

2012

# Quebec's Interculturalism Policy and the Contours of Implicit Institutional Discourse

Samuel Shapiro  
*University of Auckland*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess\\_easa](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess_easa)



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

Shapiro, Samuel, "Quebec's Interculturalism Policy and the Contours of Implicit Institutional Discourse" (2012). *EASA Workshop 2012: Working Papers*. 7.

Retrieved from [https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess\\_easa/7](https://scholarworks.umass.edu/chess_easa/7)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Cultural Heritage in European Societies and Spaces (CHESS) at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in EASA Workshop 2012: Working Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

*Quebec's Interculturalism Policy and the Contours of Implicit Institutional Discourse*

Samuel Shapiro

University of Auckland (New Zealand)  
EASA 2012 (Université Paris X-Nanterre)

*Dining with Politicians: Quebec, France, and New France*

On the evening of 23 February 2009, Quebec sociologist and historian Gérard Bouchard, then the William Lyon Mackenzie King Visiting Professor of Canadian Studies at Harvard University, invited that province's premier, Jean Charest, to speak on the topic of 'Current and Future Priorities in Quebec for International Relations with the United States'. Bouchard is the brother of one of Charest's arch rivals during the 1990s, former Quebec premier Lucien Bouchard, who is best known for helping to lead a referendum campaign in 1995 which came within one percentage point of making Quebec a sovereign country from the rest of Canada.

After Charest's talk – which was attended by an audience of about one hundred people which included representatives of the Quebec Government Office in Boston and francophone public officials from American states that bordered on Quebec – I was invited to a small dinner of about a dozen people in an elegant private dining room on Harvard's campus. Charest and his wife, Michèle Dionne, discussed the controversy that erupted when he was named a commander of France's Legion of Honour (*Légion d'honneur*) by France's then-president, Nicolas Sarkozy, earlier that month on 2 February. Charest recounted how, during his speech on that occasion, Sarkozy explicitly mentioned that he was straying from his prepared remarks to call into question France's long-standing diplomatic position of 'non-interference, non-indifference' toward

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

Quebec's internal split between those who wish to separate from Canada (like Lucien and Gérard Bouchard, who belong to the Parti Québécois, henceforth PQ) and those who do not (such as Charest, who belong to the Quebec Liberal Party). Smirking, Sarkozy called the 'ni-ni policy', as it is commonly referred to in France, as 'not [his] thing', sharply critiqued 'sectarianism', 'defining one's identity through fierce opposition to another', 'division' and 'hatred' during a time of 'unprecedented [economic] crisis'. He instead made a plea for the 'universal values' of La Francophonie in front of numerous senior officials from that organisation. A smiling Charest accepted the award from Sarkozy on behalf of all Quebecers who had sought to keep the French language and culture alive in Quebec since Quebec City was settled in 1608 by the French explorer Samuel de Champlain. Despite this, he later told reporters that he thought France would have no option but to return to the 'ni-ni' policy in the event of another referendum on Quebec sovereignty, and explicitly refused to interpret Sarkozy's speech any further. At the Harvard dinner, Charest revealed his consternation at Sarkozy's remarks, and noted that the first thing Dionne (his wife) said to him afterwards was 'we're going to be in the news tomorrow'.

Sarkozy's remarks were largely viewed in Quebec and Canada as a thinly-veiled critique of Quebec's separatist movement, one of the province's two major political forces whose an essentially bipartite system at the provincial level since the early-to-mid 1970s has centred around whether Quebec wishes or not to become a separate country from the rest of Canada. Otherwise put, what is Quebec's place as a francophone society in a Canada dominated by the English language and a North America dominated by Canada's closest

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

neighbour and arguably the world's largest superpower, the United States? But I believe that this anecdote also reveals a second question that this first one has revealingly overshadowed. Namely, what is Quebec's relationship to Europe, including but not exclusively or its de facto mother country France (cf. Bouchard 2000)<sup>1</sup>?

### *Student strikes and societal models*

Before I treat these questions in greater depth, let us fast forward to take another revealing example from the last few months. Since mid-February 2012 to the present day (July 2012), Quebec's university and CEGEP<sup>2</sup> students have been hosting strikes and staging nightly marches down the streets of cities throughout Quebec with pots and pans. The strikes, nominally over the Charest government's plan to increase tuition fees for tertiary education (which are still the lowest in Canada), have attracted international attention and many public figures and intellectuals have contributed to what has been called a larger 'societal' debate.

