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Language as the main aspect of Québec Nationalism

di Beatrice Russo

Key Words: Nationalism; Ethnicity; Language; Identity; Québec

Key Words Researcher: Nationalism; Québec; Survey; Qualitative data research.

Topic: Nationalism in Québec

Research Question: What is the factor that drives the most the Nationalism in Québec?

Thesis Statement: Nationalism is driven by many factors, such as ethnicity, religion, territory, culture, language. Analyzing Scholars' theories and public opinion (surveys and interviews) contemporary Nationalism in Québec (Canada) is affected by language more than other factors.

Abstract

Nationalism is the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of nation. Nationalism means, moreover, the actions that members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty. In this paper Nationalism is analyzed in the case of Québec (Canada) answering the question: which is the factor that drives the most Nationalism in Québec? The main hypothesis implies that the Language factor, rather than Ethnicity or Territory, drives the most Contemporary Nationalism in Québec. The dependent variable is -clearly- Nationalism; the independent variables are Ethnicity, Territory and Language. The research is based on analyzing qualitative data, using Surveys, Peer Review Articles, and Personal Interviews as sources.

Sommario

1. Introduction; 2. Theoretical background (Literature Review); 3. Methodology and data (Research plan); 4. Data analysis; 5. Conclusion; References; Appendix.

1. Introduction

Québec is a Province of Canada, and it is the largest by extension and the second most populous area of the Confederation of Canada after Ontario. The provincial capital is the city of Québec while the most populous city is Montréal. Because of its language (the official language is French, *rectius* Canadian French), its culture and its institutions, it is considered as a nation within Canada. Québec is part of the region known as French Canada, predominantly Francophone. Quebec is the only Canadian province where English is not the official language and one of the two in

which French is the official language (the other is the New Brunswick, or Nouveau Brunswick). The English-speakers in Québec are a minority recognized by law. Since 1960, there is an ongoing debate on the role of the French-speakers' world than the rest of Canada, predominantly Anglophones. The history of politics of Québec has been characterized by many efforts to achieve the sovereignty of Québec. To be more precise we have to say that during the time Québec asked for different requests: from complete independence, to create a sort of association with the rest of

Canada, or Québec claimed for the autonomy of the Province.

2. Theoretical background (Literature Review)

As Walker Connor observes: *"The essence of a nation is intangible. The essence is a psychological bond that joins a people and differentiates it"*. Nationalism is a concept *in fieri*, a principle in ongoing evolution. In history, this conception has changed in connection with the progression and the transformation of social phenomena (Lawrence, P. 2005); nationalism- indeed- shapes itself on human changes during history and on specific cases (Zabalo, J. 2008). The term "nationalism" has a variety of meanings, but it can be summarized in two main ideas: 1) It is the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of nation. 2) It includes the actions that members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty. Contemporary Nationalism in Québec is a complex phenomenon, because it is based on three factors: ethnicity, language and territory. Some scholars, to explain nationalism of the Québec, take in account just one of the three elements, others decide to combine all them or only two of them. Ethnicity represents "the sum of shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions" that make one group of people different from another. The social movements, attitudes, and ideologies which characterize the behavior of nationalities engaged in the struggle to achieve, maintain or enhance their position in the world" (Wirth 1936). That involves ethnicity as shared cultural heritage. The most common characteristics that distinguish the various ethnic groups are ancestry, history, language and religion (Smith, A. D. 2013; Azar Gat with Alexander Yakobson 2013). Sometimes the principle of nationalism, based on ethnicity, can lead to extremisms (ethnic cleansing).

Language is a tool for communication, an instrument through which interacts with other people, but it is also an icon of national group (Vessey, R. 2014).

Territory is a bounded and defined land. It is relevant because it represents the place where people -who belongs to a nation- live. People consider territory as their property and a symbol of identity too (Murphy, A. B. 2010).

Some scholars (Nelson Wiseman 2008) has a negative conception of Québec ethnic-nationalism, because they rely it to the sentiments of Québec's nationalists, who are concerned with the preservation of a "pure line" population of white francophone within the Québec province. This is, likely, the expression of isolated and narrow views, hard-fought by nationalist theorists and scholars of all sides, because this extermination of ethnicity is considered an offensive and unrepresentative sentiment regarding the independence for Québec. Nationalism of Québec is, in spite, a multi-ethnic cause movement; moreover the Quebecers and the Canadians of other provinces don't differ much on their ethnicity (because Canadians are a melting-pot of ethnicity in any province they live; and then the only different ethnicity is the one constituted by Inuits, the natives) (Will Kymlicka). Quebecers and the Canadians of other provinces, basically, differ on language and religion, that are - clearly- elements part of the "ethnicity", but they don't represent the whole (Jean-Guy Belly 2011). Accordingly to Caron, J. (2013), indeed, Québec contemporary nationalism can be defined as a form of civic nationalism. This type of collective identification can be seen as being inclusive for every citizen notwithstanding their ethno-cultural origins. In effect, the Québec case tends to illustrate that Quebecers' collective identity is defined around specific political values that are not and cannot by nature be shared by every Québec citizen,

rather than being defined on Canadian's ethno-cultural origins.

