# GENERATIONAL CHANGE AND WRITING CANADIAN HISTORY: OBSTACLES TO AN INCLUSIVE NATIONAL HISTORY

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## ABSTRACT

The following article posits that there is a lack of dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone historians in Canada. Despite a demographic revolution in academia, the new generation of Canadian historians appears to have inherited its predecessor's failure to bridge this divide. How we train future public school teachers in Canadian history could be profoundly affected, including a failure to promote an inclusive national history. As a possible solution, the author contends that we need to change standards for graduate students, expand opportunities for language training, and promote more partnerships between Francophone and Anglophone historians.

A new generation of historians has invaded the halls of academia. In 2007 more than 1 in every 3 professors teaching in a Canadian university was under 44 years old.[1] That is impressive, considering most academics complete their PhD and start looking for their first job in their 30s. In the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta, one of the largest university faculties in the country with nearly 400 professors, 24 per cent are currently considered new scholars. Not only youth but women also have changed the demographics of Canadian academia. Today, 34 per cent of university professors are women (from 28 per cent in 2001); 41 per cent of new appointments in 2007 were women; and women constitute the largest percentage of faculty in every age group below 55 years old.[2]

We have only begun to see how this new generation will transform universities. It's an exciting time for education in Canada. It's disheartening, then, to see that, at least when it comes to writing Canadian history, these new scholars appear determined to inherit one of the great failures of the previous generation of historians: a lack of dialogue between Francophone and Anglophone historians. Not only does this gulf profoundly affect the writing of Canadian history, but it has serious implications for the way universities train future elementary and high school history teachers.

For most of Canada's history, at least 25 per cent of the population has been French speaking. And yet far too many contemporary historical studies of Canada, which purport to be "national," are in fact studies of English Canada. In the past, many authors have justified this gap with weak explanations for not incorporating the Francophone experience. In his popular book on the history of the baby boom generation in Canada, Doug Owram ignores Quebec because he insists that the Francophone experience was simply too different to include in a national study.[3] Michael Horn has written a study of academic freedom in Canada, but largely ignores developments in Quebec because, according to the author, the education system is too different and it requires a separate study.[4] Nancy Christie does not address Quebec in her wonderful book on social policies directed at women, including mothers' allowances because, according to her, the issue was already fully studied by others.[5]

More recent developments suggest that this divergence has not altered despite the changing demographics of Canadian academia. The 2010 short-list for the Canadian Historical Association's annual book prize does not include a single book written in French. And these books are all regional or based on English Canada. In the past ten years almost all the books short-listed for the prize were explicitly about English-Canada or on Quebec alone. Most of the very few books that did claim to be "national" either did not draw on both English and French language sources, or in the case of English-language books, offered unconvincing explanations for excluding Quebec.[6]

The problem is not limited to historians. The Canadian Sociological Association's John Porter Tradition of Excellence book prize reflects the same trend. Since 1983 only one French-language book has won the Porter prize.[7] Only two prize-winning books link the English and French experience and draw on sources in both languages.[8]

Is the Francophone experience really so different that it requires separate consideration? Such broad generalizations are worrisome, especially in any study dealing with the post-World War Two period as technology and globalization has brought English and French even closer together. For example, the Ligue des droits de la personne, which began as a bilingual association in the mid-1960s and became a unilingual Francophone organization in the 1970s, is today a leading human rights group centred in Montreal. There is no question that throughout its history the Ligue has engaged with the same debates as its counterparts across the country, and regularly interacted with activists and policy-makers outside Quebec.[9]

Even those English historians who do address Quebec in a national study sometimes fall short because they fail to read the literature in both languages. Can we truly claim to be offering national studies when we ignore the entire literature written in French? Surely we are ignoring an incredible amount of literature on Canada. To offer one example of this disjuncture: there is not a single article written in English that explores the October Crisis of 1970 in depth.[10] Most scholars continue to depend on Louis Fournier's translated (from French) book on the crisis. Fournier's book, while it does have some merit, was written by a journalist who was himself arrested during the crisis. The book does not have a single citation and, therefore, no evidence to support the author's conclusions.[11] There are many articles written in French on this topic, several of which clearly show the problems with Fournier's account, and yet English Canadian historians continue to use this source, sometimes quite extensively, to comment on the crisis. Moreover, in excluding Francophone historiography, we fail to engage with the broader academic community studying Canada.