The strikes have provoked rumours that Charest's majority government may call early elections later this year, caused the now former vice premier and education minister to resign in early May, and caused the government to adopt a highly controversial bill (called Bill 78) on 18 May which restricted student rights to protest. Several rounds of negotiation between the government and the leaders of Quebec's major three student

---

<sup>1</sup> For comparative examples, see Herzfeld 1987 on ancient and modern Greece, and Kapferer 1988 on Australia and the UK.

<sup>2</sup> CEGEP covers grades (or years) 12 and 13 and is normally taken by most if not almost all Quebec students between secondary school (grades 7 to 11) and university.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

organisations<sup>3</sup> have produced no solution to date. Several of these student groups are currently challenging Bill 78 before the courts, and the United Nations and Amnesty International have expressed doubts as to its efficacy and legality under Quebec's and Canada's international human rights obligations.

What is arguably most revealing about the student strikes for my purposes here is how it has implicitly raised the desire on the part of sectors of these student groups to be closer to a welfare state model based on social protection, present in several Scandinavian countries and France, but not in the rest of Canada. This theme, picked up by certain sectors of the Canadian press, is one that I argue that the consistent if necessary emphasis on defining Quebec as a francophone society within North America has helped obscure. I wish here to explore how Quebec is situated at the confluence of Anglo-Saxon and French political elites, and to ask broader questions about scales and levels. In so doing, I ask broader anthropological questions about the state, nationalism and institutions through studying policy. How is it, for example, that the Quebec premier can give a talk at a world-renowned university about Quebec's 'international relations' with the United States without causing a diplomatic stir, how can Quebec sign a labour mobility agreement with France, and how have references such as Quebec 'national' parks and the National Assembly (Quebec's provincial parliament) come to be seen as normal? I shall do so through paying attention to how Quebec has tried since the 1970s to develop

---

<sup>3</sup> Namely, CLASSE (Coalition large de l'association pour une solidarité syndicale étudiante), the FEUQ (Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec), and the FECQ (Fédération étudiante collégiale du Québec).

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission  
its own (implicit) policy for the management of ethnic and cultural diversity, commonly  
called interculturalism.

*The beneficiaries of confusion over defining Quebec interculturalism*

At this point, the obvious question arises: what is interculturalism? However, fifty years  
of policy documents and a vast corpus of intellectual writing on the topic (cf. Labelle  
2008b) have created confusion about what interculturalism means in official and  
unofficial circumstances. A recent research report conducted for a 2007-08 Quebec  
Royal Commission<sup>4</sup> looking into cultural differences (Rocher et al 2007:49-52) identified  
four 'defining features' of state-level interculturalism which it claimed have remained  
constant since 1981: 1) recognition of diversity as one of Quebec's essential  
characteristics, 2) French as the explicit language of public discourse and citizenship; 3)  
mutual respect for a common heritage, democracy and participation; and 4) an effort to  
eliminate discrimination. However, these four principles sound very rhetorical and  
general, as well as ones that could or would apply to most Western democracies, with the  
possible exception of the importance of the French language.

Therefore, instead of asking the question 'what is interculturalism', I propose to explore  
how interculturalism has come to stand for a wide variety of political projects over  
several decades. In this way, I seek to ask 'whose project is Quebec interculturalism?'

---

<sup>4</sup> The Commission, officially called the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences, was commonly known as the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, after its two co-chairs, the aforementioned Gérard Bouchard and political philosopher Charles Taylor.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

Who does this confusion over the meaning of interculturalism serve, and whose interests does it benefit? Is there more political mileage out of not defining interculturalism, and why? I would like to suggest that interculturalism might fall under what Maurice Godelier (1984) calls '*l'idéal*'. Godelier links the production of meaning to questions of representation, interpretation and legitimation, and defines the '*idéal*' as a mental construct that refers to or only exists as an idea, in contrast to the 'material'<sup>5</sup>.

I argue that Quebec interculturalism is a revealing example of what Marc Abélès (1999) has called 'institutional semantics', by which he means the words that institutions use in the attempt to create a common institutional logic. Like Abélès, I am interested in the 'the political and semantic conditions of the production' of 'institutional semantics' and how their 'usage, contribution, manipulation and re-appropriation ... profoundly shape institutions and public discourse and are involved in their restructuring' (ibid:509, 510)? Abélès crucially emphasizes that institutional semantics 'constitute a kind of symbolic protection against the dangers that threaten us', are profoundly affected by the dynamics of certain political contexts, can hide changes in meaning of the same word or expression over time and can 'continue to be invoked as an essential reference, even though [their] content is becoming increasingly ambiguous' because such concepts are 'essentially polysemic, and this polysemy gives [them] even more power' (ibid:503, 504).

