THE LAURENDEAU-DUNTON COMMISSION AND THE NEED TO RETHINK CANADIAN DIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Despite the fifty years that have passed since the launch of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, the framework that was used then to address cultural and linguistic issues in Canada sounds familiar, even contemporary. The dominant approaches in debates about (re)-defining the Canadian federation have up to today always reproduced that same pattern, which revolves around the relationship between linguistic majorities (Quebec's status being a central element), minority integration as the expression of Canadian diversity and a dismissive stance towards issues specific to aboriginal peoples. Revisiting the work that has been done during that time offers the great opportunity to cast a forward-looking glance at the new conditions that will define a way for us all to coexist in Canada's multinational context.

"Developing a Canadian policy is like building a puzzle."
André Laurendeau ([1964] 1990: 75) (traduction)

Responding to the growing concerns voiced by cultural, political and economic elites in Quebec, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson launched a broad inquiry in 1963 whose aim was to revitalize the relationship between Canada's two founding peoples. He thus sparked the first of a series of major reassessments in Canada's constitutional framework that rippled through the country for more than half a century. Working with what it framed as a "crisis", the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission) set out to recognize that the Canadian federation was composed of "two majorities", the equality of which should be pursued, and that Quebec was home to a "distinct French-speaking society" (*Preliminary Report and Book I*). With special emphasis given to identity issues, the Commission's efforts were directed towards consolidating and reinforcing Canada's French and English-speaking communities. Aboriginal groups and cultural minorities, while well represented at public hearings and in the briefs submitted to the Commission, were given a somewhat more peripheral importance in the final report. The situation of aboriginal peoples was not considered as being part of the Commission's mandate, and as such are barely discussed in the report save for a mention in the foreword that the "most widespread" languages and cultures should be preserved as they are elements of the "common heritage of all Canadians" (*Book I*: xvii). Contributions made by cultural communities are discussed in the Commission's fourth volume, which bears the questionable title "The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups" and are the subject of a minor commentary written by Commissioner J. B. Rudnyckyj on the institutionalization of the "regional languages". *Book IV*, which informed Canada's multicultural policy, essentially suggests that the "other ethnic groups" should blend in with the two other linguistic majorities all the while encouraging the protection of cultural legacies that "enrich" Canadian heritage.

Despite the fifty years that have passed since the launch of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, the framework that was used then to address cultural and linguistic issues in Canada sounds familiar, even contemporary. The dominant approaches in debates about (re)-defining the Canadian federation have up to today always reproduced that same pattern, which revolves around the relationship between linguistic majorities (Quebec's status being a central element), minority integration as the expression of Canadian diversity and a dismissive stance towards issues specific to aboriginal peoples. Trying to solve this Canadian "puzzle", to quote Laurendeau, always seems to involve starting over with the same pieces that were cut-out by the Commission. Revisiting the work that has been done during that time offers the great opportunity to cast a forward-looking glance at the new conditions that will define a way for us all to coexist in Canada's multinational context. This exercise has to enable us to examine the possibilities and the limits associated with the notion of belonging, as it is conceptualized in an officially bilingual state where two "citizenship regimes" operate in constant tension with each other, moved by similar preoccupations around how to deal with cultural diversity in a multicultural context.

Two persistent sources of tension that arise when negotiating belonging and citizenship in Canada become apparent through the work done by the Commission. On the one hand, despite the emphasis laid by the Commission on the urgent need to redefine the role of Quebec to achieve equality between Francophone and Anglophone societies, it appears that only a difficult and partial institutionalization of political autonomy can be allowed if the multinational character of the Canadian state is to be maintained. On the other hand, consistent with the concept of citizenship built on the majorities' hegemonic practices as it was demonstrated by the Commission (see Haque2012), we can witness that there is in Canada, as well as in Quebec, a certain broadening of the definitions of belonging, but that while these definitions acknowledge the "cultural contributions" of minority groups (official language minorities, aboriginal peoples, individuals of immigrant origin or of mixed race), they remain largely determined by the terms and conditions that Canada's two majorities define (see Gervais, Karmis and Lamoureux 2008).

