

The Evolving Parameters of Quebec Nationalism

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Abstract

This article focuses on how Canada's French minority in Quebec developed a nationalist discourse and used its provincial state to strengthen its economic and political status within the federation. It presents the parameters that define contemporary Quebec nationalism and its evolution over the past four decades. The first part of the article deals with nationalism during the 'Quiet Revolution' (1960-1966). The second part discusses the thesis that Quebec nationalism was in decline during the 1980s. This 'retreat' was explained by a reduced role for government and greater North American economic integration. The last part addresses the new role of the Quebec state that emerged in the 1990s, which favored the growth of the private sector and a reconfiguration of nationalism. The failure of two major constitutional negotiations (in 1990 and 1992) gave new life to the independence movement, which culminated with a second referendum on Quebec sovereignty in 1995. Overall, this article discusses the political forms of Quebec nationalism, the societal and political projects advanced by the Quebec government, and the federal government's responses to Quebec nationalism.

Introduction

0.1. Tensions between Quebec and Canada have not produced violence over the past few decades, despite the political rhetoric that often stresses the divergent interests between the two. In this sense, disagreements have not led to calls for violence over issues of power (detention, execution or assassination of opponents and enemies, electoral fraud, armed occupation) or violence towards minorities (sedition, electoral intimidation, electoral fraud, terrorism, or overthrowing of governments) – except for the assassination of a provincial minister in 1970 by a cell of terrorists. The nature of Quebec nationalism and its promotion by political élites largely explains this phenomenon.

0.2. We will see in this article that the dominant ideology in Quebec is nationalism, and that partisan activism has been the means for promoting knowledge of Quebec's uniqueness within Canada. Change was gradual. The creation of sovereignist parties in Quebec (the formation of the provincial *Parti Québécois* in the late 1960s and the federal Bloc Québécois in the 1990s) was enough to channel dissatisfaction with federal policy proposals. Moreover, numerous initiatives of the Quebec government over the past four decades improved significantly the socio-economic conditions of Francophones (who historically were subject to economic, cultural and social discrimination), which eased tensions considerably. The federal government noticed the growing

dissatisfaction of many Québécois, responding with policies and programmes that in part addressed this dissatisfaction (notably the Official Languages Act of 1969). Partisan political activity was therefore the primary means used by the sovereignist forces to promote their cause.

0.3. The aim of this article is to present the parameters that define contemporary Quebec nationalism. Three general statements inform this analysis. The first postulates that the nationalist current has continually influenced Quebec. The forms adopted by these movements have, of course, varied significantly over time. Nevertheless, it has affected every social, economic, and political current that touch Quebec society. The second deals with the complex nature of Quebec nationalism. Indeed, like all societies, Quebec society is not monolithic. Many identifiable trends conveyed often-contradictory visions of the future and the routes advocated for achieving them. Quebec nationalism, like the society it supports, is characterised by trends of varying importance. Social forces displaying different degrees of organisational variables carry them along. The nationalist discourse can be more or less pronounced. Finally, despite the heterogeneous character of nationalism, it nevertheless presents a relatively coherent and ordered vision of society. Nationalist ideology, as with all ideologies, is the result of a conflict between the visions of groups promoting their own interests. The nationalist ideology thus presents the dominant vision of society, leaving aside views held by marginalised groups. In other words, only an analysis of the links between various groups within society explains the nationalist ideology that emerges in each period of Quebec's political history. An established vision of "nation" and its destiny translates into particular configurations, and the economic and political means that must be in place for them to develop.

0.4. The following analysis will present the principal movements that have marked Quebec nationalism over the past four decades. It will also highlight the principal tendencies that mark contemporary Quebec nationalism. The first part of the text deals with the nationalism of the period of the "Quiet Revolution". The second part deals with the thesis that a decline in nationalism characterised the 1980s. Many see the failure of the 1980 referendum on sovereignty, the "partial" retreat of the state and the liberalisation of continental trade as factors that contributed to this decline. The third part seeks to identify the new parameters of Quebec nationalism. I argue that those who provide an analysis in terms of the decline of nationalism present a truncated vision of the current reality. Quebec nationalism at the turn of the century is in a period of transition, marked by the consolidation of the francophone economic élite that has evolved in the context of the continental economy. This transformation has redefined the Quebec state's role in the economy. In the same manner, Canadian federalism is no longer understood in the same terms.

1. State Nationalism of the Quiet Revolution

1.1. The Liberal Party's victory in the 1960 provincial elections marked the beginning of what many call the Quiet Revolution. Opposition to the conservative-oriented Duplessis regime manifested itself throughout the 1950s, but without success on the political scene. The political discourse of the period centred on certain themes: the role of the state, the conduct of federal-provincial relations and the modernisation of institutions. On all of these issues, the opposition proposed a vision that shattered the conservative vision of the Duplessis period.

1.2. The ideology of Maurice Duplessis reflected a traditional and rural vision of Quebec. The survival of French Canadians was only possible through a fierce attachment to their only real “capital”, namely language and religion (Dion 1978). “Nation” was defined in religious and linguistic terms. The French-Canadian nation was not limited to the territory of Quebec. The social institutions that supported these “sacred” traditions (the family, the parish and the Church) were considered indispensable to the maintenance of French-Canadian culture. This social conservatism thus served as a rampart against the threat to the established social order emanating from federal economic and political institutions, dominated as they were by English Canadians. French Canadians were both underrepresented and relegated to inferior echelons of the bureaucratic hierarchy during this period. Traditions could only be preserved in a physical and social environment controlled by French Canadians, which explains the emphasis on agriculture. Agriculture was seen as the means of protecting Quebec culture against the damaging influences of the Anglo-Saxon world, thus justifying a constant struggle against the industrialisation and urbanisation carried out by the traditional élite. The nationalist conservative discourse did not stop Quebec, however, from modernising at the same pace as other provinces. At the beginning of the 1950s, two-thirds of the Quebec population already lived in urban centres, while the agricultural population made up only one-fifth of the population, decreasing to 11 per cent at the beginning of the 1960s.

1.3. On the political level, a great respect for established political institutions characterised conservative nationalism. In dealings between Quebec and Canada, Duplessis was an advocate of provincial autonomy. He believed in the virtues of federalism inasmuch as they clearly defined the limits of intervention at each level of government. The fact that this was the only means of protecting the culture and maintaining the existing social order in the province explains the will to maintain Quebec's political autonomy. Duplessis's social and political conservatism, however, profoundly tainted his sense of autonomy. He opposed federal initiatives in the area of fiscal and social legislation on the grounds of preserving the rights of Quebec (Bourque, Duchastel, Beauchemin 1994).

