SETTLING NORTH OF THE U.S. BORDER: CANADA'S LATINOS AND THE PARTICULAR CASE OF QUÉBEC[1]

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The case of Latin American Canadians offers an exceptional opportunity to examine and compare how minorities are constructed and transformed in different host societies. Minorities are shaped differently by their societal context, and Canada is especially relevant in that regard because of the existence of two main dominant cultural environments — grounded on political and territorial configurations — within the same country: an English-language Canadian majority at the national level and a French-language Québécois majority in its second most-populated province. Indeed, Canada's Latin Americans can provide unique insights into diasporic citizenship, as this rapidly growing population settles and grows as part and parcel of a multiethnic immigrant society, one with a highly decentralized state and a constitutionally-enshrined bilingual character, and marked by the presence of a large number of Aboriginal communities whose self-determination claims are recognized on the basis of their own distinctive culture. Not surprisingly, compared to most other countries, Canada projects a weaker core identity and its collective life is framed, to a large extent, by "nations within a nation" phenomena. Furthermore, given the increased linkages across the Americas, Canada holds a very particular and often overlooked position as a major country that is not contained in the United States-Latin America oppositional system that underlies how the hemispheric reality is

1 The survey results cited in this article were obtained through a research project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (Standard Research Grant 410-2010-2120, held by the author in 2010-2013). The focus group data was collected in collaboration with Sébastien Arcand (HEC Montréal), with support from the Latin American Chamber of Commerce of Québec through a grant from the Québec Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity.

commonly understood. That is why Canadian Latin Americans can help us think about the Latino diaspora formation in ways that are not necessarily tied to a strong, single nation-state or subject to a sole hegemonic cultural framework.

Latin Americans in Canada have settled over several decades, not gradually but rather through several waves. Between the 1970s and the 1990s, most immigrants from Latin America came to Canada for political reasons (i.e. fleeing military dictatorships in South America and civil wars in Central America). However, since the 1990s, and even more clearly during the following decades, most Latin Americans in Canada have been admitted under the "economic category": 70% in 2012. This means, in general terms, that they have been granted permanent residency on account of their prospective "employability" as "skilled workers" in Canada, a condition evaluated on the basis of their level of education, demonstrable work experience in "eligible occupations", and sufficient knowledge of official languages, among other factors. However, Latino Canadians' more middle-class origin does not necessarily translate into a higher socioeconomic status once they settle in the host society: Latin Americans show a higher prevalence of low income than other immigrant groups (except Black and Arab Canadians) and, interestingly, this gap is much wider in Québec. As a minority group, Canadian Latinos show one of the lowest average employment incomes: $ 26,241 (Canadian dollars, 2006), compared to $ 28,231 among Black Canadians, $ 29, 441 among Arab Canadians, and $ 31,102 among South Asian Canadians. However, unemployment rates are lower among Latin Americans (9%) than among Blacks (10.6%) and Arabs (13%), a fact that seems to confirm qualitative evidence suggesting that Latin Americans in Canada may be more prone to accept lower wage (and sometimes undeclared) jobs. This pattern also appears among highly educated Latin Americans (with university diploma): their average income is $ 42,636 ($ 32,836 in Québec), while the average income for all minority workers with university diploma is $ 47,113 ($ 39,582 in Québec).

If we take the narrowest definition possible and consider a "Latin American" any person born in a Latin American country (that is, first generation immigrants), we see that this group represents just about 6% of all immigrants in Canada. However, its growth rate is roughly three times higher than that of the overall immigrant population (32 vs. 10% between 1996 and 2001; 47 vs. 12.7% between 2001 and 2006; 49 vs. 12.9% between 2006 and 2011), due to the increasing share of Latin American newcomers, most of them having arrived from Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and El Salvador during the last decade and a half. Interestingly, Latin Americans represent almost 11% of all immigrants in Québec, proportionally twice the size of this community at the national level. Given such inflow, the Latino population in Canada with respect to national origins reflect a much wider diversity than what we see in the United States, where 63% of Hispanics declare a Mexican origin, 9.3% a Puerto Rican origin, and 3.5% a Cuban origin. In Canada, the three main nationalities — Mexican, Colombian, and Salvadorian — only represent, respectively, 17.8, 14.2, and 11.9% of the total Latino population. Let us also consider that seven out of ten Colombians (the predominant origin among first generation Latino Canadians) immigrated after 2001, making it a markedly "young" community. In a larger timeframe, the growth rate of the Latino popula-

tion in Canada is even more striking: for example, between 1971 and 2011, the number of individuals with Spanish as their mother tongue swelled more than ten times both in Toronto (7,155 and 75,305 respectively) and in Montréal (8,210 and 82,935). In brief, Latino Canadians are a relatively newly settled, still coalescing group, very diverse in terms of national origins, and rapidly growing, even more so in the French-speaking province of Québec.

