GETTING TO KNOW OURSELVES: THE ASSOCIATION FOR CANADIAN STUDIES AND ITS EVOLVING 'IDENTITIES'

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The Association for Canadian Studies (ACS) was created in 1973 as a non-profit organization with the mandate of initiating and supporting activities and projects associated with teaching and research in the field of Canadian studies. At the time of the Symons Report (To Know Ourselves) the ACS was in a formative stage and thus was not the object of specific attention in the Report. Yet the ACS was influenced by the findings of the Symons Report which reinforced its mission given the expressed concern over the population's lack of knowledge about their country. Over its forty years of existence, the mandate of the ACS evolved considerably. The Symons report emerged within the context of ongoing concerns over the relationship between English and French Canadians and the impact of immigration on intergroup relations in the country. These concerns were reflected in the report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

The Association for Canadian Studies also aimed to provide a forum for reflection across various disciplines (i.e. history, politics, literature and sociology, etc.) by bringing educators and students together to encourage cross-disciplinary collaboration around the study of Canada. The objective was to instill students with a more comprehensive knowledge of the country. The idea would be to encourage the historians, sociologists and literature specialists to become Canadian generalists or as they were otherwise known as domestic "Canadianists". There was no need for "Canadianists" to relinquish their identification with a particular discipline. Yet there was some concern on the part of the discipline-based academics that by definition Canadian Studies necessarily implied inter-disciplinarity. This presumably meant that a Canadian Studies conference or publication must involve the broadest possible range of disciplines. If more than one discipline were not included in a project it was not "Canadian Studies" rather it was the "study of Canada"-it should be acknowledged that the distinction is not necessarily obvious or relevant. The latter option was the designation eventually chosen by McGill University when it established its Institute for the Study of Canada.

Still, the term Canadian Studies remained more popular as reflected by the number of universities that introduced Canadian Studies programs and offered undergraduate degrees in the field. Beyond the challenge of addressing "disciplinarians" within Canadian Studies was the matter of how and whether area studies such as Aboriginal studies, Quebec studies and Ethnic Studies to name but a few were to be subsumed within or co-exist with Canadian Studies. The area studies were also described as interdisciplinary thus broadening the challenge for CS wherein it needed to

determine how to deal with "interdisciplinarity within interdisciplinarity." Inevitably some disciplines and some areas would inevitably feel excluded.

The Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH) created a Canadian Studies program (CSP) to promote knowledge about the country and sought to make the academy an important partner in pursuing that goal. During the 1990's with PCH-CSP support, the ACS attempted to create a meeting space for leadership of the Canadian Studies university programs and some of their students despite the risk this would exclude those from Universities without CS programs. PCH hoped the academy of "Canadianists" might be put to use to assist in the promotion of knowledge about Canada to the broader society. It came to realize however that the CS university programs were legitimately preoccupied with the objectives of their academic programs, and thus conferences and publications were geared towards faculty and students. Hence questions arose as to whether the academy constituted the ideal partner in supporting what was referred to as public education programs which in turn entailed the "popularisation" or, less appealing to Anglophones, the French term "vulgarisation" (rendering vulgar) of research and writing in the social sciences and humanities.

By the end of the 1990's the Canadian Studies Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage shifted course and determined that future funding would be directed at programs that on the one hand more clearly targeted the broader Canadian public as well as focusing in particular on the country's secondary students. Discussions between members of the academy only were less likely to secure funds from Canadian Heritage. The shift in priorities on the part of Canadian Heritage meant that the specific academic programs arising from the Universities within which they were located were to be increasingly directed to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council if they required funding for a project. While the Canadian Studies program still offered some very modest sums for university-based forums, that envelope was gradually being phased out. Continued support for the academy would be contingent on the extent to which it could support PCH's objective of reaching the broader population and/or teachers and students at the high school level.