Part of the problem is institutional. There are two separate professional historical associations: the Canadian Historical Association and l'Institut d'histoire de l'Amérique française. The former operates primarily in English, and the latter in French. The IHAF's directors are almost exclusively Francophone historians in Quebec, and few Francophone Quebec-based historians have held the CHA presidency (a similar trend is evident in the Canadian Sociological Association, which currently has not a single Quebec-based academic on its executive committee). One of the ways to address this problem is to train bilingual historians. But that is not happening. Most Canadian university history departments (excluding Francophone Quebec universities) require graduate students to pass some form of second language test. But a survey of French language tests in history departments in 2000 found that the tests were not an efficacious means to ensure bilingualism: most only required graduate students to translate a page of text into English, often with the assistance of a dictionary over three hours.[12] Compared with the Public Service of Canada language test to determine an employment candidates' knowledge of both languages, there is no question that the standards of Canadian history departments fall far shorter.

Admittedly, there is no reason to presume all Canadian historians should have a command of both English and French. After all, historians study many linguistic groups. First Nations' languages are an obvious example. But consider some of the implications of failing to train English Canadian historians to read in French: Supreme Court of Canada reports before 1974 are not translated (and few provincial court decisions are translated); Prime Ministerial archives, from Wilfred Laurier to Louis St. Laurent, are obviously in French; many of the major newspapers and magazines, especially in the 19th century, are in French. And so on.

In a recent keynote address for the Canadian Sociological Association, Dr. Jean-Philippe Warren (Canada Research Chair, Concordia University) presented disturbing statistics on the lack of engagement between Anglophone and Francophone scholars. True, his survey dealt with sociologists, but his findings are almost certainly reflected among historians as well. For instance, Dr. Warren discovered that:

- **Training**: It is unusual to find a professor with a PhD from a Francophone Quebec university teaching in others parts of Canada. Less than 10 per cent of French speaking sociologists in Quebec were trained outside the province.
- **Co-authorship**: There are fewer co-authored articles between Anglophone and Francophone sociologists in recent years.
- **Literature**: Only 1 per cent of English language articles in recent years cited French publications; about 23 per cent of French language articles cited English publications.[13]

Of course, the point is not to disparage regional histories or studies that rely on English-language sources. Far from it. But if we are going to produce an inclusive national history, we need to engage with the literature and sources in both languages. The implications, particularly for training future teachers, are profound. Professional historians produce the books that students read in university classrooms. And professors' own research provides the basis for their teaching. We are in danger of poorly training public school teachers in an inclusive national narrative. Future history teachers in will learn a different national history at university from their counterparts in English Canada or Quebec, and then pass on this experience to their students. An Association for Canadian Studies report

on second-language learning in Quebec concluded that "it is difficult to argue that Quebecers of all ages are being instilled with a strong sense of pride in Canada's history compared to such sentiment in other parts of the country. Only one in five Quebecers reported that they were very proud of Canadian history."[14]

It is essential to reconsider the way we train historians in Canada. Women's history has flourished in Canada partly as a result of more women entering academia and writing/teaching women's history. If we can train a generation of bilingual Canadian historians, we can facilitate greater dialogue among Anglophones and Francophones. Of course, simply training more bilingual academics is hardly a panacea. A more systemic solution is required. Facilitating greater language acquisition in undergraduate, if not elementary and secondary education, would go even further in promoting an inclusive national history. Bilingualism, according to the federal Official Languages Commissioner, remains popular in Canada. More than 70 per cent of Canadians support bilingualism; 77 per cent support providing more resources for promoting bilingual education; and 7 out of 10 Canadians believe bilingualism is one of the key qualities that defines Canadian national identity.[15] Only 17 per cent of Canadians, however, declare themselves fluently bilingual. A recent report produced for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages concluded that universities were not doing enough to provide second language training for students:

