently marked by a combination of American and British features. Spanish in Mexico, as in the rest of Latin America, would become a more flexible language, in both vocabulary and pronunciation, than the one that had originated in Spain.

In New France, later Quebec, French also acquired a degree of informality – very North American in character – quite at odds with the spoken French of the former metropole. Gérard Bouchard, the well-known Quebec historian, writes about arriving in France for his doctoral studies in the late 1960s: “I discovered that various words and expressions that to me seemed perfectly French were only so for us Québécois. My way of speaking amused my Parisian friends. In the end, it annoyed me but I began to adopt the French accent so that they could understand me.”⁶ The flora, fauna and geological formations of

In New France, later Quebec, French acquired a degree of informality – very North American in character – quite at odds with the spoken French of the former metropole.

the New World, interactions with indigenous peoples and languages, the hard realities of frontier existence far from Old World courts and the intermingling of immigrants from many different backgrounds were to alter the English, French and Spanish languages on the North American continent and give them a suppleness they had not known before.

Another common feature involves the importance of regions and regionalism in any larger sense of place. The different colonies had different histories of settlement behind them: New England as opposed to Virginia; Nova Scotia as opposed to Quebec. The frontier bred its own regional identities, in the American case first in the Appalachians, then along the Mississippi, then in the western plains and on the Pacific Coast. Regional divisions across the Mason-Dixon Line regarding slavery led to the Civil War of the early 1860s; as recently as the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections, the division between Democrats and Republicans could assume a regional character, so-called blue vs. red states.

Canada too has known its share of regional divisions. The most profound, of course, is that between Quebec and English-speaking

Canada, taking on more the character of a national division. But the west has often felt alienated from the rest of Canada, and this alienation has found expression in support for political parties such as the Progressives, the CCF, Social Credit, the Reform Party and the Canadian Alliance. Nor has Mexico been far behind. State and regional identities often trumped national ones through two centuries of Mexico's post-independence existence. In the 2006 presidential elections, the northern half of the country, more industrialized and better integrated into NAFTA, voted for National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón, with the southern half of the country, poorer and more indigenous in character, voting for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Then there is the role that constitutions have come to play in cementing civic identity in the three countries. This has been most striking in the United States, where the Constitution has taken on an iconic character almost since its drafting in Philadelphia in 1787. As the embodiment of the revolutionary break with Britain and a new American identity, it provided a significant part of the political glue in building a new country, as the oath of allegiance to the Constitution recited by every newly naturalized American citizen demonstrates. To challenge the American Constitution in any significant way is beyond the pale of the national consensus, and would open one to the charge of being anti-American or un-American.

In Mexico, the constitution of 1917 is also the product of a revolution. It was arguably

the most progressive document of its day, with clauses regarding the inalienability of the nation's land and resources and the rights of labour. Not all the clauses, needless to say, were honoured in practice, and there have been significant amendments to the document over time. Yet even today, the 1917 constitution retains something of an iconic character in Mexican society and political actors must respect that fact.

In Canada, born of evolution rather than revolution, the constitution until recently was not a particularly venerated document. An act of the British Parliament, lacking evocative language and even an amending formula, the British North America Act of 1867 was primarily the plaything of federal and provincial politicians, concerned about the division of powers between them. In the early 1980s, toward the end of Pierre Trudeau's prime ministership, all this changed drastically with the patriation battle and the adoption of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Though only 25 years old, the Charter has attained a degree of iconic status – not least as a means of trying to consolidate a common civic identity in a country with important linguistic and cultural divisions. In short, in all three North American societies, written constitutions have come to play an important civic role. Is this surprising in New World societies with a great deal of population intermingling and little place for purely ethnic expressions of national identity?

One final point of commonality – a quite important one from the international relations point of view. North America, at least since the second half of the 19th century, and more

especially since the second decade of the 20th, has known a Kantian peace. Kant's dream of perpetual peace for a republican Europe would remain a pipedream until after World War II, and as the Balkan Wars of the 1990s remind us, it is still too utopian for parts of the old continent. In North America, with the signal exception of the Mexican-American War of 1848 and the short-lived American incursion into Mexico in 1914 at the height of that country's revolution, the national borders between states have not been questioned through war.

This is not a trivial matter. North America has been a continent of international peace in a world that has been anything but peaceful. That too may help to forge a sense of a shared identity. Stéphane Roussel has made the argument for Canada,⁷ though it needs to be extended to Mexico. For example, Alan Riding notes that a not insignificant tradeoff for Mexico from its proximity to the United States has been the absence of a large military establishment – the bane of so many other Latin American republics in the 20th century.⁸

Differences

Let me highlight a few of the things that make the three states of North America so very different.

