MONTREAL'S ANGLOPHONE COMMUNITY AND MINORITY ETHNOCULTURAL NGOs

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ABSTRACT

Montreal's Anglophone ethnocultural minority NGOs find themselves in a set of circumstances in which they lack legitimacy in the eyes of many Québécois and are viewed with suspicion for "refusing" to integrate into the Francophone majority. At the same time, they risk being seen as irrelevant by an Anglophone community which is becoming more and more multicultural as identity becomes multiplex and community members speak two and often three languages. It is suggested that rather than view diversity as a threat, NGOs take advantage of the multiple means of communication which have evolved and the opportunities for mutual cooperation generated by overlapping interests.

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This paper is devoted to the topic of Anglophone NGOs and the English-speaking community of Quebec, particularly Montreal. The term "Anglophone NGO" may be used to refer both to those organizations which claim to act on behalf of the Anglophone community, such as the English Montreal School Board, as well as those which act on behalf of ethnocultural minority communities made up largely of English-speaking members, such as the South Asian Women's Community Center. This paper is concerned primarily with the latter.

The approach taken here is conceptual, focusing on the socio-structural context within which NGOs operate, rather than on specific policy issues. Nevertheless, conceptual matters often have a practical significance in Quebec, where ideological and definitional matters may impinge directly on policy issues and in legitimating social relations.

The following discussion addresses three issues. Since our topic is that of NGOs, I will first consider the issue of defining the boundary between the formal political and parapolitical institutions of the provincial government in Quebec—the state—and civil society. What is the pattern of relations between the provincial state and NGOs characteristic of Quebec? Are NGOs—particularly Anglophone NGOs—seen to play a significant and identifiable role in Quebec and is such a role perceived by the general public—overwhelmingly Francophone—to be a legitimate contribution to Quebec society?

Second, I will address the issue of an English-speaking community in Quebec and what we mean by such a community. Is it legitimate to refer to an English-speaking community at all? I know that many people in Quebec speak English; my question is whether that means we can refer to an English-speaking *community*? If so, what kind of community is it?

Lastly, I will consider some of the problems facing Anglophone NGOs both vis-à-vis the state and their own constituencies. As Montreal transforms into a profoundly

multicultural region—in the sociological sense of the term —is there a future for Anglophone NGOs?

NGOs AND THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

NGOs are among the most effective resources available to all citizens, and especially to minority group members, in achieving individual and collective goals. NGOs themselves emerge out of the interplay between civil society and the state and cannot be understood apart from that relationship.

As an example of how the social context has an impact on the organizational style, practices, and effectiveness of NGOs, consider the difference between what might be considered the paradigmatic NGO in the United States, the National Rifle Association, the paradigmatic NGO historically in Francophone Quebec, the Société St. Jean Baptiste, and what I would argue is the paradigmatic NGO among the minority ethnocultural communities of Montreal, the Quebec Jewish Congress.

The National Rifle Association (NRA) espouses a profound distrust of government, insists on "defending" a sharp and unyielding boundary between the state and individual rights, and has a committed membership which eagerly engages in political action while simultaneously contemptuous of most politics. Dating back to 1871, the NRA today claims to have about four million members in the United States. A glance at its sophisticated website indicates that it is both well funded and professionally administered. Clearly, the issue of gun ownership has enormous symbolic resonance in the United States. Not so in Quebec. If we compare the NRA's web sites with that of the Province of Quebec Rifle Association, which actually claims to predate the NRA (having been founded in 1869), we see indications of a dramatic difference in orientation, operation, and funding. Indeed, any organization espousing the values and the goals of the NRA in Quebec would be out of touch with the vast majority of the population; a marginal rather than a mainstream organization.

The Société St. Jean Baptiste (SSJB), founded in 1834, was at one time the predominant NGO in Quebec and one representative of Quebec's traditional values. Prior to Quebec's Quiet Revolution, the SSJB operated for many years with an amalgam of religious, political and cultural goals able to appeal to broad segments of Quebec's population, but especially middle class professionals. Following the Quiet Revolution, the SSJB found itself outflanked by the growth in the Quebec state's legislative ambitions and regulative powers. To many Quebecois the SSJB is no longer a relevant organization. It is not that NGOs have disappeared from Quebec's francophone community, quite the contrary. But contemporary NGOs tend to be highly specialized and lay no claim to *represent* Quebec society, as the SSJB did at one time; that is seen by almost all as the prerogative of the provincial government.

The case of the Quebec Jewish Congress (QJC) is interesting and is worth discussing briefly. Dating back almost a hundred years, the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) was established in Montreal and operated for many years with its national office in that city. CJC described itself as the "democratic voice" of Canadian Jewry and its membership was made up of a plethora of Jewish organizations and influential individuals. Over the years, CJC served as a model for many other ethnocultural communities establishing NGOs, especially those dealing with government on political and policy issues. Generally speaking, CJC had a long history of successful interaction both with the federal and provincial governments.