---

<sup>5</sup> According to Godelier (1984:pt. 2), the '*idéal*' part of social relations or reality refers to the conscious and unconscious ways in which people act upon principles, representations and rules in order to produce concrete social relations or organizations between individuals or groups.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

According to this Royal Commission (Bouchard and Taylor 2008:116-18), there are four major 'phases' of interculturalism<sup>6</sup>:

1. A movement to strengthen the French language in Quebec during the 1970s
2. The PQ policy statement of 1981, which sought to eliminate discrimination against what it called the 'cultural communities' while maintaining the dominance of a French-language culture
3. The 1990 policy statement under the Liberals, which sought to establish a 'moral contract' between Quebec and its immigrants, whose contributions to society were more overtly encouraged within a civic framework
4. A socio-legal citizenship model adopted by the PQ shortly after the failure of the 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty, in an attempt to place less emphasis on the ethnic or cultural dimensions of belonging

#### *A strengthening of the French language (1960s-70s)*

At the same time as Quebec began to define itself through (the French) language and its geo-political boundaries in the 1960s and 1970s, its newly-founded (in 1968) Ministry of Immigration negotiated a series of accords with the Canadian federal government that gave it more power over immigration in 1968, 1971, and 1975 (see esp. Anctil 1996:141-

---

<sup>6</sup> As mentioned above, a vast literature exists on Quebec interculturalism, despite a notable dearth in the anthropological literature on this topic. For good overviews of Quebec's interculturalism policy, see notably and especially Anctil 1996, Labelle 2008a, and McAndrew 2009.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

46; Labelle 2008a; McAndrew 2009)<sup>7</sup>. What is striking here is that, in acquiring the right over who comes into its borders as part of several ad hoc agreements with the Canadian federal government in a highly politicized climate, Quebec has one of the hallmarks of the powers of a sovereign state. Yet, as sovereigntists – including but not limited to members and elected representatives of the Bloc and Parti Québécois – constantly remind us, Quebec is anything but a sovereign state, and does not have a formal, 'special' status within Canada. What is most revealing here is that not only does Quebec define itself as a distinct political community and a 'nation' through its political rhetoric, in large part owing to its dissident policies and interpretation of Canadian federal policy, it has acquired a characteristic that few or no other non-sovereign entity in the world possesses.

According to Quebec anthropologist Pierre Anctil, 'after a long societal debate which coincided with the Quiet Revolution, the desire of the Quebec government to intervene in the domain of immigration arose at the exact moment when the linguistic question took centre stage in Montreal' (1996:141). After the two first federal-provincial accords in 1971 and 1975, 'the Quebec Ministry of Immigration was becoming a major actor in the valorization of the French language in Montreal' (ibid:142). In 1975, the Liberal provincial government concluded an accord with the federal government allowed Quebec to select the foreigners who would settle in the province based of the economic, demographic and socio-cultural needs and characteristics of the areas in which these immigrants planned to settle, as long as they respected the already established federal criteria in that domain (see, e.g., Anctil 1996:142; Bouchard and Taylor 2008:116). And

---

<sup>7</sup> As Quebec anthropologist Marie-Claude Haince (2010:280-81) observes, this complex process takes place at several levels and among many actors, involving notably the federal and provincial governments, the immigrants themselves, and specialized immigration agencies.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

two years later, Quebec's controversial new language laws of 1977 – the Charter of the French Language, popularly known as Bill 101, passed by the pro-independence PQ – created an essentially monolingual society which imposed French as the language of education for all children without at least one parent educated in English in Canada and mandated French-only public signage (see, e.g., Anctil 1996:142, Bibeau 2002:221, 227)<sup>8</sup>.

*A shift in emphasis: the PQ's 'culture of convergence' (1980s)*

The next major phase in this process began in 1981, whereby the PQ adopted an Action Plan entitled 'Quebecers Each and Every One' (Quebec 1981), setting out a plan whereby the non-French 'ethnic minorities' or 'cultural communities' (a term coined in this document which has since become part of the standard lexicon) had to adapt to Quebec society while strengthening a 'culture of convergence' around the French language, and Quebec's status as the only majority francophone society in North America<sup>9</sup>. This emphasis on the French language as a defining characteristic of the Quebec nation was an explicit effort to distinguish Quebec's approach from Canadian multiculturalism and the

---

<sup>8</sup> To little surprise, Bill 101 has been the target of several court provisions since its passage, and several provisions of it have been struck down. The law now notably allows public signage in languages other than French (i.e. English) if they were of a specified magnitude of font size smaller than in French, allows the use of English and French in the Quebec National Assembly. However, issues about access to English-language public and private schooling and the age at which francophone children should begin learning English still spark political and societal controversy. For details, see, e.g. S. Das 2008; Larrivée 2003; Le Bouthillier 1998; Pagé and Georgeault 2006.

