CONSTRUCTING CANADIAN IDENTITIES

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The theme of "constructing Canadian identities" is an especially provocative one, suggesting that identities result from a deliberate process. In popular writing, there often is a sense that identities emerge in some spontaneous fashion through which peoples finally become conscious of their existence. Yet, social scientists have long established that the rise of new identities results from a conscious act of creation.

All the elements that make up a collective identity, including the definition of the collectivity itself, reflect choices and emphases. A leadership must define criteria for membership in the group and designate the central values which distinguish a collectivity. And it must devise a strategy through which the would be people can pursue its collective interests and maximize its values. None of these matters is self-evident.

If they are to be adopted, identities cannot be constructed from thin air. They must have a certain popular resonance. They must stress values, qualities, experiences that the members of the would be collectivity do seem to share. But, in the last analysis they are indeed constructed.

What is special about contemporary Canada is the role which *governments* have played in constructing identities. The case of Quebec in the 1960s is well-known. Clearly, the Liberal government of Jean Lesage played a central role in articulating and establishing a new distinctly Québécois identity. Among the French-speakers of Quebec, nationalism was not new. A coherent nationalist ideology can be traced back to the early 19th century. But a nationalism based on Quebec, as opposed to French-Canada, was new.

In this paper, I would like to develop the ways in which *English Canada* (or "Canada Outside Quebec")[1] has become increasingly wedded to an identity, a *Canadian* identity, that was constructed by a government, the *federal* government. More specifically, under the leadership of Pierre Elliott Trudeau the federal government consciously sought to define and institutionalize a new Canadian identity. In fact, it is hard to imagine a more deliberate, conscious act of identity construction. This is probably the clearest instance in Canadian history. It also may be one of the most successful — even if only *half* successful.

Moreover, this attempt at identity construction is closely linked to the Quebec case of identity construction, since it emerged from an effort to define a counter-identity to the Quebec identity. The key elements of the identity clearly reflect this intent. Yet, there is some irony here: despite the fact that it was constructed for this purpose, this identity has had an enormous impact, not on Quebec, where it has been largely dismissed, but in English Canada.

THE TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW CANADIAN IDENTITY

Within this new Canadian identity, there are at least five discrete components: official bilingualism; a charter of rights; multiculturalism; absolute equality of the provinces and reinforcement of national institutions. Each of these elements of Canadian political nationality can be directly traced to the fundamental objective of defeating the Quebec independence movement.

Official Bilingualism

Through official bilingualism the Trudeau government sought to establish the myth that the French language, and French-speakers, were present throughout Canada. Demographically, this manifestly is not the case, and never has been. The use of French has always varied enormously from province to province. Only in Quebec does the majority (82%) use French; the next largest Francophone proportion, New Brunswick's, is only 31%. Moreover, in all provinces but Quebec and New Brunswick assimilation has been very high. As a result, in most provinces the proportion of the population which uses primarily French at home is now below 3%.[2] Nonetheless, official bilingualism gave French the same formal status as English throughout the country, at least for federal purposes, however marginal it might be to day-to-day life.

Official bilingualism thereby promised to nullify Quebec's claim to distinctiveness on the basis of language by making all of Canada like Quebec. Canada as a whole, rather than just Quebec, would be the home of Francophones. As Trudeau declared in 1968:[3]

> [I]f minority language rights are entrenched throughout Canada then the French Canadian nation would stretch from Maillardville in BC to the Acadia community on the Atlantic Coast .... Quebec cannot say it alone speaks for French Canadians ... Mr. Robarts will be speaking for French Canadians in Ontario. Mr. Robichaud will be speaking for French Canadians in New Brunswick, Mr. Thatcher will speak for French Canadians in Saskatchewan. Nobody will be able to say, "I need more power because I speak for the French Canadian nation."

