

'Silent Revolution': The Transformation of the Québécois Identity

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Abstract

Since the early 2000s, the people of Québec appear to have been engaged in the transition or perhaps even the transformation of their collective identity. This is not to suggest that the Québécois now define and present themselves in an entirely new way, but that, steeped in two different fundamental realities – generational change and the place held by immigrants in modern Québec – they are open to new answers to the three questions that have continually echoed through their self-reflections as a collective subject of and in history: Where did we come from? Who are we? Where are we going? As a result, Québec – or so this article submits – is in transition. It is somewhere between the tree of its past and the bark of its future, hesitating to choose between the known impossibilities of the past and the unknown possibilities of the future. Québec is facing options that each person, based on their own perspective, views with hope or dread.

Introduction¹

Since the early 2000s, the people of Québec appear to have been engaged in the transition or perhaps even the transformation of their collective identity. This is not to suggest that the Québécois now define and present themselves in an entirely new way, but that, steeped in two different fundamental realities, they are open to new answers to the three questions that have continually echoed through their self-reflections as a collective subject of and in history: Where did we come from? Who are we? Where are we going?

The first fundamental reality arises from a change of the generational guard. Within ten years, the vast majority of the baby boomers will be in retirement.² In decision-making positions and as the voices of the public, they will be replaced by the next generations. Born in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, these generations, having come of age, will naturally take on the societal powers of word and action.

There will be no great upheaval: the continuities between the generations are strong. Each generation is itself affected by deep inequalities of class and destiny, if not aspiration and horizon. Ultimately, the effects of the times are as or more important than the generational effects in explaining the current changes in collective identity.³

That said, when it comes to identifying issues and managing problems, the post-boomer generations – Gen X and Gen Y⁴ – do not seem to behave the same way or expect the same things as their forerunners, unsurprisingly.⁵ Overall, and very generally, of course, the members of these generations are more pragmatic and less idealistic – some might even say more lucid and less lyrical – than their elders. They are also more open to the world and freed from the memories of colonization. To that we could add that they are also more emancipated and opportunistic, that is to say, enterprising and quick to seize opportunities that arise, especially if the results appear promising for the short term.⁶ It appears that the Québécois self-identity – traditionally associated with the traits of progressivism, communitarianism and ardent nationalism redolent with state socialism, corporatism, egalitarianism and romantic sovereigntism – is undergoing a sea change. Mirroring transformations in other Western societies, particularly France, the priorities of the Québécois, including those of a goodly portion of the younger generations, are shifting silently from good to just, from equal to fair and from right to reasonable.⁷

The second fundamental reality that marks the Québécois community today is related to the growing place in the province's social fabric of people born abroad. In 2011, 12.6 per cent of the total population – more than a third of the inhabitants of the Island of Montreal – were immigrants. This proportion is likely to increase. In the long term, immigrants adopt the behaviours of the residents, particularly children socialized from a young age in the host society, but nevertheless, the consequences of the ethnic diversification of Québec society, in terms of the (re)constitution of Québec's collective identity, are significant, or soon will be.

The overall effect of the confluence of this generational change and the place held by immigrants is not yet fully known or knowable.

Québec – or so this paper submits – is in transition.⁸ It is somewhere between the tree of its past and the bark of its future, hesitating to choose between the known impossibilities of the past and the unknown possibilities of the future. Québec is facing options that each person, based on their own perspective, views with hope or dread.

Québec in transition

A society exists because it is an instituted reality but also because it has adopted reference points, including a history, through which it interprets itself, defines itself and builds the borders of its Us, so it can differentiate its Self from the Other, which we could also call, drawing on Erik Erikson, self-identity. In the last 15 years, however, the acquired or assumed reference points that Québec drew on to build its self-identity over a period of 40 years since the Quiet Revolution, have taken a beating.⁹

The observers and interpreters of the transformations that the Québécois identity is undergoing generally exhibit one of three characteristic attitudes. For some, the questioning of the customary reference points is considered to be good. They believe that Québec society will run to the dogs if it continues to cling to its sacred inspirations and aspirations. Others, while inclined to support the regeneration of the Collective Identity, hesitate to push for reform because they are wary of upsetting the balance between the two cardinal poles of Québec's historicity: transformation (the desire to change) and reproduction (the desire to continue).¹⁰ Finally, there are those who believe that Québec, as a fragile and vulnerable society, cannot engage in a process of extensive change or modification of its collective reference points because this transformational process will lead to its demise as a distinct society, that is, as a society at all. These people, naturally, forcefully and vigorously resist the changes they see in the repertory of reference points which, for them, have always defined Québec.

The hypothesis we would like to advance is that Québec society is undergoing a silent transformation of its founding reference points, which may worry and torment or, indeed, inspire and reassure. Let us look at what, exactly, these changing reference points are.

- Conception of society
For a long time, Québec society, even in the days when it called itself French Canadian, had a curtailed and partly distorted vision

of itself. In the eyes of many speechifiers, well entrenched in the public space, and echoed by those with an interest in depicting the 'Belle Province' by emphasizing its most chauvinistic traits, Québec was a homogeneous and tightly knit society, fixed and not open to change or the Other.