> *Canada needs to provide a true continuum of second-language learning opportunities for all Canadians from elementary school through to the labour market. This continuum is an important and integral part of preparing our young people for the future to be productive citizens of their own country and citizens of the world. … This study found that, while many universities in Canada offer a range of second-language learning programs and courses, there are serious gaps and unmet needs. … In particular, opportunities for intensive second-language study are limited – for example, to enroll in immersion programs, to take subject-matter courses taught in the second language or to take second-language courses tailored to different academic disciplines. Moreover, collaboration among English- and French-language institutions in Canada to promote second-language learning, including exchange opportunities between institutions, is weak, and university second-language policies and requirements are generally minimal or non-existent." [emphasis added]*[16]

If students were exposed to more language training early in their education, then university graduate programs would be in a far better position to raise standards for language testing.

It is also essential to promote partnerships. Academia can be a solitary profession devoid of linkages that facilitate dialogue and understanding. Partnerships can help bridge the gulf between French and English historians, even in cases where someone cannot conduct research in a second language but at least can function in a bilingual environment. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council should be lauded for having recently placed a major focus on grants for partnerships. Universities, governments and research funding agencies should move further in this direction. A focus on partnerships would come at a time when many university historians are new scholars. The size of this demographic shift means that, for the first time in a very long time, we have a large number of young scholars with small networks who need to develop new partnerships. The way we do this could significantly affect the evolution of our discipline and profession in the future. At the very least, it may encourage greater dialogue among Anglophone and Francophone historians. We should all be looking for new and innovative ways to establish long-term partnerships or risk producing scholarship on Canada's history that is fragmented and disengaged.

## NOTES

[1] Canadian Association of University Teachers. *Almanac of Post-Secondary Education 2009-10*, Section 2. Also available at www.caut.ca

[2] Canadian Association of University Teachers. *Almanac of Post-Secondary Education 2009-10*, Section 2.

[3] Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).

[4] Micheal Horn, *Academic Freedom in Canada: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

[5] Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

[6] Visit the page on the Sir John A Macdonald Prize at www.cha-shc.ca

[7] Visit the page on the John Porter Tradition of Excellence book award at www.csaa.ca

[8] Dominique Clément, *Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937-1982* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008). Allan Greer. *The Patriots and the People* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

[9] For a history of the Ligue, see Dominique Clément, *Canada's Rights Revolution: Social Movements and Social Change, 1937-1982* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008).

[10] Most articles written in English, including articles by Eric Bédard and Reg Whitaker, focus only on one small aspect of the crisis as opposed to a more general study. Books on the October Crisis are not written by professional historians but journalists or biographers. For a comprehensive list of readings on the October Crisis, visit http://www.historyofrights.com/reading_flq.html. The only exception is: ———, "The October Crisis of 1970: Human Rights Abuses under the War Measures Act," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 42, nº 2 (2008).

[11] Louis Fournier, *F.L.Q.: The Anatomy of an Underground Movement* (Toronto: NC Press Ltd., 1984).

[12] Dominique Clément. "A Survey of French Language Testing in Canadian History Departments." Paper prepared for the University of British Columbia Graduate Students Association, 2000.

[13] Jean-Philippe Warren. "Recent Developments in Québec Sociology." Paper presented at the Canadian Sociological Association conference (Montreal, Québec), 13 May 2010.

[14] Jack Jedwab. "Influencing Quebec and Canada's Futures and Pride in the Past." Report produced by the Association for Canadian Studies, 13 May 2006. www.acs-aec.ca

[15] Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. "The Evolution of Public Opinion on Official Languages in Canada, 2006". http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/evolution_opinion_summ_somm_e.php

[16] Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. "Two Languages, A World of Opportunities: Second-Language Learning in Canada's Universities." October 2009. http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/html/stu_etu_102009_e.php