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Reinforcement of the status of French was, in turn, the central purpose of the second element of the Trudeau government's pan-Canadian counter identity to Quebec's: an entrenched bill of rights. The *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* deals with many other rights than linguistic ones: political, legal,

mobility, social, and so on. But language rights clearly were its raison d'être.

Trudeau acknowledged this when in the fall of 1980, having released his project for constitutional revision, he addressed the Quebec City Chambre de commerce. He explained that the entrenchment of language rights alone would have provoked English Canadian cries of "French Power;" other rights had to be added to the project.[4] For that matter, federal priorities are clearly reflected in the fact that the provision for minority-language education rights is the only section of the *Charter* not to be subject to the notwithstanding clause, along with the mobility provision, and, thankfully, the requirement of elections every five years (along with the various interpretive clauses).

Multiculturalism

The Trudeau government's adoption of a policy of multiculturalism often is seen simply as a response to the demands of Canadians whose origins were neither British or French. Many of their leaders campaigned against the concept of biculturalism, which the government of Lester B. Pearson had enshrined in 1963 through the creation of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. Contending that it necessarily excluded their components of the population, they argued for a more inclusive term. But the Trudeau government clearly had an additional purpose in rejecting biculturalism for multiculturalism: by recognizing a multitude of cultures, multiculturalism could rein in the notion of duality and nullify Quebec's claim to distinctiveness on the basis of culture.

From the moment the B&B Commission was created, Trudeau and his fellow Quebec anti-nationalists had been deeply suspicious of the notion of biculturalism. Their reasoning can be seen in a *Cité libre* assessment of the B&B Commission's Preliminary Report:[5]

> [The government and the Commission] voluntarily abandon the linguistic dimension (which provides some concepts which are nonetheless applicable) so as to slip into "biculturalism" and to talk of equality of citizens in as much as they participate in one of two cultures .... And what is the meaning in practice of a Confederation which "develops according to the principle of equality between the two cultures?...." the idea of equality between peoples underlies the concept of national sovereignty, and it would have been interesting to see how the Commission intends to interpret its mandate without being led necessarily to propose the division of Canada into two national states.

In presenting his government's policy of multiculturalism in 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau was explicit in his rejection of biculturalism. He declared:[6]

> The very title of the Royal Commission whose recommendations we are now in the process of implementing seems to suggest that bilingualism and biculturalism are inseparable. But the term biculturalism does not accurately depict our society;. the word multiculturalism is more precise in this respect.

In effect, then, French Canada's language may be one of two official languages, but its culture is only one of a vast multitude of "cultures," many of which have at best a very nebulous existence.

The Equality of the Provinces

The Trudeau government's fierce commitment to the principle of absolute equality among the provinces also was clearly rooted in its determination to counter the claims of Quebec nationalists.

Insisting that "federalism cannot work unless all the provinces are in basically the same relation to the central government,"[7] Trudeau declared on one occasion that, "I think particular status for Quebec is the biggest intellectual hoax ever foisted on the people of Quebec and the people of Canada."[8]

Reinforcement of National Institutions

Finally, this insistence on a uniform federalism was coupled with a determination that the federal government play a significant role in the lives of all Canadians (Québécois included), whether it be through programmes of direct transfer payments, such as Family Allowances, or major national undertakings, such as the National Energy Program. From the late 1960s onwards Ottawa was greatly concerned that its actions be "visible" to Canadians. As Anthony Careless has noted:[9]

> [The] growing desire at Ottawa to secure a greater visibility of federal policies [can be seen as stemming] *in the first instance*, from the increasing strength of and effectiveness of Quebec's separatist claims and, in later years, from the growing belligerency of rich provinces...

CONTRADICTORY IMPACT OF TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S "COUNTER-IDENTITY"

Clearly, each of these elements of a new "pan-Canadian" identity has had a certain resonance in English Canada. Many English Canadians have embraced them as the basis of their own conception of Canada, sometimes transforming them somewhat so as to better accord with English Canadian social reality. Ironically, this new pan-Canadian identity has fared much less well in French Quebec, the population for which in fact it had been designed. By and large, Québécois have remained

indifferent to these new principles of Canadian political life. As a consequence, rather than leading to national integration, federal dissemination of this new "pan-Canadian" identity has driven Canadians further apart.

