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New Chances for Accommodation: Has Québécois Separatism Run its Course?

Zusammenfassung

Das Unabhängigkeitsreferendum führte 1995 fast zu einer Sezession Quebecs von Kanada. Wie wir in diesem Artikel argumentieren, stellt der Quebecer Nationalismus den kanadischen Föderalismus heute nicht mehr grundsätzlich in Frage – und mehr als das: Die Grundlage für eine Zusammenarbeit zwischen Quebecern und kanadischen Föderalisten scheint heute besonders günstig. Zum einen haben sich anglokanadische und Quebecer Nationalismuskonzepte im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts verändert und sind heute kompatibel. Während der kanadische Nationalismus heute weitestgehend als ‚zivil‘ verstanden wird, kann Quebec als sozio-politische Nation bezeichnet werden. Neben dieser eher konzeptuellen Konvergenz spricht auch die politische und ökonomische Konjunktur für eine Stabilisierung der Verhältnisse. Drei Tendenzen sind hierbei entscheidend: eine neue Bedeutung der Staatsbürgerschaft im Quebecer Nationalismus, die erfolgreiche Integration von Einwanderern und die gesellschaftliche Bedeutung einer auf individueller Autonomie und Flexibilität basierenden neoliberalen Globalisierung.

Abstract

The 1995 Quebec referendum almost resulted in Quebec's secession from Canada. This paper makes the case that since then the chances for the accommodation of Québécois nationalism in Canada have significantly increased – more than that: today, cooperative arrangements between Québécois and Canadian nationalism have reached an unprecedented stability. We make this argument on a conceptual and an empirical basis. We contend that both Anglo-Canadian and Québécois conceptions of nationalism have experienced a shift from an ethnic to a civic orientation over the course of the 20th century. We argue that today, Canadian nationalism is widely understood as purely civic whereas Quebec is a case of what Michael Seymour has described as a socio-political nation. From this perspective, the accommodation of Québécois nationalism has become more likely under the current political and economic conjuncture for three major reasons: a new emphasis on citizenship in Québécois nationalism, the integration of immigrants, and the dominance of neoliberal globalisation centred on individual autonomy and flexibility.

Résumé

Le référendum sur la souveraineté du Québec de 1995 a failli mener à une sécession. Comme le montre la présente analyse, l'accommodement du nationalisme québécois au Canada semble beaucoup plus probable qu'à l'époque. Plus que cela : aujourd'hui, la base pour une coopération entre les nationalismes québécois et canadien est considérablement meilleure qu'auparavant. D'un côté, les conceptions de nationalisme ont connus une modification au cours du XXème siècle, ce qui permet une nouvelle stabilité politique. Tandis que le nationalisme canadien contemporain est largement aperçu en tant que nationalisme civil, le Québec peut être caractérisé comme nation socio-politique. Sous cet angle, l'accommodement du nationalisme québécois est devenu plus probable aussi à cause de la présente conjoncture politique et économique. Trois dynamiques sont particulièrement importantes dans ce contexte : une nouvelle importance de la citoyenneté dans le nationalisme québécois, l'intégration d'immigrants, ainsi que la dominance d'une mondialisation néolibérale qui se fonde sur les principes de l'autonomie et de la flexibilité individuelle.

New Chances for Accommodation?¹

In a 2006 speech before the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper expressed his view on the Quebec question: "Our position is clear. Do the Québécois form a nation within Canada? The answer is yes." (CBC News 2006) This avowal seemed to represent a serious step forward in the Canadian debates about recognising Quebec as a "distinct society." For the first time in history a Canadian Prime Minister had called Quebec a nation – a conservative Prime Minister born in Ontario and politically socialised in Western Canada at that. Yet, Harper's following sentence constituted an important qualification to his statement: "Do the Québécois form an independent nation? The answer is no and the answer will always be no" (CBC News 2006).²

Does Harper's stance on Québécois nationalism represent progress in federal-provincial relations between Quebec and Canada? Despite this ambiguity and despite these limitations? To a certain extent, it certainly does. The context in which Harper pronounced these sentences was a parliamentary debate and it included the symbolic recognition of Quebec as a nation within Canada. Doubtless, this constitutes an improvement vis-à-vis the violent outbursts of the Quiet Revolution or the night of long knives during constitutional negotiations in 1981. Moreover, since

1 We would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

2 Harper's motion had been prompted to defuse a Bloc Québécois motion to be debated in the Canadian Parliament. The Bloc motion called for Quebec to be recognised as a nation but did not include the words "in Canada." To this, Harper retorted somewhat laconically that since the "Bloc Québécois has asked us to define this [...] perhaps that's a good thing because it reminds us that all Canadians have a say in the future of this country."

