FRANCOPHONE IDENTITY IN CANADA: AN INTERVIEW WITH LIANE ROY, PRESIDENT OF THE FFAC

The following is an edited transcript of a Q&A with Liane Roy, President of the Federation of Francophone and Acadian Communities of Canada, and Serge Quinty, Communications Director.

ACS: Could you describe your personal identity(ies), how you define yourself, and what you consider to be the most important element in this respect?

Liane Roy: Of course, when I'm in Canada, my answer is a little different from when I'm abroad. Because when I'm in Canada, I define myself as an Acadian who belongs to a Canadian Francophonie that is much broader and inclusive, plural, supportive, modern and that includes all those who want to speak French. Now, that's when I'm in Canada. If someone asks me the question when I'm outside Canada, it's similar to the previous answer, but I'll add that in Canada, we have two official languages, and I'll explain that New Brunswick, where I live, is officially bilingual.

ACS: If you had to describe Canada and its people to a foreign visitor, what would you say?

LR: I would say that Canada is a country that includes three major components: Indigenous Peoples, Francophones and Anglophones. At the same time, being a model for the treatment of minorities and identity-seeking groups is very important for our country. Here, people can live in security, regardless of their ethnicity or situation. Canada is a country governed by the rule of law, where the major constitutional and legislative instruments are very important, notably the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This is what enables us to coexist. But despite everything, there is still work to be done. Canada is not experiencing the rise in intolerance and hate speech that we see elsewhere,

especially in the United States. However, with everything that happened in Ottawa in the winter of 2022, it has to be said that we are not immune to these trends.

ACS: What elements would you focus on in constructing a Canadian national narrative, given Canada's regional diversity and cultural pluralism? Do you think there is such a thing as a national history?

LR: I think there are many national histories. Francophones have their narratives, which include the founding of Acadia, the founding of Quebec, the founding of New France, the deportation of the Acadians, language protections, and so on. This is a dimension which is hardly, if ever, taught to young Anglophones or even, to young Francophones. Let me give you an example. Last week, I was at a conference in Calgary, Alberta, and we were given a tour of what used to be Rouleauville. The first inhabitants of the Calgary area, other than First Nations, were Francophones, and they founded the Basin that gave birth to the city of Calgary. I was completely unaware of this history. Another example: the experience of Indigenous Peoples is not at all integrated into Canada's identity narrative. We've only recently started talking about it.

We know very little about our history. Canada was born out of a complex and often conflictual relationship with Indigenous Peoples, Francophones and Anglophones. This complex relationship has evolved with the arrival of successive waves of immigrants. Our country has only just reached the level of maturity required to deal with some of these contradictions in its historical development, and to reckon with them. In short, Canadian history can be viewed through three key pillars: language issues, multiculturalism and reconciliation with First Nations.

ACS: Which institutions and policies in Canadian history do you consider most important in your definitions of Canadian identities?

LR: I'd like to come back to the three key pillars: official languages, multiculturalism and reconciliation. So the four I chose – which are, in my opinion, the most important – are the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, multiculturalism, official languages policies and the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms creates the infrastructure for dealing with minorities and equity-seeking groups. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission enables Canada to come up with a synthesized view of the conflicting and contradictory elements of its history.

A few words about the monarchy. For me, it's a mixed record. On the one hand, the monarchical system underpins all the treaties that have been signed with Indigenous Peoples. On the other hand, it's also a symbol of colonialism. For Acadians, the monarchy is also the controversial element that deported us; that was responsible for the deportation.

If I come back to the official languages policy, for us, it has enabled francophone civil society to organize and structure itself into networks, including the Federation, of which I am president, and our entire network. In a way, it's the official languages policy that has allowed us to exist and still allow us to exist. So it's very important.

ACS: Which of the following do you see as the greatest challenge to reconciliation? In terms of differences?

LR: The following issues: the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, visible minorities, racialized people and white people, and relations between immigrants and non-immigrants. Too often, two concepts are held in opposition when they don't need to be. It is possible to create a way of living together based on this complex richness and diversity.

We can also see that Canada is changing. The face of our society is changing. But this is an opportunity to shape Canadian society as a whole, not just for Francophones, but for all of us. As a civil society, we have the opportunity to shape the society in which we want to live in harmony.

SQ: I could add a few brief words to round off these remarks. In terms of living together, we are fortunate in Canada to be in a situation where we can make societal choices immediately in the next few years that will influence how the next generations, the groups that make up modern Canadian society, will form a community together. How are we going to resolve the conflicts and histories of injustice that have led to destruction – the destruction of First Nation communities, for example? How will we re-establish our relationship with these communities? How are we going to identify the systemic obstacles to the integration of newcomers? How are we going to eliminate the obstacles caused by systemic racism, and thus avoid conflicts among future generations of Canadians? In Canada, we're currently in a situation where we have the opportunity to make choices about society, to build something together that may not resemble what we've seen up to now, but something new that brings us together.

LR: Let me give you an example. A few years ago, a francophone living in New Brunswick, a native of Morocco, said: "You know, we have to ask ourselves the question in Acadia: Are we bringing in immigrants in simply to preserve and continue expressing our francophone culture, exactly as we've been doing for 50 or 60 years? Or can we talk to each other to build something new, together, a new Francophonie, which will probably be different from the one we've known."

Immigration isn't just economic – we can learn from each other. And build the diverse, inclusive community we are striving for.

ACS: Is there anything you'd like to add?

LR: If there's one thing that ties it all together, it's the concept of coexistence or, in French, "vivre ensemble". That's the most important thing. It came up in the majority of responses. It's one of the fundamental values of our federation. Furthermore, it's not always obvious. I'm not saying we're there yet, but that's what we're aiming for.

SQ: When we celebrated Canada's 150th birthday in 2017, one of the things the FCFA put forward was that things had changed between the 100th anniversary in 1967 and the 150th. Canadians had lost the desire to talk to each other and get to know each other. So what had to be done was to give Canadians opportunities to get to know each other, to understand each other and also to have a common understanding of their identity. I think the indicators show that we're a long way from

that common understanding. Many of the lists of Canada's top ten authors of 2023 feature only English-speaking authors. I'm also thinking of the 2007 CBC series The Story of Us. When we get to the New Brunswick episode, the history of New Brunswick begins in 1783 with the Loyalists, as if nothing had happened before then. So we Acadians would say, "Hello, *bonjour*! We're here!"

LR: We were there.