Official Bilingualism

Official bilingualism is perhaps the least securely established as a political principle in English Canada. Nonetheless, support for it has been manifested in a variety of ways. For instance, English Canadian reaction to Bill 178 reflected, at least in part, a commitment to the notion that linguistic justice means the official equality of both languages within the same territory. For a good number of English Canadians Quebec was breaking the central element of a contract into which it had entered with the rest of the country.

The attachment of many English Canadians to official bilingualism as a central tenet of Canadian nationality can also be seen in the way in which they have adapted it so as to make it part of their own social reality: through French-language immersion. Acquisition of bilingualism was not a central theme of the deliberations and recommendations of the B&B Commission; they were much more concerned with the ability of Canadians to live in their first languages. There are many factors behind the remarkable growth in French-language immersion programs outside Quebec over the last three decades. But a major one clearly is the belief of a good number of English Canadians that part of their responsibility as Canadians is to ensure that their children acquire a knowledge of the other official language. In effect, they are seeking to apply in their personal lives, or at least those of their children, this new principle of Canadian nationality.

For their part, Quebec Francophones have resisted these developments. They may generally support official bilingualism in federal institutions but clearly would not want the principle applied to the Quebec government, as is demonstrated by their widespread support for both Bill 101 and Bill 178. Nor has the popularity of French immersion in English Canada led Quebec nationalists to drop their opposition to English immersion for Francophone children in Quebec.

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms

Most commentators agree that the *Charter* has had a profound impact on the political culture of English Canada. A variety of far-reaching effects have been ascribed to it. It has heightened public sensitivity to conventional individual rights. It has strengthened the conviction that a wide variety of groups are entitled to rights, in the process mobilizing the members of these groups to defend the *Charter* and to seek to strengthen its application. More generally, it is presumed that the *Charter* has led people to conceive of Canadian society itself as a composite of groups, whose relative status is delineated in the *Charter*. Finally, through entrenching both individual and group rights the *Charter* is believed to have expanded the meaning of Canadian citizenship, in the process providing a new focus for Canadian nationalism.[10]

On the other hand, the *Charter* clearly has not acquired the same sanctity in Quebec. Not only did Robert Bourassa have widespread support for his use of the notwithstanding clause to counter the Supreme Court's decision on "the sign law"[11] but the ostensibly federalist Quebec Liberal Party adopted the Allaire Report without modifying its recom-mendation that Quebec should constitutionalize its own charter, and that appeals from Quebec courts to the Supreme Court should be abolished.[12]

Multiculturalism

Just as with official bilingualism, the principle of multiculturalism continues to encounter opposition in English Canada. Nonetheless, it has acquired strong bases of support among precisely the parts of English Canada that could not be easily accommodated within the notion of biculturalism. Clearly, the initial adoption of multiculturalism did respond to strong pressures from within English Canada, even though I argue that more was involved. These pressures have only grown over the years as Canadian society has itself become more diverse.

To be sure, by combining bilingualism with multi-culturalism the federal government created a certain tension. Ottawa committed itself to support "all cultural groups with a demonstrated will to develop," yet under bilingualism was committed to support of only two languages. What is the logic of supporting a cultural group and not its language? Many of the advocates of multiculturalism have seized on this contradiction to secure state support for "non-official languages;" and have met with a certain success.

Not surprisingly given its origins, the federal government's notion of multiculturalism has been firmly resisted in Quebec. While Québécois may be prepared to support application of the principle within Quebec, as with the Quebec government's program of "interculturalisme," they have firmly resisted any notion of seeing Quebec's place in Canada within these terms.