<sup>9</sup> For details on the 1981 policy statement and the 'culture of convergence', see Anctil 1996:142-144; Bibeau 2002:227-228; Bouchard and Taylor 2008:116-117; Handler 1988:178-81; Juteau et al 1998:99-100; Labelle 2000:277-78, 2008a:24-29; McAndrew 1995:41, 2009:212.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

American melting pot<sup>10</sup>, although it may have presaged the Canadian multiculturalism by explicitly recognizing the right of 'cultural communities' to maintain their traditions as well as their contribution to the larger society (McAndrew 1995:41). According to Bibeau (2002:226-230), 1981 marked a 'territorial turn' in Quebec's policy focused on defining the province as a political territory, as distinct from the earlier 'linguistic turn' of the 1970s, and the later 'civic turn' in 1990 and 'republican turn' in 2000, all of which Bibeau conceives as part of the same 'spiral'<sup>11</sup>. The 1981 Action Plan accomplished two paradoxical processes at once. On one hand, it defined the 'Quebec nation' as including native-born Quebecers of English and French descent as well as the indigenous peoples and excluding the so-called 'cultural communities' whose native language was neither English nor French, while defining these as relatively homogenous entities. On the other hand, the government now made an explicit effort to include the cultural communities into Quebec society through teaching 'heritage languages', establishing radio stations, newspapers, and social clubs for these communities, and including them in public institutions such as schools, courts, hospitals, etc.<sup>12</sup>

*The Liberals' 'moral contract' (early-to-mid 1990s)*

In 1990, the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa drafted a new statement on its immigration and integration policy, entitled 'Let's Build Quebec Together' (Quebec 1990), which instituted a 'moral contract' between the host society and newcomers, now

---

<sup>10</sup> See Bouchard and Taylor 2008:117; Labelle 2000:277-278, 2008b:43-44; Juteau et al 1998:99.

<sup>11</sup> See discussion of these latter two 'turns' below. In a related vein, Labelle argues that the ethnic nation (a socially constructed ethno-cultural group) and the civil nation (a territorial identity linked to non-legal citizenship) are both present in Quebec nationalism and 'indissociable from an historical perspective' (2008a:41).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Bibeau 2002:228; S. Das 2011; Helly 1996:28-29, 299-309.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

defined as full Quebecers instead of as exterior to the Quebec nation as in the 1981 statement. This document emphasized the contributions of Quebec's non-francophone population, as well as insisting on reciprocity and mutual accommodation, as well as viewing cultural diversity as an explicit asset. Furthermore, everyone would have to live according to the norms and practices of Quebec's 'common public culture', notably the equality of the sexes, French as the common public language and of education, and adherence to democracy and the equality of all citizens, including Quebec's English-speaking and indigenous populations<sup>13</sup>. The document explicitly stressed citizen participation in common institutions (see esp. Anctil 1996:144; Bouchard and Taylor 2008:117), and the equality of all citizens in an explicitly pluralist society<sup>14</sup>. It clearly laid out Quebec's desire to select immigrants who '[would contribute] to the development of a francophone society and a striving economy, in keeping with Quebec values of family reunification and international solidarity, and a gradual increase in immigration levels according to the needs of the host society', and sought to develop resources for learning and promoting the use of French, and '[develop] harmonious relations between Quebecers of all origins' in order to '[increase] support for the openness of the host society and the full participation of immigrants and their offspring in Quebec's economic, social, cultural, and institutional life' (McAndrew 2009:208, 209). McAndrew (ibid)

---

<sup>13</sup> For details on the 1990 policy statement, the 'moral contract', and 'common public culture', see Anctil 1996:144-145, 147-148; Bibeau 2002:228-229, 235; Bouchard and Taylor 2008:117; B. Gagnon 2006:131-137; Juteau 2002:444-445; Juteau et al 1998:99-100; Labelle 2000:278, 284, 2008a:29-32; McAndrew 1995:39, 42-44, 2009:207-13; Satzewich and Liodakis 2007:137. Significantly, according to Bibeau, this common public culture is 'organized around ... a group of values inherited from Judaeo-Christian traditions and Greek humanism' (2002:235). For a broader reflection on 'common public culture' in its various interactions, see the volume edited by Gervais et al (2008).