1.4. No one anticipated the depth and rapidity of the changes that were to affect Quebec society. The Quiet Revolution put an end to the traditional nationalism's grip on the ensemble of political and social institutions. Many viewed the end of this nationalism as the entry of Quebec into the age of modernity. Observers were therefore surprised to note shortly thereafter the rise of a new nationalism, or more accurately a neo-nationalism, incorporating the antinomial themes of democracy, statism, and modernity. This new nationalism proposed a revised definition of the Quebec state. Responsibilities allotted to institutions of civil society would now be granted to the state. The valorisation of statist functions was rendered indispensable by the necessity to adjust the social and economic structures of Quebec to contemporary realities.

1.5. The multiple interventions by the state in all spheres of Quebec society needed ideological justification. This was imposed through a new discourse with a nationalist theme, but in a largely revised form: the State of Quebec was presented as the only institutional framework able to promote the well-being of French Canadians. Thus Jean Lesage, who led the Québec Liberal Party to electoral victory in 1960 and 1962 (see Table 1 for all electoral results from 1956 to 1998), liked to present Quebec as the "political expression of French Canada" and even indicated that it should play the role of "mother country" for francophones outside Quebec. The French-

Canadian identity was not only found in the homeland, but also in the political climate that enabled them to promote their interests. (Comeau 1989)

1.6. Daniel Johnson, who won the election of 1966 as head of the Union Nationale, pursued the same steps as those of the Lesage government while expressing them in different terms. In this manner, he prepared the way, albeit timidly, for the elimination of the preferential reference to ethnicity as the principal element in the definition of nationalism. Referring to the definition of the term “nation” given in a French dictionary, Johnson took the sociological dimension of the definition (that of human community manifesting a historical, linguistic, religious, and economic unity animated by a common will to live) to affirm that two nations did incontestably exist in Canada. This national duality did not depend upon the ethnic origin of the citizens, but on their culture. The existence of a nation, according to normal evolution, must be driven by the creation of a nation-state. (Johnson 1965) This phenomenon is common in English-Canadian provinces, where they accept the loss of their liberty of jurisdiction because they know that the norms established by Ottawa function in favour of the majority. Since English Canadians have a national state, conforming to the rights of the people it serves, the French-Canadian nation can follow the same principal. Johnson’s nationalism thus marks an important change: from a definition essentially based on ethnicity, Quebec nationalism was now based on territoriality.

1.7. The emancipation of the French-Canadian nation was made possible through the appropriation of the only instrument that could act on behalf of the collectivity, namely, the state. Throughout the 1960s, statist initiatives were numerous, with few areas excluded. However, interventions in five important sectors marked the Quiet Revolution: the democratisation of society, the pursuit for a greater equality in the access to education and to health, the control of major economic structures (the most important being the nationalisation of hydro-electricity companies), the modernisation of the Quebec public service, and the emergence of a sovereignist political movement. (Rocher 2001b) This catching up was not possible without the accompanying massive growth of the state apparatus, which provided necessary support to implement these reforms.

1.8. However, labour strife marked Quebec society in this era, as did the rise of a sovereignist movement – of which some currents, albeit admittedly marginal, privileged violent actions. Even though such violent acts were the product of a marginal group, they still affected the collective imagination/outlook and led to a forceful response from the state. In the 1960s, Quebec had a terrorist movement whose actions culminated in the kidnapping of Quebec’s Labour Minister and a British diplomat. The former was killed while the latter was later released. The self-proclaimed Quebec Liberation Front (FLQ – Front de Libération du Québec), created in 1963, instigated numerous terrorist acts, such as using Molotov cocktails to damage symbols of political power (military installations, mailboxes, government offices). In all, nine people were killed, including the Labour Minister Pierre Laporte in 1970.

1.9. This movement linked the fight against oppression caused by Anglo-Saxon economic and political institutions to the struggle for national liberation. Even though it was later shown that the FLQ had but a handful of members (35 is often given as the number), the federal government still exploited the 1970 “October Crisis”. Citing a suspected insurrection, it used the War Measures Act to grant the police exceptional powers of detention and arrest, even though all

elements of the political and social classes denounced the kidnapping and assassination of Pierre Laporte. We now know that the FLQ did not have a structured organisation, that its actions were largely improvised, and that it never constituted a political threat. Nevertheless, its existence allowed those holding political power to mount a campaign of disinformation suggesting that a real threat existed, in order to de-legitimise the nascent sovereigntist movement (Laurendeau 1990; Fournier 1998).

1.10. Among the principal achievements of the Quiet Revolution, one should note the reform of the education system and health insurance plan. However, the nationalist character of state intervention was most visible in the area of the economy. In effect, the avowed goal of the government was to permit French Canadians to allocate resources in their favour to counter the economic domination to which they were subjected. To improve the representation of French Canadians in the upper echelons of the entrepreneurial hierarchy, state interventionism looked less at modifying the hiring practices of enterprises held by non-francophone capital than at enlarging the economic base of existing French-Canadian businesses or creating francophone business in areas where it did not exist. (McRoberts 1988) To do this, Quebec Francophones could only depend on the state, the only important institution that could compete with large Anglo-Saxon companies, not only on its own territory, but also on a national and international scale. Two complementary strategies were adopted, the creation of public enterprises in the key sectors of the economy, and support of companies held by French Canadians.

1.11. This new role played by the state did not develop without having an important impact on the public service in Quebec. Its size increased in a remarkable fashion. In 1955, about 28,000 people were working in the Quebec public service, and this number rose to 70,000 by the end of the 1960s. (Bernier, Boily 1986, 357) The control of the new activities of the state was guided by the ideals of planning, consultation, rationalisation, and professionalism ending the political favouritism that had characterised the preceding period.

1.12. The emergence of Quebec neo-nationalism affected the provincial government's relations with the central government. The constitutional debate that permeated Quebec political life for three decades reflected the political will of successive governments to revise the division of powers by way of transferring to Quebec the powers claimed under the Constitution of 1867, or those exercised by the federal government under the spending power. This is not a new issue. The desire to preserve areas of provincial competence existed well before the Quiet Revolution. Thus, Duplessis had established in 1953 a royal commission of inquiry into constitutional problems (the Tremblay Commission), whose mandate was to remind Quebec of the need to preserve its provincial prerogatives enumerated under the BNA Act, and to provide a response to the declared intention of Ottawa to proceed with a greater centralisation of powers. (Quebec, 1956, Vols. I–IV) The report of the Tremblay Commission reiterated the dogma of provincial autonomy.