But for some time now, thanks to the work of historians in particular,¹¹ this conception has been floundering. Québécois, including francophones, and especially young francophones, increasingly work on the assumption that Québec has always been an ethnically diverse and culturally composite society (which does not mean there were not tensions among groups).

The indigenous peoples were the first to be integrated into the new conception of Québec as a diversified society, to the point of being considered, by some, as the 'first Québécois' and raised to the position of one of the founding cultures of the Québec nation.¹² Then the anglophones and ethnic communities were granted an adjustment in their identity status when they were welcomed into the collective Us,¹³ although that process was and remains contentious in more than one respect.¹⁴ Currently, the idea that Québec society and culture do not arise simply and strictly from their Frenchness is gathering steam and slowly but surely entering the collective imagination.

It is hard to say whether this trend will become more pronounced or collapse. The paradigm of duality (Us/Them) continues to profoundly affect the historical conception that the Québécois have of their 'nation'.¹⁵ Whether this conception lives on due to fundamental conviction, force of habit or the lack of an alternative, we have no way of knowing. That said, it is clear that Québec is experiencing pluralism in a way that is worrisome to many of the society's editorialists. This could be seen in June 2009 when two Anglo-Montreal bands, Lake of Stew and Bloodshot Bill, wanted to take part in Québec's national holiday celebrations, performing in their mother tongue, English. This provoked a harsh response from some quarters, which was roundly criticized by others asserting that anglophones were also Québécois and that they were entitled, as citizens, to perform in their language, especially if it was to express their sense of belonging to Québec as anglophones. Ultimately, Lake of Stew and Bloodshot Bill did play a somewhat bilingual show.

The story is strictly anecdotal,¹⁶ and yet it is symptomatic of a shift which, in its potential political consequences, is absolutely

deplorable to many people. What would be the outcome of a trajectory in which anglophones and allophones, instead of being symbolically perceived as boils on the face of Québec, were seen as features of the collective self, which would mean that its personality and identity depended on the presence of these two generic groups *as well?*¹⁷

Insofar as one of the outcomes would be to (re)model Québec's self-identity, that is, the nature and historical constitution of what is 'Québécois', some see it as a significant problem. Re-examining Québec from the prism of its constituent heterogeneity rather than its putative homogeneity is, for some people, the best way to destroy the conception underlying the Us, an identity that cannot be modified without fatally shattering the Nation.¹⁸ In other words, it is dangerous for the Québécois to engage in a process of broad recognition of what they are and what they have been, within or beyond their elemental Frenchness, because coming face to face with all the many folds of their identity could lead them to discover some surprising pockets.

- Relationship with language

It seems, however, that the Québécois, including a large proportion of the francophones, are open to the idea of looking at Québec outside its French traits, or at least admitting that there is such an option.

This does not mean that the proponents of this approach deny the French fact or plan to nip Québec society from its French roots. Their goal is, rather, the contrary. In general, Québécois, including anglophones and allophones, support the idea of Québec as a francophone society. The vast majority of them also promote French as the language of public communication and the vector of social cohesion. On a continent where Tremblay's tongue is very much in the minority and English reigns as a kind of new Esperanto, the hard-won place and recognition of French in Québec and, spreading out from there, in Canada and even the United States (trilingual labels for products made in Monterey, Mexico and sold in Fargo, North Dakota) are worthy of admiration.

Among the youth in particular, however, the relationship with English and the English fact is changing. For them, speaking English or switching to English, in certain conversational contexts, demonstrates neither an individual state of alienation nor a heart-rending capitulation. For most young people, speaking the 'other language'

is not the same as speaking the Other's language. It's just a way of communicating with more people. They assume that in today's world, not speaking at least two languages, including English (and French in Québec), is a handicap for upward or even lateral social mobility. It is a matter of recognizing that being bilingual allows them to express a greater or more complex range of sensitivities and sonorities than a single language, even their mother tongue, can accommodate.¹⁹ For many young people, especially those in the avant-garde networks of Montreal, which may make them either trendsetters or early adopters, the beauty of Québec, and its urban centre especially, resides in its linguistic duality.²⁰

And yet the linguistic hearts and minds of Québec youth, especially the francophone youth who live in Montreal, are perceived by many worried stakeholders as the doomsayers of the future. Hence the continual tension on the linguistic front, the personal emotions and perceptions in politics and the media that so often overpower the demonstrative reason of sociolinguistic studies.

Do we have any reason to be alarmed? Opinions vary.

For some, despite the pressures that French continues to suffer, its situation in Québec has rarely been better. French is the language spoken most often by most people in the province. Approximately 94 per cent of the inhabitants of Québec are able to use French in regular conversation. The proportion of anglophones who speak French is also on the rise, at nearly 90 per cent of young people. Finally, because they have to attend French elementary and high school, allophones are often trilingual, which makes Montreal one of the world capitals of trilingualism, a situation famously embodied in polyglot comedian Sugar Sammy, whose bilingual stand-up comedy show *You're Gonna Rire* broke every popularity record.