<sup>14</sup> E.g. B. Gagnon 2006:133; Juteau et al 1998:99; McAndrew 2009:208-209.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

highlights how the 1990 policy statement highlights the socioeconomic performance of immigrants and the limits of adaptation to pluralism, especially religious pluralism. At the same time, many commentators on Quebec interculturalism<sup>15</sup> have highlighted that immigration and cultural pluralism are intimately linked to Quebec's affirmation as a distinct political or 'national' community, especially as it showed that Quebec was capable of establishing its own terms of belonging to a territorially-defined political community, and accommodate diversity within a society which consistently emphasized the precarious nature of its French-speaking majority.

At the same time as the Bourassa (Liberal) government released this policy statement, the Progressive Conservative federal government of Brian Mulroney introduced a round of constitutional debates and negotiations – known as the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, of 1990 and 1992, respectively – which sought to formally inscribe Quebec's recognition as a 'distinct society', ability to select the immigrants who would settle in Quebec, and right to 25% of the seats in the federal House of Commons, among other provisions, in the Canadian Constitution of 1982<sup>16</sup>. In the words of Quebec political philosopher Charles Taylor, '[the] Meech [Lake Accord] was important because it was the first time that recognition of Canadian duality and the special role of Quebec was being written into a statement of what Canada was about' or 'a clear recognition that this

---

<sup>15</sup> See, among others, A. Gagnon and Iacovino 2002:325, 336, 2005:28, 39; B. Gagnon 2006:138; Garcea 2006:14, 15; McAndrew 2009:214; Taylor 1991:60, 67.

<sup>16</sup> For details on the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, see Anctil 1996:142; Bataille 1988:386; Bibeau 2002:233-234; A. Gagnon and Rocher 1997:55, 59; Labelle 2000:271; Labelle and Rocher 2006: 148, 162; Rocher 2002: 88-90, 92; Sévigny 2008 MA:56, 83; Taylor 1991:58-75. Notably, the Meech Lake accord occurred in the same year as the Oka Crisis, the first of several constitutional crises over land with the First Nations (indigenous) peoples and the Canadian federal government during the 1990s and 2000s (see Mackey 2002:110-14, 122-31 for details).

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

was part of our purpose as a federation', which served as 'a common reference point of identity, which can rally people from many diverse backgrounds and regions ... as part of the indispensable common ground on which all Canadians ought to stand' (1991:65, 58). The failure of both of these accords led to a rise in Quebec nationalist sentiment, shared by both Quebec federalists and sovereigntists, who insisted on Quebec's status as a 'distinct society' despite this perceived rejection by English-speaking Canada. This culminated in the election of the PQ government led by Jacques Parizeau in 1994 and a referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995 that failed by about 1%. Significantly, it also led to the creation in 1990 of Canada's first ever sovereigntist party at the federal level, the Bloc Québécois, in the aftermath of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, which won a majority of seats in Quebec in every federal election from 1993 until 2011, and formed the federal Official Opposition – ironically still named Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition – from 1993 to 1997 despite only running candidates in one of Canada's ten provinces.

After the failure of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990, the Canadian and Quebec governments concluded an accord in 1991 that gave Quebec greatly increased power over the selection and integration of immigrants<sup>17</sup>. This accord, which has led to a mostly peaceful collaboration between the two levels of government (McAndrew 2009:207), must be situated in its immediate political context of the failure of the Meech Lake Accord and the Canadian government's aforementioned continuing desire to assure national unity and counter the Quebec sovereigntist movement. As a result of this accord, the Quebec government gained the exclusive power to select all immigrants who chose to freely settle in that province, while Canada retained exclusive power over family

---

<sup>17</sup> For details on the 1991 Canada-Quebec accord, see Ancil 1996:146, 2005:47, 49, 53; McAndrew 2009:206-207.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

reunification and granting status to refugees and other humanitarian immigrants, as per the Geneva Convention (ibid:206). Quebec gained control over the linguistic and economic integration of newcomers, emphasizing that Quebec is a francophone milieu, while Canada dealt with the obligatory medical exams and police reports after the Quebec government had already accepted immigrants, as well as promoting intercultural relations, encouraging societal participation, and establishing the criteria for and formally granting Canadian citizenship (ibid:206-207).

