CANADA: POST-NATIONAL, MULTINATIONAL OR NEITHER?

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INTRODUCTION

In 2015, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau described Canada as a country with "no core identity" and thus called it post-national (Foran, 2017). The notion that a country has no core identity is sometimes associated with such things as deep diversity, multiculturalism and/or more specifically multiethnic countries or states. In effect, they presume that the country has no dominant ethnic majority and/or other identity-based majority as its defining demographic characteristic. Underlying academic and/or political conversations about whether Canada is post, bi-national or multi-national are varying or diverging definitions of the term nation and its related use or misuse. Ongoing conversation in Canada about nationalism, nations and nationhood are important towards helping us define who we are as Canadians in the era of multiple and intersecting identities. That which follows will examine will offer insights into these issues with a focus on how Quebec defines national identity and what that implies for Canadian identities.

WHAT KIND OF NATIONAL IDENTITY? FROM FRENCH CANADIAN TO QUEBEC NATIONALISM

Nadeau and Barlow (2006) point out that: "...French Canadians tend to see Canada as a country made up of two nations, while the English tend to think that 'country' and 'nation' are one and the same". But prior to the 1960's that view was largely predicated on equating nation (s) with ethnic or ethno-national group and thus many French Canadians assumed that the other nation was British or English Canadian (and not simply Canadian). Until well into the 1960's the French population in Quebec (hereafter francophones) and those elsewhere in Canada described themselves as *Canadiens* and/or *Canadien-Francais* (French Canadian). The pre-1960's vision of two nations in Canada, one ethnically British and the other ethnically French, also meant that there were two such nations in the province of Quebec (we'll return to this issue shortly).

During the 1960's during the period hailed at the Quiet Revolution, there was considerable movement amongst francophone Quebecers away from French-Canadian nationalism towards Quebec nationalism. In effect, the growing sense that the protection of French language and culture was best secured in Quebec saw many French-Canadian nationalists become Quebec nationalists increasingly looked to the provincial government to preserve and promote their core identity and determined it was preferable to identify as a national majority in Quebec – as a Quebecois – rather than as part of the national francophone minority in Canada.

In recognition of the growing concerns over the future of the French language and culture across the country, in 1963, the Government of Canada established a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism aimed at developing an equal partnership between the country's British and French peoples which were also referred to as its founding peoples. After considerable deliberation, the Government did not go for the bicultural model and rather opted for multiculturalism within a bilingual framework. In April 1971, then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau stated that no singular culture could define Canada and thus while there could be official languages (as enshrined in the 1969 Official Languages Act) there could be no official culture (Jedwab 2005).

Reacting to Trudeau's bilingual/multicultural vision for Canada, then Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa argued that the policy of multiculturalism was highly unsuited to Québec where, he said, "...the predominant population group is linguistically and culturally French, where a large minority is linguistically and culturally English, and where there are many minorities having other linguistic and cultural origins."

During the late 1960's several gestures aimed at affirming Quebec's national identity with the legislature was renamed Quebec National Assembly and the province's library was became the National Library. That said, the transition to Quebec nationalism did not imply the outright detachment from Canada (other than amongst some Quebecers that favored establishing a separate country). Rather the majority of Quebec nationalists identified primarily with Quebec and therefore tended to render Canadian identification subordinate to it (ironically this might be seen as putting the nation before the

country). That was predominantly the case for the many Quebec francophones that felt reflected in the nationalist vision – a feeling not shared by most of Quebec's non-francophones.

BLURRING THE NATION

Although they're often used interchangeably it is widely held that there are important differences between nation, state, and country. Country and State are sometimes seen as symmetrical as they tend to apply to self-governing political entities while a nation is widely seen as a group of people who share the same culture but do not have sovereignty. For the better part of the twentieth century most people tended to equate nation with country (and many still do so). By consequence, in the later part of that century and into the next one when Quebec politicians, intellectuals and others called for Quebec to be recognized by the rest of Canada as a nation it was widely assumed that they were speaking about one that was independent or separate from Canada (or the rest of Canada).

However, the way in which some politicians use the term nation may blur the aforementioned distinctions and unintentionally or intentionally promote ambiguity by allowing multiple interpretation by citizens. When in 2001 he was sworn in as Quebec Premier, the late Bernard Landry declared in French that "my action in this sense is based on a central and powerful idea that is largely accepted: that Quebec forms a nation." Switching to English, Landry added, "I warmly invite you, English-speaking compatriots, to participate fully in the construction of a plural and inclusive Quebec, a Quebec that will stand proud beside the other occidental nations." (CBC, 2001). Elsewhere Landry observed that "Quebec is a nation without the complete status of one." These observations suggest that nation may or may not imply country.

