ON SOME OBSTACLES TO MULTIPERSPECTIVITY: INDIGENOUS HISTORY AND PERSPECTIVES WITHIN HISTORY TEACHING IN QUEBEC

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The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's* calls to action have given new impetus to include the history of Indigenous peoples in curriculums, from kindergarten to post-secondary levels. To better understand how this effort is taking shape in Quebec's educational institutions, we conducted interviews with 45 individuals responsible for teaching the history of Quebec and Canada both in high school and at university. This research project[1] aims to identify progress and resistance to the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in Quebec and Canadian history.

A SINCERE COMMITMENT TO THE INCLUSION PROJECT

When asked, the professors and teachers interviewed were supportive of the current movement to include Indigenous history and perspectives within history lessons. It is a matter, they specify, of the historical truth, insofar as the history of Quebec and Canada has for too long been written according to the sole interests of the Euro-Canadian groups. Additionally, some people consider it essential to learn more about the history of Indigenous peoples in order to combat persisting stereotypes. By tackling a conflicting history head-on, they hope to free themselves from the heavy legacy of the colonial past in order to build a more serene, peaceful, even reconciled future. Thus, their wish to approach Indigenous content derives from a moral and political duty, because it is necessary, in the words of one individual, to "repair the broken pots" (HUF17fr).

1 Moisan, S. et al. "The plurality of historical experiences in the national past and its teaching. Representations of historians, teachers and future secondary school teachers" [CRSH, 2017–2022]

This openness reflects profound changes within Quebec society as a whole. In August 2020, a Léger poll conducted on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador revealed that eight out of 10 Quebecers have a positive opinion of First Nations and nine out of 10 believe that they are subject to discrimination or racism. "The opinion of Quebecers, declared the Chief of the AFNQL, Ghislain Picard, has greatly evolved.[2]" Moreover, compared to the average for the rest of Canada, it is in Quebec that we find the highest proportion of people who support the land claims of Aboriginal peoples and who believe that the Canadian government should do more to resolve disputes with Indigenous peoples.

MAIN OBSTACLES TO INCLUSION

There are still many obstacles on the road to reconciliation.

The point that comes up most regularly in the comments of those with whom we met during our research is the lack of personal knowledge and educational resources. They underscore how the material for classroom teaching is incomplete and how the Ministry of Education does not provide the tools necessary for the integration of specific knowledge within the curriculum's topics. Admittedly, in Quebec, elements of Indigenous history have been added to various chapters covered by the *History of Quebec and Canada*, taught in secondary 3 and 4. However, beyond these additions, no particular help is granted to history teachers who are already overwhelmed by a heavy workload, and cannot by themselves respond to the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We find ourselves facing a vicious circle: if the state of knowledge on Indigenous history and perspectives among teachers is incomplete, it is partly due to the deficiencies of textbooks and school programs that were used during their training.[3] However, the fear remains that the current generations will reproduce, for lack of truly adequate training, the past dynamic by adding only a few ornamental Indigenous elements to their perspectives.

This poor preparation is exacerbated by the view that Indigenous history has yet to be written, either because Indigenous people have not left enough traces (archaeological, written, oral), or because the established historiography has for too long neglected this field of study. More profoundly still, according to history teachers (especially those working in universities), Indigenous history teaching suffers from the fact that the "Western-centric" theoretical framework is not adequate for thinking about non-Western experiences, namely Indigenous histories. The necessary dialogue between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western epistemologies[4] seems to them a difficult exercise. Many non-

2 Lia Lévesque, "Quebecers have a positive opinion of First Nations, according to a survey", *La Presse*, August 12, 2020.

3 Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich; Bories-Sawala, HE and Martin, T. (2020). *THEM and US The place of Aboriginal peoples in the teaching of the national history of Quebec* (vol. 1). University of Bremen. http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/Bories-Sawala_Helga_Elisabeth/Eux_et_Nous_vol_1/Eux_et_Nous_vol_1.html; Larochelle, C. (2021). *The School of Racism. The construction of otherness in Quebec schools (1830-1915)*, PUM.

4 See for example Marker, M. (2011). Teaching History from an Indigenous Perspective: Four Winding Paths up the Mountain. In P. Clark (ed.), *New Possibilities for the Past: Shaping History Education in Canada* (pp.). UBC Press.

Indigenous have also said that they do not feel entitled to speak about Indigenous history.[5]

Other people with whom we met (particularly those who work in secondary schools), caring about the well-being of their classes, are looking for a way to teach delicate content without arousing a feeling of guilt or horror. They try to give the full measure of the violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples (for example, the topic of genocide), while still accounting for the sensitivity of their students. They believe that, like any sensitive subject, colonial history needs to be "cooled down", which in turn makes it a complicated subject to broach.