Structurally, there existed a regional department of the CJC entitled Canadian Jewish Congress, Quebec Region, which had its own elected officials, legislative structure and professional staff. Housed in the same building as the national office, the policies promoted by the Quebec Region were usually consistent with those of CJC. An example would be opposition to religious instruction in public schools, an issue much more salient in Quebec than in the rest of Canada since education is a far more contentious issue in Quebec. Such opposition has a political cost in Quebec. Another example would be support for multiculturalism, a stance which put the Quebec Region in opposition to the provincial government which has in large measure consistently opposed federal multicultural policy.

A series of changes in recent years resulted in the national office moving to Ottawa, altered the patterns of funding for CJC, and has led to subtle shifts in the way decisions are made. The re-naming of the regional operation to the Quebec Jewish Congress (QJC) indicates a re-orientation for the QJC which now sees itself as operating as a distinctive Quebec NGO concerned with provincial issues and taking an independent stance. While the new QJC is still tied to the CJC, the change in name is of major symbolic significance. But this change was initiated at the top with some opposition from community members, indicating that in many ways the new QJC is not the grass-roots operation the CJC Quebec Region claimed to be. Rather than attuned to nuances within the Jewish community, the QJC's leadership would seem more concerned with nuances within the state apparatus. This increases the distance between QJC and the community it claims to represent. Ironically, though, this may actually constitute a more effective means to operate in the Quebec context.

NGOs AND THE QUEBEC STATE

Quebec is not merely a political unit, not merely a province of Canada; it is a distinct society with much of the political, institutional and symbolic apparatus of a state. It makes sense, then, to refer to a Quebec state even if it is not a sovereign state.

Since 1960 the Quebec state has been perceived by most Quebecers to be a tool of and an expression of the culture and aspirations of the Québécois, the descendants of the original French settlers of New France. How (and whether) other groups fit into Quebec society has been problematic for many Quebecers since then and has been seen by them to be a legitimate matter for state policy and action. How can Quebec evolve as a Francophone society having its own distinctive culture if it incorporates individuals and groups who share neither that language nor that culture? State policy on immigration and integration, then, has been directed above all to the integration of immigrants into the Francophone milieu.

From the point of view of the state, moreover, linguistic integration means more than that people speak French; they are also expected make a commitment to Quebec as a society: to share in its culture, to participate in its institutions, and to identify with its aspirations. Indeed, a policy statement of 1990 asserts as an essential premise that "the success of integration depends on the respect from Quebeckers of every origin for the social choices that govern modern Quebec" (Énoncé: 19). Immigrants are expected to accept and contribute to the collective project of the Québécois. This is not assimilation, but it is much closer to a model of shared values and identity than to the promotion of diversity which is built into the Canadian policy of multiculturalism.

The problem, of course, is that integration is a vague concept at best and becomes ever more ambiguous the higher the level of expectations assigned to it (Jedwab, 2006). As such, the general public has no way of determining whether minorities are integrating, especially since "successfully" integrated individuals fail to stand out for that very reason. The result is a suspicion that ethnocultural minorities refuse to integrate, either because they form self-contained institutional and cultural "ghettos" of their own or are seduced by the anglophone community whose English-speaking culture is dominant in North America.

This suspicion is consistent with the fact that historically ethnocultural minorities did not integrate into Quebec's mainstream Francophone society. Yet they did not integrate into the Anglophone society either, however, since the two dominant communities refused to incorporate ethnocultural minorities or provide services for them. Italian immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th century, for example, discovered that many of Montreal's Francophone Catholics considered them rude and disrespectful during Church services and in their interaction with priests. Both Francophones and Italians felt more comfortable having separate Catholic parishes for Italians. While Jews and Greeks were allowed in Montreal's English-speaking Protestant schools, they were treated as second class citizens and did not attain full and equal rights in these schools until the late 1960s. The result was that Italians, Jews and Greeks set up their own institutions not because they wished to segregate themselves from the broader society but because in large part they had no choice (Rosenberg and Jedwab, 1992). Montreal's extensive Jewish day school system serves as an excellent example of that process (Rosenberg, 1995).

All that changed profoundly with Quebec's Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and especially after the election of the Parti Quebecois in 1976. Today in Quebec the state pervades civil society in ways which are not only absent elsewhere in North America, but which would be abhorrent to most Americans and many Canadians. Such state intervention is considered acceptable because most of Quebec's Francophone population have come to equate the promotion of their collective identity with the empowerment of the state. The Québécois, as they began to call themselves, felt that in the state and its agencies they had the collective tools with which to build a society that would be distinctively their own. Rather than see the state as a separate domain having a circumscribed set of tasks, the Québécois came to view the state as a manifestation of their aspirations and as the appropriate instrument with which to build a modern, democratic, and Francophone society. This means that people came to view the state as the only appropriate and legitimate medium for the solution of collective problems and the achievement of collective goals. In that sense, there is no recognition in Quebec that that there should be a clear boundary between the state and civil society. As the manifestation of the will of the Québécois, civil society penetrates the state; as the collective tool of nation-building, the state penetrates civil society.