The majority of scholars tends to base the Québec claim for independence as a language issue. This is so because -nowadays- Québec differs from the other Canadian Provinces basically on the language. It is clear that each Province is different from the others on the basis of economic and territorial criteria, but when we look at Canada as whole we can divide it in two parts only if we use language as a tool: one English-speaking, the other French-speaking (the francophones are concentrated in Québec). Even if in Canada the religious tradition is different and it was considered as one of the main division (English-speakers are mainly Protestants and French-speakers are mainly Catholics), with the secularization of Québec -during the sixties- today the only *discrimen* remains the language (Jean-Guy Belly). The linking of language, nationalism and identity is, in large part, a product of the German romanticism and of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Herder, Humboldt, Fichte). *"Has a nation anything more precious than the language of its fathers?"* or *"What a treasure language is when kinship groups grow into tribes and nations. Even the smallest of nations...cherishes in and through its language the history, the poetry and songs about the great deeds of its forefathers. The language is its collective treasure."* (Herder). Those quotes explain how nationalism is driven by language, because language is part of the identity of a nation. Language is protected and enforced by laws and it can become a privileged channel for minorities (Pettinicchio D. 2012), based on the principle that language is a fundamental aspect of the identity of a nation. The idea of language involved in the construction of reality has been pointed out by the post-structuralism theorists, by Derrida in particular. The Post-structuralism is not a *paradigma* to explain reality, but a

myriad of critical attitudes towards the representation of reality, which is shaped by political practice, by language and knowledge. Who as the power, who possesses knowledge, who imposes a language creates the image of reality. For Derrida, language or 'texts' are not a natural reflection of the world. Text structures our interpretation of the world. Following Heidegger, Derrida thinks that language shapes us: texts create a clearing that we understand as reality

Territory is a nationalist feature because it is within a territory that the political power can be sovereign. Accordingly to the classical international relations theories there is no sovereignty without territory. So one of the reasons why it is possible for Québec to ask for independence and self-determination is because it has a defined territory (Michel Seymour).

Nationalism is a clear example of how Constructivism functions. According to Constructivism there is no objective reality; the role of ideas, values and identity is fundamental and they shape an alternative conception of national interests. Anarchy is what states make of it (Wendt), because anarchy -as every aspects of reality- is built on ideas and values. Even the concept of nation is based on values. Following this discourse we can say that all the characteristics which form the identity of a nation (such as language, history, ethnicity, religion...) are constructed on the strongest power's values.

The hypothesis implies that the Language factor, rather than Ethnicity or Territory, drives the most Contemporary Nationalism in Québec. The dependent variable is -clearly- Nationalism; the independent variables are Ethnicity, Territory and Language. The research is based on analyzing qualitative data, using Surveys, Peer Review Articles, and Personal Interviews as sources.

3. Methodology and data (Research plan)

This paper tries to answer the question: which is the factor (Language, Ethnicity or Territory) that characterizes the most Contemporary Nationalism in Québec. The first hypothesis is based on Language as the independent variable and Nationalism as the dependent one. The second hypothesis is based on Ethnicity as independent variable and Nationalism as the dependent one. The third hypothesis is based on Territory as the independent variable and Nationalism as the dependent one. The research is constructed analyzing qualitative data, using Surveys, and Personal Interviews, as primary sources and Peer review articles as secondary sources. The Survey is a e-mail sent survey, made of ten questions: two open-ended questions, eight closed-ended questions of which: one one-word answer, seven multiple choice of which four yes or no questions and three as scale of satisfaction. Question 1 is meant to test Territory as variable; questions 2, 3 and 8 are meant to test Language variable; questions 4 and 5 are meant to test Ethnicity variable and finally questions 6, 7, 9 and 10 are meant to create a relation with Nationalism, nationalism aspects and Politics (direct intervention of citizens in politics and comparative politics in particular). The most interesting aspect is the comparison between question 4 and question 5 that are meant to differentiate, compare and overlap Canadian Ethnicity and Quebecker Ethnicity, *rectius*, they are meant to understand if there is a real ethnic difference between Canadians and Quebeckers. Personal interviews have been made via Skype® or by telephone. The personal interviews are all made by open questions, and they focus on four topics: Language, Territory, Ethnicity and Nationalism. The target of population (for surveys and interviews) is made of University students, post-graduated

students, workers and pensioners (the age range goes from 23 to 65 years old).