Data from the 2006 census shows that two-thirds of individuals who indicated a Latin American ethnic origin (in a question about ancestry) also identified themselves as members of the Latin American community (in a question about so-called "visible minorities", i.e. non-white). The other third was distributed as follows (under categories defined by Statistics Canada): 29% "not a visible minority", 2% "Black", 1% "Aboriginal", and 2% "multiple visible minority". But these proportions vary quite widely when national origins are taken into account. Immigrants who declared a Central American national origin (Salvadorians, Nicaraguans, Guatemalans, Hondurans) are more prone to see themselves as members of the Latin American minority (80% or more), and those from the Southern Cone (Paraguayans, Brazilians, Argentinians, Uruguayans) generally do not identify themselves as such (43% or less). Venezuelans and Mexican are somewhat in the middle (51% to 53%). Another difference emerges from the comparison between first-generation Latin Americans (foreign-born) and their offspring (the so-called second generation): while 83% of Latin American immigrants declare themselves minority members, only 56% of second generation Latin Americans identify as such. It goes without saying that these results are impossible to compare to data from the United States. The concepts and social representation (of "race", "Latino", etc.) are extremely different, as are the policy and methodological approaches to ethnic diversity deployed by government agencies in either country. But the contrast may still be useful as a way of exploring the diverging forms of "Latino-ness" developing in the North American context. On the other hand, it is also possible to speculate that the Latino reality in the United States is so massively important — and becoming more so in the near future — that Canadian Latinos will eventually gravitate towards the U.S. model of pan-ethnicity. If Anglo-American multiculturalism and even the racial-relations perspective gains ground in English-speaking Canada, what will happen with Québec's Latinos? Will they follow the continental trend, will they assimilate into the *Québécois* society, or will they create a different mode of diasporic identity? Could language proximity play a role in those cultural and political affinities?

Survey data on Latin Americans in Canada shows that the relative weight of those who declare Spanish as their mother tongue is affected by the place of residence: almost a third (32.1%) of Canadians who have Spanish as their "first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the individual" (as defined by Statistics Canada) live in Québec, but the proportion of immigrants born in Latin America in that province is 28.5% (if we exclude Portuguese-speaking Brazilians). The 5-percentage point gap could be evidence of a higher rate of first language retention of Spanish among Latin Americans in Québec. The French-speaking Québécois show, on their part, a predilection for Spanish when they chose to learn a second language. On the other hand, an intriguing phenomenon transpires when we take into account the self-percep-

tion of Latin Americans in Québec as members of a "visible minority": immigrants who were born in a Latin American country and live in Québec represent 27.8% of the total Latin American immigrant population nation-wide, but they account for 30.8% of all first-generation "ethnic" Latin Americans in the country, as measured by Statistics Canada. This 3-percentage point difference may point to a stronger sense of belonging to a "minority" within the French-language province. In other words, the sense of community is affected by the way in which the host society conceives in-group and out-group relations. Cultural and language proximity does not necessarily translate into an erasure of inter-group boundaries.

Data drawn from focus groups shows that Latin American immigrants in Québec are generally aware of the idea of a "cultural affinity" between them and the Francophone society. Sometimes they see it as real (e.g. language proximity, Catholic background, etc.), and sometimes they discard it as a myth (the *Québécois* would be as "cold", "superficial", "materialistic", and "individualistic" as other North Americans, as opposed to Latin Americans). Ironically, when Québec is considered as culturally and politically close to Latin America, some Latin American immigrants express a preference for the "Anglo" world, because of its more dynamic economy, broader individual freedoms, and pragmatic outlook (while Québec would be more like Latin America: corrupt, bureaucracy-laden, ideologically-driven, etc.). In their view, "Anglos" would be more open to "Others" than "Francos", and would offer more opportunities to minorities and immigrants. Latin Americans are also keen on noticing that community "ghettos" — i.e. too much "multiculturalism" — are not socially acceptable in Québec, and integration (including language learning) is considered a civic duty. The reality of trilingualism (Spanish as mother tongue, plus English and French as both necessary for employment) is sometimes seen as a burden, but many consider it an advantage, particularly for their children. But, even if they criticize Québec's shortcomings, Latin Americans still see value in their cultural affinity with Quebeckers: the French-language population usually holds "positive stereotypes" about Latinos, whom they recognize as reliable, hard-working, law-abiding citizens (especially when compared to other groups, less favorably perceived).

In conclusion, if a North American perspective needs to take into account a two-country reality (U.S. / Canada), it can be argued that, in fact, there are actually three host societies to consider. Canada has a national multicultural policy in effect since the 1970s, while Québec has established an official "intercultural" policy (closer to assimilationist/secularist European models), linked to a more collectivist, state-centered public culture. Canada has a federal immigration policy based on a points system open to all applicants with an emphasis on economic factors, while Québec handles the selection of its own "skilled workers" (70% of all immigrants) with a similar system but with different weighing given to language skills (giving preference to the French language) and other priorities (such as the provincial labour market needs). Overall in Canada, the top country sources of immigration in 2012 were China, the Philippines, India, Pakistan and the United States, while in Québec the top sources were China, France, Haiti, Algeria, and Morocco. Naturally, given these national origins, the largest minorities in English Canada are South Asian and Chinese, whereas in Québec the largest are Black,

Arab, and... Latin American. The most spoken non-official languages in English Canada are Cantonese, Punjabi, and Mandarin, while in Québec the most spoken non-official languages are Arabic and... Spanish. In short, on the basis of current immigration trends, even putting aside language and institutional differences, Québec's very social fabric sets this province apart from all others, and Latinos may well play a significant role in its future evolution.