That does not mean that the Québécois deny the significance of community life and community institutions. But community groups and organizations are understood to be partners with the state in nation-building. To reject the right of the state to set the agenda and make the rules is to reject the aspirations of the Québécois. To reject a partnership with the state in nation-building is to segregate oneself in opposition to the broader society and the democratic will of the majority. Again, that does not mean that there are no differences of opinion among Quebec's Francophone population—the debate over sovereignty is proof of

that—but regardless of disagreements on how to achieve their goals, most Québécois agree on the kind of society they want to achieve.

Because the Francophone majority in Quebec expects more from minorities and immigrants than does the rest of Canada, integration into Quebec society is no easy process. NGOs of all kinds, particularly minority and immigrant group organizations, have played a vital role in facilitating that process. Nevertheless, NGOs are to some degree viewed with suspicion, especially those which represent the views of minorities or seek to deal with issues such as racial profiling. In the Quebec context, most people assume that NGOs are not to act in opposition to government, not even as a loyal opposition. NGOs should partner with the state and accept the will of the majority. They should sit down at the table with all other communal groups and participate in the construction of a collective consensus to which they then adhere. Changing the name of Canadian Jewish Congress' Quebec Region to Quebec Jewish Congress reflects a public commitment precisely to such participation and partnership.

QUEBEC'S ANGLOPHONE COMMUNITY

Let us move on to the issue of the Anglophone community. When we refer to an English-speaking community, to what do we refer?

One possible reference is to that set of Protestant English-speaking Quebecers of original British origin who established many of the Anglophone institutions of Montreal, such as the schools, hospitals, social service agencies, cemeteries and newspapers. While many such people still live in Montreal, their community has become very much a minority, and many of the people in Montreal who today speak English on a regular basis—Jews, Italians, Greeks, Caribbeans, Filipinos, Chinese, Sikhs—were never members of that particular community. That is not what we mean by the English-speaking community of Quebec today, although the institutions established by that earlier community persist and are central to the contemporary Anglophone community.

What of the North-American population of English-speaking people? Does the English-speaking community of Quebec identify itself as a branch of that majority group? Certainly there are many cultural and economic ties among the English-speakers of North America. Many Anglophone Montrealers watch American Idol, drink Starbuck's coffee, wear Gap jeans, listen to their iPods, and go on shopping trips to New York (or Burlington if they are less affluent). But all that is just as true of many Francophone Québécois. It does not serve either to attach Anglophone Montrealers to other English-speakers nor to differentiate them from Francophones. Rather, the English-speaking population of Montreal find themselves in a context which is significantly different from that of Toronto, Boston, or Los Angeles. The English-speakers of Montreal are aware that they are a minority and that their status in the society reflects that fact. One need only listen to English-speaking Montrealers complain about being taken for granted by provincial Liberal governments to recognize the widespread recognition of that status and its implications.

Structurally, the Anglophone community consists of sets of overlapping networks loosely connected by a preference for the use of English in public life. That preference may be pragmatic, cultural, or historical, but in practice it does not serve to overcome the many significant differences among the groups which make up the community. Moreover, that community is undergoing a profound change as a result of Quebec's language and cultural legislation. The change, though, is not the one envisioned by those who drafted that legislation. Rather, the Anglophone community is being transformed into a multicultural community whose members feel at home in multiple cultural contexts and speaking multiple languages.

Montreal's English-speaking population, especially its young people, have become part of a multicultural community in the sociological sense that they participate in, feel comfortable with, and are a part of multiple ethnocultural groups at once. For many this is because they are literally the product of multiple cultures, having parents of different religious and cultural backgrounds. Structurally, though, there is another factor: that almost all of the English-speakers brought up in Montreal since the late 1970s are bilingual. They are literally members of two linguistic—and often three linguistic—groups at once. Both integration and diversity are facts of their lives. Thus they do not necessarily have a sense of belonging to one and only one group, but to being a part of something which transcends linguistic and cultural groups. Asking them to what group they "belong" is to ask them the wrong question. It is to ask them to distort the reality of their lives, their friendships, and their work experiences. That is why many of them describe themselves as Canadian, it is an inclusive term which they see as independent of a particularistic identity. They readily understand that others may belong to an ethnocultural group in this way and they accept that as legitimate, but it does not reflect their experience.

