RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY IN QUEBEC, REAL AND IMAGINED, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE

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INTRODUCTION

In Quebec, the religious landscape has been shaped by a very rapid secularization process that started with the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, just as globalization began to open the province to new religious influences. Our research, done in collaboration with five other researchers, aims at documenting: 1) the new religious diversity that appeared in Quebec over the last decades; 2) the meaning of religion in the everyday lives of the Québécois today. Although the study concerns the whole of the province, this presentation is based mainly on data that have been collected in Montreal, the province's largest and most multicultural city. Over the past three years, observations have been carried out on religious groups that represent (1) religions established in Quebec since the 1960s (e.g., Baha'i; Neo-shamanism, including Druidism and Wicca); (2) new forms of religious practice in long-established religions (the case of some Jewish and Catholic congregations); (3) religions imported by immigrants (including Islam, Hinduism, certain forms of Buddhism); (4) congregations of long-established religions that include a substantial proportion of immigrants among their members. Thus far, observations have been completed on a total of 100 groups in Montreal (out of a total of 137 to date). Of the Montreal groups, 38 have been studied in-depth through extended participant observation and interviews with members and leaders. The second phase of the study (2010-2014) is extending the research to the regions of Quebec outside Montreal where several dozen more groups are under study.

Research assistants have carried out observations of religious rituals and other religious activities such as neighbourhood prayer groups as well as social activities involving members of the group, like communal meals and picnics, funding events, and courses that are sponsored by the group. They have also interviewed members who vary in terms of gender, age, profession, matrimonial status, and level of commitment to the group. The interviews cover individuals' personal and religious trajectories, the role of the religious group in their everyday lives, their level of economic, social, and ideological commitment to the religious community, and when relevant, religious activities pursued outside the group's purview. Meintel and Mossière devised the tools for the team study on the basis of their own extensive fieldwork, in a Spiritualist church for Meintel and in a Congolese Pentecostal congregation for Mossière. In what follows, we present Montreal's current religious landscape, looking at some of the trends that emerge from our findings. This is followed by a closer examination of our findings regarding immigrant religious groups.

THE QUEBEC CONTEXT

Most of the religious currents mentioned herein took root in Quebec in the wake of the "Quiet Revolution" (*la Révolution tranquille*), a time of dramatic social change in the province (1960-1966) (Linteau *et al.*, 1989). During this period, the state took over the social welfare, as well as the educational and health systems, that had long been the fief of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile the religious practice of the Catholic faithful was declining rapidly (Bibby, 1990) and the ranks of the clergy and other religious were being depleted. As the political system was liberalized in the 1960s, Quebec society became thoroughly secularized and far more open to religious diversity (Linteau *et al.*, 1989). The new climate of religious freedom that developed has made for an ever more diversified religious landscape.

Recent years have seen the apparition of an ever-increasing number of places of worship in the province, especially in cities (Germain & Gagnon, 2003). This is partly due to immigration. The relative demographic weight of immigrants has been growing steadily, from 5.6% of the province's total population in 1951 to 9.4% in 1996 (Immigration et Communautés Culturelles Quebec, 2004). By 2001, according to census data, this figure had risen to almost 10%. Religious diversity among native-born

Québécois has also grown a great deal in recent years. While some have converted to Islam, Buddhism or to Evangelical religions (Mossière, 2010), others have discovered forms of spirituality that have either developed in situ from various sources or that present themselves as contemporary versions of ancient traditions such as Druidism, Native-inspired shamanism, Wicca and so on. Note that none of these require conversion, so those that were brought up Catholic sometimes retain certain elements of Catholic identity and religious observance (Meintel, 2012/2011). Many of these spiritual currents involve beliefs in spirits and spirit contact. One of the major findings from our ongoing team study, as well as in Meintel's work on Spiritualists, is that the mainstream Quebecois (French-speaking, born in Quebec and baptized in the Catholic faith) who frequent such groups are unlikely to discuss this openly with others. We have found that this is true of those who frequent many other groups in our study, be they practicing Catholics or members of Protestant congregations. Public discussion of religion tends to focus on Islam and visible markers such as the veil or the *kirpan* (a ceremonial dagger carried by Sikh males). Thus, we find that although Quebec's religious landscape is quite diverse, much of this diversity remains socially invisible.

