

Nationalisms, Languages and Linguistic Minorities in Québec:
Comparing the Philosophy of René Lévesque and his Contemporaries

Summary

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Considering that diverse nationalisms existing within a minority nationalism has not been well documented (Lluch, 2014), this thesis was undertaken to identify various Québec nationalisms that major political figures aspired to. Importantly, the reductive independentist vs. anti-independentist dichotomy must be questioned; it seems important to explore the numerous nationalisms that exist between these two extremes. Additionally, since Québec has entered a new era of embracing both nationalism and pluralism (Maclure, 2003), the author also tries to examine how Québec was able to pursue a course towards embracing both these isms. The thesis concentrates its discussion on language: French defining the Québec identity and also acting as a focal point of inclusiveness (Mackey, 2010).

The hypothesis centres strongly on one person, René Lévesque, who initiated the first referendum for Québec independence in 1980 as Premier. However, different from his more hard-line colleagues, his nationalism did not pursue independence as an ultimate objective. Moreover, as a nationalist, but also as a democrat and a defender of minority rights, the author intends to situate him as a pioneer of a modern Québec which strives for a new identity. Thus, the hypothesis is that Lévesque was the one who a) went beyond the dichotomy of independentist vs. anti-independentist and b) set the basis for and was able to act as a vehicle for Québec to pursue both nationalism and pluralism. In addition to his determination to achieve rights as a minority within Canada, he knew that there were certain obligations as a majority within Québec to manage its own minorities. Importantly, he treated Québec's three minorities differently, having his own ideology for the management of each. Thus, the most important task is to determine Lévesque's ideology on Québec nationalism and each of the minorities in Québec.

In order to avoid giving Lévesque sole credit for the changes in Québec and to paint as clear and unbiased a picture of him as possible, the author situates Lévesque on both diachronic and synchronic lines. On the diachronic line, the author overviews the history of Québec and the transformation of identity and nationalism, giving the basis of the discussion. On synchronic lines, Lévesque is compared with his contemporaries, namely André Laurendeau, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, Robert Bourassa and Camille Laurin. By situating Lévesque among these four Québec nationalist discourse, the author seeks to a) identify each's conception of nationalism and minority and b) treat Lévesque as someone who chose his own path among many possible options, both similar and different to those chosen by others.

For Lévesque and other figures, the author uses both primary and secondary materials to explore their philosophies. The former includes memoirs, interviews and articles, as well as scripts of debates in the Québec National Assembly and other governmental publications. Secondary materials mainly include biographies, anthologies and other articles both academic and journalistic.

The first chapter deals with the theoretical framework of this thesis. The most important is the *Theory of Survival* which was proposed by Canadian author Margaret Atwood in 1972. It identified four *Basic Victim Positions* (BVPs), which are four interrelated positions that illustrate the types of victims and clarify their respective characteristics: those in Position One deny victimhood for fear of losing their privileges; those in Position Two acknowledge their victim situation but consider it to be unchangeable since the real cause cannot be identified; those in Position Three reject the role of victim and make the effort to alter the situation, having the possibility to go on to the forth position but also to

return to the second position if failed; those in Position Four are non-victims or ex-victims directing energy towards creative activity (Atwood, 2012). This is a useful and innovative tool to better understand the historical transformation of Québec identity and how it leads to what is embraced in the current era of modern Québec, and the distinctiveness of each nationalism espoused by the five figures.

The first chapter further contains the theory on modern Québec identity proposed by Maclure (2003), exploring how Québec tries to go beyond its social imaginary which is limited to melancholy nationalism and anti-nationalism, and further to form a *pluralistic distinct society* (Laforest, 1995a). Importantly, this new Québec identity maintains nationalist narratives and yet also tries to reconcile its past relations with minorities, particularly with anglophones and the indigenous (Laforest, 1995a).

The last section of the chapter introduces our framework concerning language policy. To best understand the linguistic philosophy of each figure, this thesis discusses status planning; introducing the principles of personality and territoriality; and linguistic models of bilingualism, unilingualism, dualism and preferentialism. The notions of dualism and preferentialism are crucial, both having important ideological implications. The former suggests that Québec nationalists mostly claimed the dualistic nature of Canada instead of the exclusivity of Québec. The latter implies their willingness to accommodate English having its own status within Québec while preferring the dominance of French, different from the mere exclusivity of unilingualism.