*A controversial attempt at Quebec citizenship (mid 1990s-early 2000s)*

Shortly after the razor-thin failure of the aforementioned 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty, the PQ government of Lucien Bouchard began to elaborate a more socio-legal model of Quebec citizenship to replace the more civic model of the Liberals' 1990 policy statement<sup>18</sup>. According to Labelle and Rocher (2004:272-280), the PQ tried to construct Quebec citizenship as a common civic contract or political community that linked citizenship and nationality based around a civic heritage shared by all Quebec citizens. Quebec sociologist Danielle Juteau (2002) highlights how this Quebec citizenship emphasizes the need to share, defend and protect the French language against the joint threats of globalization and English-dominated North America and wanted to formalize a status that was criticized for being too slanted toward a homogenous national French-Canadian ideal that deleted ethnic differences from the 'cultural communities'. In

---

<sup>18</sup> For details of the PQ's citizenship-based approach, see Bouchard and Taylor 2008:117; Juteau 2000:12-20, 2002:445-453; Labelle 2008a:32-35; Labelle and Rocher 2004:271-80.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

Juteau's words, according to this new citizenship paradigm, 'cultural diversity must express itself within a unified institutional system dominated by the Francophone majority (read French Canadians) ... and building a collective national identity was associated with the struggle against exclusion' (ibid:448).

### *An emphasis on discrimination and equality (2003-2012?)*

After their election in 2003 (and winning two subsequent re-elections until the present day), the current Liberal government of Jean Charest placed a greater emphasis on explicitly valuing diversity, and particularly the contributions of the 'cultural communities', as well as prominently combatting the discrimination, racism, and socioeconomic inequalities they faced<sup>19</sup>. In these regards, the Charest government's policies bore remarkably more resemblance to the previous Liberal government under Bourassa than the PQ citizenship approach.

### *Concluding paradoxes and larger significances*

At the end of this review of Quebec interculturalism since the 1970s, what larger anthropological points can we draw out of this analysis? We have certainly seen how a precarious balance exists between openness to diversity and protecting the distinctly francophone heritage and character of Quebec's long-dominant majority population (or 'stock', as it is often called). This situation exists in large part because of Quebec's

---

<sup>19</sup> See Bouchard and Taylor 2008:118; Garcea 2006:4-5; Labelle 2005:92; McAndrew 2007:150.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

consistent attempt since the 1960s to define itself through policy and as a 'policy community' (Shore and Wright 1997:15; 2011:11-12). Interculturalism seems to be an apt example of how post-Quiet Revolution Quebec governments have come to believe in what Tess Lea (2008:15-20, 129-34, 151) calls 'the magic of intervention', whereby bureaucrats and institutions become determined to 'fix' problems through the solution of more governance (see also Bacchi 2009). But the key and more general question here, I believe, is what are the historical and current dimensions of the political equation and the academic climates in which we work – the deep-seated assumptions too often uncritically taken for granted instead of problematized or scrutinized (Bacchi 2007, 2009, 2012) – that make us able to ask certain questions and unable or unwilling to challenge certain core conceptions or paradigms<sup>20</sup>.

To return to the specific case study I have presented, the Quebec situation presents us with three simultaneous major paradoxes. Firstly, post-1960s political elites have consistently attempted to define Quebec as a 'policy community' through its provincial-level political institutions based around the territory of the province of Quebec and especially the French language. The focus in these discussions has been on questions of jurisdiction and powers, whereby successive Quebec governments – whether sovereigntist or federalist – have sought more and more powers from the federal government. However, just as these same politicians and elites are trying to situate Quebec as a distinctive political community, they simultaneously explicitly situate (francophone) Quebec as a minority within a North American framework, instead of a

---

<sup>20</sup> See also Božić-Vrbančić 2003; Fassin 2006, 2010; Neveu 2006, 2009; Povinelli 2002

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

majority within Quebec. This implicit framing, while often not interrogated, has served to underline the spirit of the interculturalism policy as articulated by the provincial Liberals and the PQ for decades.

I further suggest – and this is the second paradox – that Quebec's continuing, perpetual and fraught attempt to situate itself within North America has made it so that Quebec's ties to Europe in some areas (such as interculturalism) tend to be de-emphasized. While Quebec's ties to France in the cultural and linguistic domains are undeniable, interculturalism's ties to French Republicanism have been denied, and much more emphasis has been spent differentiating it from Canadian multiculturalism and the American melting pot<sup>21</sup>. This is one of the key issues that the current student strikes raise; namely, how does Quebec situate itself vis-à-vis both Europe and North America at the same time? Indeed, interculturally speaking and otherwise, Quebec shares ties to the United Kingdom, the United States, France, and the rest of Canada, and seeing in detail how these connections coexist and play out is a crucial task for future research. The underlying issue at hand here, then, is far from unique to Quebec, and could be fruitfully explored for other places in the world.