THE DIFFICULTY OF INSTITUTIONALIZING POLITICAL AUTONOMY IN A MULTINATIONAL STATE

The Laurendeau-Dunton Commission was set in motion at a time when citizenship belonging to Canada was being redefined, a process to which the Commission significantly contributed. According to Eve Haque's recent study (2012), the language and culture of either of the "founding people" (more so than ethnic origin or descent) explicitly became the elements through which Canadian "national" identity is defined and expressed. According to Haque, institutionalizing this approach enabled us to avoid relying on ethnic or racial criteria, all

the while making sure that majorities that descend from original settlers retain their privileged position when laying out the building blocks of national identity and citizenship, what she described as the "ongoing project of white settler nation-building" (2012: 5). Furthermore, it should be added that the Commission was launched at a time where not only one but two identity-defining processes were underway, the coexistence of which regularly generated many negotiations and disputes, some of which have lasted up to this day (Gagnon and Iacovino 2003; Labelle and Rocher 2004). This Canadian "duality" identified by the Commission, while it allowed for a minimum of consideration to be given to aboriginal and immigrant minority groups, mainly aimed at achieving a symbolic, material and political equality – so as "to alter the power dynamics" as Laurendeau said (1990: 96) – of two overlapping societal projects, one of which was predominantly subordinated to the all-encompassing ambitions of the majority. This pursuit of equality between Canada's two main linguistic communities clearly reflects the political element of the initiative undertaken by Lester B. Pearson's liberal government.

> *Finally, let us consider another dimension of equality between the two communities – the political dimension. This covers the possibilities for each society to choose its own institutions or, at least, to have the opportunity to participate fully in making political decisions within a framework shared with the other community (…); it is not cultural growth and development at the individual level which is at stake, but the degree of self-determination which one society can exercise in relation to another (…) but with the extent of the control each has over its government or governments. This is the basis for the discussion of the constitutional framework in which the two societies can live or aspire to live (…)* (Book I, *p. xxxv).*

However, following Laurendeau's death on June 1st 1968, the notion of two founding nations he had been advocating with the Commission was dropped and promptly replaced with an approach that would later be articulated as "multicultural in a bilingual framework"; this idea was central to the notion of Canadian nationalism as it was understood by the new liberal government of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, which came in place in late June 1968.

The substitution of the notion of biculturalism for the notion of multiculturalism, while it might have better addressed some of the concerns voiced during commission audiences and through certain recommendations, was mainly intended to sideline the recognition of the distinct status of Quebec, a status for which nationalists, federalists as well as sovereignists, were advocating (McRoberts 1999; Forbes 2007). However, achieving equality between Anglophone and Francophone societies as the Commission intended is not possible without recognizing Quebec's distinct status (see Gagnon and Latouche 1991; Bickerton, Brooks and Gagnon 2003).

Recognizing equality between the "two founding nations" as it was pursued by the Commission remains as problematic today as it was in the past. Canada is slow in acknowledging formally and constitutionally the existence of more than a singular citizenship regime on its territory, even though these "two distinct societies" have considerably crystallized and asserted themselves. In fact, there is a kind of "duality" that has been institutionalized, more or less formally and not without opposition. In spite of repeated setbacks in the constitutional recognition of its distinct status as a society, Quebec has progressively established its unique citizenship regime and has defined itself as a "host society", setting in place its own citizenship education strategies, integration measures and policies of social inclusion and interaction between communities (Gagnon and Iacovino 2003; Gagnon and Iacovino 2007; Bouchard 2012).

The possibilities that official and constitutional recognition offer has been fueling the hopes and the criticism of multinational federalism theorists for many years. We have recently witnessed the emergence of a school of thought on diversity in Canada, but its main protagonists outside of Quebec are most likely to support a first-level type of diversity (procedure) than a second-level type of diversity (community) (see Taylor 1992). In Québec, the approach to diversity, mainly inspired by Gérard Bouchard, Jane Jensen, Guy Laforest and Charles Taylor, has mainly focused on community elements all the while simultaneously defending human rights.

CITIZENSHIP REGIMES, INTEGRATION MODELS AND THE HIERARCHY OF BELONGINGS

Before becoming a model for managing ethnic diversity known here and abroad as the country's

trademark "Canadian model" (Kymlicka 2003; Choudry 2007), the term "multiculturalism" espoused a variety of somewhat diverging and often contradictory meanings and was brought forth in order to replace the notion of biculturalism as the B&B Commission's core concept (see Haque 2012: 94-128). The notion was believed to be better suited to deal with Canada's cultural diversity, as biculturalism became considered too narrow. For some critics, the arguments take on the appearance of a zero-sum game where, as Laurendeau observed first-handily, "somewhat oddly (…) to grant something to Francophones seems to equate to the act of taking something away from their groups" (1990: 68). This understanding, based on the imagery of a zero-sum game, which sets in opposition the recognition of Canada's multicultural character to the notion of Quebec as home to a "francophone society" as if they were two mutually exclusive options, was officialised in 1971 as part of an approach pursuing the idea of a mono-national multicultural and bilingual nation. However, the multicultural policy thus formulated considerably distorted and simplified the portrait drawn by the Commission and validated the demands of an obstinate but very circumstantial and unnatural opposition. As a matter of fact, one of the ideas introduced by Laurendeau but barely touched upon in the report was that, o*n any given level*, majorities would benefits greatly from being more open towards minorities (ibid.: 344-345; *Book I*: xlvi). Laurendeau thought that would be the case not only for the relationship between Anglophones and Francophones, but also between the two majority groups and the "others".

