

COLLECTIVE DESTIGMATIZATION AND EMANCIPATION THROUGH LANGUAGE IN 1960s QUÉBEC

*An Unfinished Business*¹

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Abstract

In the history of Québec, the 1960s are known as the time of the Quiet Revolution. That decade is commonly referred to as a major watershed since it marked the onset of a spectacular economic, social, and cultural recovery of the Francophone (“French Canadian”) population. Previously, and for two centuries, Francophone Québec had been dominated by the British Empire and English Canada. Throughout the period, as a cultural minority, it had borne the brunt of ethnoracial stereotypes and had suffered from discrimination in the workplace. I seek to investigate one dimension of the destigmatizing process that unfolded in the 1960s by focusing on the discursive strategies devised by a group of young leftist intellectuals who argued that Francophone Québec needed a new national language as a condition of its full emancipation. My research focuses on major contradictions that this radical group had to confront: 1) they could have rejected the vernacular, stigmatized language (known as *joual*) emblematic of the English domination, to adopt the Parisian French and thus become fully part of a great civilization, but by doing so they would have lapsed into another form of colonization since this superior language was considered as foreign and imposed at the expense of “authenticity”; and 2) they could have promoted *joual* as the authentic language of the nation and worked to free it from stigma, but this would have come at the price of a “parochialization” of Québec culture. I show that these intellectuals failed to invent the collective myths that would have transcended this double bind and other contradictions. Finally, the paper compares Québec to other societies in the New World in order to better highlight the distinctiveness of this case.

Keywords: National Language, Decolonization, Discursive Strategies, Myths, Elite/Popular Classes

THE QUIET REVOLUTION

The numerous major changes that took place or were initiated in Québec society during the 1960s are known as the Quiet Revolution. This decade offers a remark-

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able instance of collective dynamism that brought about profound collective transformations. During this period, the French Canadians of Qu bec, who represented around 80% of the population of this Canadian province, made a spectacular recovery,² and succeeded in transforming their collective identity.

It would be wrong to describe pre-1960 Qu bec as a “stagnant” society, given the scope of the positive changes it had undergone since the end of the nineteenth century (urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth, increased fertility and lower infant mortality, increasing primary literacy, and so on). That, however, does not detract from a number of well-documented facts: French Canadians, as an ethnic group, were socially and economically severely disadvantaged in relation to Anglophone Canadians. They were characterized by many Canadians and Americans as culturally inferior, overly community-oriented, unable to occupy high-level jobs, unfit for the challenges of modern life. These stereotypes were largely internalized by the Francophones (D’Allemagne 1966; Harvey 1970; Valli res 1968). Qu bec political life was plagued with nepotism, corruption, and dysfunction. Post-secondary education was underdeveloped. The Catholic Church had, by and large, been an influential agent of conservatism, opposing modernity and exerting control or close surveillance over several spheres of collective life such as education, the family, welfare, labor relations, and the media. Censorship (mostly church-based) was still widely practiced at the end of the 1950s. Social thought, arts, and literature were impoverished by a submissive stance toward France acting as an authoritative normative center. Creativity, innovation, and bold collective endeavours were hindered by an acute sense of fragility and insecurity fostered by Qu bec’s cultural minority status in North America. Finally, advocates of reform were in the minority and the very idea of change was considered highly controversial.

Against this backdrop, the Quiet Revolution has been widely interpreted as a major watershed in Qu bec’s history. It is said to have brought about or initiated profound transformations and marked an abrupt break with the past, thanks to the initiatives of new elites that spearheaded a strong movement of national emancipation of Francophone Qu b cois, a movement that has rekindled the old dream of an autonomous if not a politically independent Qu bec.³ Numerous studies have been published on this outstanding decade. Some of them, mainly excerpts from historical textbooks, offer short overviews of the period. Others focus on one particular dimension (the new national literature, the emergence of Francophone economic power, the restructuring of the State, the embrace of a liberal nationalism, and so on).⁴