4. Data analysis

The results of the data analysis show how Contemporary Nationalism in Québec is based on Language. The 90% of interviewed don't see an ethnic difference between Canadian and Quebeckers, because they consider themselves as Canadians. This is so for two reasons in particular: 1) Nowadays it is easier, for people to move (for all sort of reasons, such as: study, work, retirement) from one Province to another. 2) Secondly Canadians consider themselves as a melting-pot culture with roots in Asia, Europe, Africa and Middle East. The importance of territory is not as strong as in the past because, as we said, they travel, easily, along Canada. The majority of Quebeckers are perfectly able to speak both languages and the majority of Canadians are three-linguals. Just some Quebecker pensioners, who don't speak English, believe in the importance of French rather than English. The majority of Quebeckers feel comfortable with the bilingual system existing in Canada (everything is provided in English and French). The about 89% of interviewed doesn't feel the necessity of a *referendum* to ask for Québec Independence from Canada. The 10 % of interviewed, in spite, believes that the Independence of Québec is necessary because they think that the Québec Administration/Bureaucracy can -effortlessly- work separately from the rest of Canada Bureaucracy. 1% does not take sides and it is not concerned with the Referendum issue. Religion is no anymore a *discrimen*, thank to secularization on Québec. About 5% of the interviewed doesn't believe necessary the Independence of Québec not for language, ethnic or territorial reasons, but because it can have economic negative outcomes. It became clear that, in Canada, there are not strong

nationalist tendencies; the Contemporary "residual" Nationalism is driven by Language.

5. Conclusion

Trough this research paper we analyzed Language, Territory and Ethnicity as variables to explain Québec Nationalism. As mentioned before Nationalism, intended as the actions that members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty/independence, *rectius* Contemporary Nationalism in Québec - Canada- can be defined as "Language Nationalism". In other words we can say that the different language spoken in Québec is the main reason why Québec separatists, nationalists and indipendentists claim for Separation of Québec from Canada. This is so because language is one of the deepest elements, which compose identity, as Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "*Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow.*" Canadians and Quebecers don't feel to belong to two different ethnicities, but they all participate of a melting-pot ethnicity. Quebecers don't feel necessary going to vote for a *referendum* asking if they want separate from Canada, the majority of French-speakers disagree with a scenario as Scotland Referendum 2014. But which are the differences between Scotland Nationalism and Canadian Nationalism? Which are the factors that drove Scotland to the November 2014 Referendum? Surely historical background, United Kingdom economy and the fact that Scotland -as Region- involved in European Union Policy, distinguish the situation.

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Appendix

A. SURVEY AND INTERVIEW (Beatrice Russo source)

Survey

- 1) Are you from Québec?
 - yes
 - no

2) Are you an English-Speaker or a French-speaker

3) Are you bilingual?

- yes
- no
- more then two languages

4) Which of the following characteristics makes you feel a Quebecer?

- Religion
- Language
- Ethnicity
- All three
- Other

5) Which of following characteristics makes you feel a Canadian?

- Religion
- Language
- Ethnicity
- Other
- Tim Hortons®
- Open-mind and kindness

6) Do you think that Québec should become independent from Canada?

- Yes
- No

7) Why?

8) What do you think about bilingualism in Canada?

9) Scotland Referendum results

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Neutral

10) Do you think they is it necessary a referendum in Québec

- yes
- no

Phone calls questions:

- 1) Where do you live in Canada?
- 2) In which Province are you born?
- 3) Why you moved (if)?

4) Is it possible to live in Canada not being bilingual?

5) Are you bilingual?

6) Do you feel more Canadian or from Québec?

7) How do you define Canadian Ethnicity?

8) How do you define Québec Ethnicity?

9) Do you believe in Nationalism of Québec?

10) Would you vote for the Independence of Québec? Why

B. MAP

Canada map, blogspot.it



Source: <https://www.blogger.com/blogin.g?blogspotURL=http://jeremyrenners.blogspot.it/2010/01/map-of-quebec-canada.html>

C. TABLES

1. K-words in nationalism:

	Meaning
Nationalism	1) It is the attitude that the members of a nation have when they care about their identity as members of nation. 2) It includes the actions that members of a nation take in seeking to achieve (or sustain) some form of political sovereignty
Ethnicity	Ethnicity represents "the sum of shared cultural practices, perspectives, and distinctions" that

	make one group of people different from another ≠ extremism based on the superiority of an ethnicity
Language	(Herder) Language as Identity of a Nation "Has a nation anything more precious than the language of its fathers?"
Territory	(Michel Seymour) no sovereignty without territory/ ask for independence and self-determination is because it has a defined territory

2. Theories used in the paper

Theory	Characteristics
Post-structuralism	(Derrida) The role of language in the construction of reality
Constructivism	(Wendt) Ideas, Values: Language, Religion, Political beliefs, History... Knowledge