SOME TRENDS OF THE CURRENT QUEBECOIS RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE

Among the main findings of our study we note the enormous variety of religious resources now available to the Québécois; roughly speaking, we could say that rapid secularization on the institutional level, and generalized anticlericalism on the ideological level have created a religious void in the lives of the Catholic-born majority while at the same time, globalization has increased religious diversity and brought new symbolic resources to the province. Whether they formally change religion or (more often the case) do not, immigrants and non-immigrants are highly mobile across religious traditions and groups. Indeed, while some thousands have converted to religions such as Islam, which is attracting the highest numbers at the moment, converts are but the tip of the iceberg when it comes to crossing religious boundaries. Most of the Quebecois-born participants in the non-Catholic groups we study retain a Catholic identity, while finding new ways to experience the sacred in their lives. Such behaviours bring about new religious hybridities, like Neoshamanism or Wicca-related practices. We have found that young people are the most active in introducing innovations in various types of religious groups and networks, sometimes adding political involvement to their spiritual commitment; for example, regarding environmentalism and the protection of Mother Earth. Healing usually has an important if not central role in the religious currents we have studied (Meintel and Mossière, 2011). A lot of creativity is found in the forms of sociability religious gatherings may take, some of which are sustained by the extensive use of websites. Many are aimed at spontaneous and time-limited experiences, like some rituals related to their members' life experiences (abortion for example) or meditations dedicated to full moon.

We find that local religious institutions, including Catholic ones (with some exceptions), show remarkable adaptability to modernity and to the new attendees it brings in their spaces: immigrants, homosexuals, etc. Moreover, religious groups represent important sites of interethnic relations. In fact, virtually none of the groups we have encountered is monoethnic and most include individuals from a number of national backgrounds (e.g. Haitians, Vietnamese). Immigrant groups are often religiously diverse. However, immigrants bring more Catholics than any other religion to Canada and of these, many come to Quebec (Castel, 2004), especially Montreal. At the same time that these new arrivals bring their own styles of Catholic worship, the archdiocese may also accommodate such groups by creating "missions" instead of territorial parishes (as, for example, in the case of Tamils) while existing parishes offer services in the language of these new populations (Polish, Laotian, etc.). Hispanic Catholics have given new vitality to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal in Quebec. This relates to our findings about immigrant religious groups, to which we now turn.

ROLES AND ACTIVITIES OF IMMIGRANT RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN QUEBEC

Among the religious groups we have met, those formed by immigrants tend to be greatly concerned with giving members the help they need to adapt to the new society: they support newcomers in the settlement process by providing them with material, social, and emotional resources, along with recreational activities, information, and advice for finding employment and housing. For example, the "murids" or Senegalese Muslim brotherhoods offer substantial material assistance to any member who is newly arrived from Africa. This includes providing housing and hospitality, often for months. It is worth noting that informal resources offered by religious groups to their immigrant members do not substitute for public institutions and government-provided services; rather, they complement the resources provided by the state and often convey information about them to new arrivals. For example we found cases of Congolese Pentecostal families who have taken in unaccompanied minors. In this respect, immigrant religious groups provide community structures that help compensate for social ties and support that have been attenuated by migration.

Immigrant religious groups are also highly helpful for providing symbolic resources that allow migrants to give value to the difficult experiences associated with migration. For example, some Muslims and Pentecostals we have met consider religious belonging as a source of pride and a positive distinction that distinguishes them from the Other. One Pentecostal Haitian believer Mossière has interviewed finds in her faith the tools for transcending her previous experiences of discrimination based on racial categorization: *"Now I don't see this one as Black or this one as White. We are all human beings doing the work of God. I have White friends, we talk on the phone, but they have been baptized. You have to differentiate whether or not people are baptized."* Furthermore, we find that most of the religious groups also position themselves and their members in the new society in ways that are valued in religious terms. These prompt a variety of attitudes toward the host society. A minority of Evangelical groups adopts a sectarian approach; their religious rhetoric presents proselytizing as a way of improving Quebec society. In their view, Evangelical immigrants are endowed with the mission of saving Christian souls in a province one of them describes as *"devastated for decades because of the collapse of Catholicism."*

Attitudes regarding visibility in the host society vary between religious groups, and even within the same tradition: some Muslims adopt a discreet profile while others prefer to organize activities that make them known to the wider public in a positive way. Likewise, in a certain African Pentecostal congregation, the leader has organized a blood donation campaign although blood has been refused by health associations because their Africans members' countries of origin are considered as involving a high risk of AIDS. We also note various strategies for dealing with the challenges of fitting into a secular society. Often religious groups choose to emphasize the commonalities between the religious community's vision of the world and the dominant Québécois world view. A Congolese pastor explains that sermons and Pentecostal norms are aimed at making members into "*good citizens*" and promoting their social and economic participation and mobility in their new country. This perspective is illustrated by his pastoral approach, which he terms "The Church in the City." The same pastor runs seminars to help members adapt to Québécois laws and norms. A typical activity that he organized was entitled, *"How to Interpret Marriage as a Christian, in Accordance with Quebec Law."* Along this line, most religious groups we have encountered espouse a discourse of integration or adaptation and see their members as social actors who can make a positive contribution to Quebec society. Religious leaders often mention the important role of immigrants for the province's prosperity, cultural enrichment, and social development.