1.13. The attitude of the Lesage government concerning the constitutional dossier was marked by a profound change in perception and strategy. Provincial autonomy was presented not as a means of limiting the pernicious influence of Ottawa, but rather as a means of political, economic, and social restoration of the French-Canadian "people". (Lesage 1959, 26) The autonomist discourse thus took on a new orientation: the need to preserve the traditional character of French Canada

giving precedence to the need for national affirmation that required the defence of power conferred upon the provinces, powers judged as indispensable to the task of modernisation towards which Quebec was striving. This could also be realised through administrative arrangements. However, the debates centred on the federal position to repatriate the Canadian Constitution that was to be accompanied by an amending formula, and this contributed to Jean Lesage's decision to adopt a different constitutional line. This is why the discussion addressing a new division of powers and their extension to Quebec prevailed over the constitutional mechanics such as the issues of repatriation and the amending formula. The Fulton-Favreau amending formula proposed by Ottawa was perceived as a straitjacket and closed the door on any future extension of powers to Quebec. The constitutional question took a new turn within the framework of the parliamentary committee on the constitution, which sat from 1963 to 1968. The various witnesses who appeared before the committee recommended not merely a series of amendments to the Constitution but rather a rewriting based on a recognition of the two-founding-nations thesis.

1.14. If the state nationalism of the Quiet Revolution led a growing number of Québécois to reconsider the division of powers, it also witnessed the emergence of a political movement that increasingly advocated the sovereignty of Quebec. Daniel Johnson had already evoked this possibility without ever concluding in favour of this option. (Rocher 2001a) Thus, he proposed the renewal of the equality of the two founding peoples. The logical consequence of this was a constitution that would be an instrument of equality for French and English Canadians, the two ethnic groups on which Canada had been built. It also meant an equality of the two groups on a national scale. However, it is well known that the French Canadians comprised a majority only within the territory of Quebec. It is normal that every cultural community that wants to attain a certain maturity looks for a state. The traditional ethnic nationalism transformed gradually to a nationalism based on territory. Thus, French/English equality was not possible but for a growth in the constitutional powers of Quebec, notably in the areas of social security, international relations, education and culture. Nevertheless, it seemed to Johnson to be impossible to preserve the original constitution because it no longer reflected the political reality. This is why a more radical step was recommended, consistent with the writing of a new constitution. In the absence of a satisfactory agreement, Johnson felt that Quebec would have no other choice than to opt for independence. However, the ultimatum of independence referred sometimes to the French-Canadian national and sometimes uniquely to the Quebec territory. It was not Johnson who broke this ambiguity, but René Lévesque, an influential member of the cabinet, who opted clearly for the adoption of a new political status for Quebec.

1.15. However, this step adopted by René Lévesque within the Liberal Party of Quebec led him to found the *Mouvement Souveraineté-Association*, which later became the *Parti Québécois*. The thesis advanced by Lévesque in 1967 has remained unchanged over the years. In basing his beliefs, as did many of his contemporaries, on the recognition of two majorities in Canada, he nonetheless believed in the view that the constitutional negotiations would only end in an impasse. In a very significant way, the needs of the two communities were going in two different directions: English Canada looked to rationalise, simplify and centralise powers to the central government, while the demands of Quebec went in the opposite direction. (Lévesque 1991) This is why Lévesque recommended sovereignty-association, which he respectfully judged as the

appropriate step for the two majorities to best ensure the necessary conditions for economic stability and to maintain an economic, monetary and customs union.

1.16. In sum, the nationalism that characterised the period of the Quiet Revolution was based on a dynamism of state action. The Quebec state looked to take into its own hands the economic and social development of Quebec through numerous policies that sought to confer a new status on French Canadians, who had been relegated for a long time to the inferior echelons of a society where they comprised a majority. In this context, it is not surprising that the growth of state interventionism and the awareness of the power of the state as a tool of socio-economic promotion has led governments since 1960 to call for powers that further the interests of Quebecers, and more specifically, francophones. It is no longer surprising that among the competing options, some defended the idea of a complete rebuilding of Canadian federalism, while others opted for the idea of sovereignty with an economic association with the rest of Canada. These two options emanated from the same dynamic, though they presented divergent readings of the routes to follow to consolidate the economic, political, and social foundations of Quebec society.

1.17. On a global level, two elements warrant further attention. First, to describe the period of the Quiet Revolution only in terms of modernisation results in the impression that Quebec society in the preceding period was characterised simply by conservatism and traditionalism. One should note that despite the dominant nationalist ideology that placed an emphasis on these elements, the “real” Quebec was already in a period of modernity. In order to be convincing, it is sufficient to consider that the province of Quebec was characterised by a rate of urbanisation and industrialisation among the highest in Canada. In other regards, Quebec society was for many decades open to American influences in the area of culture. (Lamonde, Trépanier 1986) and francophones participated for a long time in the economic system dominated by capitalist logic. (Bélanger, Fournier 1987) In other words, one should not consider conservative nationalism as an exact reflection of the true nature of socio-economic relationships that were in place in Quebec before 1960.

1.18. The nationalist ideology of the Quiet Revolution was essentially articulated around the necessity for Quebec francophone society to have recourse to state tools to promote their interests. The new definition of collective identity is thus structured around the state, viewed as an important instrument of emancipation for the French-Canadian nation. It is in this context that the constitutional debate and the necessity for Quebec to obtain new areas of intervention to respond more effectively to its social, economic and cultural specificity must be understood. Even if the principal political parties presented divergent strategies to Ottawa, the Liberal Party and the Union Nationale favouring a recasting of federalism while the *Parti Québécois*, by bringing together the more nationalist elements of society, recommending instead the route to Quebec's accession via sovereignty, the end result was a growth in the interventionist capacity of the State and a larger control of more sectors. Finally, the period of the Quiet Revolution permitted the realisation of a juncture between the growth of statist activity and the consolidation of collective identity. This state nationalism was not only the spearhead of the reforms put into place throughout the 1960s, but also left an indelible image on nationalism of the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, the calling into question of the providence-state and the statist project that supported this phenomenon, one that was seen in other Western countries, including Quebec,

throughout the last decade, was perceived by many observers as a manifestation of the decline of nationalism.

2. The 1980s: Towards a Decline of Nationalism?

2.1. Many factors that marked the end of the 1970s and the start of the 1980s contributed to the transformation of the Québécois nationalist ideology as articulated around the statist project. The election in 1976 of a political party that was the standard-bearer of integral nationalism paradoxically participated in its gradual revision. One can say that their power declined, and because much of their power was based on nationalism, this declined as well. In other words, the *Parti Québécois* had raised expectations that it could only partially satisfy. The policy that followed engaged multiple deceptions involving the groups that had supported the party when it was in opposition. The difficult economic context in which the *Parti Québécois* tried to manoeuvre did not aid in the implementation of progressive policies in Quebec. On the contrary, the Quebec government had to face an important budgetary crisis that forced it to adopt unpopular measures. One should add to this that the referendum defeat had contributed to demobilising those who supported the sovereignist option. After the defeat of the 1980 referendum, the sovereignists were in retreat and were preoccupied by other concerns. The large coup of repatriating the Canadian Constitution extinguished the hopes that had persisted until then. Finally, the neo-liberal turn of the state throughout Quebec society, expressed by the will of many to privatise a large number of activities and demonstrated by their support of the continentalisation of the economy, indicated to many that Quebec nationalism was out of breath. In sum, the redefinition of interventionism limiting the scope of the model developed throughout the preceding decades contributed to mitigating the hold of the nationalist ideology on Quebec society.