The paper seeks to investigate a debate that unfolded in the 1960s over the choice of a national language in Qu bec. At the time there was widespread agreement that French should be the national language, but what kind of French? The Parisian French that the elites were widely promoting or a vernacular form spoken by less educated Francophone Qu b cois? I analyze this question by focusing on the discursive strategies of a group of young leftist radicals who, through a new journal, *Parti pris*,⁵ set out to advance the destigmatization and the emancipation of Francophone Qu b cois by way of a change in the national language. As I will demonstrate, however, *Parti pris*’s discourse, like most ideologies, was fraught with contradictions: for instance, promoting a Qu bec vernacular language while resorting to Parisian French in their own writing. As we have learned from intellectual history, contradictions are frequently overcome by inventing or calling upon efficient myths that restore consistency or an appearance of consistency (Bouchard 2003). The analysis looks closely at this aspect of *Parti pris* by scrutinizing the articles it published. More specifically, I seek to understand how and to what extent the intellectuals involved were successful in transcending those contradictions. However, the reader must bear

in mind that the following analysis is intended neither to criticize *Parti pris*'s thought nor plead in favour of the popular language known as *joual*.⁶ It is an attempt to describe the deadlocks that beset Francophone society at that time.

This essay draws upon the approach to the study of destigmatization strategies developed by Michèle Lamont.⁷ The originality of the paper is to focus on language as a collective tool for destigmatization at the national level. It also draws on a content analysis of a group of intellectuals' writings rather than oral data derived from interviews with ordinary people and expressing every day responses to perceived stigmatization. The paper also addresses the question of the efficacy of the symbolic destigmatizing strategies.

PARTI PRIS: A DECOLONIZATION AGENDA

Founded in 1963, *Parti pris* advocated no less than a revolutionary program for Québec. This journal aimed to free what was defined as an oppressed, colonized, and alienated nation from the grip of Anglo-capitalism and the Canadian political framework. It called for the downfall of the bourgeoisie (Francophone as well as Anglophone), the introduction of socialism, the liberation of the working class, the political independence of Québec from Canada, and a clear separation of state and church. The periodical was run by a group of ten to fifteen young, well-educated intellectuals, some of them with a working-class background.⁸ Hard-core Marxists taking their cue from radical theorists and philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Jacques Berque, Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, they sought to make the Quiet Revolution less quiet, so to speak.⁹ They wished to replicate in Québec the decolonization movement that was still rocking Latin America, Africa, and Asia. To that end, they developed fairly sophisticated arguments in order to convince other Québec intellectuals, union leaders as well as members of the working class, to gain a greater awareness of their condition and to launch social protests, strikes, street actions, even violent acts. Having rejected the idea of a liberal democracy, they were prepared to use whatever means were available to them to break the bourgeois political and social order. They went as far as to flirt with the idea of terrorism (Chamberland 1966, pp. 2–3).

According to one of their theses, the lousy popular language spoken in Québec, the *joual*, was a legacy and a reflection of the oppression inflicted upon Francophones by two centuries of colonization. Strangely enough, they depicted *joual* not only as a by-product but also as a cause of colonization. Consequently, the *Parti pris* activists believed that, by changing the status and/or the form of the language, they could bring about a significant change in the social order, thus contributing to the emancipation of Francophones. Some believe that upgrading the status of *joual* could lead to upgrading its speakers.¹⁰ That, at least, was one of the viewpoints that the journal promoted. However, *Parti pris* folded in 1968 and the movement aborted both as a destigmatizing and as a revolutionary endeavour.

PARTI PRIS: A CONTRADICTIONARY ARGUMENT¹¹

Parti pris's program failed to materialize. Overall, as a revolutionary initiative, it was clearly a failure, which is not to say that it had no impact on public debate. Indeed, it influenced the minds of many young Québécois who, thanks to this radical, nonconformist journal, could develop a taste for social criticism and political mili-

tancy. It also influenced those who engaged in terrorism within the *Front de lib ration du Qu bec* (FLQ).¹²

The failure of *Parti pris*'s revolutionary endeavour had various causes. One of them was the fact that as an oppressed and resource-poor people, the Francophones were not that badly off when compared to African Americans or to most Third World societies in the 1960s. After all, Qu b cois had been living for a long time in a liberal democratic country and, despite their inferior socioeconomic status within Canada (see note 2), they were not tragically deprived in terms of living conditions.

Broadly speaking, I have pinpointed three major loci of contradiction and ambivalence in the journal's argumentation. I describe them below.

Joual: Beautiful and Praiseworthy or Ugly and Shameful?