In 2006 in the House of Commons, the separatist Bloc Quebecois asked for a vote on a motion to recognize that Quebecers form a nation. In response to what was regarded as "an unusual request" then Prime Minister Stephen Harper put forward a motion asking that "...this House recognize that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada."

During the debate in Parliament over the motion, Bloc Quebecois leader Gilles Duceppe contended that the refusal to recognize the Quebec nation, to recognize an obvious reality, could be called a great Canadian mental block. He added that the only attitude that shows respect for Quebecers is to recognize them for what they are, that is, a nation that continues to be a nation even if it is no longer part of Canada...a nation because that is what we are...Quebecers form a nation whether or not they remain within a so-called united Canada. They form a nation whether or not they become a country."

Harper used the French term Québécois rather than Quebecer in the English version of the motion thus raising questions about whether he referred to all Quebecers or just the majority French population. It raised concerns that the motion's formulation might imply that Quebec is being recognized as an ethnic nation rather than a civic entity. But this all became academic as soon after the motion's adoption it has become increasingly common for Quebec politicians (federalist and sovereignist alike) to simply refer to the Quebec nation in public discourse (as opposed to the Quebecois nation) thereby disassociating the "nation" from its ethnic dimension

even for some the Quebec nation sought primarily to reflect the interests of the ethnocultural French majority (about which not all saw something morally or ethically wrong).

In its 2017 Policy on Québec Affirmation and Canadian Relations, the Liberal Government of Quebec remarked that "... Québec is free to make its own choices and able to shape its own destiny and development. Québec has all the characteristics of, and recognizes itself as, a nation...the Québec nation is not limited to its reality as a predominantly French-speaking society in North America. The Québec nation includes all the people living in Québec. It includes, in particular, Québec's English-speaking community, which has certain specific rights and prerogatives. It also recognizes eleven Aboriginal nations."

NATIONS IN THE NATION: HOW MANY NATIONS ARE THERE IN CANADA AND IN QUEBEC?

A multinational state is a sovereign entity that comprises two or more nations or states within. By contrast, a nation state is a singularity that is not characterized by dual or multiple national identities. Political scientist Alain Noël declares "Canada is undeniably a multinational federation but he says this fact is not recognized either constitutionally or politically." Proponents of the vision of Canada as a multinational federation tend to repeat that it is an indisputable fact and therefore not open to debate (as Duceppe suggested those with opposing views suffer from a mental block). As said however as Canadians still equate nation with country.

It is worth noting that while Quebec politicians often refer to Quebec as a singular nation the Government officially acknowledges that are eleven indigenous nations with the territory.[1] Hence Quebec can be classified as a multination or multinational nation. Indeed in following the logic of multinational recognition, the indigenous nations of Quebec are nations within a multination entity (Quebec) that is in turn part of another multinational entity (Canada).

When asked how many nations that Canadians believe there are in the country, there are important differences between Quebecers and other Canadians. A survey conducted by Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadians in July 2022 reveals that while some one in six Quebecers think that there is one nation in Canada that view is held by nearly one in two persons outside of Quebec (with some variation between Ontario and British Columbia and the other regions of the country). Nearly 60% of Quebecers believe that there are at least ten nations in Canada a view shared by half of British Columbians surveyed. Those outside of Quebec who subscribe to the idea that there are a multiplicity of nations within the country are likely thinking of the many First Nations across the country).

There is also a noteworthy difference in views amongst Quebecers around how many nations there are in Canada as over one in three non-francophones believe that there is only one nation compared with some one in ten Quebec francophones.

1 www.quebec.ca/gouvernement/portrait-quebec/premieres-nations-inuits/profil-des-nations/a-propos-nations

TABLE 1. QUEBEC INCREASINGLY REFERS TO ITSELF AS A NATION AS DO SEVERAL INDIGENOUS GROUPS. HOW MANY NATIONS DO YOU THINK THAT THERE ARE IN THE COUNTRY?