2.2. The political discourse of the *Parti Québécois*, pushed by the nationalist credo in the 1960s, made the state the pivotal force in the improvement of the socio-economic status of French Canadians. However, the policies adopted by the *Parti Québécois* did not involve a marked expansion of state interventionism. It is not the intention here to reveal all of the measures taken by the *Parti Québécois* administration. However, some did carry a real symbolic importance. The adoption in 1977 of the Charter of the French Language (Bill 101) made French the official language of Quebec. More than simply pursuing the bold objectives of previous language legislation, such as encouraging the *francisation* of public institutions and businesses in making French the language of work, and the insertion of immigrant children in French-language public schools, Bill 101 clearly confirmed the determination of the Quebec government to make the Quebec territory the principal seat of North American francophony. Even if the legislation wanted to increase the *francisation* of Quebec society, it did not accord specific advantages to francophones. It essentially looked to strengthen the social environment in which the French language could evolve within Quebec. Despite this, Bill 101 took on a symbolic value of primary importance for the Québécois collectivity. This explains the great prudence that Quebec politicians exercised in modifying the law to any extent for fear of the social backlash that any such move would inevitably engender. The discontent brought on by Bill 178, adopted in 1988, which modified the relative layout of public signage in French, based on a judgement from the Supreme Court of Canada, is the clearest example of this.

2.3. Paradoxically, Bill 101 contributed in reassuring Quebec francophones against the real or imaginary threats that perennially endangered their language and that represents the determining element of their collective identity. In fact, it had the effect of reassuring francophone Quebecers about their general linguistic environment. By doing this, it reduced one of the great francophone fears, one that has constantly sustained nationalism, namely, the fear of linguistic assimilation.

2.4. Two electoral promises by the *Parti Québécois* helped them gain power in 1976: on the level of public administration, to act as a “good government”, and on the constitutional side, to hold a referendum on the question of national sovereignty. Bound by this promise, the *Péquistes* government was thus obliged to hold this popular consultation before the end of its first mandate. To group together the nationalist forces in the best way to ensure victory, the *Péquistes* strategists opted for a question written along the lines of traditional claims of Quebec concerning constitutional reform. This is why they asked Quebecers to give the provincial government the mandate to negotiate a new agreement with Canada based on the principle of the recognition of equality of two founding peoples. They would thus postpone for a second referendum the approval of the newly negotiated package. The respective *Oui* and *Non* camps essentially mirrored partisan cleavages. Those who supported the first option were virtually all *Parti Québécois* supporters.

2.5. The hope held by the government strategists was that those who supported the growth of state powers would support the government's position and would defeat the strategy of their opponents. Thus, while the question referred to the subsequent negotiations that would be held on an “equal-to-equal” basis with the rest of Canada, the provincial Liberals, supported by Ottawa, focused the debate on the independence of Quebec. This was essentially the position put forth by the leader of the *Non* forces, Mr. Claude Ryan, who took his inspiration from a working document published by his party in light of the pending referendum. Following the tune heralded by Ottawa and led by the federal Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, the federal Liberals guarded against taking a firm position in this regard, playing on the ambiguity created by the political circumstances. It is in this context that the two camps furthered the nationalist ideology. It was thus possible to be both nationalist and a federalist, without favouring a large centralisation of powers to Ottawa.

2.6. Following the results of the 1980 referendum, one witnessed a tremendous reinterpretation of the results of the *Non* vote. Mr Trudeau immediately claimed that Quebec had chosen Canada. The support for a strong Quebec was reduced to the 40 per cent who had voted *oui*. It was quickly forgotten that close to 60 per cent had voted in favour of a rearranging of powers in favour of Quebec. (Balthazar 1986, 177–81)

2.7. The referendum defeat had significant consequences. At the symbolic level, nationalist rhetoric lost its credibility. At the political level, the federal government exploited the referendum result and at the same time discredited the Quebec claims issued over the preceding twenty years in order to carry out its centralisation plan. At the social level, the defeat of the *Péquiste* project translated into an important demobilisation of the nationalists. Even though 40 per cent of Quebecers had voted *oui*, the result was a searing defeat for the nationalist cause. This caused serious damage to nationalist ideology and to the intellectuals who were its principal

spokespersons. The Quebec intellectuals were thus silenced. The construction of a modern Quebec throughout the period of the Quiet Revolution rested on three pillars (science, language and the state). There had been a tight interweaving of sociopolitical development and the development of the institutions dominated by workers whose language was their indispensable tool of work, the basis of their intellectual function. The taking over of many important activities of the state by this new social group was based on a power founded on their rationality and competence which had been facilitated both by the expansion of state interventionism and the promotion of nationalist ideology. These élites voluntarily acted on the political stage, playing a dual role in enlightening members of the collectivity and advising politicians who were in charge of direction and management.

2.8. The repatriation of the Canadian Constitution that followed the referendum was realised after intense federal–provincial negotiations which took place under difficult conditions. The process was achieved through the isolation of Quebec, notably in the area of linguistic matters, without the province's consent. The contract that linked Quebec with the rest of Canada, negotiated over a century previously, was the object of revision without the prior accord of one of the provinces. Furthermore, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms entrenched within the 1982 document looked to redefine the individual identity of citizens modelled on a new political culture for all Canadians. These latter reforms were founded on the allegiance of Canada to federal institutions, guardians of the Charter, which granted and protected the collective rights. Now the Charter undermined provincial legislation and attempted to reduce the social differences between them. This is contradictory to the project that promotes Quebec national identity in so far as it does not permit asymmetry in the treatment of individuals or provinces. In sum, concerning the contents, the Charter is considered by a large number of Québécois as a document that limits their aspirations. Yet the reactions to the federal initiatives from the Quebec perspective did not occasion more than verbal protests. Certainly the Quebec National Assembly, by an all-party unanimous vote, condemned the Ottawa gesture, but apart from that it did not raise the same passions among Quebecers as had been done with the Conscription Crisis of 1942. Yet the new Canadian Constitution was nowhere near what the Québécois population expected following the referendum, with respect to renewed federalism.

2.9. One can take into account the relative decline of nationalism by considering the constitutional strategy the Bourassa administration put in place in 1985. Taking note of Ottawa's new climate of openness towards Quebec, the Liberal government proposed five conditions to bring Quebec back into the Canadian Constitution: (a) recognition of Quebec's distinctiveness; (b) a Quebec veto on future constitutional change; (c) control of federal spending power; (d) power over matters of immigration; and (e) participation in the naming of Supreme Court justices coming from Quebec. The "Quebec Round" attempted to respond, *inter alia*, to the demands put forward by Quebec. This represented an important change in strategy from the previous lines of negotiation. One should state that the repatriation in 1982 changed the relations of power, Quebec no longer having any trump cards in its deck. Nevertheless, Quebec had never demanded so little within the framework of constitutional negotiations.