1. American exceptionalism vs. Canada's role as a more European-influenced Atlanticist power and Mexico's as a Latin American-oriented one

Deborah Madsen writes, "American exceptionalism permeates every period of American history and is the single most powerful agent ...

concerning the identity of America and Americans." Michael Kammen asks, "How exceptional *was* (past tense) American exceptionalism? I will venture a one-word hunch: very." There is no parallel notion of exceptionalism – of constituting a civilization or society apart from all others – in either Canada or Mexico. Moreover, the United States was the birthplace of Manifest Destiny, with statesmen like John Quincy Adams convinced that "the whole continent of North America was destined by Divine providence to be peopled by one nation ... in one federal Union." Though that aspiration has long since vanished, the United States has become a global and hegemonic power, with far greater influence over its two North American neighbours than the latter can ever hope to wield over it. As Carlos Fuentes put it recently, "In the world in which we live, Mexico will always have problems with the United States."⁹ Most Canadians would not see things very differently.

2. The relationship between market and state

There has been a more untrammelled capitalism in the United States as opposed to a more sustained use of the state as an instrument of economic development and/or defensive nationalism in Canada and Mexico. As Alfred Chandler argued, "In the United States the base [for the coming of mass production and mass distribution] was designed, constructed, and operated almost wholly by private enterprise." Economic individualism is deeply embedded in the American body politic, a byproduct in part of the deep religious individualism that characterizes that society. This economic

individualism has historically been less characteristic of Canada, with its need to build basic infrastructure in a sparsely populated land, and of 20th-century Mexico. Governments in both countries have also been prepared to see culture as a legitimate sphere of state activity. The CBC, National Film Board and Canada Council come to mind in the Canadian case. As for Mexico, Néstor García Canclini writes, “It is logical that, among Latin American countries, Mexico, because of the nationalist orientation of its post-revolutionary policy, should be the one that has been most concerned with expanding visual culture, preserving its patrimony, and integrating it into a system of museums and archaeological and historical centers.” The same is not true for the United States, with its much more extensive system of private endowments. As Michael Kammen observed, “Why is the United States so distinctive in not having a ministry of culture? And why is that office comparatively non-controversial in some nations yet politically and ideologically problematic in others – above all, in our own?”¹⁰

3. Democratic institutions

These have been clearly embedded in the American system from the beginning. One thinks of de Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, of Walt Whitman’s *Democratic Vistas* (“These States have assumed the task to put in forms of lasting power and practicality ... the democratic-republican principle”¹¹) and of Harold Laski’s mid-twentieth-century *The American Democracy*. In Canada, democracy has enjoyed a less mercurial development,

more in the British mould, though with American features such as populist movements, especially in the west. In Mexico, democracy has proven a more uncertain characteristic, winning at moments in mid-19th century and after 1910, but going into long periods of eclipse such as the Porfirian dictatorship of the late 19th century and the 80 years of one-party domination by the PRI, which ended only in 2000.

4. Levels of development

Both the United States and Canada are first-world societies, members of the G-8, with high levels of GDP per capita (\$41,890 in the U.S. and \$33,375 in Canada in 2007–8), high levels of public education and literacy, social programs (albeit stronger in Canada than in the United States) and well-established bureaucratic and legal norms. On the negative side, racism has long undermined equal treatment where American blacks were concerned, and Native/Aboriginal peoples have been marginalized in both countries. Mexico, compared to its two North American neighbours, is a second-world society (\$10,751 GDP per capita in 2007–8), with huge income gaps between the middle and upper middle classes and the lower classes, between north and south, between creoles and *indigenas*.¹² The theme of Lesley Simpson’s book *Many Mexicos*,¹³ with its description of four or five distinct societies with gaps between them equivalent to the dimensions of India’s caste system, is almost as true today as it was 65 years ago. To this might be added the depredations of a narco-economy – the dirty money, corruption and violence it engenders.

5. A culture of exuberance vs. a culture of doubt

In the United States, a buoyant and extroverted tone has tended to dominate, exemplified in such figures as Herbert Melville, Walt Whitman, Mark Twain and Ernest Hemingway, in American cinema and in a good deal of American pop culture, from jazz to rock and roll. One of de Tocqueville's more telling observations about American life notes, "They clutch everything and hold nothing fast."¹⁴ As Max Lerner put it in arguing the case for America as a civilization,

Most Americans persisted in their image of America as an unfinished country in which history was the art of the possible, but in which the possible, by experience, seemed to stretch further than anywhere else ... Since the beginning there have been two crucial images in the American mind. One is that of the self-reliant craftsman, whether pioneer, farmer, or mechanic ... the second that of a vast continent to be discovered, explored, cleared ... The American will not tolerate the fate of being boxed in like a trapped rat.¹⁵

In Canada, survival has been a more characteristic theme, accompanied by a degree of melancholy, especially in Quebec, reflective of the deeper ambiguity of a nationally divided country. In Mexico, there have been melancholic and self-destructive strains to its culture, reflecting in part the confused legacy of conqueror and conquered; the popular imagery of death associated with the celebration of the *Día de los Muertos*; and revolutionary

art forms such as the mural paintings of Diego Rivera and others in the 1920s and 1930s.

The historical trajectories of the three North American countries have been different; their relative positions, both within North America and in the world at large, divergent; their physical characteristics – northern, temperate, semitropical – no less contrasting.