---

<sup>21</sup> A large literature exists on this topic, but the lack of discussion about the relationship between French Republicanism and Quebec interculturalism may be just as revealing as the attempts to distinguish the latter from Canadian multiculturalism and the American melting pot. See, for one recent and revealing example, Bouchard 2011:404, 411, 413, 427n50, 430. I discuss some of this at greater length in a forthcoming article under the auspices of the British Association of Canadian Studies. For a revealing comparative example on the French case, see Neveu 2009 and references therein.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

Thirdly, the student strikes help bring to the fore Quebec's welfare state arrangement based on social protection, which differentiates it markedly from the rest of Canada. Quebec's comparatively higher provincial sales taxes provides numerous social services such as more inclusive health care, lower tuition fees, state-funded child care, but also has led to greater state intervention in other domains, such as its oft-criticized language laws and liquor control boards. The student strikes are a vivid reminder of the fact that certain segments of Quebec's population want the provincial government to provide greater levels of social protection, namely lower tuition rates. Along with the current re-framing of the political landscape caused by the crushing defeat of the pro-sovereignty Bloc Québécois in the May 2011 Canadian federal elections, some in Quebec are asking out loud if the province is moving toward a left/right division co-existing with or even replacing the federalist/sovereigntist divide which has dominated provincial politics since the 1960s and 1970s.

I conclude by offering three larger take-away points. Firstly, we have to simultaneously look at several scales in order to understand the state (see also Abélès 1996, Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Herzfeld 2005; Randeria 2007). In the Quebec case, in order to understand how Quebec tries to operate as a 'state-like' actor (cf. Scott 1998), we have to scrutinise at least four levels, and look at what happens at each level and the interactions and complex influences between them:

- Regional diversity within Quebec (including a well-ingrained but infrequently challenged dichotomy between urban, diverse Montreal and the 'regions' which constitute the white, French, homogenous 'rest' of Quebec)

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

- Quebec's place within Canada
- Quebec's place within North America
- Quebec's relationship with Europe (including but not limited to France)

Secondly, we must be attentive to how forms of government impact questions of political culture. For Quebec, the model of asymmetrical federalism (e.g. Burgess 2001; Gagnon and Iacovino 2007; Requejo 1998:esp. 49-83) has made it so that Quebec governments, pro- as well as anti-independence (sovereigntist vs. federalist), have continued to ask for greater voice on the international stage. Examples have abounded on the Canadian political scene in the last few years. To cite only two examples, the federal Conservative government of Stephen Harper has tried to court the Quebec nationalist vote since its rise to power in February 2006 by giving the province a permanent representative in the Canadian delegation at UNESCO. And, in October 2008, the Charest provincial government signed a labour mobility agreement with France that attempted to simplify the recognition of professional qualifications, especially those for practising a regulated profession or trade, and thus make it easier to work in the other jurisdiction. At the same time, Quebec has continued to demand greater powers and jurisdiction within Canada. As we have seen, Quebec has acquired several of the hallmarks of a sovereign state, namely quasi-total control over immigration flows into its territory, without being a sovereign state, or without one of its two largest political parties asking for any sort of special status. By a series of similar de facto, case-by-case accords with the federal government, Quebec has also developed its own revenue agency, language laws, health care system, pension system, etc. Quebec statehood, then, exists both within Canada,

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission below the level of Canada, and on the international stage. Analysing any one or two of these levels without the others would leave us with an incomplete portrayal of the situation at hand.

Thirdly and lastly, we must interrogate the implicit assumptions underlying policies and political cultures. In Quebec, the politicking about statehood and a desire to affirm Quebec as a 'nation' under different guises (sovereigntist and federalist) has resulted in some important but revealing lacunae. Something as banal as Quebec 'national' parks, or the region around Quebec City being officially called the 'Capitale nationale', serve as two of many revealing examples in this regard. In Quebec's essentially bipartite political system since the 1970s, oppositions between the two main parties (the sovereigntist PQ and the federalist Liberals) and a common desire to assert Quebec as a distinct political community has meant that a lot of positions that could cause disagreement go unsaid. The fact that interculturalism – and associated terms such as 'common public culture', 'cultural communities', and others – have existed as common unifying terms despite their changes in meaning (cf. Abélès 1999) has served to mask the disagreements over two vastly different visions for Quebec's political status. This serves to underscore the usefulness of the flexibility of a term such as 'interculturalism' and how the hesitancy to define the term allows it to serve as a rallying cry for Quebec's difference allows one to stay at the level of the '*idéal*' (Godelier 1984) instead of the material or concrete. As Quebec ethnic relations and education scholar Marie McAndrew has revealingly written, 'although the existence of a dichotomic opposition between [interculturalism and multiculturalism] is still an article of faith widely shared by politicians and public opinion

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission in Quebec, in part because it is closely linked to the very definition of Quebec's distinct identity, when one focuses on actual programmes and practices, instead of political rhetoric, it is clear that Canadian multiculturalism and Quebec interculturalism have much in common' (2009:204).