2.10. Among the factors that work in favour of the thesis of the decline of nationalism, was the movement of partial disengagement of the state. This tendency was not unique to Quebec. The financial crisis of the state and the global revision of the welfare state were phenomena that

affected many Western countries. However, this phenomenon took on a particular salience in Quebec where state interventionism had been perceived as indispensable to the progression of Québécois within their own economy.

2.11. In the same manner, the support accorded by the political and economic élites to the federal initiative of free trade was perceived as being in opposition to state nationalism. Acknowledging the implications of free trade for the political sovereignty of Canada, and thus on Quebec, apart from the changes in all likelihood to state interventionism, this continental economic strategy posed a contradiction to the nationalist theses based on the recourse of the state. (Brunelle, Deblock, 1989, 131–2) This change was explained by some as the defeat of the state interventionism that had been in place since the Quiet Revolution. It can thus be said that the continental option translated into reconfiguration of the nationalism of the 1960s and 1970s that rested on public measures of intervention in the economy, society, and culture.

2.12. Many explanations have been advanced to understand this phenomenon. The relative decline of state nationalism is explained by its own success. By improving the position of francophone Quebecers within the economy and the raising of their social status, the Quiet Revolution and what followed had in part fulfilled the wishes expressed by the new middle class. These aspirations found their ideological foundation in a new nationalism. With social conditions having changed, the necessity of the state was reduced, relegating the nationalist ideology to a level of support increasingly based on personal initiative. For McRoberts (1988, 435), the decline of nationalism throughout the 1980s is interpreted "as the reflection of a desire to use the state to accentuate Quebec's economic and social development, and to overcome the conditions that frustrated or 'distorted' this development". As these elements of distortion became less prevalent, the presence of the state became less pressing, undermining the bases of the nationalism of the two preceding decades.

2.13. Can one conclude that this was an irreversible decline of nationalism? If the departure point is accurate, one must expect a reformulation of Quebec nationalism in new terms that better correspond to contemporary challenges. The principal problem with the decline of the thesis of nationalism is that it attempts to understand the actual reality in reproducing a model that corresponds to previous decades. It is not nationalism itself that is in decline, but the form of expression that has been in place since the Quiet Revolution. Quebec nationalism is thus going through a phase of transition comparable to that which it went through at the start of the Quiet Revolution.

3. Towards a New Form of Nationalism

3.1. Globally, the 1980s were a decade of political vacuum. Québécois were forced to choose *a contrario*. They said *non* to the referendum on the issue of political sovereignty and they said *non* to renewed federalism centred on the repatriation of the Constitution by the rest of Canada, and they have pronounced themselves against an increased role of the state in the context of economic crisis. In the 1990s, the members of the economic élite became the tenors of the collective identity. In a context of repeated defeat where the political leaders enjoy less and less popular confidence, the business class and its overseeing organisations have become the new spokespersons for the interests of the Québécois collectivity. Not that they have been absent

from the political debates that Quebec has continually experienced, but the new political, economic, and social circumstances (comprised of repeated defeats) have furnished the necessary conditions permitting this group to impose itself over others as a credible spokesperson. This pretence continues to be contested by other groups (trade unions, nationalist movements, etc.), without which the latter would be able to dominate the terms of the debate.

3.2. Certain observers of Quebec society had already noted a change in the preoccupations of the population and, more specifically, the political élite. For economist Thomas Courchene the referendum defeat was the occasion to place the emphasis on the economic dimensions of nationalism to the detriment of political aspects. He described the phenomenon as “market nationalism”. Thus, “this new political economy is decidedly nationalist in nature, since it represents an integrated strategy for economic development and for the control of economic institutions by Québécois and from a location within Quebec, namely Montreal” (Courchene 1986, 7). These economic orientations illustrate the new role played by the state, which favoured the growth of the Quebec private sector. As the promotion of the socio-economic status of francophone Quebecers can no longer be uniquely fulfilled by the state, it is now the private sector that is looked to in order to fulfil this role. The presence of francophones in key sectors of the economy is essential. However, the consolidation of their presence still necessitates that the state plays a supplementary role during periods of crisis.

3.3. On an ideological level, the business milieu led the continentalist discussion that did not, however, annul the necessity to obtain state support. This was posed as necessary for the competitive progression of business and the improvement of its competitive capacity. It would thus be wrong to consider the free-trade movement as simply a form of neo-liberalism. Moreover, the state must play a role of primary importance in the support of Quebec business which is looking to penetrate the American market and in the protection of the economy and society in facing the internal adjustments that will follow from the opening of the Quebec market to American firms.

3.4. In sum, it was thus possible to speak of business nationalism to understand the position of the business class concerning the continentalist option. The continental integration process was perceived as a means of full-term reinforcement for the bases of francophone capital. Little matter that it consists primarily of small and medium size businesses, many of which develop subsidiary activities. Although one should note the success enjoyed by some large Québécois businesses controlled by francophones (such as Bombardier, SNC-Lavalin, Cascades, Unigesco, Power Corp, etc.) one should not forget that the majority of francophone capital was found in small- and medium-size businesses. Finally, one can attribute the success enjoyed by free trade in Quebec to the *garde montante* which joined with the dominant elements of the Canadian business class in the debate and who converted the political agents, both Canadian and Québécois to their way of thinking.

3.5. On the whole, the business class preferred political stability to important changes which are inevitable carriers of economic instability. One will still find this discourse in Quebec regardless of the political circumstances. Investors preferred to know the actual rules of the game before taking risks. This strong simple equation also applies to Quebec businesspersons. This is why they overwhelmingly supported the Meech Lake Accord, which allowed for a response to certain

Quebec demands without substantially modifying the general economy of Canadian federalism. The position taken in this regard assumed very few words: finish with the long constitutional discussions and pass on to more pressing concerns, namely the economy. The preoccupations of the business class did not involve constitutional details. The only clause deemed as significant, and considered as non-negotiable, was that of the distinct society. Moreover, for the spokespersons of this group, it was important to resolve the constitutional debt, a source of uncertainty, which could only discourage certain investment in Quebec and Canada.

