HAS FRANCE FINALLY FOUND A "USABLE DIASPORA" IN NORTH AMERICA?

ABSTRACT

Among the major European powers in the early 20th century, it was noted that France was the only one not represented in the United States by any sizeable diaspora. In the previous century, France watched as the German diaspora grew in the U.S. and feared the Germans were making considerable diplomatic inroads there. Despite France's lament, David Haglund says there is and was a firmly entrenched French community in Canada, that also spread into the United States. However, Haglund argues it is not a "useable" diaspora.

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Introduction: Duroselle's Lament

The late, great French historian Jean-Baptiste Duroselle once remarked that France was, among the major European powers in the early 20th century, the only one not to be represented in the United States by a diaspora of any size; and this, he added, was bound to have a negative impact upon the quality of France's relationship with America and, by extension, France's broader interests in global security.[1] The early decades of the twentieth century were, much like that century's concluding decade, a time when the role of ethnic diasporas in American diplomacy was receiving a good deal of attention. It was easy to argue that in an age characterized by the increasing prominence of "public opinion" in foreign policy, those foreign interests who were well represented by ties of demography within American society would, all things being equal, have an advantage over less well-positioned foreign states in the struggle for American sympathy.[2]

If any example needed to be adduced to prove the point, at least as far as French analysts were concerned, there was that of Germany. Throughout the nineteenth century, tales of impending demographic and economic decline had inspired anxiety in France, with the spectre of "depopulation" remaining an ever-present concern.[3] Not surprisingly, France was hardly going to be in a position to export many of its people, and those who were likely to leave the metropole for a life abroad were to do so on behalf of the country's empire, and not venture to America. At the turn of the last century, France had Europe's lowest birth rate, and its population was growing at only a tenth the rate of Germany's; in this context, it was not difficult to imagine the worst. By the eve of the First World War, France's neighbour and foe had a population of 64 million, compared with its own 39 million,[4] and because of Germany's emigrants, it was establishing, or so it appeared to French observers, demographic beachheads in America guaranteed to increase its diplomatic and other advantages at their expense.[5]

America's German Diaspora and French Interests

There was, indeed, something to these French worries a century ago. Americans (save for those moments when they have been fighting against them in world wars) really have seemed to prefer Germans to French and part of the reason lies in the extent to which the former have been a demographic presence in America. Germans emigrated to the US in vast numbers (7.1 million between 1820 and 1995) while in comparison, the French largely stayed home.[6] By the turn of the last century, more than a quarter of America's population could be said to be of German "extraction". If one went back a couple of generations; and even if demographers stuck closer to the present in establishing lineage, the German content in American society was still impressively large in the early years of the twentieth century. The 1910 US census found some 8.3 million inhabitants who regarded Germany as their land of origin, meaning either they had been born there, or they had at least one parent born there.[7]

Though too much can be claimed regarding the power of ethnic diasporas to shape American foreign policy – then or now – it is impossible to deny that at certain times certain ethnic groups have attained electoral and other means of conditioning America's position on foreign affairs. The German-American community may not have been able to prevent America's intervention in the First World War, but they were one element in delaying it, to obvious French disadvantage. Moreover, after the war they constituted one part of the opposition against America's assuming any security obligations

in Europe, especially a treaty guarantee of French security.[8] Before the first post-war decade had ended, American public opinion once more looked to prefer Germany to France.[9]

France's Own "Diaspora"

Now, it might be objected that those, such as Duroselle, who decried France's missing diaspora were themselves missing the point, namely that there was a rather large "French" community firmly implanted in North America and that this community had even managed to spread extensively into the United States starting in the mid-nineteenth century. As Jean Heffer has remarked of the million or so French Canadians who emigrated to the U.S. between 1840 and 1940, "they are the great absentees from our [France's] memory. It is not even correct to say we French have forgotten about them, because we have never even known that they existed."[10] If, as Gabriel Sheffer instructs us, a diaspora consists in "a social-political formation, created as a result of either voluntary or forced migration, whose members regard themselves as of the same ethno-national origin and who permanently reside as minorities in one or several host countries," then how else are we to label the French in North America than as a diaspora?[11] And if the settlers of New France might, initially, have been a majority of the European population along the St. Lawrence, they were *always* a minority when set against the aboriginal population of New France, and would become a minority even when measured against the English settlers of New England and, subsequently, of Canada itself.[12]