The ACS mandate, mission and funding model were perhaps best described as a hybrid. In *Taking Stock: Canadian Studies in the Nineties*, David Cameron wrote that: "the ACS has always been something of a hybrid as an organization-part learned society, part publishing house, part program administrator, part social administrator for the community of 'Canadianists'. " While undertaking various projects for the Department of Canadian Heritage (PCH), the ACS pursued activities common to learned societies with an annual conference and a refereed journal that published the conference's selected papers once per year. It also administered awards on behalf of the Government that encouraged academic writing. While delivering services to its membership to which it also had a constitutional responsibility, it was also accountable to the policy-makers that extended the bulk of the funding. The ACS needed to reconcile the policy objectives of its principle stakeholder with the academic orientation and goals of its members. By the end of the 1990's the legitimate academic pursuits were not deemed to be in line with the policies of the Department of Canadian Heritage. Under the circumstances, the Association for Canadian Studies needed to rethink its objectives accordingly, in light of the direction taken by its principle stakeholder and the majority of ACS Board members.

A 1999 Conference at McGill University on the state of teaching the history of Canada prompted the Canadian Studies program to prioritize the promotion of knowledge of Canada's history and seek ways to support those secondary school teachers that were deemed central in the pursuit of that objective. The idea of creating initiatives to support greater knowledge of Canadian history were in part aimed at addressing the challenge of offering a national vision or historic narrative, since education was a provincial responsibility, thus giving rise to multiple history programs and several accompanying narratives.

Given the success of the national history conference at McGill, at the behest of PCH, the Association for Canadian Studies would organize the next national history conference and examine the feasibility of making the event a biannual or annual gathering. The national history conference would become a central function in the contractual relationship between ACS and PCH. Other aspects of the ACS agenda also needed to be reconsidered. ACS participation in the Congress of the Social Sciences and the Humanities annual gatherings failed to yield the necessary critical mass of participants as

those academics and students that attended the Congress with ACS support naturally gravitated to their disciplines shortly after their presentation. This left very few people at the ACS general assembly. By consequence ACS ultimately chose to hold its annual conference outside the learneds. As to the ACS annual learned publication, *Canadian Issues*, in 1999 its funding was discontinued by the Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences. To sustain the publication with PCH support required that it looked beyond its traditional academic readership.

The new *Canadian Issues* (CI/TC) evolved into a magazine format that showcased academic work in essays that ranged between 1500 and 3500 some of which were original essays and others condensed versions of longer essays that appeared in peer reviewed publications. The new format held considerable appeal to academics, policy-makers and civil society organizations which saw it as a forum within which to engage in public debates. To be fair, some academics felt the publication was of no use to the academy since the contributors could not make use of the non-refereed essays to bolster their resume towards upgrading their status in the academy.

CITC proved sufficiently popular by attracting a broad cross-section of contributors with the majority from the academy that valued the opportunity to share their work with policy-makers. Since it first appeared in the year 2000 the more than 50 editions of the publication have culminated in the production of well over 700 essays offering a rather sizable body of knowledge from many of Canada's leading experts in a wide variety of areas. The growing number of submissions to CITC offered impetus for the creation of a second similar publication that focused on the challenges confronting our society with respect to the increasingly diverse composition of Canada's population. In 2003, the ACS introduced the publication *Canadian Diversity* (CDC) and with the generous support of Rogers Media was able to secure funding to allow the production of 3-4 editions of the publication annually. The publication caught on quickly with the substantial numbers of academics, policy-makers and researchers attending Citizenship and Immigration Canada's national Metropolis conference. In 2005, Metropolis began commissioning editions of CDC touching upon the challenges of international migration. Certain editions of CDC had print runs of 25 000 for distribution within Canada and abroad while benefitting from contributions from some of the world's leading specialists on immigration, integration and identities. Currently in its tenth year of production, CDC has included over 500 contributions from scholars and policy-makers and is probably one of the most widely read publications in the globe that is singularly dedicated to the theme of diversity.

As the Department of Canadian Heritage expressed a desire to better understand the degree of knowledge about the country's history on the part of the Canadian public, the ACS took up the challenge of examining what Canadians know about history, about which specific areas of Canada's history they were most knowledgeable, where they learned about it and the impact on such knowledge on their identities. In pursuing that objective, the ACS developed an in-house research capacity. It was important in conducting research on knowledge about Canada's history to take into account various demographic considerations such as age, education, region of residence, language and immigrant status. Hence our in-house resources extended their area of expertise to include the study of our population and the salience of identities. We did this primarily via analysis of the census and through the use of public opinion surveys.