3.6. However, the rejection of this accord in June 1990 put back into question the unconditional *parti pris* of the Quebec economic élite to the federal political structures. For the majority of Québécois, including the business class, the refusal to ratify the Meech Lake Accord was interpreted as a rejection of Quebec as a distinct community. More than that, this brought out the contradictory visions between an English Canada fiercely attached to its new symbol of pan-Canadian unity, that is, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms addressed to the citizens and the favouring of the central government, and a Quebec more desirous than ever before to reaffirm its collective rights, notably the right to a French environment. In sum, the events of June 1990 have come to confirm that which was clearly established in 1982: the dualist vision of Canada has ceded its place to one that places emphasis on the equality of provinces and citizens, conferring to Ottawa the status of senior government in opposition to provincial government considered as junior. (Webber 1994; McRoberts 1997) Between 1990 and 1992, intense constitutional negotiations took place. Many elements of the Meech Lake Accord were included but watered down in a broader constitutional document agreed upon in Charlottetown, the provincial capital of Prince Edward Island. The document contained a "distinct society clause" for Quebec, but many of its elements were perceived negatively by the Quebec population, namely the lack of recognition of Quebec and absence of a substantial clarification of the powers between the two orders of government. In a pan-Canadian referendum held in October 1992, a majority of Canadians (54.3 per cent), including a majority of Quebecers (56.6 per cent), rejected this agreement. The most profound obstacle to a constitutional resolution is ideological: English Canada and Quebec are now firmly attached to notions of political community that are mutually exclusive. Inevitably, future constitutional proposals will be assessed in these terms. On that basis, what is acceptable to one party is highly likely to be unacceptable to the other.

3.7. Quebec nationalism in the 1990s was evolving in a different context than in previous decades. The rejection of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords profoundly modified the perception that comprised the possibilities of constitutional arrangements that could be made to the satisfaction of Quebec. The large majority of submissions to the Commission on the constitutional future of Quebec (better known as the Bélanger-Campeau Commission) underlined the unacceptable character of existing constitutional arrangements and the necessity to proceed to an extensive decentralisation of powers. In the case of a rejection of negotiations, the hypothesis of sovereignty could become the only acceptable alternative. The business class was not impervious to the debates that held the attention of the population throughout the autumn of 1990.

3.8. Finally, it should be remembered that around the controversy surrounding the Meech Lake Agreement, popular support for sovereignty as indicated by public opinion polls reached the unprecedented level of as high as 70 per cent of respondents. (Cloutier, Guay, Latouche 1992)

The support of sovereignty was in part linked to the Québécois perception of English Canada's unwelcomed response to Quebec's constitutional demands. The symbolic character of the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society must not be underestimated. The inaccuracy of the federal proposals, the lack of response by the Liberal government in Quebec to the federal position, and the crises encountered by the Quebec economy and its impact on the population, were key factors in the development of Quebec nationalism by the mid 1990s.

3.9. In September 1994, the *Parti Québécois* won the provincial election. The Throne Speech revealed the Premier's intentions to submit to the National Assembly a document that would serve as the basis for popular participation in the pre-referendum debate. On 6 December he announced his plans for an extensive consultation process to be held between January and March 1995. The government intended to create 15 regional consultative commissions, made up of parliamentarians and citizens from each region. It invited all Quebecers to debate the contents of a proposed bill (*Avant-projet de loi*) and to participate in the writing of a declaration of sovereignty. Quebec premier Pariseau invited the population as well as all political parties, including the Liberal Party of Canada and the Progressive Conservative Party, to reveal their views on this proposal for the independence of Quebec. Following this consultation, the document would become a bill, be passed by the National Assembly, and then be submitted for approval by Quebecers in a referendum.

3.10. The proposed bill on Quebec's sovereignty has 17 clauses. It declares in Clause 1, the shortest clause of all, that "Quebec is an independent country". The second clause deals with economic association and authorises "the government to reach an agreement for maintaining the economic association between Quebec and the rest of Canada". The other clauses take up, in order, the following issues: the elaboration of a new Quebec constitution; territorial integrity; citizenship; currency; participation in international treaties and alliances; the continuation of legislation; the division of assets and debts and, finally; details concerning the introduction of the law, one year following a referendum unless the National Assembly decides otherwise. Clause 3 on the new constitution states that it "must guarantee to the anglophone community the preservation of its identity and its institutions. It must also recognise the right of aboriginal nations to govern themselves over the lands they control. This guarantee and this recognition is exercised within the respect of the integrity of Quebec's territory." Apart from the regional commissions, the *Parti Québécois's* strategy relied on the work of experts, many of whom were recruited from abroad, in order to demonstrate the feasibility of sovereignty and the inconveniences of federalism (Turp 1995).

3.11. The weakness of the sovereignty option among the Quebec electorate in opinion polls encouraged the federal government to maintain the "strict silence" strategy it had adopted after *Parti Québécois's* election victory. This strategy was premised on two considerations. First, the apparent lack of public enthusiasm for sovereignty indicated that there was no need to develop counter-proposals for constitutional change that would appeal to Quebec voters. The recent history of two failures (Meech Lake and Charlottetown) to secure agreement on constitutional revision suggested that such proposals could well backfire and reinvigorate separatist sentiments. Moreover, given the new Canadian Prime minister's prominent role in 1982, many Quebecers might not trust his offers of yet another variant of "renewed federalism" like the Liberals had promised before the 1980 referendum. Second, although former Prime Minister Trudeau had

enjoyed widespread popularity in Quebec in 1980, the large francophone majority was decidedly lukewarm about Canadian Prime Minister Chrétien in 1995.

3.12. An important element in the PQ strategy was to craft a referendum proposal that would allay fears about possible negative consequences of sovereignty. The proposal's wording of the question implied that a sovereign Quebec might be able to maintain economic and political ties with Canada. The question was the following: "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new Economic and Political Partnership, within the scope of the Bill respecting the Future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?" The date for a referendum on this question was set for 30 October 1995. Polls conducted during the summer showed support for sovereignty among those citing a preference moving upward into the mid-to-high 40-per-cent range.

3.13. On 30 October, the turn-out level was 93.5 per cent, 18 per cent more than those who voted in the Charlottetown Accord referendum three years earlier. The result was a razor-thin victory for the No side, with 50.6 per cent of the valid votes being Nos and 49.4 per cent, Yeses. However, in terms of total votes cast, neither side won: the gap was merely 52,000 votes, some 34,000 less than the number of spoiled ballot papers. The narrow defeat of the sovereignist option forced the federal government to review its national unity strategy. The federal government opted to bring forth a reference case to the Supreme Court, thereby judicialising the political conflict. The federal government asked the Supreme Court whether a unilateral declaration of independence by Quebec, as proposed by sovereignists in the case of failed negotiations on renewed partnership, would be legal. At the end of August 1998, the Supreme Court answered negatively, yet it qualified its answer by adding that if the population of Quebec indicated clearly that it no longer wanted to be part of Canada, Canada was constitutionally obligated to negotiate in good faith the terms of secession. The rift between Quebec and the rest of Canada was made wider when the federal government made it clear in November 1999 that it would not negotiate the terms of secession if it judged that the question asked in a referendum was not clear, or if the sovereignists only won by an absolute majority of the votes (50 per cent plus one). In doing so, the federal government introduced the principle of a qualified majority, fearing that the rules accepted for the 1980 and 1995 referenda would not go in its favour next time round. This new federal legislation makes it impossible, in practical terms, for Quebec to accede to independence while conforming to the Canadian constitution. The Canadian constitution imposes an amending formula that is so rigid that all negotiations towards secession are most likely to end unsuccessfully.