> *"both societies, the French-speaking as well as the English-speaking, accept newcomers much more readily than they have done in the past; and that the two societies willingly allow other groups to preserve and enrich, if they so desire, the cultural values they prize. We believe that they should go further." (*Book I*, p. xv).*

According to his colleagues Paul Lacoste and Neil Morrison, Laurendeau's opposition to "multiculturalism" should be understood as the refusal of a model giving precedence to one type of diversity over another instead of acknowledging their possible complementarity (see Comeau and Beaudry 1990: 207-218).

Implementing a citizenship regime unique to Quebec, built around integration policies that define Quebecois "interculturalism", would counterbalance multiculturalism's pervasive and standardizing discourse. This implementation contradicts in practice one of the regime's fundamental principles, since it considers that cultural diversity should be recognized within a unique pan-Canadian framework. In implementing interculturalism, we would institutionalize the duality present in Canadian society, a model which, even though not flawless, would be better suited than the one used by the central government (see Bouchard and Taylor 2008; Bouchard 2011: 425-430). Following a much longer, more hazardous and unstable path than the one the Commissioners' would have probably hoped for, two societies have come to assert themselves; those two societies, whose social structures follow a similar asymmetrical pattern that was exposed in the Commission's report, are largely determined by the leading practices espoused by their respective majority (for Canada, see Mackey 2002 and Winter 2011; for Quebec, see Armony 2010 and Salée 2010).

At the present moment, we should try to assess the different ways citizens live their lives in Canada. This assessment should take into account the limits inherent to the conceptualisation of the language and culture issues that exist amidst the two main citizenship regimes in Canada. How can Canadian and Quebecois societies, to paraphrase the commissioner's wish, "go further" in their efforts to recognize their citizen's diversity? This issue appears to be even more relevant in a context where Anglophone and Francophone majorities seem to share an increasingly "strong" and traditional conception of citizenship and belonging (Winter and Sauvageau 2012). However, the tendency of some citizens who are part of the majority to stake a claim on the definition of citizenship belonging recreates the same asymmetrical patterns between majorities and minorities on which the Commission's reading was based on. (Re)thinking citizenship-belonging to Canada and to Quebec in a way that takes into consideration both the historical development of those communities and the profound diversity of contemporary societies involves a reassessment of the power dynamics set in place through the use of those categories, dynamics which are typical of the logic of unitary and standardizing nation-states. We should not be afraid to conceptualize citizenship while referring to new analytical and interpretative frameworks. This will be possible through a renewal of the institutional and daily discourses we hold on "diversity", discourses in which diversity is conceptualized as an exception more

than anything else, a fact that is external to Canadian reality and which has to be accommodated and regulated by the majority. We should prioritize approaches that focus on the involvement of citizens of all backgrounds and the empowerment of communities inhabiting the country that we all share and belong to.

CONCLUSION

The Laurendeau-Dunton Commission showed impressive insight when it identified the main challenges that Canadian communities had to face over the last half century, such as recognizing and institutionalizing Canada's multinational character and broadening the definition of citizenship so as to include individuals from different backgrounds. Revisiting the Commission's work today also allows us to better understand the enduring effects as well as the limits associated with how language and culture issues were framed and how definitions of citizenship-belonging were structured according to the asymmetrical relationship between the majority and the minority, a group of citizens' legitimate aspirations becoming subordinated to the majority, hence preventing them from having an equal role in creating the society we cohabit.

The next few years will be crucial for the future of the Canadian federation. Many fundamental questions still remain. To what extent will the federation be able to respect the federal pact binding the communities that have formed the country? To what extent will these communities be able to eliminate the injustices that prevail within them and which often define the social structures in place? The Commission's expectations regarding the achievement of a true equality between the communities remain, sadly, and even fifty years after the Commission's was launched, often confined to an ideal. It is important not to distance ourselves too much from the project of building a just society, an ideal which was at the heart of the Commission's endeavours, even in our age of excessive neo-liberalism where there is a strong tendency to disregard such considerations. In many respects, the future of the country is far more dependent on its capacity to defend justice and equality than on the tendency to let the rule of might prevail.

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