So Quebeckers, and their Franco-American kith and kin, do really fill the bill as a diaspora, a French one at that, in North America. But historically they have hardly constituted – at least since France gave up the contest for North American supremacy after the Seven Years War – very much of a "usable" diaspora for France's world-order interests. The reasons for this are numerous, and cannot be recounted in the space available here; suffice it to note that, when France needed them most, i.e., when it was engaged in struggles for its survival twice in the twentieth century against its German foe, French Canadians proved resistant to committing blood and treasure – especially the former – to the defence of the former mother country.[13] Moreover, although not the sole factor accounting for Canada's own policy of isolationism during the 1920s and 1930s, Quebec opinion did influence Canadian foreign policy, so much so that during the interwar decades both Canada and the United States could be said to have effectively turned their backs on the challenges of French, and European, security.[14]

Nor was the U.S.-based branch of the diaspora any more likely to put itself at the service of the Third Republic than had been its counterpart in Quebec: indeed, as in Quebec, so in New England was there a tendency of a deeply religious Franco flock to show a disquieting preference for France's home-grown opposition to the Third Republic, and pro-Vichy sentiment flourished on both sides of the 45th parallel after the defeat of 1940.[15] But a diaspora that was never particularly useful for the Third Republic would show itself of greater interest to the Fifth Republic, first with the intervention of Gaullist France in Canadian domestic affairs – an intervention some have argued was aimed more at the U.S. and the U.K. than at English Canada[16] – and more recently, with the French-led opposition to the 2003 Iraq war.

There can be no doubt that anti-war opinion in Quebec was much firmer than in English Canada – indeed, for a brief moment in April 2003, after the fall of Baghdad, English-Canadian opinion temporarily swung over to the view that Canada had erred in not joining the U.S. and U.K. in the war. Not so in Quebec, where some analysts were speculating that a "French connection" influenced Quebec opinion.[17]

The Iraq War: A "French Connection"?

It is in respect of that recent war that one raises the question carried in this article's title, with some writers detecting in Quebec's strong opposition to the anti-Saddam coalition the hand of France. There can be no doubt that anti-war opinion in Quebec was much firmer than in English Canada – indeed, for a brief moment in April 2003, after the fall of Baghdad, English-Canadian opinion temporarily swung over to the view that Canada had erred in not joining the U.S. and U.K. in the war. Not so in Quebec, where some analysts were speculating that a "French connection" influenced Quebec opinion.[17]

Nor is there too much doubt that Quebec opinion, particularly with an important provincial election in the offing, played a role in conditioning Canada's stance on the war, which was noteworthy in that it was the first time that Ottawa would distance itself from both Washington and London on such a world-historic matter. But it is more likely that Quebec's traditional anti-militarism rather than any French connection was the determining factor in the province's and, consequently, federal government's stance on the war. The impact of ethnicity upon grand strategy, to be sure: but not really a French connection in the sense of Canada's having been summoned to do the bidding of Paris. Therefore, much as France might like to, it really cannot claim to have found for itself, at long last, a "usable diaspora" in North America.

Notes

1 Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, *France and the United States: From the Beginnings to the Present*, trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 46-48.

2 See, for one attempt to gauge the impact of ethnic diasporas upon American foreign policy in this period, Joseph P. O'Grady, ed., *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Politics* (Lexington: University of

Kentucky Press, 1967). Tellingly, O'Grady's research project included case studies of the following diasporas in the US: German, Irish, British, Italian, Magyar, South Slav, Czech, Slovak/Carpatho-Ruthenian, Polish, Jewish, and even "Mid-European Union" – but no chapter on the French.

[3] Koenraad W. Swart, *The Sense of Decadence in Nineteenth-Century France* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964).