3.14. This initiative undertaken by the federal government has further crystallised the conflict with Quebec. Because of the federal government's refusal to negotiate with Quebec in the event of secession, the First Nations, and the demands voiced by western Canadians, Canada is now trapped in a constitutional status quo. For some, this confirms that Quebec is not free within the Canadian federation. That is to say that a member of the federation that wishes to be perceived as a nation can only succeed in doing so through discussion, negotiations, and amendments not blocked by arbitrary constraints. (Tully 1999) The fact that the constitutional changes of 1982 were imposed upon Quebec without its consent, that the amending formula was modified to prevent the recognition of Quebec as a nation, and that, finally, secession should have been addressed within the framework of the amending formula but was not, brings Tully to conclude

that Canada will remain a state in which liberty, justice and stability will always be partially absent, contributing to the increasing identification by the people of Quebec with their own society without developing equivalent bonds of belonging to Canada.

4. Conclusion

4.1. Nationalism is a constant of Quebec history. It has been sustained by the will to preserve and affirm the membership of a collectivity (a people and a nation) and its ties to its given territory. It has, however, adopted forms and put into place societal projects that have varied over time. Despite this evolution, the new forms of the nationalist ideology continue to borrow from previous expressions. The nationalist ideology has thus been gradually transformed not necessarily resulting in a radical rupture with the past.

4.2. Since the Quiet Revolution, Quebec nationalism has undergone two important transformations. On the one hand, it has developed a nationalist ideology making the state of Quebec one of the principal elements of identification of economic, social, and political promotion of francophones. The growth of statism in Quebec society was obviously not the only constitutive aspect of this new form of expression of this sentiment of membership but it occupied a dominant position. This dynamic, among others, is translated by a will of political affirmation without precedence since the defeat of the Patriot Rebellion in 1837. Politically, a number of increasingly important Quebec francophones have questioned the political form of organisation represented by the Canadian political system. Economically, francophones have been able to improve their position and to implement a network of industrial, financial and service businesses with the support of the state. Socially, they have started to consider themselves a majority. This new dynamic was not possible without placing emphasis on the fact that they cannot occupy a dominant place except within Quebec territory, mitigating the definition of the collectivity formulated simply around cultural dimensions. The beacons of this state nationalism were principally defined by the new middle class, which largely developed during this period. The question is not to find out if this social group effectively dominated Quebec society throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Rather the driving point is to recognise if it was this group that articulated the nationalist state discourse.

4.3. A second possible transformation was perceivable in the 1980s. Many factors contributed to the redefinition of the parameters of nationalism: economic crisis, the defeat of the sovereignist political project, and the redefinition of the role of the state. These elements contributed to mitigate the reach of the statist nationalist discourse. Many have spoken of the decline of nationalism to describe the political and social dynamic of this period. It appears however, that the 1980s was the occasion to review the parameters of nationalism. These economic aspects have taken on greater importance to the detriment of the project searching to create a national state. This reconfiguration of nationalist ideology was accompanied by the rise in the symbolic status of the business class. At the political level, they favoured accommodations within the framework of Canadian federalism rather than its profound transformation. The necessity of decentralisation of powers from Ottawa to Quebec was still present, but in a gradual manner and often by means of administrative agreements. However, the rejection of the Meech Lake Accord in 1990 and the Charlottetown Agreement in 1992 hardened this new climate, and contributed to keeping the sovereignist project alive. Not that it corresponds to a growing willingness to the

necessity of a larger degree of interventionism on the part of the Quebec state, but it translates into a disillusionment with the economic viability of Canadian federalism and the possibility that the interests of Quebec will one day be recognised by the majority of people in Canada.

4.4. The federal government's response to Quebec nationalism was one of accommodation under the federal Conservative government, but one of confrontation with the federal Liberals in power. The most recent development, that is, the adoption of the Clarity Act in 1999, marked a rupture with how the federal government has dealt with this issue. The real irony, unfortunately is that the bill focuses not on how to reconcile unity through diversity, but how to deal with Quebec if the results of a future referendum indicate that its people wish to separate, providing that all the criteria set out by the federal government are met. This ignores the root of the problem, that of linguistic duality and the diversity of Canada. As Claude Ryan, a former leader of the Quebec Liberal Party argued, since the Secession Reference, the public is concerned with two issues: clarity of the question and what a clear majority means; these two issues are reinforced by the Clarity Act. (Ryan 2000, 29) Consequently, this narrow focus misses and, more importantly, ignores the crux of the conflict between Quebec and the rest of Canada. Instead, one should focus on the more important questions: Why does a sovereignist movement exist in Quebec? Why has this movement been so significant over the past quarter-century? What is the best strategy to counter the idea of Quebec sovereignty? (Ibid.)

4.5. I do not wish to invoke the moral superiority of Canadians and Québécois in explaining the peaceful management of their historic tensions. An explanation of the lack of violence in Quebec–Canada relations can be found elsewhere. Nevertheless, the outcomes of the Quiet Revolution – educational reform, the rise of a new business class and its growing dominance over the provincial economy, the creation of an effective, state-supported social safety net, reform of the labour code – surely played an important role in the creation of a social climate that did not lend itself to the explosion of conflict. Few societies can claim that, in the space of one generation, they eliminated such a wide and entrenched gap between incomes earned by anglophones and francophones. To be sure, discrimination has not totally disappeared from the landscape, but it is less of a factor for most francophones. Discrimination continues to be experienced by racial minorities, a situation which Quebec must tackle with great energy.

4.6. The Charter of the French Language undoubtedly helped stabilise a society in which its language remains marginal within the grander scale of North America. Without the growing *francisiation* of immigrants (due largely to Bill 101, which obliges children of immigrants to attend French schools), it is easy to speculate that social tensions would otherwise have been greater and probably would have resulted in more violence.

4.7. The creation of a sovereignist party and the recognition of its legitimacy by the rest of Canada channelled the aspirations of many Québécois into a movement based on dialogue and the respect for democratic principles. The debate on the political status of Quebec did not prevent many Québécois of all origins from adopting a dual identity incorporating its Quebec and Canadian roots (see Figs. 1–3), with one or the other being more emphasised, depending on how society and its political debates evolved.

