

Ethnolinguistic minorities and national integration in Canada

JOSEPH YVON THÉRIAULT

Abstract

In the light of the other contributions to this issue, which offer various perspectives on ethnolinguistic minorities — Anglophones in Quebec and Francophones in Canada outside Quebec — this article explores the question of how the identity process unfolds in these minority groups. These processes do not reflect pure definitions of types of identity groups, such as nation, minority nationalism, or ethnic groups. They are, instead, an interlocking pattern of these different types, which produces a dynamic determined, in large part, by historic modes of national integration particular to the Canadian context. The specific dynamic, rather than leading us away from our understanding of ethnolinguistic identities, leads us towards the possibility of a better understanding of how contemporary societies are constructed by the interweaving of ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural groups, national minorities and nations.

1. Introduction

In his work *Postethnic America*, David A. Hollinger (1995) describes the transition from a multicultural America to a postethnic America. In multiculturalism, the national community is perceived as being pluralist, that is, it brings together ethno-racial groups whose boundaries need to be defined and preserved, and individual identity is determined by the belonging to one of these groups. In postethnic America, however, the national culture is cosmopolitan, and rests on a civic culture, leaving more and more to the individual the choice of one's community of descent. In postethnic America, ethnicity is a generalized condition, but the ethnic group tends to disappear. In a commentary on this book, published in the journal *Dissent*, the Canadian political philosopher Will Kymlicka (1998) highlights the dangers of transforming the processes of

identity formation specific to the United States into universal analytical categories.

In what way is this distinction between national civic culture and individualized ethnic culture not a concept that could take the planning of ethnocultural differences into account elsewhere? Kymlicka emphasizes that this distinction is based on a normative dichotomy which contrasts a national culture that is open and founded on pure civic values (cosmopolitan) and a closed identity culture, without individual choices, a closed culture as would practice a pluralist type of multiculturalism which focuses on protecting the rights and promoting the identity of ethno-racial groups. With this kind of contrast, collective identity references, other than civic cosmopolitan, are limited to a closed ethnicity. Such divisive contrasts can never really allow to express the diverse articulations of civic culture and identity culture in contemporary societies. As Kymlicka explains, it is particularly inadequate for describing the minority nationalism of groups which seek to position themselves both as a community with shared history and, at the same time, as a place of internal ethnocultural diversity that is welcoming towards newcomer cultures.

This is the way, he continues, that we should understand Quebec nationalism within the dynamics of Canadian politics. A community with shared history, which seeks to be recognized as a national community built on liberal and civic values: in other words, a community which seeks to integrate and internalize not only ethnocultural diversity, but also economic, political, and social diversity; a national minority that also seeks to develop a framework in which individuals can exercise personal choices about their identity. Finally, it should be noted that this type of identity group, like civic-cosmopolitan groups or nations, wants to be recognized as being a particular place where society is built in the modern world, unlike ethnic groups which do not make such claims or set such objectives.¹

In discussions about nationalism and multiculturalism, at least three different types of groups need to be distinguished: national groups, minority nationalism, and ethnic groups. A true understanding of the historic development of diversity in contemporary societies cannot be reduced to the question of whether or not ethnicity is considered in a pluralist or cosmopolitan dimension (Hollinger 1995), but should also consider whether the state is capable of recognizing the existence of national minorities.

Canada is a particularly interesting case for an exploration of the complexity of the interweaving of national identity, national minorities, and ethnolinguistic or ethnocultural groups. For over a century, from the Act of Union of 1840, which politically united the colonies of Lower Canada

(now Quebec) and Upper Canada (now Ontario) in the Union of Canada, until the 1970s when the Trudeau government affirmed that Canada was now a multicultural society, the political and cultural identity of Canada was founded on the idea of national duality. The affirmation of this duality was mainly based on the existence of French-Canadian nationalism, which perceived itself as a national minority and demanded political recognition of this fact. During the 1970s, the political recognition of a multicultural foundation to Canadian reality was superimposed on the binational dynamics of Canada. That is why the policy of recognition in Canada can not be reduced to a cosmopolitan or pluralist notion of multiculturalism. Instead, the plurinational character of Canada must also be recognized.