Long-term political implications

In an era marked by the globalization of investment and production, there has been a move to continental trading blocs. The primary motivation behind these developments has been economic, with multinational corporations and big business associations the key forces pushing governments toward freer trade. At the same time, a variety of nongovernmental actors have been engaging in activities beyond the level of the nation-state, around issues ranging from development to the environment to human rights. We may be witnessing the emergence of a more cosmopolitan type of consciousness, reinforced by the rapidity of communication in the world of the Internet. While I hold no illusions about a cosmopolitan identity coming to displace national ones, I can anticipate continental blocs constituting in time a stepping stone to a less narrowly national form of consciousness. At the normative level, this may be the most appealing feature of arrangements such as the European Union, and with time it may also come to mark developments in North America.

However, there are major differences between the EU model and anything that could

happen in North America. The sheer size and power of the United States – culturally, demographically, economically, militarily, politically and technologically – make the idea of political integration a good deal less attractive to the two weaker, less populous North American states. It is one thing for the Netherlands or Denmark or Portugal to accept membership in a European Union in which no single larger power dominates. It would be quite a different story for Canadians and Mexicans to accept the prospect of North American political integration.

Nor are the Americans about to surrender sovereignty to a transcontinental political union. American public opinion is still predominantly given to thinking of the United States as a world unto itself, and American political leaders and commentators would not easily take to the notion of imitating the European Union, with its bureaucratic heaviness and recurring political disagreements. Moreover, critics would see any move to North American political integration as bypassing the American Constitution – a charge certain to doom it from the start. Nonetheless, in the aftermath of the Iraq War, a weakening of American power in an increasingly polycentric world order may make American policymakers more open to the North American dimension of their international situation.

There may be something in earlier American history that could serve as a template for greater North American cooperation in the future. I am referring to the Articles of Confederation, which served as a *de facto* constitution for the Thirteen Colonies for eight years, until the current Constitution of

the United States was enacted. The articles represented a confederal arrangement among the 13 states, with each retaining “its sovereignty, freedom, and independence.”¹⁶ To be sure, Congress was vested with powers related to common defence and mutual and general welfare – something that would not transpire in any North American proposal. But the key analogy from my point of view lies in the *confederal* nature of the original Articles of Confederation.

This would come a lot closer to meeting the needs of the three North American states than a more integrated federal proposal. A loose confederal arrangement among the three North American states somewhere in the future would be building on practices of intergovernmental cooperation that have sprung up with NAFTA and might be extended from the strictly economic realm to other areas of continental concern. Any agreements would always be subject to the consent of the three governments in question. There would be no North American Political Union along EU lines.

The idea of North America is still at an embryonic stage when compared to the idea of Europe. There are multiple other identities, regional and national, to easily trump it in all three countries that make up this continent. Yet it is latent in each of them. With continental economic integration in an era of globalization a reality, and with migration and other ties among the three countries growing apace, the pressures for political collaboration at the North American level will not disappear. *À suivre*, as they would say in one of North America’s three official languages!

Notes

- ¹ Edmundo O’Gorman, *The Invention of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961), p. 145.
- ² See Louis Hanke, ed., *Do the Americas Have a Common History? A Critique of the Bolton Thesis* (New York: Knopf, 1964).
- ³ J.H. Elliott, *Do the Americas Have a Common History?* (Providence, RI: John Carter Brown Library, 1998).
- ⁴ José Vasconcelos, *The Cosmic Race: A Bilingual Edition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).
- ⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 279.
- ⁶ Gérard Bouchard and Michel Lacombe, *Dialogue sur les pays neufs* (Montreal: Boréal, 1999), p. 16.
- ⁷ Stéphane Roussel, *The North American Democratic Peace: The Absence of War and Security Institution Building in Canada–US Relations 1867–1958* (Kingston, ON: School of Public Policy/McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004).
- ⁸ Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbours: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 317.
- ⁹ Deborah Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 1; Michael Kammen, *In the Past Lane: Historical Perspectives on American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 198; John Quincy Adams cited in Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2006), p. 130; Carlos Fuentes in Karim Bitab and Robert Fadel, eds., *Regards sur la France* (Paris: Seuil, 2007), p. 212.
- ¹⁰ Alfred Chandler cited in Kammen, *In the Past Lane*, p. 189; Robert Bellah, “Is There a Common American Culture?” in Robert Bellah and Steven Tipton, eds., *The Robert Bellah Reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 329; Hugh Aitken, “Defensive Expansionism: The State and Economic Growth in Canada,” in W. T. Easterbrook and M.H. Watkins, eds., *Approaches to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: Carleton Library, 1967), pp. 183–221; Néstor García Canclini, *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Leaving Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), p. 117; Kammen, *In the Past Lane*, p. 93.
- ¹¹ Cited in Madsen, *American Exceptionalism*, p. 71.
- ¹² GDP per capita figures for all three countries are from United Nations Development Programme, *Statistics of the Human Development Report*, retrieved May 11, 2008, from <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/>
- ¹³ Lesley Byrd Simpson, *Many Mexicos* (1941; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).
- ¹⁴ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, cited in Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 117.
- ¹⁵ Max Lerner, *America as a Civilization* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1957), p. 501
- ¹⁶ Articles of Confederation, 1781 (retrieved April 23, 2008, from http://www.4literature.net/Historical_Document/Articles_of_Confederation_US_/), Article 2.

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