[4] Shelby Cullom Davis, *The French War Machine* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1937), p. 29-30.

[5] Michel Winock, *La Belle Époque: La France de 1900 à 1914* (Paris: Perrin, 2002), p. 34-41; Joseph J. Spengler, *France Faces Depopulation: Postlude Edition, 1936-1976* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1979), chap. 6.

[6] Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration,* 4th ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). By contrast, only a tenth that number emigrated to the US from France since the start of the nineteenth century. Amazingly, the category that topped the list of ethnic groups with which Americans identified themselves in the census of 2000 was German, with some 46.4 million identifiers; second on the list was Irish, with 33 million so identifying. Jack Jedwab, "Demographic Dimensions of Identity in Canada and the United States at the Beginning of Century 21," *Canadian American Research Symposium* 1 (Fall 2003): 14-20, citation at p. 16.

[7] Hans W. Gatzke, *Germany and the United States: A "Special Relationship"?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 28-31, 58-68; Frank A. Ninkovich, *Germany and the United States: The Transformation of the German Question Since 1945* (New York: Twayne, 1995), p. 2-3.

[8] On the general impact of diasporas, see Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society,* new and rev. ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998); and Alexander De Conde, *Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy: A History* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992). On the specific case of the German diaspora, see Louis L. Gerson, *The Hyphenate in Recent American Politics and Diplomacy* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1964), p. 62-72; and Austin J. App, "The Germans," in O'Grady, *The Immigrants' Influence on Wilson's Peace Politics,* p. 30-55.

[9] Elizabeth Brett White, *American Opinion of France: From Lafayette to Poincaré* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1927), p. xi-xii.

[10] Jean Heffer, "Préface" to *Les Franco-Américains,* by François Weil (Paris: Éd. Belin, 1989), p. 5.

[11] Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home and Abroad* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 9.

[12] Niall Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), p. 71.

[13] See Ramsay Cook, *Canada and the French-Canadian Question* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1986; orig. pub. 1966), p. 37, 107; Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada: From Champlain to the Gulf War,* 3rd ed. (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992), p. 152; and Elizabeth H. Armstrong, *The Crisis of Quebec,* 1914-18 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1937).

[14] See David G. Haglund, "'Are *We* the Isolationists?' North American Isolationism in a Comparative Context," *International Journal* 58 (Winter 2002-2003): 1-23. On Quebec's part in this, see John MacFarlane, *Ernest Lapointe and Quebec's Influence on Canadian Foreign Policy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

[15] Gaston Henry-Haye, *La Grande Éclipse franco-américaine* (Paris: Plon, 1972); Esther Delisle, *Essais sur l'imprégnation fasciste au Québec* (Montréal: Éd. Varia, 2002); and Guy Fritsch-Estrangin, *New York entre de Gaulle et Pétain: Les Français aux États-Unis de 1940 à 1946* (Paris: La Table Ronde, 1969).

[16] See, inter alia, Jean-François Lisée, *In the Eye of the Eagle,* trans. Arthur Holden, Kathe Rothe, and Claire Rothman (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1990), p. 48-50; Eldon Black, *Direct Intervention: Canada-France Relations, 1967-1974* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1996); J. F. Bosher, *The Gaullist Attack on Canada, 1967-1997* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999); Vincent Jauvert, *L'Amérique contre de Gaulle: Histoire secrète,* 1961-1969 (Paris: Éd. du Seuil, 2000); and Frédéric Bastien, *Relations particulières: La France face au Québec après de Gaulle* (Montréal: Éd. du Boréal, 1999).

[17] Among them are political scientists Denis Monière and Louis Bélanger. See Monière, *Les Relations France-Québec: Pérégrinations d'un intellectuel Québécois en France, 2001-2004* (Montréal: Chaire Hector-Fabre d'histoire du Québec, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2004); and Bélanger, quoted in Robert Wolfe, "Most Safely on the Fence? A Round Table on the Possibility of a Canadian Foreign Policy after 9/11," *Canadian Foreign Policy* 11 (Fall 2004): 97-118.