English-speaking Montrealers are thus cosmopolitan in terms of how they understand themselves and how they accept others. Many of them expect their institutions to be similarly cosmopolitan, to transcend the limits of any one language, culture, or set of issues. This

expectation was articulately expressed by one young Pakistani Montrealer:

> At twenty-five years, I am one of the last of a generation of Quebec Pakistanis that was educated exclusively in English schools. Many in my generation are perfectly bilingual and trilingual, thereby stretching the boundaries of how this ethnic community fits into the spaces of Quebecois and Canadian society… We are hybrid and adamant… No one can force us to choose allegiances, because in the deepest parts of ourselves there exists a multiplicity… [our] identity is dynamic and fluid (Ahmad, 2002/03: 17).

Anglophone NGOs which fail to take the multiplicity and dynamism of their community members into account face the risk of becoming irrelevant to their constituents.

IMPLICATIONS

The old image of "two solitudes" which once dominated thinking about Quebec does not reflect contemporary reality. If we take as an example a group identified as English-speaking, the Sikh community, how are we to locate them? Structurally, we can distinguish between the majority group, Québécois descendants of the original French settlers (along with those who assimilated into that community), and Quebec's ethnocultural minorities. Among the ethnocultural minorities we can differentiate between largely Anglophone minorities such as the Sikhs and largely Francophone minorities such as the Lebanese. Thus Sikhs are a minority group within the minority Anglophone community which is itself only a part of the diverse set of ethnocultural minorities which all together constitute a minority within a largely Francophone Quebec society. Not only does this mean that a Sikh organization, such as the Sikh Community Center of Montreal, represents a relatively small community, but that members of the Sikh community have other identities to which they may develop a sense of attachment. In that case, they may feel that participation in a Sikh organization is restrictive rather than empowering.

Minority ethnocultural NGOs, then, have to adapt not only to the pattern of relations between the two linguistic communities but also to patterns of relations among individuals. They must also adapt to the state. Government policies have an influence upon ethnic communities, often a fateful influence. Policies with respect to immigration, anti-racism, affirmative action, and the recognition of professional credentials are matters which directly affect many ethnic groups. More fundamentally, the state's definition of its relations with its citizens forms the context within which the members of ethnic communities establish goals, form organizations, act on their interests, and interact with one another and with the state. By promoting integration as the goal of state policy, the Quebec government has set an agenda within which ethnic communities can legitimately act.

At the same time, though, an Anglophone community is emerging in Montreal which is multicultural, where identity is multiplex, and where people are able to communicate in not only English but in several languages. This community is not like the English-speaking communities of English Canada or the United States, although it might present us with an image of how those communities will evolve. Moreover, it is a community that does not define itself in opposition to the Francophone community but through its particular way of interacting with that community, neither being incorporated within it nor seeking domination over it.

To sum up, the intimate link between NGOs and particular ethnocultural minority communities poses a number of problems. Most ethnocultural minority groups are too small to sustain significant NGOs which can provide extensive and comprehensive services to its members. Small size also means that they may not be taken seriously by either the provincial or federal governments. Moreover, those NGOs which are seen to represent only the interests of a particular group rather than those of the social majority lack legitimacy in the eyes of that majority. Additionally, they may fail to reflect the reality of life in Quebec for many of their own community members, especially younger people who do not want to be locked into a rigid traditionalism but seek to participate actively in both the Anglophone and Francophone communities. As such, ethnocultural minority NGOs are often seen as irrelevant and have difficulty attracting participants or obtaining funding.

I am certainly not suggesting that ethnocultural NGOs in the Anglophone community have no long term future and should simply dissolve; they have an important role to play as resources both for individuals and groups. But if they are to persist they must broaden their mission, so to speak, presenting themselves not only as the representatives of a particular group but as concerned with issues which transcend group boundaries. I would suggest a three-fold strategy.

NGOs should continue to provide ethnocultural minority groups with the means to affirm their distinctive identity and retain critical values, practices, and memories. At the same time, they need to "adapt and change the way identity is expressed, in order to meet new circumstances" (Churchill, 2008), be open to new

initiatives and allow the younger generation to take the lead in defining their mode of participation. When dealing with the broader community or with the state, NGOs should consider acting in concert with others to achieve collective goals. Unity is itself an important political resource. Informal networks can be strengthened and those institutions which already exist can be utilized. Additionally, a coalition of groups which act in concert rather than reflect the interests of particular ethnocultural communities will have greater legitimacy in the eyes of the Québécois, especially if the contribution being made to that society can be clearly and pragmatically illustrated. Rather than posing a threat to the Anglophone community and its institutions, diversity is strengthening that community and its members by allowing it to adapt to the new circumstances in which people find themselves. That is a lesson which may be of great value to the Francophone majority. It may be a lesson of value for much of the world.

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