How, in view of the analyses presented in this issue, can minority language communities (Anglophones in Quebec and Francophones in the rest of Canada) be inscribed in this general pattern of nation, national minorities, and ethnic groups? This question, as we will see, is far from being simple. The effort to provide an answer will show how the understanding of ethnolinguistic or ethnocultural diversity can, in large part, be attributed to historical and political modes specific to each national context.

2. Which type of group is it?

According to the terminology used up until now, the Canadian government's recognition of official bilingualism in 1969 was an affirmation of a national type (nation-state building) which was meant to be distinct from a binational recognition (minority nationalism), as well as from a multiethnic recognition of Canada (ethnicity). In the mind of legislators at that time, languages needed to be detached from a politicocultural identity — as until then French-Canadian nationalism had required and as the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963–1969) still proposed — in order to give the two official languages a pure civic character in service of all Canadians, no matter what their ethnocultural origins were. PanCanadian bilingualism was explicitly intended to close the door on the demands for dual nations and favored an expression of ethnocultural belonging concurrent with the formulation of pluralist multicultural policies (multiculturalism became an official policy in Canada in 1971, two years after official bilingualism). French and English have equal status as national languages in Canada; there is not a majority language and a minority language. In other words, the existence of ethnolinguistic communities and, to an even greater degree, that of ethnolinguistic minorities

was not the intended effect of legislation on bilingualism which, on the contrary, aimed to eradicate the political nature of these realities.

If this was the goal of the legislators, the result wasn't exactly what they hoped. Language policies, admittedly, do not easily lend themselves to purely civic and individual concepts of language. As Pierre Foucher (this issue) states in his presentation of language laws in Canada, collective language rights exist even at the federal level, for example in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which made language legislation part of the constitution in 1982. Section 23 specifically recognizes the rights of official language minority groups (Francophones in the rest of Canada and Anglophones in Quebec) to have access to educational facilities, and courts have entrenched the right of these communities to govern their own schools. The evolution of language policies and the interpretation of language rights by the courts have accentuated the recognition of linguistic minorities and the obligation of the federal government to enhance the vitality of minority official-language communities (cf. Jedwab and Cardinal this issue). By making French and English the two civic languages of Canada, this legislation has sought to recognize the equality of the French and English languages throughout Canada. At the same time, it has contributed to the creation of ethnocultural minority groups, as the articles in this volume illustrate.

Clearly, then, if we want to understand the collective reality of the existence of ethnolinguistic communities, of Anglophones in Quebec and of Francophones in the rest of Canada, we need to see how these communities reflect some fundamental aspects of the definition of Canada (at least as it has been defined since the Charter in 1982), how they are inescapably national collectivities (French and English being official languages), and how, at the same time, their sociolinguistic behaviors can be understood according to the analysis applied to ethnolinguistic minority groups (Landry et al. this issue; Bouhris et al. this issue).²

But neither the national dimension nor the ethnolinguistic minority behavior can account for the entire situation of these groups. The Canadian political culture of identity remains fundamentally marked by the Quebec question — or, before the 1960s, what was called the question of French Canada — which, to come back to Kymlicka's distinction, neither comes out of the reality of a "cosmopolitical" nation (despite the intentions of official bilingualism) nor out of an ethnocultural affirmation (despite the existence of a multicultural policy), but rather from the dynamics of a national minority. Canadian Francophones outside Quebec, like Anglophones in Quebec are, as much by their history as by their geographical implantation, inextricably interweaved in this question of plurinationality.

How exactly can we then define the ethnolinguistic groups we are discussing here? As we said earlier, their nature is not synonymous with the reality inherent in the cosmopolitical nationality, although these dynamics are one part of the reality of the groups considered. Nor are these groups ethnolinguistic or ethnocultural minorities, as multiculturalism would define them, although the way the communities function is often quite similar. Lastly, they are not national minorities as such, although their historic dynamics is hard to understand without referring to their place in the Canadian plurinational dynamics. As we saw in Kymlicka's discussion of Hollinger's theses on the American postethnic reality, analytical categories cannot be exported directly from one national context to another. The processes through which ethnocultural groups are constructed and represented depend largely on historical modes of national integration. This does not mean that the concepts on which social sciences base their observations — in this case nation, national minority, ethnolinguistic groups — are not valid, but simply that they can only be exported well if they are reinserted into their own particular historical dynamics.³ In the specific case of Canadian Francophones in minority contexts and of Anglophones in Quebec, the polysemy of their references, when reinscribed in the dynamics of history that produced them, is anything but a handicap. It is, in fact, instructive about the processes by which identity boundaries are constructed, whether in terms of national, national minority, or ethnolinguistic or ethnocultural identities.