It is true that the proportion of mother-tongue and/or old-stock francophones, in metropolitan Montreal especially (which accounts for half the population of Québec), will decline in the future, to the point of being a minority within two or three decades. Likewise, it is clear for all sorts of reasons – Québec's geographic situation, the continental integration of the economy, the mobility strategy of stakeholders, the benefits of speaking more than one lingua franca, especially English – that the phenomena of bilingualism and trilingualism will increase in the province, including in workplaces, especially in sectors that interface with the global economy, which are increasingly common.

In light of these trends, the people we could call ‘serene’ about the linguistic situation in Québec are left wondering where the problem lies. Isn’t the important thing that French, in Montreal and the rest of Québec (where the primacy of French is of no concern), remains the common public language and that it continues to support a collective culture and identity – let’s qualify them as Québécois – that grow and develop through and in their contact with the Other, as they always have throughout history?

Others are concerned by the situation.²¹ In their eyes, the fact that the fate of the French language in Montreal depends increasingly on speakers whose mother tongue is not French, even though their first spoken official language is, presents a stumbling block for the collective future.²² It is also troubling that francophone youth are gleefully embracing bilingualism but at the same time neglecting the quality of their own language. Finally, the idea of English as a neutral language, or even ‘another of our languages’, rather than the language of historical alienation, is viewed as a third stone that could sink the collective boat.

It gets worse. Since language is not just a vehicle for communication but also a vector of culture, speaking another language, for those who are worried about the linguistic situation in Québec, is already a step towards the Other; it is a little – or a lot – like making the Self into an Other. And, these worriers add, for a culture to live or at least subsist, it has to focus on itself. It has to maintain itself through its structures. It cannot allow the Trojan horse of the Other language within its walls. The Other language’s vocabulary that is hiding in the horse’s belly (or French language) is the leavening of an opposing culture, with a pernicious potential for the Self. To put it directly, Québécois culture (meaning: Franco-Québécois culture of French-Canadian heritage) is in danger. It needs to be protected.²³

Protecting the culture, in this case, means sheltering it, supporting it and chaperoning it. It also means recalling its carriers to their duty. It means, ultimately, defining it as minutely as possible, because it seems that the interested parties – francophones – are particularly susceptible to the cultural and identity siren song of ‘Others’. In a recent document, Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, a star member of the *Parti Québécois*, reported that the current word on the street – or at least the word he heard in a tour of Québec in which he met with 1,800 people, including lots of youth – has it that ‘all the other cultures seem more interesting than ours!’²⁴

This idea that Québec culture, poorly moored to the quayside of continuity by the fragile rope of a fraying language, is, of its own misguided accord, heading out on the turbulent seas of Otherness has some people demanding that it once again be leashed firmly to its base.

- Relationship with history and memory

In Québec, history – or more specifically the narrative of the Québécois experience across time – is practically a religion. Any questioning of the grand national story inevitably leads to condemnations that go far beyond reasonable and reasoned criticism. This was the situation in 2006 when a heated debate on the course ‘History and Citizenship Education’, newly introduced by the Québec Ministry of Education for high school students, roared through public space in the province. Decried as an attempt at denationalization, depoliticization and ‘defrancophonization’ of the Québec experience, apparently in favour of a post-nationalist, Canadianist and multiculturalist vision of the province’s past, the course was eventually withdrawn by the Ministry. It was replaced by a course of a far more traditional bent, featuring the accepted national framework, simply called ‘History of Québec and Canada’.²⁵

There is no need to pronounce an opinion in favour of or against the citizenship education course, which had its strengths and its weaknesses. It is important to note, however, that the debate fundamentally opposed those, on the one hand, who wanted to refresh the vision of Québec’s past by pointing out its failings in terms of both interpretative accuracy and civic relevance, and those, on the other hand, who advocated the consolidation of the existing narrative because, in their view, that narrative is historically just and politically essential. On one side, then, updating the narrative to reflect society in a process in which memory does not supplant method;²⁶ and, on the other, confirming the narrative so that society remembers itself as it should, in a process in which method is subordinated to memory.²⁷

Memory brings us to another major debate, apparently about Québec’s past but actually about its future. This was a debate that took place in 2009 between two groups – unequal in terms of rhetorical strength and ideological legitimacy – over the 250th anniversary of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham.

On one side, there were those who wanted to celebrate a historically meaningful event differently and from less familiar

perspectives, in the hope of giving the community a new view of one of its founding episodes. On the other, there were those for whom it was the drama of a nation that required remembrance and commemoration.²⁸ Our intention is not to claim either side was right, but rather to state that the dispute – and it was intense – was about remembering the past ‘as it should be’ or looking for possible reinterpretations.²⁹

For those opposed to the ‘breakaway’ commemoration of the Battle of the Plains, the issue was clear: we cannot play with this battle, the narrative and meaning of which must remain intact in the accredited script of the event, which is historical and identity-based. Straying from that script means opening the Pandora’s box of the collective identity, because history, memory and identity, in Québec as in any other society, are symbiotic.³⁰

Why are people so affronted by what belongs to history and memory when communities live in the present and look towards the future? Because for many people, history and the memory of what was are a compass that ensures the society will not lose the thread of continuity that binds its lasting identity. Some people find it lamentable to allow even a little complexity to seep into the national identity in Québec’s past, given the doubts that this complexity may instill in the society’s or nation’s vision of how it was in relation to what it is with regard to what it could *become* – also known as historical consciousness.