Equality of the Provinces

Clearly, the notion of absolute equality of the provinces has become established as a preeminent principle in English Canada. Not only has it become the primary basis for resisting Quebec's pretensions to distinctiveness, but it has been used by Western Canadian and Atlantic Canadian provinces against Ontario as well. In the process, arrangements that even the Trudeau government had been prepared to live with became unacceptable. For instance, at the Victoria Conference all English Canadian provinces accepted a constitutional amend-ment formula which would have guaranteed a veto to Ontario and to Quebec, and to no other province. By the mid-1970s this was no longer acceptable. British Columbia declared that as a fifth region it too should have a veto. Alberta proposed that *all* provinces should have a veto. The principle of equality among the provinces was reiterated at an interprovincial meeting in Edmonton. By the

same token, it is an integral element of proposals for "Triple E" Senate reform.

It goes without saying that Quebec Francophones have remained as committed as ever to the belief that theirs is a province unlike the others, even a nation.

National Institutions

In recent years, there have been several demonstrations of strong English Canadian commitment to the defense or reinforcement of national institutions. In each case, this has meant taking positions that were rejected in Quebec.

The Free Trade Agreement was opposed by the majority of English Canadians, many of whom feared that national programs would be endangered; it had overwhelming support in Quebec.

English Canadian opposition to the Meech Lake Accord was in part based on fear that the provinces would assume too much power over the Senate and the Supreme Court, and that the federal spending power would be undermined. All these arguments were firmly rejected in Quebec.

Finally, within English Canada national institutions have become the new focus for schemes to resolve regional grievances; especially in the case of Senate reform. In Western Canada one finds little of the 1970s agitation to devolve powers to the provincial government so that they can better defend regional interests. Now the concern is for better regional representation at "the centre." For their part, Quebec nationalists remain as focused as ever on strengthening the powers of the government of Quebec.

In sum, over recent years English Canadians have displayed a much clearer sense of a Canadian identity than has been the case for a long time. By and large, it derives from the pan-Canadian "counter-identity" which the Trudeau government constructed in its effort to defeat Quebec nationalism. However, this identity does not appear to be shared by the majority of Quebec Francophones.

CONCLUSIONS

A first conclusion to be drawn about this new pan-Canadian identity is that it has greatly complicated the arrangement of any accommodation of Quebec's constitutional demands. After all, this pan-Canadian identity was constructed precisely to exclude Quebec's. During the 1960s English Canadian intellectual and political elites were quite prepared to examine such notions as "two nations" and "opting out" by Quebec from national programs. For instance, the Liberal government of Lester Pearson not only gave the B&B Commission a mandate to determine the conditions necessary to create "an equal partnership between the two founding races"[13] but allowed Quebec to "opt out," with compensation, from a large number of federal programs. By the late 1980s, even the essentially symbolic "distinct society" clause of the Meech Lake Accord was unacceptable to most English Canadians.

A second point to be noted is that this "pan-Canadian" identity is very much a top down identity, designed and disseminated by government officials. One might wonder what would be the elements of a more popularly derived identity for English Canada. The network of social movements which formed the anti-free trade coalition of the late 1980s points to some interesting possibilities.

Finally, it is exceedingly difficult to address the Aboriginal question within such a resolutely liberal vision of Canada. Its logic was clearly revealed in Trudeau's initial and widely rejected policy proposal for Native peoples: elimination of any distinctive status or treatment. Nonetheless, English Canada has finally recognized that the question must be addressed. Within the Charlottetown Accord, Aboriginal culture stood as the basis for not only creation of a new level of government but corporate representation within national institutions. Does this require a rethinking of fundamental categories? After all, in the effort to deny Quebec's pretensions, the new Canadian identity had been designed to minimize the role of culture as a basis for political institutions. Can it accommodate the needs of another culturally distinctive collectivity — or collectivities?

Clearly, the process of construction and reconstruction of identities for English Canada, and Canada, is bound continue. An interesting question for the coming years is whether governments will lose some of the dominance of this process in favour of other more popularly based leadership groups. English Canada's recent rejection of the Charlottetown Accord perhaps has set the stage for a new period of change and creativity.