It is these lessons that we will try to outline briefly here, by considering certain observations from the comparative analyses of convergent and divergent realities of the groups presented in this issue.

3. Anglophones in Quebec: an abbreviated ethnicization

The case of Anglophones in Quebec is particularly unique in a North American setting. In the last 50 years, the English-speaking community has witnessed a gradual transition to minority status. Certainly, an Anglophone community has existed in Quebec for a long time. In fact, during the entire nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the political, economic, and cultural elite of English Canada were largely based in Quebec. Anglophones in Quebec were part of the dominant group of English Canada and, as a result, were a dominant group in Quebec as well. Historically, they were never viewed or represented as a minority and, as John A. Dickinson (this issue) reminds us, their integration into the political life of Quebec was, until the 1960s, based on a "consociational arrangement."

The shift of Anglophones in Quebec into a minority position is closely linked to the rise of Quebec nationalism after World War II. By territorializing the representation of the nation to the space of Quebec, this nationalism redefined the French Canada/English Canada opposition as that of Quebec/the rest of Canada opposition, thereby making the existence of minorities in each of the new configurations of national identity more visible. In Quebec, this shift to minority status was accentuated by what Dickinson called the “majority rule,” which has applied ever since. During the *Révolution tranquille* (quiet revolution), the vast sociopolitical transformations that marked Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s, the state and the Francophone elite of Quebec took hold of the economic direction of Quebec which was, from that point on, perceived through nationalism as a global society. This empowerment was facilitated by a shift of the Canadian economic center towards the west — Toronto and then Alberta. The minoritization of Anglophones was later accentuated by language laws that made French the only official language in Quebec — the best known, Bill 101 (1977), was only one piece of legislation that marked the history of language legislation in modern Quebec.

The creation of an Anglophone minority in Quebec should also be seen as an internal process within the group of English speakers. The exodus of a portion of the English-speaking population has been compensated by the phenomenon of the entry of recent immigrants who were integrated into the Anglophone community in Quebec, a phenomenon that persisted despite the Quebec school laws, which required new immigrants to be registered in French schools. Anglophone Quebec became a community that is less British, more cosmopolitan, with a majority of bilingual members who are better integrated into the Francophone majority, as much in daily life (for instance, with the number of exogamous couples) as in the public space (with the frequent use of French in their communications with the majority group). If, at the beginning, the Anglophone population reacted negatively to their new minority status, in particular after the election of the sovereigntist government in 1976, the articles in this current issue give ample evidence to support the fact that the shift to minority status has now been integrated into the group’s identity and is even valued by its members. We have, then, witnessed the creation of an ethnolinguistic minority: Anglophones of Quebec.

Bourhis et al. (this issue) ask another question: how do we measure the effect of language legislation in this rather harmonious transition from a community with national status (English-Canadian) to one with minority status (Anglophones of Quebec)? Certainly, the case of Quebec supports the view of those who believe that language policies can influence social determinism.

However, we also have to realize that the case of Anglophones in Quebec is a rather unique one, and not necessarily typical of shifts to minority status. The minority status of Anglophones of Quebec has not been accompanied by a tendency towards assimilation, for instance. The group continues even to assimilate a large portion of the immigrant population. As Patricia Lamarre (this issue) has clearly shown, the place of the French language in English schools, through French immersion classes, mixed-language marriages and families, is not of great concern to community leaders. The development of this community, as Jack Jedwab (this issue) explains in his article on identity and governance in Anglophone Quebec, appears to contradict one of the most frequent observations in theories of ethnicity: that a high degree of institutional completeness, such as that which the Anglophone population in Quebec possesses, leads to a similarly high level of identity awareness. Analysis has not validated this finding.