In this situation, presenting Québec’s past as a trajectory that can be assessed without the ideas of failure or incompleteness is politically dangerous, because it reinforces the uncertainty that Québécois, and especially francophone Québécois, feel about their identity, which is rooted in the concept of shortcoming, if not frank victimhood.³¹

Ditto for 1759. If this date were dissociated from a founding initial defeat and the beginning of a lasting ordeal that continues to the present, in ways that are subtler, of course, but still alienating, it might plant the seeds of identity doubt in the heads of Québécois: Are we still in survival mode or have we escaped? Were we ever in survival mode? In the event that today’s Québécois, and the youth in particular, might answer no to this question – which seems to be the case for many of them³² – it’s better to react by using the tried-and-tested cassette and winding up the old ‘chatterbox’ which distils the known incantations, rather than abandon them for a new identity anthem.³³

- Relationship with the Self

Using history and memory to map and reinforce identity is a well-known, widespread method. In Québec's current circumstances, when some people believe that the diversity-addled elite are embracing pluralism and globalism with a deplorable naivety,³⁴ it is best to reinforce the walls of the Québec identity enclosure using tall, stout planks.

What is this Québécois identity that needs such protection from the onslaught of the Other and Elsewhere? To answer this, we could paraphrase St Augustine's attempt to define time: For what is Québécois identity? Who could find any quick or easy answer to that? [...] If no one asks me, I know. If I want to explain it to someone who asks me, I do not know.

It seems, nevertheless, that some people believed they knew – or believed they could determine – what the Québécois identity was, to the point of wanting to codify it in a law – Bill 195, which was called the *Québec Identity Act* – tabled in the National Assembly in October 2007.

The text does not state anything concrete about the Québec identity other than to say it is related to a history (national), that it is expressed in a culture (Québécoise) and that it is spoken in a language (French). Many people have expressed satisfaction that the bill died on the order table, given the possible consequences for the definition and attribution of Québécois citizenship, which was also to have been instituted through the Identity Act.³⁵ Fundamentally, Bill 195 has to be seen as a political process to appease the 'worriers' about the general identity situation in Québec,³⁶ a situation they interpret from the angle of identity degeneration, dissipation or deprivation, while it could actually – and this is our hypothesis – stem from the usual process of cultural evolution and actualization that occurs in any living, open society, a process Québec has passed through many times in its history.

- Relationship with the Other

The debate generated by the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences, commonly known as the Bouchard–Taylor Commission, is the last example I will use to show that the silent revolution that Québec is currently undergoing with regard to its collective identity elicits hope in some and fear in others.

The hearings held by the Commission allowed a great many people to air their feelings about the challenges of opening up to the Other. All sorts of opinions were expressed before the Commission, from the most ardent to the most sectarian. The question underlying the debate was more or less the following: How can we open up to the Other without getting lost Elsewhere? Fundamentally, it is the definition of *'Nous-Autres les Québécois'* that was the subject of discussion for the 16 months between the time the Commission was set up (February 2007) and the day its report was released (June 2008).³⁷

For some people, including Commissioners Bouchard and Taylor, it was time to recognize what Québec had become or had always been as a society: pluralist, inclusive, open and cross-cultural, which does not mean that the French fact, on one hand, and humanist, modernist values, on the other, have not been the heart of the historical experience of the Québec community.³⁸ For others, it was important for the Québécois identity to be preserved in what it was and continued to be, because its preservation promised the continuation of a political community rooted in history.³⁹ How did these people define the Québec identity? By its Frenchness, naturally, but also by its history of humiliation, its traditions and, surprisingly, its religion – Roman Catholic, of course.⁴⁰

In the wake of the general educational reform and the release of the Bouchard–Taylor Commission report, another debate arose, this time about the 'Ethics and Religious Culture' course which replaced the existing religious culture course, centred on the Roman Catholic tradition. It remains to be seen whether the debate about the Ethics course and the polarization of positions that ensued in public opinion – for or against the course, for or against its replacement by any other moral or religious course – were related to Québécois' religious affiliations, although the spirit of Catholicism, at least cultural Catholicism,⁴¹ is never far from the surface, and certainly among the baby boomers.⁴² Whatever the case may be, what ultimately led so many people to oppose the new course was the fear of seeing other reference points – specifically, multiculturalism, which is associated with cultural relativism and specific accommodations as vectors for establishing a shared public culture that would drain the life blood out of a historical culture.⁴³ And yet the goal of the course designers was never to transfigure Québécois culture, question the historical heritage or crush any religious regime that exists in that society. It was simply to introduce the students to an

important dimension of the human condition – spirituality within religious institutions – and make them aware of the diversity of that spirituality and those religions.⁴⁴ Some, however, felt it would be reckless to open up these religious or historical perspectives to the youth, as opening up to difference meant (or might turn out to mean) closing off or marginalizing the reference point designated as the vector of the identity, heritage, memory and, by extension, rootedness of the Québécois culture across time, of which the youth are intended to be both the heirs and the trustees. What is this ‘Québécois culture’ and how can it be circumscribed? We are back to square one.