2006 some of the Québécois demands have actually been met by the federal government. Quebec has obtained a formal role at the United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organisation (UNESCO) and the fiscal balance between the federal and provincial level has been recognised and reduced (Changfoot/Cullen 2011, 771).

But what do these developments reveal about the long term relationship between Quebec and Canada and about the place of Quebec within the Canadian Federation? What do they mean for this difficult relationship which has a long history, beginning even before the founding of the Canadian federation? A relationship that has been characterised by violence, that has seen a revolution, even if it was called a 'Quiet' one (that in part it was not), that has witnessed successful and failed constitutional reforms, two referendums on the sovereignty of Quebec in 1980 and 1995, and a so-called 'Clarity Act'. Given this complicated history, is there a chance for an accommodation of Québécois nationalism in Canada? Or will there be another referendum – a 'neverendum', as some call it wryly – and an ongoing debate about an independent Quebec (Lammert 2001)? Our answer to this question is a qualified yes: there is a realistic and, given present circumstances, likely chance for accommodation.³

Indeed, the sovereignist movement seems to have lost in political clout over the past decade. Some have argued that the loss in popular support for the Parti Québécois (PQ) since 1994 has been a symptom of waning aspirations for sovereignty in Quebec (Changfoot/Cullen 2011). Others interpret low support for national sovereignty as a consequence of new social movements. Reacting to globalisation processes and increasing social injustices, these movements that are driven by actors from civil society such as unions and environmental groups no longer see Québécois nationalism as the adequate response and vehicle for change (e.g., Dufour 2005; Salée 2002; Graefe 2005). Others again have emphasised that a young and depoliticised generation of Quebecers no longer identifies with the sovereignist movement (Mendelsohn et al. 2005). Finally, some stress the role of neoliberalism and its impact on federal-provincial relations. For instance, Nadine Changfoot and Blair Cullen have argued that "the changing contours of federalism shaped by neoliberal exigencies" have made "federal and Quebec government co-operation viable enough to pre-empt a separatist groundswell and keep separatism off the agenda" (Changfoot/Cullen 2011, 771–2).

According to our analysis, the chances for a cooperative arrangement between Quebec and the federal government are good, not because of Stephen Harper, neither because of that particular debate of 2006 and its mid-term repercussions, but for mainly two other reasons: the Canadian model of federalism and social, political, and economic changes in the last two decades. As we argue, these longer

3 By accommodation we do not refer to the debate on "reasonable accommodation," but to a cooperative and stable arrangement of Canadian and Québécois forms of nationalism.

term changes that have deep-seated effects on the composition and outlook of Québécois society, combined with a new understanding of nationalism will provide the basis for more harmonious federal-provincial relationships. In a first step, we will discuss Canadian federalism to explain the new potential for accommodation. This will lead, in the subsequent section, to a more conceptual argument. The pivotal question that stands in the focus of the first two sections is this: How have self-conceptions of the nation in Canada and in Quebec changed over time and how do these changes support the potential for accommodation? In the third and last section we will explore how major shifts in society – notably globalisation processes and immigration – have fundamentally altered the parameters of Québécois separatism. In addition to the rethinking of nationalism in Quebec and Canada, we argue by way of conclusion, these changes have increased the chances for accommodation in a process that is unlikely to be reversed any time soon.

From Ethnic to Civic Nationalism

Quebec enjoys a special status in the framework of Canadian federalism. This includes special rights and competencies in language policy, in social policy and in immigration policy. The concept of asymmetrical federalism has served as a way of recognising Quebec's special status in the Canadian Federation. Although this arrangement was and still is criticised by other provinces in Canada, it has been acceptable and flexible enough to accommodate Quebec's special interests until today. This institutional setting has provided the framework for the development of a concept of the nation in Quebec that goes beyond traditional understandings such as those of the ethnic, civic or cultural nation.

The conceptual dichotomy between an ethnic and a civic version of nationalism has been particularly dominant in social science debates on the nation in the Western World in general and, more specifically, in Canada and Quebec (see Smith 2008). It helps to explain, to a certain extent, the tensions and antagonisms of federal-provincial relations during the twentieth century – as well as the emerging potential for accommodation, as we shall see.