In its shift to a minority status, the Anglophone community of Quebec has not demonstrated a high propensity for building ethnic boundaries. In fact, Anglophones have acted in a manner strangely similar to the cosmopolitan attitude described by Hollinger in the American postethnic perspective, that is, as an ethnicity without an ethnic group, whose identity can be largely attributed to an individual piece-work construction. With Anglophones of Quebec, this characteristic cannot be explained by their minority status but, rather, is related to the high status of English in North America. Despite the fact that this group is a minority in demographic, legal, and political terms, the social status of English remains high in Quebec. For this reason, the shift to minority status is not complete; it is an abbreviated minoritization.

4. Francophones in the rest of Canada: a refusal of nationality

By their number (nearly a million people have French as a first language) and by their legal status (one of two official language minorities), Francophones in Canada living in a minority situation (outside Quebec) can be said to be in a situation comparable to that of Anglophones of Quebec. Indeed, we are often reminded that the process of minoritization in the Anglophone population of Quebec has made them a minority group similar to Francophones outside Quebec. As we have just noted, however, the way the Anglophone community in Quebec functions, in terms of language and identity, is not entirely typical of minority communities. With Francophone minorities in the rest of Canada, on the other hand, as the two articles in this issue by Landry et al. illustrate, we see a situation in

which bilingualism is achieved only at the expense of the minority community: assimilation, low language status, subtractive bilingualism. It is, then, easy to understand how ethnocultural boundaries have become a major preoccupation for this minority, and why they are more of a concern than they are for Anglophones in Quebec. This observation is substantiated by the project of cultural autonomy, which remains an important issue, for instance, with questions of public education (Landry et al. this issue), the demand for political entrenchment of language rights (Cardinal this issue), and the continuing efforts to establish economic borders through community economic development (Forgues this issue).

In spite of displaying sociolinguistic characteristics more typical of a minority ethnolinguistic group, Francophones in the rest of Canada cannot be defined as an ethnic minority. Until the 1960s (cf. the history presented in Allaire [this issue]), this group defined itself as an integral part of French Canada and, as a result, as a member of one of two nations (French and English) at the source of the Confederation agreement. As we have seen with the case of Quebec, this representation is more closely connected to a minority nationalism than to that of an ethnic group. French Canada did not seek to be differentially integrated into Anglo-Saxon North America, as do ethnic groups, but rather to participate in a process of creation of another civilization in North America, a collectivity also capable of producing a society.

The affirmation of Quebec nationalism at the beginning of the 1960s, and the territorialization of identity that such a process involves, have greatly modified the boundaries of these communities. In provincializing their projects, they have, as have Anglophones of Quebec, undergone a virtual process of minoritization that is a stronger integration into the Anglophone majority of their respective provinces and a certain organizational split with the French Canada of earlier days, which has now become Quebec. Nonetheless, the representation of identity has not completely followed this objective fact of being a minority. On one hand, French outside of Quebec is politically and legally one of the two national languages of Canada, and this fact has consequences for the linguistic identity of these groups. On the other hand, Francophone minorities in Canada continue to be largely self-defined and self-represented as a national minority which seeks to acquire all the characteristics of a global society. This is how we have to understand their insistence on institutional autonomy or their desire to be recognized as a distinct community with internal differentiation, especially in terms of immigration. The processes at work within these communities cannot be properly understood unless we inscribe them into the perspective of a quest for nationality that history seems to have refused them.

In summary, then, the processes described in the studies presented in this issue on the Anglophone minority in Quebec and the Francophone minority outside Quebec do not reflect pure types of ethnolinguistic group formation. Their evolution is, in effect, largely dependent on the manner in which Canadian society has, throughout history, dealt with a pluralism of identities. Recognizing this unique aspect of Canadian identity, rather than leading us away from an understanding of ethnolinguistic identities, leads us towards the possibility of a better understanding of how contemporary societies are constructed by the interweaving of ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural groups, national minorities, and nations.

University of Ottawa

Notes

1. In Thériault (2005), for Quebec, and in Thériault (in press), for Francophones outside Quebec, a longer discussion on the development of the identity project of these groups.
2. The names refer to the contributions in this volume, without adding lengthy explanations and specific citations.
3. For more on the differentiation between ethnocultural arrangements that correspond to various political modes of national integration, see Schnapper (1998).

References

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