By way of conclusion

Despite the foregoing, no one should fear that Québec is on the point of exploding, because it is not. Québec is a society where radicalism has little hold. The demonstrations and disruptions that shook the province between February and September 2012 – known by the ludicrous label *‘Printemps érable’*⁴⁵ – did not bring the community even close to a social crisis or political revolution. At the very worst, there was a confrontation between two major groups, the ‘lucids’ and the ‘solidaries’, a confrontation comfortably won by the former, no matter what some may claim.

Nor should anyone imagine, based on what I have said, that those people referred to here as ‘worriers’ are reactionaries or xenophobes. The worriers’ world is first and foremost peopled by conservatives, not in itself a bad thing, or people who, unable to find an answer to the question that haunts them – ‘What can we make of what made us?’ – prefer the timidity of the familiar to the intrepidity of change. The same goes for those called ‘serene’. They are not obtuse, neoliberal, over-optimistic or unpatriotic, but people who believe that Québec’s current situation, overall, is good, rather than bad.

Subject to internal demographic transformations (sustained immigration, change of generation) and external pressures of various kinds (transculturality, globalization, partnership of political entities), Québec is looking for its path forward.⁴⁶ The hypothesis presented here claims that the transitions and transformations underway, in terms of linguistic and cultural practices, stem from the actualization of Québec’s identity and heritage, not their decline. Québécois and especially young Québécois have a desire to open up to the Other, which is expressed in the common practice of multiple identities (*inter-référence* in French)

and the tacit recognition of interdependence, which temper their attraction for the idea of permanence and independence.⁴⁷

In this opening to the world and Otherness, we should not see a desire for the Québécois to cut short their connection with their historic cultural. Most people want to embrace the culture they inherited and regenerate it through a generous, thoughtful and empathetic relationship with the Other. Practically speaking, to welcome and recognize the Other in themselves without necessarily turning into the Other.⁴⁸

Likewise, we should not see the apparent weakening of support for independence among Québec's youth as a deterioration of the sense of identity or a reduction of their desire to form a nation. It is rather that the political form that the baby boomers associate with this identity and national impulse – independence – no longer convinces or seduces the post-baby boomers. The fact that Québécois, especially the youth, have never felt quite 'Québécois' and yet at the same time found themselves so attracted by the 'Canadian option' is not at all paradoxical. This dual-reel feeling smacks of neither the 'de-Canadianization' of young Québécois nor the 'Trudeauization' of their minds. As was true for the older generations, who all exhibited the same behaviour (and contentedness) to varying degrees, it appears that post-baby boomers place their future (and, by extension, Québec's) firmly in the heart of the central dynamics of Québec political culture, straining between the simultaneous desires of collaboration (without assimilation) and empowerment (without isolation) and the concomitant desires of transformation (without abandoning the Self) and continuation (without retreating into the Self).

Québec is changing, there is no doubt. We must not think, however, that the society's basic political identity matrix – which developed over time and is a matter of history, not essence – is about to crack. Although it is now borne by new stakeholders, the future of Québec is not about to leave its three customary paths: liberal pragmatism, progressive conservatism and quiet reformism.

Notes

- 1 This text is based on the oral format for which it was originally designed and presented – the UCL Annual Quebec Lecture at the UCL Institute of the Americas, 14 December 2015.
- 2 2018 is the demographic tipping point when the members of post-boomer generations will make up the majority of electors in Québec.
- 3 Charles Fleury, 'Génération lyrique et génération X: parcours de jeunesse de deux générations au Québec' (PhD Thesis, Université Laval, Department of Sociology, 2008).