Nationalism is an ideology, a system of ideas that orients and rationalises the social process of nation-building and that legitimises its outcome (Calhoun 1997, 2007). The ideological system can be more or less theoretically elaborate, more or less grounded on historical evidence – real or fictitious – and more or less rich in symbolic and ritualistic expression. Nationalism, according to Raymond Breton, is “a component of the process whereby a particular kind of socio-political entity is constructed, maintained, expanded or otherwise transformed” (Breton 2005, 104). The nation-building process involves, on the one hand, the acquisition of control over resources that tend to be territorially based. This is the *instrumental dimension* of society building. On the other hand, the construction of a community or society also entails the definition of a collective identity, its content and the forms through

which it is represented. This is the *cultural-symbolic dimension* of social formations. Both components are distinct, but closely interrelated (Vormann 2015).

Even though nation-building processes and related nationalistic ideologies usually contain both dimensions – the instrumental and the cultural-symbolic – the emphasis placed on them can vary considerably. Some forms of nationalism are based primarily, and even exclusively, on economic and political considerations whereas the content of others refers mainly to values, customs, and traditions. On the spectrum between these polar extremes it is possible to analyse the evolution of collectivities in terms of two ideal-typical forms of nationalism. The first type emphasises the instrumental dimension of societal institutions. Societies are constructed in order to acquire control over resources, to solve problems, and to defend members against enemies. The basis for inclusion and exclusion is civic – it is transmitted by birth or on the basis of legally established criteria and procedures. This type of nationalism is called *civic nationalism*. In the second type the society and institutions that are constructed are seen as founded on cultural unity. The basis of inclusion and exclusion is ethnic and therefore the type may be called *ethnic or cultural nationalism*.⁴

Within this conceptual antagonism of the civic and the ethnic nation 20th century history of both Canada and Quebec may be described as a shift from an ethnic to a civic conception of the nation. The most important aspects of this development can be summed up in a longer historical perspective:

Arguably, the Canadian nation was invented only with the beginnings of the Dominion of Canada in 1867. It was a project borne by elites and necessitated by economic and strategic political considerations. John MacDonald's National Policy was built on three pillars: immigration policy for the settlement of the North-West, protectionism to foster domestic industries, and the establishment of a transnational railway, the Canadian Pacific Railway (Vormann 2012, 144–5). The *Canada First* movement of the early 1870s clearly recurred to myths of an ethnic Anglo-Canadian nation, describing it as part of "robust Nordic races disciplined by their efforts to survive in a harsh environment" (Francis 1997, 271). In the absence of unifying myths of origin – such as the battle of Hastings in Britain – and of a historical point of origin – such as the French Revolution for France – throughout the early 20th century and particularly after World War I Canadian national myths were constructed primarily on the basis of British descent, envisioning Canada as a subservient part of the British Empire. In short, the Canadian nation, pre-World War II, was understood as an ethnic nation, based on the nationalism of English-speaking Canadians. The society that this collectivity was attempting to construct was British. Ethnic minorities were to be assimilated and the prevailing ideology was "Anglo-conformity" (Palmer 1976, 498). The basis of inclusion in Canada was Britishness by birth. As a consequence, the main threats to this concept of nationalism were per-

4 For a more thoroughgoing elucidation of these two concepts see Vormann 2012, 22–31.

ceived as cultural – and embodied, above all, by the francophone population in Canada. But to a considerable extent, the presence of this linguistic group was to be accommodated with the adoption of a federal political system.

Three major changes have led to a shift from this ethnic to a civic conception of Canadian nationalism in the course of the 20th century. The first factor was a significant change in French-Canadian nationalism. Incidents such as the Riel Rebellion in Manitoba, the school question in New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Ontario, and the reaction to those events in English Canada gave rise to a pan-Canadian nationalism among the francophone populations. As a consequence, francophone populations began to demand the institutional means necessary to preserve the French language and culture throughout the country – and Canada had to react to these demands. Second, and just as importantly, the demographic and economic dimensions of the nation-building process in Canada produced results that impeded the assertion of British ethnic nationalism. A social contradiction was to emerge between the politico-economic and the ethno-cultural orientations of English or British nationalism. And finally, the challenges that Anglo-Canadian nationalism faced were also the result of its success, at least with regards to language. The imposition of Anglo-conformity was more or less willingly adopted by most immigrants and their descendents who began to speak the English language and who internalised the conception of Canada as an English-speaking country. Perhaps paradoxically, however, the linguistic assimilation of minorities dissociated ethnicity from language. The English language was increasingly reduced to a means of communication and lost its significance as a vehicle of culture and a symbol of group membership. This also meant that the definition of the English-Canadian collective identity was blurred. This development was reinforced by the fact that, in the process of modernisation, ethnicity became progressively decoupled from religion so that the basis of membership in the collectivity could be less and less defined in ethno-cultural terms.