Given the evolved ACS mandate to stimulate public discussion and national conversations about Canadian history and identities, it followed that research findings be communicated to the media. We frequently timed the dissemination of research with a conference or with the release of a publication. By 2003, research had emerged as an important part of the ACS agenda and we have become one of the most quoted organisations in national and regional print and electronic media. We have been engaged to conduct research by an increasing number of governmental and non-governmental bodies on a rather diverse set of topics which generally touch on our national identity. A strong case can be made that research generated by the ACS has had an impact on policies in the areas of national governance, immigration, official languages and multiculturalism. Over the past decade, rarely has a week gone by that the research disseminated by the ACS has not been the object of media coverage in some part of the country. The frequent media references to the ACS have meant that Canadian Studies has enjoyed considerable brand recognition probably a factor contributing to the retention of the name Canadian Studies by the Department of Canadian Heritage.

GOVERNANCE

The constituency of the ACS has always been diverse but over the past decade has become increasingly so. Constituency is not meant to refer to those individuals involved in organizational governance nor confined to the membership. Rather it refers to the individuals that attend the conferences, contribute to the publications and subscribe to them and follow the research. Membership in the ACS has fluctuated greatly but gains have been dependent on the extent to which the ACS successfully required membership from those securing funds via its awards, conference travel support or discounts its or other publication subscriptions (in exchange for the discounts the other organizations sought ACS subsidies). When PCH made it clear that it would no longer fund, either directly or indirectly, its scholarly activities, the membership would inevitably decline and must to the displeasure of other Canadian studies organizations the subsidies would be discontinued. By desire and necessity, the ACS reached out well beyond the academy to include a wide range of policy-makers and civil society representatives all with a shared interest in and commitment to the advancement of knowledge about Canada. In doing so, the ACS contributed to broadening the definition of who belonged to the community of domestic Canadianists.

With nearly 15 years of involvement with this organisation and having worked closely with the Canadian Studies program of PCH, I think I can safely be dubbed a "Canadianist de souche" (a rooted Canadianist). The diversification of the community of Canadianists has been reflected in the composition of its Board of Directors. It is worth noting that neither the ACS Board nor its Chair were confined to members of the academy. In 1998 the ACS Chair was a senior official from the National Library and Archives. Since 2000, the ACS has been fortunate to have outstanding Canadianists serve as Chair from different sectors such as Foreign Affairs senior historian Hector Mackenzie, Acadian Studies Guru Maurice Basque, former Constitutional Law Professor Honourable Herbert Marx, activist scholar and civil society champion Professor Minelle Mahtani, University of Alberta constitutional law professor and activist the late Gerald Gall and currently one of Canada's most respected historians Université Laval's Jocelyn Letourneau.

The ACS has a Constitution which de jure makes it accountable to its membership and they in turn are represented by a national Board of Directors. Unlike many associations the revenue of the ACS is not driven by membership dues or members donations which together account for less than one percent of overall income. ACS funding arises largely from conference proceeds, publications and research projects undertaken by the ACS for various government and non-government organizations the principal support originating with the Department of Canadian Heritage. The funders have a large stake in the organisation and righty expect the projects they contract to the ACS to effectively respond to a set of agreed upon objectives. The projects that the ACS undertakes are consistent with its current mandate which focuses on the promotion of knowledge about Canada. The ACS needs to think in terms of partners and stakeholders in the construction of its program. ACS member's main motivation for joining is to secure the publications and this does not make for a considerable organizational "stake" or "buy in". This reality raises important issues about the associative dimension of the ACS especially where managerial remuneration is not derived from the membership. Such questions confront several associations in light of government cuts and declining numbers of individuals from the academy. Many observers see the ACS as think tank or research institute addressing questions about Canadian identities. Both in Canada and abroad there has been significant change to the academy, civil society and government but not always sufficient thought directed at how they can collaborate successfully. In the next edition of CI/TC I will offer some insights and ideas on how the study of Canada and the Association for Canadian Studies can most effectively adapt to the changing circumstances and ideally grow stronger in going forward.