- 4 Generation X is made up of people born from approximately 1966 to 1976 – or 1961 to 1980, according to some sources. Generation Y, also called Millennials, are those born either from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s or from 1980 to 2000.
- 5 For a portrait of baby boomers, in addition to Fleury, ‘Génération lyrique’, see the classic by François Ricard, *The Lyric Generation* (Stoddart, 1994). For the post-boomer generations, some interesting observations and telling data can be found in Jean-Marc Léger, Jacques Nantel and Pierre Duhamel, *Cracking the Quebec Code. The 7 Keys to Understanding Quebecers* (Toronto: Juniper, 2016), chapter 10.
- 6 ‘Strive for energy, rather than transcendence’ appears to be their motto!
- 7 Michel Forsé and Olivier Galland, eds., *Les Français face aux inégalités et à la justice sociale* (Paris: A. Colin, 2011).
- 8 Jocelyn Létourneau, *Le Québec entre son passé et ses passages* (Montreal: Fides, 2010).
- 9 Our intuitions about this, the incipient signs of which could be seen in the early 1990s, seem to have been borne out over time. See: Jocelyn Létourneau, ‘La nouvelle figure identitaire du Québécois: Essai sur la dimension symbolique d’un consensus social en voie d’émergence’, *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 6, 1 (1991), 17–38; and Jocelyn Létourneau and Sabine Choquet, eds., ‘Le Québec, une autre Amérique: dynamismes d’une identité’, Special issue of *Cités, Philosophie, histoire, politique*, 23 (France, 2005).
- 10 Jocelyn Létourneau, *Que veulent vraiment les Québécois? Regard sur l’intention nationale au Québec (français) d’hier à aujourd’hui* (Montreal: Boréal, 2006).
- 11 Gérard Bouchard is the person who has pleaded most insistently for the development of a new collective narrative based on the expansion of the ‘circle of the nation’. Bouchard, *La nation au future et au passé* (Montreal: VLB, 1999). Although our interpretation supports the idea of rehistoricizing the collective Québécois experience, it differs in some respects from that of the UQAC historian. Jocelyn Létourneau, *A History for the Future. Rewriting Memory and Identity in Quebec* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), chapter 2. Bouchard’s initiative and ours have been stridently attacked by Mathieu Bock-Côté, *La dénationalisation tranquille. Mémoire, identité et multiculturalisme dans le Québec post-réréndaire* (Montreal: Boréal, 2007). For a more in-depth discussion on the attempts to revise Québec’s collective narrative, see Jocelyn Maclure, *Quebec Identity: The Challenge of Pluralism* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003).
- 12 Gérard Bouchard, *The Making of Nations and Cultures of the New World. An Essay in Comparative History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008).
- 13 Already in the 1980s, the integrative work of Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, *Quebec, a History, 1867–1929* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1983) and *Quebec Since 1930* (Toronto: Lorimer, 1991) was moving toward a ‘territorialization’ of the definition of Québécois, a term that, for them, included everyone who had ever lived in Québec, from yesterday to tomorrow, regardless of their ethnic origin. The intention of the three historians appears to have been to include everyone in their narrative. Currently, some authors (Jocelyn Létourneau, *Le Québec, les Québécois, un parcours historique* [Montreal: Fides, 2004]; Peter Gossage and Jack Little, *An Illustrated History of Quebec. Tradition and Modernity* [Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014]) have embraced an even broader goal: they want to establish how different groups and individuals jointly built the society, with dissention and conflict, of course, from their specific interests, including, sometimes, on the basis of characteristic ‘ethnic’ positions. In such a project, there is no Us (insiders) or Them (outsiders). Instead there are people, groups, parties, etc., that agree with each other or confront each other in different circumstances around political, economic or ideological issues, in order to build ‘something’ – a country, a nation, a society – that coincides with their particular or hegemonic interests. It hardly bears mention that this historical perspective does not enjoy consensus.
- 14 Bina Toledo Freiwald, “‘Qui est nous?’ Some Answers from the Bouchard-Taylor Commission”, in *Religion, Culture and the State. Reflections on the Bouchard-Taylor Commission*, eds. On Adelman and Pierre

- Ancil (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 69–85.
- 15 Jocelyn Létourneau and Raphaël Gani, 'Les mots de la nation. Au cœur du vocabulaire de base des Américains, Français, Anglais, Écossais, Gallois, Canadiens et Québécois lorsqu'ils parlent du passé de leur pays' (unpublished manuscript).
 - 16 As is the story about Pierre Karl Péladeau, when he was running to become the leader of the *Parti Québécois*, at an English performance of the francophone band Groenland at the new music festival in Abitibi-Témiscamingue in February 2015, when he shouted 'En français s'il vous plaît!' (in French, please!). According to the media, PKP's outburst was widely deplored and received little support.
 - 17 It can be said, quite rightly, that the prevailing conception of Québec and Québécois is inclusive. There have been countless public professions to this effect. An ambiguity remains, however, in terms of the conception of *Nous les Québécois*, an 'Us' that has not managed to rid itself of its ethnic roots, despite the civic definitions associated with the Québec nation. For examples of ambiguous discourse, see: Jean-François Lisée, *Nous* (Montreal: Boréal, 2007); Serge Cantin, *La souveraineté dans l'impasse* (Montreal: L'Hexagone, 2014) and Jacques Beauchemin, *La souveraineté en héritage* (Montreal: Boréal, 2016).
 - 18 Mathieu Block-Côté, *Le nouveau régime. Essais sur les enjeux démocratiques actuels* (Montreal: Boréal, 2017); *Le multiculturalisme comme religion politique* (Paris: Cerf, 2016); *Fin de cycle. Aux origines du malaise politique québécois* (Montreal: Boréal, 2012).
 - 19 This justification is put forward by the proponents of code-switching, who use a mishmash of French and English in regular conversation or to express themselves artistically, striving, perhaps, for a different linguistic aesthetic.
 - 20 Urbania, 'Parlez-vous français?' Supplement published in *La Presse* +, 25 February 2017; Catherine Leclerc, *Des langues en partage. Cohabitation du français et de l'anglais en littérature contemporaine* (Montreal: XYZ, 2010); Sherry Simon, *Translating Montreal: Episodes in the Life of a Divided City* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); Leigh Oakes and Jane Warren, *Langue, citoyenneté et identité au Québec* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009).
 - 21 Guillaume Marois, 'L'avenir du Québec comme société distincte: enjeux démographiques', in *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles*, ed. É-Martin Meunier (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2016), 289–312.
 - 22 Michel David, 'Les irritants', *Le Devoir*, 2 February 2017.
 - 23 Jacques Beauchemin, 'La protection de la langue et de l'identité collective comme enjeu au sein de la conscience historique Québécoise', in *Le français, langue de la diversité québécoise. Une réflexion pluridisciplinaire*, eds. Pierre Georgeault and Michel Pagé (Montreal: Québec-Amérique, 2006), 131–51.
 - 24 Paul St-Pierre Plamondon, 'Oser repenser le PQ: retrouver l'esprit d'aventure, faire renaitre l'espoir', online (<http://jflisee.org/osser-repenser-le-pq-retrouver-lesprit-daventure-faire-renaitre-lespoir/>). St-Pierre Plamondon's observation seems paradoxical, when we know that the Québécois never stop repeating how proud they are of their collective accomplishments. In reality, however, we should not be surprised. This is a constant in the Québécois system of representations—boasting and belittling themselves in the same breath, a trait clearly linked to one of the cardinal tensions of Québec's political culture: wanting to be different from the Other (desire for differentiation) but still wanting to resemble them (desire for normalization). On this topic, see: Létourneau, *Le Québec entre son passé et ses passages*, and Jocelyn Létourneau and Jacinthe Ruel, 'Nous autres les Québécois. Topiques du discours franco-québécois sur Soi et sur l'Autre dans les mémoires déposés avant la Commission Bélanger-Campeau', in *Mots, représentations. Enjeux dans les contacts interethniques et interculturels*, eds. Khadiyatoulah Fall et al. (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1994), 283–307.
 - 25 Jocelyn Létourneau, 'La renationalisation de l'histoire québécoise. Récit d'une opération publique d'histoire, de son initiation à sa consécration', online (<http://www.tonhistoireduquebec.ulaval.ca/>).