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1.　　There are in fact a number of terms that have been developed as substitutes for "English Canada." Beyond "Canada Outside Quebec," possibilities are "The Rest of Canada" and "Canada Without Quebec." But they are not in public usage nor do they offer a term to denote the populations themselves. Thus, *faute de mieux* I will use "English Canada" in this paper.

2.　　Calculated from Statistics Canada, *Adjusted Language Data*, April 1988.

And blow you old winds of time
You've wrinkled my face with your blowing
Well you've given me all that I have
But you've taken away my youth without me knowing

Well we sure had our bad times and our fun
And we paid all our taxes to the government of old
Saskatchewan
I raised up my kids 'till they finally raised away
And they drop in now and then
To visit on their holidays

Now they say I'm too old to cook and sew
And there's an old folks home in town they want me to go
But I'll stay here on my own 'till that wind blows me away
I've been through harder times than this
On less than pension pay

You say that I'm old
But I've just been through a lot
And the fact that I've lots of wrinkles
Just shows how hard I fought

I won't go in, and you hear me
You can't take me away
For I've a will, and I've decided
I'm going to stay

But blow you old winds of time
You've wrinkled my face with your blowing
Well you've given me all that I've got
But you've taken away my life without me knowing.

Donna Greschner, College of Law, University of Saskat-chewan, Chief Commissioner, Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission.

1. Robin West, "Jurisprudence and Gender" (1988) 55 U. Chi. L.R. 1.
2. Wallace Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* (New York: Random House, 1992).
3. Guy Vanderhaege, *Things As They Are?* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992) 173.

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3. Speech to Quebec Liberal Convention, 28 January 1968, reported in Ottawa Citizen, (29 January 1968), as quoted in George Radawanski, *Trudeau* (Scarborough: Macmillan — NAL Publishing Ltd., 1978) at 286.
4. "Des provinces ont prié Ottawa de leur imposer le respect du français," *le Devoir* (23 October 1980) 1.
5. Comité pour une politique fonctionnelle, "Bizarre algèbre" (1965) XX *Cité libre*, [Albert Breton, Claude Bruneau, Yvon Gauthier, Marc Lalonde, Maurice Pinard] at 14. Pierre Trudeau reportedly was closely involved in the preparation of the document but did not sign it since he had already entered federal politics.
6. This constitutes a translation of extracts from the French text, as reproduced in *le Devoir* (13 October 1971).
7. Peter Newman, *Toronto Star* (2 April 1966), as quoted in Richard Simeon, *Federal-Provincial Diplomacy: the making of recent policy in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972) at 68.
8. Don Peacock, *Journey to Power: The Story of a Canadian Election* (Toronto: 1968), as quoted in Simeon, *Ibid.* at 90.
9. Anthony Careless, *Initiative and Response* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1977) at 177 (emphasis added).
10. See Peter H. Russell, "The Political Purposes of the Canadian Charter" (1983) 61 Canadian Bar Review, and Rainer Knopff and F.L. Morton, "Nation-Building and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," in Alan Cairns and Cynthia Williams, eds, *Constitutionalism, Citizenship and Society in Canada*, Vol. 33, Collected Research Studies, Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985).
11. For instance, a January 1989 survey found that 69% of Francophone respondents agreed that the Quebec government was justified in restricting the right to erect signs in English or another language so as to protect French; 16% disagreed. ("Francophones et anglophones sont insatisfaits de la loi 178" *La Presse* (23 January 1989) A1).
12. In adopting the Allaire report a party convention did pass amendments specifying that it is only the Senate ("dans sa forme actuelle") that would be abolished and that the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* would continue to apply in Quebec ("Bourassa choisit d'abord le Canada" *le Devoir* (11 March 1991)).
13. Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, *Preliminary Report* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1965) at 151.