Some people also admit to feeling ill at ease vis-à-vis a movement that they consider raises too many political demands, similarly to the movement for women's history or that for history of the working class in previous eras. They consider that there is a "do-gooder" element to the project of including Indigenous history and perspectives in history lessons, and this perceived whiff of political correctness tempers their desire to do more. We noticed within them a certain ambivalence: the enthusiasm for the issue of an inclusive history is real, but the motivations for the latter arouse a certain reluctance. While affirming that a sense of justice must form part of the teaching of history, they are wary of too much moralization within the historical narrative. It is therefore, rather paradoxically, the very reasons for a commitment to teaching that take into account Indigenous realities that sometimes nurture a certain caution among our interviewees.

Finally, some interviewees believe that it is not only necessary to identify the "blind spots" of colonial history, not to say "colonialist history", in order to add content, but that it is also necessary to rewrite the common narrative from new reference points. This raises an issue for some Francophones, insofar as Indigenous history undermines the principle of a single overarching Quebec national framework.

In the project we conducted, almost all of the respondents said they advocated integrating Indigenous history into the narrative currently taught in schools and universities. The segments when "Indigenous content" is added by the respondents to their courses mainly concern the pre-colonial era, the colonial period of New France, the reserve system, residential schools, the capitalist experience of the 19th century , the colonization of the West, the formation of the Métis people, the *Indian Act*, contemporary issues, constitutional debates and the Oka Crisis. These are all moments when Indigenous history is grafted onto the conventional narrative framework of the history of Quebec and Canada.

AVENUES FOR MULTIPERSPECTIVITY

In general, the approaches proposed in the interviews we conducted concern the adding of content to existing programs. They do not fundamentally or very significantly call into question the Euro-Canadian outlook. Attachment to the national framework still seems solid and reflection on other ways of conceiving history and the past are

5 This feeling seems to be shared by non-Aboriginal teachers across the country. Kanu, Y. (2005). Teachers' Perceptions of the Integration of Aboriginal Culture Into the High School Curriculum. *The Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 51(1),50-68; David Scott & Raphaël Gani (2018) Examining social studies teachers' resistances towards teaching Aboriginal perspectives: the case of Alberta, *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 12:4, 167-181.

in very early stages. The French-Canadian ethos seems particularly strong among Francophone respondents, both in high school and at university. The cognitive imperialism denounced by Battiste and Youngblood Henderson[6] thus seems to still be very active in Quebec's history classrooms.

There is an openness to making room for Indigenous voices, but we did not truly witness any questioning of the means of writing or teaching the history of both Quebec and Canada. It is particularly respondents who identify as Anglophones who seek to move beyond the Quebecois national framework to better reflect Indigenous experiences and perspectives.[7] One of the individuals we met favored a Canadian narrative, but whose framework concerns notably the struggles of minorities and Indigenous peoples to further the recognition of their rights and dignity. Another respondent ventured into the sphere of a transnational history that follows human groups and their activities rather than sticking to the arena of facts associated with national development. These avenues are not representative of the general results of our investigation, but they do show that other options and perspectives are also possible.

It seems to us, for our part, that the inclusion of different historical experiences in the teaching of history can be done by adopting the prism of multi-perspectivity, that is to say not only by adding content specific to the cultures and worldviews of minority groups and through the inclusion of sensitive themes (such as colonization, persecutions, genocide, slavery), but also through the questioning of national narratives and their functions. The unique experiences and perspectives of minority groups need to be better recognized.

Interesting leads were offered by a few individuals who participated in our project, who mentioned the need to integrate the voices of Indigenous peoples into a pluralized narrative. To do this, these people favor the use of testimonies and documents produced by Indigenous peoples themselves (including oral history, particularly with community leaders). They also propose a different reading of the historical sources, through a lens that is conscious of the experiences specific to Indigenous people. In short, they invite us to vary the sources and to question the traditional way of constructing historical narratives. This multiperspectivity seems to us to be a particularly promising approach for the future.

6 Battiste, M. and [Sa'Ke'J]. Youngblood Henderson, J. (2018). Compulsory Schooling and Cognitive Imperialism: A Case for Cognitive Justice and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. In: Trimmer, K., Dixon, R., S. Findlay, Y. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Education Law for Schools*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.

7 See also Moisan, S., Warren, J.-P., Zanazanian, P., Hirsch, S. and Maltais-Landry, A. (2020). The plurality of historical experiences in the past of Quebec and Canada: Viewpoints of university historians. *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 74(1-2), 103. https://doi.org/10.7202/1075497ar