- 26 Létourneau, *Le Québec entre son passé et ses passages*, chapter 3.
- 27 Éric Bédard, *History of Quebec for Dummies* (New York: For Dummies, 2012); Beauchemin, *Souveraineté*.
- 28 J. Maurice Arbour, *Cessons d'être colonisés!* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2015).
- 29 For more on this debate, see Philip Buckner and John G. Reid, eds., *Remembering 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), chapters 11 and 12.
- 30 Historians were barely involved in the quarrel about the commemoration of 1759. From start to finish, the jousting was led by journalists and a few politicians, perfunctorily, and by petty and grand ideologues.
- 31 Jocelyn Létourneau, 'Mythistoires de loser: introduction au roman historique des Québécois d'héritage canadiens-français', *Histoire sociale / Social history*, XXXIX, 77 (May 2006), 157–80; Jean-Jacques Simard, 'L'identité comme acte manqué', *Recherches sociographiques*, XXXVI (Winter, 1995), 103–11.
- 32 This, at least, is what can be understood in the report produced by St-Pierre Plamondon, 'Oser repenser le PQ: retrouver l'esprit d'aventure, faire renâitre l'espoir', 20 – 'L'absence d'un sentiment d'infériorité ou d'injustice'. See also Léger et al., *Cracking the Quebec Code*, chapter 10. Note that while Québécois youth envisage the future of Québec outside the paradigm of historical inferiority, they continue to broadly use the script of 'destiny crushed by the Other' to represent Québec's historical experience. The paradox may stem from the fact that there is not yet any other, alternative narrative powerful enough to influence the youth in terms of their historical consciousness. On this topic, see Jocelyn Létourneau, *Je me souviens? Le passé du Québec dans la conscience de sa jeunesse* (Montreal: Fides, 2014).
- 33 Following the National Battlefields Commission's decision to cancel the most spectacular and popular events for the commemoration of 1759, one group, mainly sovereigntists, decided to hold, on the Plains of Abraham on 8 and 9 September 2009, a public reading of texts illustrating Québec's history 'from its indigenous sources to the multiple facets of its present'. The event, called 'Le Moulin à paroles' (literally 'word mill' but used to mean windbag or chatterbox), gave its organizers the chance to remind Québécois about the tragedy of their existence, a tragedy that began with the Conquest in 1759. See: Collective of authors, *Sous haute surveillance. Le Moulin à paroles* (Montreal: L'Instant même, 2010).
- 34 Christian Rioux, 'La "diversité" ou la tarte à la crème', *Le Devoir*, 13 January 2017. Rioux, a columnist with *Le Devoir* who is connected with 'conservative nationalism' (also known as 'identity nationalism'), is one of the main stakeholders who continue to denounce anything that is likely to change historic cultures. 'Conservative nationalists' consider themselves to be the clairvoyant heroes and protectors of a political community – (French) Québec – that is disintegrating and broadly repudiated by its 'multiculturalized progressive' intelligentsia. On conservative nationalism, see Jean-Marc Pottle and Jean-Pierre Couture, *Les nouveaux visages du nationalisme conservateur au Québec* (Montreal: Québec-Amérique, 2012).
- 35 The bill was presented to the National Assembly by Pauline Marois, at that time the PQ representative for the Charlevoix riding.
- 36 For an overview of the position of the 'worriers' about the contemporary condition in Québec, see the cited works of Beauchemin, Bock-Côté and Cantin. Within the 'worrier' movement, the first two are among the most articulate and influential thinkers (see Jocelyn Létourneau, 'Triste espérance'. [Review of Jacques Beauchemin's *La souveraineté en héritage* and Serge Cantin's *La souveraineté dans l'impasse*.] *Recherches sociographiques*, LVIII, 1 (2017), 173–80).
- 37 Gérard Bouchard and Charles Taylor, *Building the Future. A Time for Reconciliation. Report* (Québec: Commission de consultation sur les pratiques d'accommodement reliées aux différences culturelles, 2008).
- 38 Gérard Bouchard, *The Making of Nations and Cultures of the New World. An Essay in Comparative History* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008).