The second chapter focuses on the diachronic line of Québec identity and nationalism through an introduction of the history of Québec. It was observed, utilizing the BVPs of the survival theory, that

the history of Québec can be divided into five eras. The first era was from French arrival in the seventeenth century to around 1790, when people first identified themselves as *Canadiens*. This corresponded to Position One where victimization was denied and thus no visible nationalism was in place. This was followed by Position Three, the time of rebellion from 1791 to 1840. The major reason for the rebellion's ultimate failure was the lack of support from the masses and fear of assimilation, relying on the Catholic Church for their identity. This prevented them from achieving greater change which led to a reversion back to Position Two. The traditional nationalism of the *Canadiens français* lasted until 1960, valuing Catholic and rural values. It was a defensive and passive nationalism relying on the will of god, surrendering their agency and refusing to change the situation for themselves. However, the Quiet Revolution brought the people back to Position Three, seeing them once again playing an active role. Change was realized in many spheres of life with the emergence of the *Québécois* identity and it was also in this era that the separatism movement grew, resulting in two failed referenda. Although these failures could have caused Québec to regress to Position Two, Québec has instead entered an era of a pluralistic distinct society which signifies Position Four. It does not deny nationalism but seeks pluralism as well; pursuing both is a major challenge that Québec is currently facing.

Through chapters three to six, the focus shifts to the synchronic line. Lévesque is compared to the other figures on four themes: their attitudes on nationalism, language including English and anglophones, cultural minorities and indigenous peoples. Concerning nationalism, Lévesque became a sovereigntist who aspired for association but ultimately to make Québec an equal partner of English

Canada, thus a faithful follower of the two nations theory. He obviously went beyond the dichotomy of melancholy nationalism of Laurin (Position Two) or anti-nationalism of Trudeau (Position One). He also denied yielding to any fear of assimilation as in the neo-nationalism of Laurendeau or to economic obedience to anglophone business of Bourassa so that Québec could be on equal terms with English Canada, i.e. dualism. Indeed, Lévesque's strong nationalism was necessary in making English Canada realize that Québec was an important part of Canada. Lévesque's commitment to democracy was also essential to earning respect from other provinces, which further advanced his importance.

As with Bourassa and Laurendeau, Lévesque's French preferentialism was clear, vis-à-vis Laurin's more unilingual approach. French preferentialism, rather than bilingualism, is justified by what Kymlicka (2001) called a *societal culture* in which French functions as a common language of the Québec societal culture. Different from Bourassa who valued the opinion of the anglophone business sector solely due to his prioritization on economy, or from Laurin who tried to degrade the anglophones as much as possible, Lévesque valued the anglophones a great deal. Importantly, he saw their rights as acquired rights, which could not be modified. How to deal with them was one of the tests for maturity, an important process for openness and tolerance. In this sense, Lévesque's insistence on French preferentialism included anglophones from the beginning, their existence being undeniable.

While there was consensus among neo-nationalists that immigrants should integrate to the francophone sphere of Québec, Lévesque's relation to the cultural communities went further, reaching out to them for constant dialogue. Lévesque's significant experience of seeing the liberation of a

concentration camp as a war correspondent made him reach out to the Jewish community, through which he learned how to interact with cultural minorities. His first riding also contained many cultural minorities with whom he initiated constant dialogue. Just as the anglophone population was for him a test of maturity, the cultural minorities were for him an integral part of his nationalism, in the sense that they kept him from pursuing an extreme type of nationalism. Thus for Lévesque, they were inspirations for him to become a fair politician and to avoid to become an excessive nationalist.

As for the indigenous people, the neo-nationalists acknowledged aboriginal rights, contrary to Trudeau who struggled to incorporate indigenous rights into his liberalist views. However, in contrast to Laurin who saw them, collectively, as another conquered people, Lévesque saw them as constituting distinct nations based on their own languages and territories. Hence, their languages were not officially recognized for the Québec nation, instead Québec officially recognized each indigenous group as a nation of its own. His greatest attachment among the three *silos*, namely the anglophones, cultural communities and indigenous, was for the indigenous peoples with whom Lévesque had a very special relationship, especially with many Inuit leaders who admired him greatly (Godin, 2007; Poliquin, 2009).

Considering his overall attitude and philosophy, he alone can be thought of reaching Position Four of the BVP, as a person who pursued both nationalism and pluralism without sense of victimization or fear of assimilation. Pursuing an important responsibility to respect their inner minority, Lévesque was solemnly assuming the role of acting as a sovereign nation. Indeed, as a democrat who defended minority rights, his motivations derived from the fact that he was a nationalist. Thus, his attitude as a

firm *Québécois* nationalist was the key factor for advancing Québec from Position Three to Four, as Maclure (2003) indicated as a crucial condition for modern Québec identity.