It shall suffice for the sake of our argument only to outline in brush strokes these major processes that have been involved in the transformation of English-Canadian nationalism from an ethnic to a civic orientation (see Vormann/Lammert 2014 for more detail). The collective identity that emerged in these processes was partly based on the notion of cultural pluralism and has found its manifestation in the official policy of multiculturalism since the 1970s. This policy has emerged largely as a reaction to the changing nature of Québécois nationalism in an attempt to maintain national unity (Gagnon 2011a, 81).

A similar shift from ethnic to civic nationalism throughout the 20th century can be observed in the case of French-Canadian nationalism. Akin to early British-Canadian nationalism, it was also based on an ethnic conception of society in the beginning. French nationalism, especially after the failure of the *Rébellion des Patriotes* in the late 1830s, has often been described as defensive, oriented toward the past, with its primary concern being the preservation against threats of a culturally

defined type of society. The idea of having survived against all odds on the North American continent, under the 'double domination' of Anglo-Canadians and imperial Britain, was the unifying myth – the myth of 'la Survivance' – of the Franco-Canadian nation (Kolboom 1998, 14). As in the case of English Canadian nationalism, a number of phenomena including processes of industrialisation, urbanisation, and the diffusion of U.S.-American culture have progressively transformed French-Canadian society. Many of these changes began early in the 20th century but culminated in what became known as the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s. With the end of the Duplessis era – often described as a dark historical episode in retrospect: 'la Grande Noirceur' – and paralleled by developments such as sinking birth rates in Quebec which led to fears of losing the francophone heritage within the Canadian Federation, nationalism shifted from its former unificatory institution, the Catholic Church, to the French language and culture (Vormann 2012, 167).

At the same time, the community underwent a shift from a minority to a majority conception of itself. This change is reflected for instance in the substitution of 'Québécois' for 'French-Canadian' as the acceptable self-denotation, the emerging notion of the 'société distincte,' and the renaming of Quebec's provincial parliament as 'national assembly' in 1968 (Kolboom/Vormann 2011, 15). Related to this was a shift from a pan-Canadian to a Québécois definition of the boundaries of their collectivity. Quebec lost much of its defensive and past-oriented 'survivance' character to become more assertive and oriented towards economic development. A crucial factor in these developments was that state institutions, rather than the Church, have come to be seen as the critical instrument for the realisation of collective ambitions (Lammert 2004, 107–12). As the French Canadian nation became the Québécois nation, the ethnic interpretation of the nation was gradually replaced by a civic understanding, albeit with a strong emphasis on the French language and heritage.

This process entailed also some form of reterritorialisation of boundaries as well as identities which created two distinct communities: *les Québécois* and *les Francophones hors Québec* (Juteau 2002, 443). And although we might clearly speak of a civic conception of the nation, the emerging and newly constructed national community did not include all the residents of Quebec from the start; it was in fact limited to the French Canadians within the newly proclaimed boundaries who still shared a common history and a developing destiny that was increasingly connected to the sovereignist project. In the first referendum on independence in 1980 40% of the electorate voted in favour of separation, but an overwhelming majority of the non-French Canadians rejected this option (Drouilly 1997). The failed referendum started a discussion on how to win the support of the non-French Canadians in Quebec. Getting their support would require the formation of a national community that coincided more with the existing territorial boundaries and formulating a common identity across the ethnic boundaries in Quebec (Juteau 2002, 444). In order to redefine belongingness, Quebec's institutions and politicians embraced

intercultural and pluralistic practices – though with even less success: in the second referendum on independence in 1995 about 95% of non-French Canadians in Quebec voted against the sovereignist option (McRoberts 1997). The strategy to integrate immigrants and ethnic groups in the national community of Quebec had failed and a new strategy had to be developed.

According to Danielle Juteau (2002, 446), the ‘citizen’ made an entrance as the third step in the process of boundary definition. Again, the goal was a direct outcome of the second referendum: to foster and institutionalise a strong shared national identity. Within this new conception of the national community, the construction of national identity required the homogenisation of the national subject as well as the successful integration of newcomers and minorities. Under the label of universalism, the dominant ethnic group (the French-Québécois) had to impose their specificity (language, values, norms) by extending it to the public sphere. According to Juteau (2002, 449) the main goal was to put some cultural content around a universalistic bone. Language is of special importance here. The French language has been presented as a common good and a heritage that belongs to all Quebec citizens. Language has been transformed into the language of *la citoyenneté québécoise* (Forum National 2000, 4–5). In this context, language has been presented as providing a common basis for identification: The French language is described as the foundation of citizenship and political participation, as a vehicle of communication that brings the population together in a common national project. In short, by making the integration of non-French Canadians into the national community of Quebec the main objective and by linking language to the status of citizenship, the redefinition of a collective national project has become less past-oriented than former models of national identification in Quebec and has rendered it more civic and inclusive.