	CANADA	BC	AB	PRAIRIES	ON	QC	ATLANTIC
1	38%	42%	**49%**	**53%**	**41%**	**16%**	**49%**
2	8%	**4%**	7%	5%	10%	9%	6%
3	11%	**4%**	11%	9%	11%	**15%**	8%
10	16%	19%	**8%**	15%	14%	**23%**	11%
50+	28%	31%	25%	**19%**	**24%**	**36%**	27%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies. July 8–10, 2022.

TABLE 2. QUEBEC INCREASINGLY REFERS TO ITSELF AS A NATION AS DO SEVERAL INDIGENOUS GROUPS. HOW MANY NATIONS DO YOU THINK THAT THERE ARE IN THE COUNTRY?

QUEBEC	FRANCOPHONE	NON-FRANCOPHONE
1	11%	36%
2	9%	8%
3	17%	13%
10	26%	17%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies. July 8–10, 2022.

WHO'S IN AND WHO'S OUT? ATTACHMENT AND IDENTIFICATION WITH THE QUEBEC NATION

A key issue arising from debates about nation and country is the impact on people's respective attachment, belonging and/or identification. Leadership of a given nation like to see, and therefore often, describe their members as a cohesive and coherent unit with shared culture and experiences. Identity formation of the nation centers around language, ethnicity and/or religion amongst other identity markers. But where the nation is defined by geographic boundaries not all members may feel reflected and/or represented in the vision of the nation and that seems especially to be the case for those persons who simply don't identify the dominant marker that is the defining characteristic of the nation. Debates around who feels as though they are part of the nation and who doesn't have often been said to determine whether the nation should be described as civic (inclusive) or ethnic (exclusive). Yet others have suggested that the term sociological nation is more appropriate than ethnic nation with the former referring to "a status group united by common historical memory and fighting for the prestige of power and culture with other nations" (Norkus 2004). The distinctions between the sociological, civic and ethnic nation are a good deal more complex and nuanced than they in which they get presented. Still there are varying degrees within nations in terms of who feels they do or don't identify and why that is the case. Canada is a good example in that regard as historically large numbers of francophones have not felt reflected or represented in the vision underlying the nation/country. The same is true for Quebec as much of its anglophone population does not feel a strong sense of attachment to Quebec (and probably less so to the Quebec nation).

TABLE 3. ATTACHMENT TO QUEBEC AND CANADA ON THE PART OF QUEBEC FRANCOPHONES AND ANGLOPHONES.

QUEBEC	FRENCH		ENGLISH	
	ATTACHMENT TO CANADA	ATTACHMENT TO QUEBEC	ATTACHMENT TO CANADA	ATTACHMENT TO QUEBEC
Very Attached	29.5%	53.9%	61.5%	23.7%
Somewhat Attached	39.5%	35.4%	28.2%	44.7%
Not very attached	21.3%	8.2%	5.1%	18.4%
Not attached at all	9.1%	1.6%	2.6%	10.5%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	0.6%	0.9%	2.6%	2.6%
Total		100.0%		100.0%

Source: Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 20–March 3, 2023.

The 2017 Quebec Liberal party policy statement declares that: "...the majority of Quebecers feel that they are both Quebecers and Canadians. A vast majority of Quebecers feel a strong attachment to Québec, based on a national identity" Yet it is clear that the majority of anglophone Quebecers feel a much weaker sense of attachment to Quebec than do francophones. As illustrated in the Table below, the degree to which anglophones express attachment to Quebec is roughly similar to the extent to which francophones feel attached to Canada. Still, majorities of francophones and anglophones in Quebec feel attached to Quebec and Canada respectively but it would be hard to deny when considering the survey results below that either "nation" is not without problems of "national" unity.

CONCLUSION: IS CANADA POST NATIONAL, BINATIONAL OR MULTINATIONAL?

In response to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's characterization of Canada as post national respected writer Charles Foran claims that no "nation" can truly behave postnationally as it possesses established mechanisms of state governance and control via armies, borders and passports which the PM oversees. Still Justin Trudeau's characterization of Canada as having no core identity or as former PM Pierre Trudeau said has "no official culture" is probably at the root of the view that it is no post-national. Post-nationalism or non-nationalism is the process or trend by which nation states and national identities lose their importance. On the other hand a multiplicity of nations within a given territory risks diminishing the political importance and status of affirming national status. Underlying all this is an ongoing debate about how nations and multinationalism is defined, a conversation that is not easy to undertake when its respective visions are not the object of debate.

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