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Appendix

Table 1: Provincial Electoral Results from 1956 to 1998 (percentage and number of seats)

Year	Union Nationale	Liberal Party	Parti Québécois	Social Credit	Others	Number of seats	Participation rate %
1956	52 % (72)	45 % (20)			3 % (1)	93	77
1960	47% (43)	51 % (51)			2 % (1)	95	82
1962	42% (31)	56 % (63)			2 % (1)	95	80
1966	41% (56)	47 % (50)			12 % (2)	108	74
1970	20% (17)	45 % (72)	23 % (7)	11% (12)	11 % (12)	108	84
1973	5 % (0)	55 % (102)	30 % (6)	10 % (2)	2 % (1)	110	80
1976	18% (11)	34 % (26)	41% (71)	5 % (1)	2 % (1)	110	85
1981	4% (0)	46 % (42)	49% (80)		1 % (0)	122	83
1985		56 % (99)	39% (23)		5 % (0)	122	76
1989		50 % (92)	40% (29)		10 % (4)	125	75
1994		44 % (47)	45% (77)		6 % (1)	125	82
1998		44 % (48)	43% (76)		12 % (1)	125	78

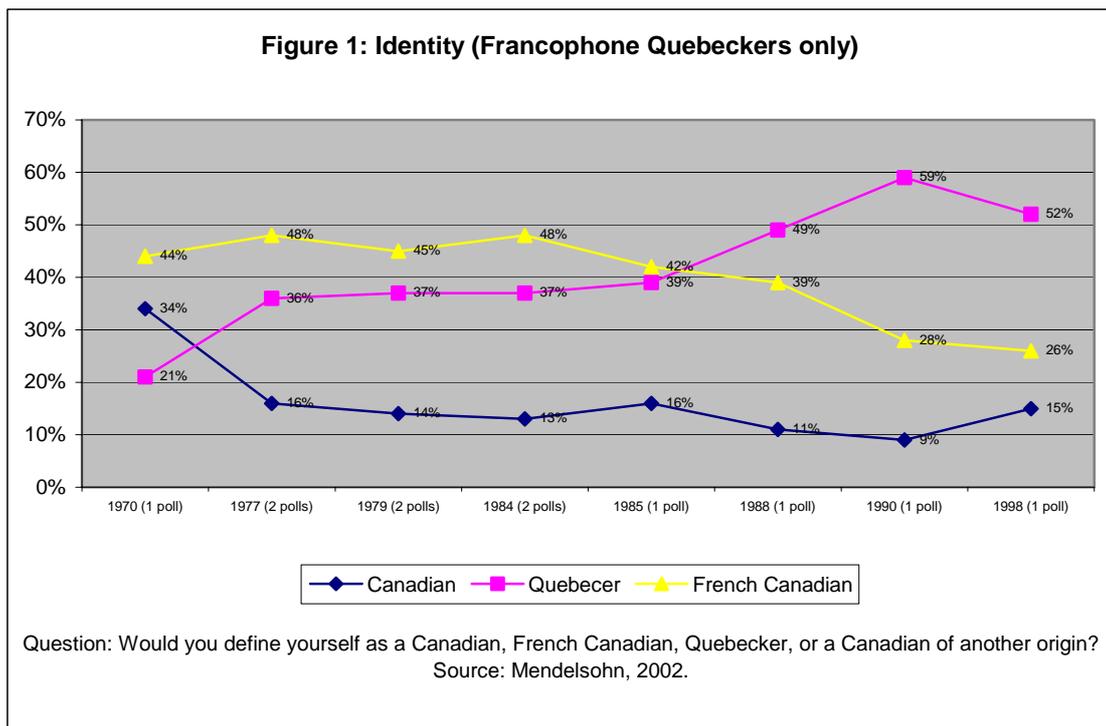
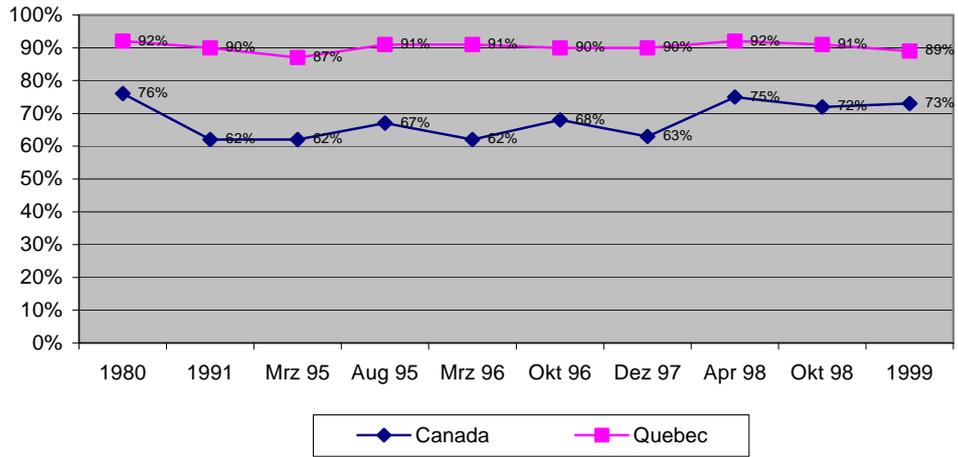
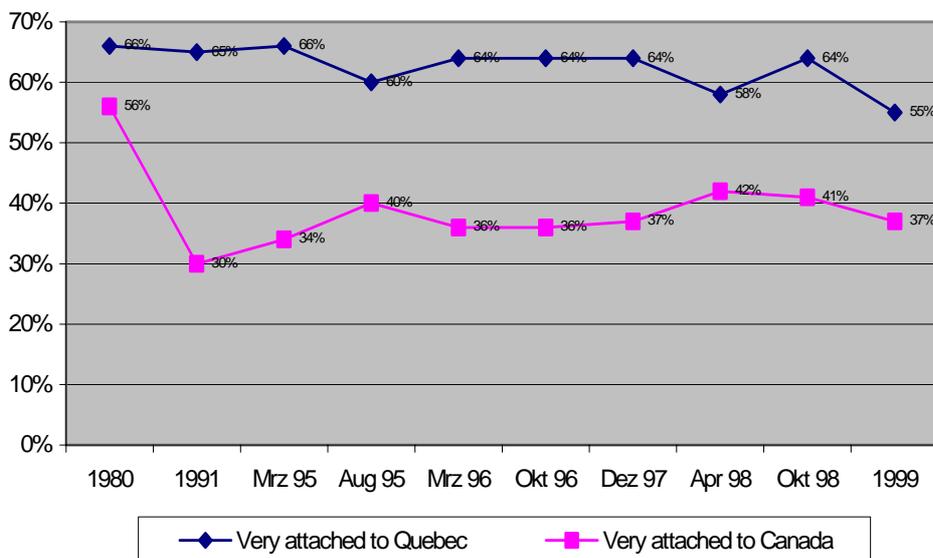


Figure 2: Attachment (All Quebecers)



Do you agree or disagree with the statement: 'I feel profoundly attached to Québec/Canada'
 Source: Mendelsohn 2002.

Figure 3: Intensity of Attachment (All Quebecers)



Source: Mendelsohn 2002.