This summary of historical shifts in national self-conceptions in Canada and Quebec is admittedly brief. Yet, it should reveal the basic weaknesses of these overly antagonistic models which rendered accommodation impossible and which no longer seem to fit constantly changing social realities and new forms of pluralism. Indeed, developments in the course of the last two decades such as, first and foremost, new waves of immigration and processes of economic globalisation under neoliberalism have changed the situation so drastically that traditional understandings of civic and ethnic nationalism are no longer appropriate to capture the evolving relationship of Quebec and the Canadian Federation. Accordingly, discourses on nationalism have changed in both Quebec and the ROC, promoting the potential for accommodation.

Conceptual Reasons for Accommodation

We cannot emphasise enough, and Kymlicka has repeatedly done so in many of his texts (e.g., Kymlicka 2003), that in Canada, different populations exist that represent themselves as nations in different ways and with different concepts. We need

to keep this in mind although, for the purpose of this argument, we will limit ourselves to the discussion of the Canadian and the Québécois nation and will not treat other important cases such as the First Nations or the Acadian nation.⁵

Quebecers, as we have seen, used to represent themselves as members of a purely cultural French Canadian Nation. Since the Quiet Revolution they have begun to see themselves as part of a Québécois nation in a new territorial and civic sense. As far as English Canadian nationalism is concerned, at first blush, opinions seem to vary considerably as to its current status. Some see Canada as a post-national “community of communities” (Webber 1994). Others think of Canada as a multinational state composed of different cultural or socio-political nations (Resnick 1994). According to that view, there is such a thing as an English Canadian nation. But the majority of those who argue in this line would see contemporary Canada as constituting a single, purely civic nation; the Canadian nation for them is the country as a whole. Within this group we can find a variety of individuals entertaining different attitudes toward the multinational character of Canada. Some accept the existence of the two linguistic communities (Kaplan 1994). Others recognise the existence of a multinational society. Finally, there are some who are willing to accept the existence of a “deep diversity,” and who are equally willing to recognise the existence of Quebec as a nation.⁶

Politicians, political scientist, and intellectuals within Canada hold a vast array of political positions. Yet, in spite of all these differences, most would agree with the idea that the Canadian nation is *purely civic*. This civic character of Canadian nationalism has often been interpreted as a juxtaposition vis-à-vis Québécois nationalism, which has been described, from the Anglo-Canadian perspective, as an ethnic variety in order to discredit its legitimacy in the 1980s and 1990s (Karmis 2011, 127). In other words, conceiving Canadian nationalism as a civic nationalism has also been a function of federal-provincial relations with Quebec.

It is mostly changes in the nationalist discourses of Quebecers and French Canadians that have changed the overall situation in federal-provincial relations. Even if there are francophone Canadians outside Quebec who roughly share the same language, history, and culture, they are less numerous than those who live in Quebec. Francophones outside Quebec form a national minority, an extension of the French national majority within Quebec. Put differently, francophone Canadians living outside Quebec do not represent themselves just as any other minority. They form a ‘historical minority,’ that is, they are part of what used to be one of the ‘two founding nations’ of Canada. This is why they have to be considered as a national minority of French Canadians. However, this French Canadian nation no longer exists, for it has been replaced by new communities: a cultural Acadian nation with-

5 For the case of the First Nations and Acadia see respectively Salée 2011; Flanagan 2008; Dupuis 2001 and Kolboom 2010; Allaire 2001.

6 In Charles Taylor’s opinion Canada misses the opportunities offered by this ‘deep diversity’ of society precisely because of its concept of multiculturalism (1991).

in the province of New Brunswick and the Québécois nation within Quebec. The French Canadian founding people has paved the way to new forms of national consciousness emerging within New Brunswick and Quebec and, in the process, has receded.⁷

Now that Francophones inside Quebec are the majority of a group of people with one language, history, and culture, they have come to regard themselves as a 'national majority'. At the same time, however, the political community in Quebec has a national minority of Anglo-Quebecers and individuals with other national origins. The Quebec nation is part of a larger political community, but it constitutes a distinct nation. Dimitrios Karmis has described Québécois nationalism today as an assemblage of contradictory currents, that is, of Trudeauism – a mixture of civic nationalism and multiculturalism –, Québécois Jacobinism – a monistic vision of the nation-state in the tradition of ethnic nationalism –, and, a mixture of the two other tendencies, integration nationalism, which reflects the pluralism of Québécois society in recognising ethnocultural and national minority, but which prioritises the language and culture of the majority culture (Karmis 2011, 133–9).