Overall, we find many instances where religious practices have been adapted to the conditions in Quebec: although the prohibition on paying interest makes it nearly impossible for Muslims to acquire a home in Quebec, the imam of a mosque in our study suggested that his followers respect the spirit of the rule rather than the rule itself, that is, the principle that wealthy people should not abuse the poor by imposing usurious rates of interest. On the individual level, we find considerable religious change over the life course, for example, in how religion is practiced and the intensity of religious practice. Further changes can be expected as religious groups evolve over time and the second generation comes of age, especially regarding the issue of the language of worship.

The main divergences with the host society revolve around differing interpretations of family models. For example, Tamil Catholics wish that Quebec society would provide better examples for young people; they see a causal relationship between the low levels of religious practice among the Québécois and the breakdown of family structures, as expressed in high rates of divorce, cohabitation without marriage, single-parent families and children born out of wedlock. Tamil priests often point proudly to the low divorce rate among their members. By comparison, the non-immigrant groups in our study are typically less preoccupied with their place in the wider society, and take their members' status as Québécois and Canadian as a given. At the same time, they are usually less developed on the community level; in many cases, non-immigrant groups provide religious and spiritual services but little in the way of sociability for their members.

CONCLUSION

The rapid secularization of the 60s, in conjunction with new migration patterns and the increased mobility of the Québécois all contributed to creating a religious diversity that is in fact quite different from the imagined diversity one finds in Quebec mass media. That is, the term "religious diversity" tends to evoke Muslim veils and Sikh kirpans; moreover, there is a certain widespread stereotype that imagines locals as nonreligious, and immigrants as religious. Apart from the fact that much immigrant religiosity is nearly invisible (small, mobile, materially poor congregations; observant Muslims who do not frequent mosques or do not wear distinctive signs of religious belonging), the one of non-immigrants is even more so. The Quiet Revolution seems to have made religion something of a social taboo; even practicing Catholics are unlikely to advertise the fact. The word "religion," in fact, is widely resisted, connoting "clerical authority" to many. Those we interviewed often consider themselves "*spiritual*" rather than religious; moreover, those who are active in an open religious group such as the Spiritualist congregation

Meintel studies – including those who work as healers and mediums at church services – if asked about their religion, will often say something like, *"Well, I was brought up Catholic."* All this makes for a little known religious diversity that involves non-immigrants just as much as it does immigrants.

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LA DIVERSITÉ RELIGIEUSE AU QUÉBEC, RÉELLE ET IMAGINAIRE, VISIBLE ET INVISIBLE

Le paysage religieux québécois a connu un processus de sécularisation très rapide ayant débuté dès la Révolution tranquille des années 1960, alors que la mondialisation commençait à introduire de nouvelles influences religieuses dans la province. Notre recherche ethnographique, réalisée en collaboration avec cinq autres chercheurs, vise à documenter la nouvelle diversité religieuse qui est apparue au Québec au cours des dernières décennies, ainsi que la signification du religieux dans le quotidien des Québécois. Bien que le projet couvre tout le Québec, nous présentons ici les résultats des données recueillies à Montréal, la ville la plus grande et la plus multiculturelle de la province. Au cours des trois dernières années, l'équipe de recherche a effectué des observations et des entrevues auprès de 100 groupes religieux situés à Montréal (sur un total de 137 groupes dans toute la province), dont 38 ont fait l'objet d'études plus approfondies. Les groupes visés représentent (1) des religions établies au Québec depuis les années 1960 (par exemple les Baha'is, les groupes néo-chamaniques, incluant le duidisme et le wicca) ; (2) de nouvelles formes de pratiques religieuses apparues au sein de traditions religieuses établies depuis longtemps (dans le cas de certaines églises catholiques ou juives) ; (3) des religions importées par les immigrants (incluant l'islam, l'hindouisme, certaines formes de bouddhisme) ; (4) des congrégations de religions établies depuis longtemps qui incluent un nombre important d'immigrants parmi leurs membres. Dans cette contribution, nous présentons le paysage religieux québécois actuel en soulignant quelques-unes des tendances qui ressortent de nos données. Dans une seconde partie, nous présentons plus spécifiquement les groupes religieux composés d'immigrants.