Therefore, instead of trying to establish a model of Quebec interculturalism's distinctive traits, perhaps a more revealing angle on questions of the state, institutions and governance would be to try track how the term interculturalism has been used to refer to different representations and practices in particular historical and present-day conjectures. This would then allow us to work backwards (Bacchi 2009:3) from programs and practices and recognise the 'alternative discourses' that make 'cultural change ... forever emergent in performance' (Herzfeld 2005: 54, 66). In so doing, we should dare to critically question the underlying premises that underlie, and examine the individuals, groups, and political actors who benefit from the changing, if not confusing, contours of Quebec's implicit institutional discourse.

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

Selected references

Abélès, Marc

1996 Le rationalisme à l'épreuve de l'analyse. *In* Jeux d'échelles. La micro-analyse à l'expérience. Jacques Revel, ed. Pp. 95-111. Paris: Gallimard/Seuil.

—

1999 Pour une exploration des sémantiques institutionnelles. *Ethnologie française* 29(4 (octobre-décembre)):501-511.

Bacchi, Carol

2007 The Ethics of Problem Representation: Widening the Scope of Ethical Debate. *Policy and Society* 26(3):5-20.

—

2009 *Analysing Policy: What's the Problem Represented to Be?* Sydney: Pearson.

—

2012 Introducing the 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' Approach. *In* Engaging with Carol Bacchi: Strategic Interventions and Exchanges. Angelique Bletsas and Christine Beasley, eds. Pp. 21-24. Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press.

Bouchard, Gérard

2000 *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde. Essai d'histoire comparée.* Montreal: Boréal.

Božić-Vrbančić, Senka

2003 One Nation, Two Peoples, Many Cultures: Exhibiting Identity at Te Papa Tongarewa. *Journal of the Polynesian Society* 112(3 (September)):295-324.

Fassin, Didier

2006 Nommer, interpréter. Le sens commun de la question raciale. *In* De la question sociale à la question raciale? Représenter la société française. Didier Fassin and Éric Fassin, eds. Pp. 19-36. Paris: La Découverte.

—

2010 Frontières extérieures, frontières intérieures. *In* Les nouvelles frontières de la société française. Didier Fassin, ed. Pp. 5-24. Paris: La Découverte.

Ferguson, James, and Akhil Gupta

2002 Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality. *American Ethnologist* 29(4 (November)):981-1002.

Godelier, Maurice

1984 *L'idéal et le matériel: Pensée, économies, sociétés.* Paris: Fayard.

Herzfeld, Michael

1987 *Anthropology through the Looking Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

—

2005 *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State.* Second edition. London: Routledge.

Kapferer, Bruce

1988 *Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia.* Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Lea, Tess

2008 *Bureaucrats and Bleeding Hearts: Indigenous Health in Northern Australia.* Sydney:

NB: Please do not quote, cite or circulate without the author's explicit written permission

- University of New South Wales Press.
- Neveu, Catherine  
2006 *Le quartier des politistes. In Le quartier. Enjeux scientifiques, actions politiques et pratiques sociales.* Jean-Yves Authier, Marie-Hélène Bacqué, and France Guérin-Pace, eds. Pp. 32-40. Paris: La Découverte.
- 2009 *Comment faire l'anthropologie d'un objet 'trop lourd'? Approche anthropologique de la citoyenneté en France.* *Anthropologie et sociétés* 33(2):25-42.
- Povinelli, Elizabeth A.  
2002 *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Randeria, Shalini  
2007 *The State of Globalization: Legal Plurality, Overlapping Sovereignties, and Ambiguous Alliances between Civil Society and the Cunning State in India.* *Theory, Culture & Society* 24(1):1-33.
- Requejo, Ferran  
1998 *Federalisme, per a què? L'acomodació de la diversitat en democràcies plurinacionals.* Valencia: Edicions 3 i 4.
- Scott, James C.  
1998 *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Shore, Cris, and Susan Wright  
1997 *Policy: A New Field of Anthropology. In Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power.* Cris Shore and Susan Wright, eds. Pp. 3-39. London: Routledge.
- 2011 *Conceptualising Policy: Technologies of Governance and the Politics of Visibility. In Policy Worlds: Anthropology and the Analysis of Contemporary Power.* Cris Shore, Susan Wright, and Davide Però, eds. Pp. 1-25. Oxford: Berghahn.