Michael Seymour seeks to overcome the civic-ethnic dichotomy with his concept of the *socio-political* nation; a critique that proves to be a helpful heuristic to clarify this complex situation, because it integrates these various tendencies (Seymour 2000). As Seymour argues, both forms of nationalism – ethnic and civic – favour the nation-state as the only adequate political arrangement. Clearly, from the viewpoint of ethnic nationalism, every ethnic group should have its own state. But even civic nationalism (e.g., Trudeauism) excludes minorities by maintaining a policy of benevolent state neutrality – which, above all, favours the homogeneity of the state and thus its ruling groups. According to Seymour's model, a nation, similar to the civic definition, is a type of political community (Seymour 2000, 231). But unlike the civic account, this political community may or may not be a sovereign state. Seymour's concept also differs from the civic definition in that it is not strictly political, but also includes a societal dimension: A majority of individuals in the political community need to share the same language, culture and history (similarly to mononational Jacobinism). To a certain extent, then, the socio-political nation also resembles the ethnic and cultural nation. But unlike the purely cultural account, it is not strictly societal, but also political. The socio-political nation is a political community which may consist of more than one nation. In addition to the national majority, it includes national minorities and individuals of other national origins. Contrary to purely cultural accounts, the socio-political nation may be pluricultural.⁸

This means that Quebec can be treated as a part of the Canadian nation only if we understand the latter in a purely civic sense. At the same time the Québécois nation

7 Nonetheless, of course, French Canadians who live outside Quebec still form a national minority and must be recognised and respected as that.

8 Alain-G. Gagnon's account of political emancipation in multinational polities is congruent with our understanding of a socio-political nation (Gagnon 2011a).

still constitutes a distinct nation in the socio-political sense. Canada cannot be understood as a socio-political nation containing a national majority of Canadians and a national minority of Quebecers because Quebec is no longer a national minority.

Of course, one potential problem arises from the fact that Anglo-Quebecers become part of the Quebec nation. And indeed, Anglo-Quebecers are full active members and equal citizen within the Quebec nation. However, and it is important to realise this, especially from the perspective of an Anglo-Quebecer: one need not be sovereignist in order to be part of Quebec's socio-political nation and voting for the Parti Québécois (PQ) in Quebec's provincial elections is not equivalent to a vote on Quebec's independence (Lammert 2004, 200). Anglo-Quebecers can be part of a Quebec nation within the Canadian nation understood in the exclusive civic sense and there is no reason to object the fact that individuals can simultaneously possess different national affiliations. This also means that the inclusion of Anglo-Quebecers within the Quebec socio-political nation equals the status of a national minority within the Quebec nation.

One might argue that Quebecers are committed to a form of cultural or ethnic nationalism because the main arguments of nationalists have been based upon the protection of language and culture. It is certainly true that Quebec nationalism has always involved the defense of the French language and the promotion of Québécois culture. But this should not be seen as favouring one particular group over others, for French is now the common public language of all Quebecers and Quebec culture is nothing over and above common public institutions such as the government, laws, the system of education, libraries, etc., belonging to all Quebecers. To use Will Kymlicka's phrase, it is a societal culture understood as a cultural structure, which provides a 'context of choice' and should not be confined to a particular character of culture held by a particular group during a given period of time (Kymlicka 1996, 82–4).

What we end up with is, on the one hand, a purely civic conception of the Canadian nation, held by most Canadians, and a socio-political conception of the Quebec nation, held by most Quebecers. The question is to argue and find ways in which these two different nations could live in harmony (and with harmony we mean without the constant threat of separation). From a more theoretical perspective, Michael Seymour insists on the political primacy of the basic principle of tolerance and the respect for the self-representation of others (Seymour 2000, 245). For the Quebec nation, this could mean that Quebecers have to accept their plural identity as Quebecers and Canadians. And for Canadians, it could mean that they should accept the existence of Quebec as a socio-political nation within the Canadian nation.