Un des résultats les plus significatifs de notre projet consiste en la relative invisibilité de la religiosité des Québécois dits « de souche », soient les personnes francophones, nées au Québec et baptisées catholiques. En fait, les individus qui fréquentent de tels groupes restent généralement discrets quant à leurs pratiques et n'en parlent pas à leur entourage. Tandis que les débats publics concernant la religion tendent à se concentrer sur l'islam et sur les marqueurs visibles du religieux tels que le voile ou le *kirpan*, nous soutenons que bien que le paysage religieux soit relativement varié, une grande part de cette diversité demeure relative invisible socialement.

Parmi les caractéristiques principales du paysage religieux québécois actuel, nous trouvons une grande variété de ressources religieuses désormais disponibles aux Québécois ; il semblerait que le processus de sécularisation ainsi que l'anticléricalisme généralisé qui a suivi la Révolution tranquille aient créé un vide de références pour la majorité des Québécois nés catholiques, au moment même où de nouvelles ressources religieuses pénétraient la province. Nous

observons également une grande mobilité des individus entre les traditions et groupes religieux. En effet, si on compte plusieurs milliers de convertis à l'Islam, ceux qui traversent les frontières religieuses sans changer d'affiliation sont encore plus nombreux. Ainsi, beaucoup de Québécois « de souche » que nous avons rencontrés disent s'identifier au catholicisme, tout en adoptant de nouvelles façons d'expérimenter le sacré, à travers le spiritualisme par exemple. De tels comportements définissent de nouvelles hybridités religieuses, telles que les pratiques néo-chamaniques ou celles liées à la Wicca par exemple. À cet égard, les jeunes se montrent particulièrement innovateurs pour créer de nouveaux types de regroupements religieux, qui impliquent parfois un activisme politique en sus de leur engagement spirituel, par exemple dans le domaine environnemental pour la protection de la « Terre Mère ». Soulignons à cet égard que la guérison occupe généralement une place centrale dans ces courants religieux. Les formes de sociabilité religieuses démontrent également la grande créativité des groupes religieux puisque certains recourent au médium Internet tandis que d'autres privilégient les expériences collectives spontanées et limitées dans le temps.

Par ailleurs, les résultats montrent que les institutions religieuses, en particulier catholiques (à quelques exceptions près) font preuve d'une grande flexibilité pour s'adapter aux nouveaux défis nés de la modernité, en particulier aux nouvelles populations qui se présentent à elles (homosexuels, immigrants). De façon générale, les congrégations religieuses constituent d'importants espaces d'interactions ethniques. En effet, aucun des groupes que nous avons rencontrés n'est monoethnique et la plupart comptent des individus provenant de divers horizons nationaux. Les populations d'immigrants sont d'ailleurs également fort diverses au niveau religieux (par exemples, les Haïtiens et les Vietnamiens). Notons toutefois que les populations immigrant au Québec sont majoritairement catholiques, et qu'ils introduisent ainsi leur propre style liturgique et obligent les paroisses locales à certains accommodements, notamment au niveau de la langue de culte. Les catholiques d'origine latino ont par ailleurs insufflé un nouvel élan au mouvement charismatique au Québec.

Dans ce paysage, les groupes religieux composés d'immigrants se démarquent par leur souci d'aider leurs membres à s'adapter à leur société de résidence en leur offrant une variété de ressources matérielles, sociales, émotionnelles, et psychologiques, etc. Ces services complètent bien souvent ceux offerts par les associations gouvernementales. Pour ces populations, la religion constitue un langage symbolique qui leur permet de reformuler leur expérience migratoire en des termes valorisants. À cet égard, les groupes religieux affichent une variété d'attitudes relativement à la société québécoise: si une minorité adopte une approche sectaire ou prosélyte, d'autres préfèrent rester discrets tandis que certains groupes organisent des activités destinées à les faire mieux connaître au public plus large. Face à l'attention médiatique dont ils font l'objet, beaucoup de ces groupes comme certains Pentecôtistes choisissent de souligner les convergences de point de vue qui les rapprochent de la société québécoise en soulignant combien les immigrants ont à apporter à leur pays d'accueil en termes économique, culturel et social. D'ailleurs plusieurs groupes ont adapté leurs pratiques religieuses aux contraintes de leur nouvel environnement. Ce sont toutefois les modèles familiaux qui restent le point de tension le plus important puisque de nombreux groupes tels que les Catholiques Tamouls considèrent le haut taux de divorce, de monoparentalité ou de concubinage ayant cours dans la société québécoise comme de mauvais exemples et voient un lien de cause à effet entre la faiblesse du lien familial et le taux de pratique religieuse relativement bas des Québécois « de souche ».