- 39 Several contributions to the publication edited by Bernard Gagnon, *La diversité Québécoise en débat. Bouchard, Taylor et les autres* (Montreal: Québec-Amérique, 2010) suggest this. See in particular the texts by Thériault and Beauchemin.
- 40 This article will not comment on the debate stemming from Bill 60, the Charter of Québec values, tabled in the National Assembly in November 2013 by PQ minister Bernard Drainville. While ultimately this law was not adopted, the discussions about establishing shared rules for living in a secular state and mapping out religious accommodations are still very much alive and continue to draw in politicians. The enthusiasm over the debate is essentially unchanged from in the days of the Bouchard Taylor Commission. It opposes, on one side, people with an open conception of Québec identity and culture, based on the idea of identity and cultural actualization, who advocate minimal legislation on the matter; and, on the other side, those who have a closed conception of this identity and culture, based on the idea of identity and cultural permanence, and who advocate varying degrees of protectionist legislation on the matter. So far, the position of the former has won out over that of the latter, which is nevertheless fairly strong in the public space.
- 41 Cultural Catholicism means a conception of the Catholic religion as an identity resource, a marker of historical continuity and a reservoir of collective meaning. In Québec, Catholicism, even secular Catholicism, is part of the national identity. Jean-François Laniel, 'La laïcité Québécoise est-elle achevée? Essai sur une petite nation, entre société neuve et république', in *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles*, ed. É-Martin Meunier (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2016), 423–74; Robert Mager and Serge Cantin, eds., *Modernité et religion au Québec. Où en sommes-nous?* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2010).
- 42 It appears that Catholicism as a cultural reference point is quickly fading among the new generations. É-Martin Meunier, 'Effritement de la religion culturelle et transformation du modèle québécois de laïcité', in *Les enjeux du pluralisme: actualité du modèle québécois*, eds. Jean-François Plamondon and Anne Vaucher (Bologna: Pendragon, 2010), 151–6; Louis Rousseau, ed., *Le Québec après Bouchard-Taylor: les identités religieuses de l'immigration* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2012).
- 43 Joëlle Quirion, *Le cours Éthique et culture religieuse: transmission des connaissances ou endoctrinement?* (Montreal: Institut de recherche sur le Québec, 2009); Mathieu Bock-Côté, 'Du Printemps d'érable au débat sur la Charte des valeurs: mutation et renaissance du nationalisme québécois', in Meunier, *Le Québec et ses mutations culturelles*, 393–419. For a critique of the course from a secular and civic perspective, see Daniel Baril and Normand Baillargeon, eds., *La face cachée du cours Éthique et culture religieuse* (Montreal: Leméac, 2016).
- 44 George Leroux, *Éthique, culture religieuse, dialogue: arguments pour un programme* (Montreal: Fides, 2007); Nancy Bouchard and Mathieu Gagnon, eds., *L'éthique et culture religieuse en question: réflexions critiques et prospectives* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2004).
- 45 The play on words does not translate: *Printemps arabe* (Arab Spring) and *Printemps érable* (Maple Spring).
- 46 Like many societies, some of which, including the United States, the United Kingdom and even France, are flirting dangerously with or even embracing populist ideas.
- 47 According to a study conducted by Simon Langlois ('L'appui à la souveraineté du Québec de 1995 à aujourd'hui', unpublished manuscript, Department of Sociology, Université Laval, Québec, 2015), between 2004–5 and 2012–15 support for sovereignty has only remained steady among those 55 and over. It has declined for all other age groups, dropping by 25 basis points among 18-to-24-year-olds, 19 basis points among 25-to-34-year-olds, 22 basis points among 35-to-44-year-olds and 21 basis points among 45-to-54-year-olds. The diagnosis of a loss of *faith* ('Yes, and it all becomes possible') but not necessarily of *consideration* ('Eventually, but why now and why at all?') among youth concerning the idea of independence can also be seen in St-Pierre Plamondon, 'Oser repenser le PQ'.
- 48 This vision is expressed in St-Pierre Plamondon, 'Oser repenser le PQ'.

Note on contributor

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