New Realities: Empirical Reasons for Accommodation

This conceptual argument – seeing Canada as a multinational entity and Quebec as a socio-political nation – provides us with strong arguments in favour of accom-

modation. Indeed, recent polls indicate that Quebec's sovereignty is getting less and less important for Quebecers. According to an Angus Reid poll from November 2012, only 32% of the respondents would vote 'yes' in a referendum on whether Quebec should become a country separate from Canada, 54% said they would vote 'no' (Angus Reid 2012). Even among French-speaking Quebecers just 36% would vote 'yes' in a third referendum. Among English-speaking Quebecers a clear majority of 93% declared to vote 'no'!

This does not necessarily mean that Quebec separatism is a dead issue. It remains an option that still can be used and mobilised in the fight over competencies and autonomy rights between the federal government in Ottawa and the Quebec provincial government. According to a Leger Marketing survey, 44.5% of Quebecers would still support a separation from Canada if the Constitution could not be changed enough to satisfy the majority of the province (Blatchford 2012). Nonetheless, most Quebecers consider the overall debate whether the province should separate from Canada no longer relevant: Nearly 71% think the sovereignty debate is outdated (Simpson 2011).

The separatist cause has lost in momentum over the course of the past two decades. Only 14% believe that Quebec will become an independent country within the next 30 years (Chung 2010). Since 2006, the support for sovereignty in Quebec has been at an historical low (Changfoot/Cullen 2011, 770). To be sure, Quebecers still have difficulties with the Canadian federal government. Should a new crisis in federal-provincial relations occur, a debate about sovereignty could certainly erupt and return to the political agenda. Still today, over half of all Quebecers (56%) believe that Quebec typically is disadvantaged in federal-provincial relations. Only 47%, less than half of the respondents, agreed that there were fewer reasons for Quebec to separate than there had been 30 years ago – 41% believe that there are just as many reasons today, if not more. Also, support for separation continues to hover around 40%, a number that resembles statistics from the 1980s (Bélanger/Chhim 2012).

However, this debate has fundamentally changed. A case in point regards debates about language. Indeed, in Quebec nearly 60% of all respondents thought that the French language in the province is less secure than 30 years ago. But when asked about the French language's principal 'enemy,' the answer has changed: it is no longer English Canada, but globalisation. Moreover, only a minority of Quebecers think of themselves as sovereignists (24%). Today, about a fifth of all Quebecers (22%) call themselves federalist, another 22% call themselves both – federalist and sovereignists – and another 25% believe to be neither (Mendelsohn et al. 2005). This is certainly not a strong popular basis for a separatist movement, even more so since, with the rising economic importance of globalisation processes, anger seems to be directed against a less tangible force than Anglophone Canada. A closer look reveals that there are additional changes in Quebec that indicate a difficult future for separatists in the province – and that increase the likelihood of accommodation.

First, understandings of nationalism have changed, altering, in turn, the nature of Québécois nationalism. This relates to but goes beyond the argument we have made in the prior section: As a result of the negative image associated with nationalistic and ethnicity-driven upheavals in many parts of the world in the 1990s and 2000s, a number of political philosophers and social theorists, particularly in the West, have felt compelled to uphold the virtues of nationalism, but in stressing its liberal nature, insisting on its emancipatory potential, and/or pointing out its openness to diversity. Quebec's leading nationalists can serve as an example. Over the last two decades, the nationalist discourse elaborated both by the state and intellectuals in Quebec has progressively rejected the traditional ethnic and cultural connotations. Quebec nationalists, at least in our reading, claim to understand *La Nation Québécoise* no longer as the sum total of an historically determined, common cultural experience shared mainly by French-speaking Quebecers, but as the gathering, through citizenship of reasonable and equal social and political beings around rational, democratic institutions upon which they all have agreed, regardless of their difference and diverging interests. Quebec's new nationalism encourages pluralism beyond the historical, culturally determined confines that used to define the nation. It celebrates diversity, promotes the integrity of minority cultures, and at the same time posits the Quebec state as the rallying point with which all can and should identify. For better or worse, this new emphasis on pluralism meets the liberal prerequisites of unimpeded individualism; its insistence on democratic citizenship satisfies the liberal faith in universal values and its aspirations for a common civic culture fulfil the fundamentally integrative bent of the liberal state.

The influx and increased visibility of immigrants in many sectors of Quebec's social and economic life have also influenced the transformation of the nationalist discourse and has made a separatist movement less likely. By requiring immigrant children to attend French schools, language legislation has progressively socialised immigrants and several minority groups into the francophone mainstream, bringing larger segments of these constituencies to take a more active and more direct part in the social, cultural, and economic life of Quebec. This tendency has its origin in the language laws 22 and 101 of the 1970s which had their social repercussions only during the 1990s – when these developments were also intensified by new attempts to prioritise immigration from francophone countries (Gidengil et al. 2011, 190). Moreover, the 1991 *Gagnon-Tremblay-McDougall Agreement* has secured a partial influence of the Québécois state over its immigration and has granted it the exclusive say over the linguistic integration of its immigrants (Mc Andrew 2011, 297). As a consequence of these developments immigrants have been perceived less and less as a threat to Quebec's majority culture over the course of the last two decades. Certainly, there are counter-evidential backlashes such as recent debates about Islam. But this xenophobic line of argumentation has no political tradition in Quebec and can be seen as a deviation. A recent study has found that while Manitoba and Nova Scotia are the Canadian provinces considered the "most favourable

to immigration," it is Quebec that "stands out as the province with the largest proportion of people happy with the status quo in immigration intake (49.6%)" (Bilodeau et al. 2012, 586).

Finally, the third important factor that has strengthened Quebec nationalism's emphasis on citizenship and that stabilises cooperative federal-provincial relations is the expressed will of Quebec's economic elites to embrace economic globalisation. The nationalist state policies of the 1960s and 1970s largely contributed to the social and political ascent of a new class of francophone capitalists who, since the early 1980s, have come to prevail in the economic and political affairs of the province (Martin 1995). These new economic elites have been particularly anxious to tackle new markets, to expand their international economic horizons of action, and to foster individual flexibility on labour markets – rather than to revamp Québécois sovereignty. This is not just a passive view held by these groups: they have regarded the provincial state as a hindrance to their success and have joined their pendants in other North Atlantic countries in their efforts to push back state regulation and intervention so as to roll out neoliberal marketization (Brenner et al. 2010). Reinforcing this trend, and similarly to developments in other countries, the individualisation of both producers and consumers in the context of neoliberalisation processes has also had a far reaching effect on Quebec's social fabric, equally taking wind out of the sails of Québécois nationalism. Collective institutions of the Fordist era such as labour unions, a common public education system, and equalising welfare institutions have gradually been disintegrated and have lost in political sway, losing with it the unifying rallying points and identity markers that have been essential pillars of any national project. In their stead, new meritocratic values of choice and competition have dissolved ideological tenets of the national community, relegating all responsibilities for success and failure from the sphere of the collective to the individual.

In short, the new openness for pluralism and citizenship values, a certain aplomb and tolerance vis-à-vis immigration – a new-found cultural security –, and, finally, dynamics of individualisation and widespread hopes for individual fulfilment accompanied by the disintegration of national social institutions are converging dynamics that constitute a cultural and politico-economic conjuncture which undermines the galvanising potential of the Québécois national project. These tendencies are both rationalised and reinforced by the changing self-conceptions of nationalism in Quebec and Canada. From this perspective, constantly decreasing support for the separatist cause is not a historical coincidence, neither is it a short term development that is likely to evaporate.

Conclusion

Québécois sovereignists are facing an interesting, yet somewhat paradoxical challenge. By turning Quebec into a socio-political nation with strong civic elements, they have contributed in the efforts to modernise Québécois nationalism. At the

same time, however, they also seem to have diluted its ability to persuade Quebecers to engage in a vigorous tug-of-war with Canadian federalism. To the extent that collective identity in Quebec now appears inevitably more polymorphous and variegated, it is also more difficult and hardly reasonable to actually preserve the traditional, ethnicity-based mantle of unity and social cohesion which had been so crucial in justifying and legitimising the uncompromising stance of successive Quebec governments vis-à-vis Ottawa and the Rest of Canada. These shifts will make it more difficult for sovereignists to muster the unequivocal support they need to stand up to Ottawa and achieve their ultimate political goal. It is in this sense that the accommodation of Québécois nationalism has become a probable mid-term consequence of the current political and economic conjuncture. Changing understandings of Québécois nationalism in the context of new waves of immigration and of the expansion of neoliberal globalisation – centred on the creative, consuming, and flexible individual, not the group – seem to have eclipsed the ideological potential and political clout of Quebec's separatist project.

This does not mean, however, that nationalism has been overcome as a category of social integration and identification in Quebec. Neither does it mean that this would necessarily be a good thing. Of course, the ethnic connotation of Québécois nationalism, from which today's socio-political variety has emerged, could easily be remobilised. For instance, a more solidaristic organisation of society, as a counter-movement to neoliberalisation processes could recur, in a reflex, to ethnic national mythology. Indeed, as Graefe (2011) has argued, Québécois nationalism might serve as a baseline for the emergence of a more socially just form of capitalism – though the line to walk between a solidaristic project and an exclusive, mononational conception of the Québécois state would certainly be a very thin one.

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