Parti pris's position perpetuated an old argument condemning *joual* as a vulgar, degraded form of French that had flourished mostly among the popular classes and that inspired shame and ought to be eliminated (Brault 1965, p. 44; Chamberland 1965, pp. 34–36; D'Allemagne 1966, pp. 80, 82, 87; Girouard 1964a, p. 63; Godin 1965a, 1965b, p. 57; Major 1965b, p. 13; *Parti pris* 1963a, p. 3; Renaud 1965). In this respect, *Parti pris* was pursuing an old tradition among Qu bec's intellectual elite (Bouchard 1998). As poet Paul Chamberland said in an interview with Malcolm Reid (1972), *joual* is a "decomposition of language, it is not a language. It is a monster" (p. 99–100). However, the periodical brought something new to the old argument. Strategically, it rejected the well-known solution favoured by traditional elites, which consisted in humiliating ordinary people, identifying them as ignorant, and making them feel shame for the way they spoke and, by the same token, for their identity as poor manual workers.¹³ Rather, *Parti pris* adopted a pedagogical stance where the best course of action was to promote *joual* in novels and plays. This strategy was meant to help ordinary people to come to realize the ugliness of *joual* and to want to improve their language. Such was what could be called the *self-therapy* approach to *joual*.¹⁴

Often by the pen of the same writers, *Parti pris* would simultaneously set forth the opposite view: articles suggested that *joual* was the *authentic* creation of Franco-phone society and it should be preserved and promoted for this reason (Cloutier 1966; Godin 1965a, p. 19; Major 1965b). *Joual* was also depicted as a beautiful language, full of life and truth, sensitive, pure, and poetic, in tune with Qu bec's reality and filled with numerous and wonderful inventions that expressed the soul of the nation. Consequently, what needed to be changed was the negative, condescending attitude of the elites toward the language, not the language itself. The goal was to reveal the beauty underlying the apparent ugliness so that everyone could agree that *joual* was a valuable part of Qu bec culture (Brochu 1965a, pp. 56–59, 62; 1965b, p. 58; Chamberland 1965, p. 37; Godin 1965a, p. 19; Maheu 1965, p. 4; Renaud 1965, p. 21). That moment would be celebrated as a reappropriation and a reconquest over the colonized past since it was believed that *joual*—or more precisely the disparaging of *joual*—was said to be a legacy of the British and English Canadian colonizers. That was the *redeeming* approach to *joual*.¹⁵

Over time, as described in Larose (2004), some contributors to the journal considered establishing *joual* as the Qu bec (national) language, thus flatly rejecting the Parisian norm (pp. 183–186). This idea was short-lived (Gauvin 1974) although it was revived in the 1970s by a new generation of authors. As much as the contributors to the journal resented the absence of a Qu bec language (stressing the fact that *joual* was not a language), they refrained from venturing further (Brochu 1965a,

p. 56; André Major interviewed in Cloutier 1966, p. 27; Girouard 1963, p. 33; 1964a, p. 64). However, some wished to use it as a literary language, at least on a temporary basis, until the revolution produced its purifying effects. Again, this quest for an original language (“une langue à soi,” or “a language that is ours” as one commentator put it) was deeply rooted in Québec’s literary tradition, originating in the poet Octave Crémazie’s call for a new language, in a celebrated 1867 letter (Gauvin 2000, pp. 17–32).

To Change the Society or to Change the Language?

Let us take a step back and examine again the scenario where *joual* was depicted as undesirable and ugly. There were two conflicting options. According to the first one, *joual* was a social fact inherited from a long period of colonization.¹⁶ It mirrored two centuries of oppression—hence the need for revolution as the only appropriate solution (Brault 1965; Chamberland 1966; D’Allemagne 1966; Miron 1965; *Parti pris* 1963b).¹⁷ Decolonization and revolution alone would root out the deep seeds of this collective stigma. According to the second option, *joual* itself (whatever its origins) was the problem. It was a source of shame and humiliation (Chamberland 1965; Renaud 1965). Therefore, its speakers had a duty to correct it, that is: to “improve” their language and even (at least implicitly) to align it with Parisian French (or what was also vaguely called International French), just as conservative intellectuals had, for a long time, advocated. The first option called for a radical change in society, while the second sought to change the language. These conflicting positions did not leave much room for compromise or intermediate arrangements, especially given that the Parisian norm was highly elitist and often legitimized in an authoritarian and paternalistic fashion.

The Old French Catch-22

From another standpoint, *Parti pris* intellectuals were caught in a double bind. On the one hand, they were not prepared to use *joual* as a literary medium as this would open the way to a parochialization of Québec culture, a perspective that was not palatable to those talented young writers eager to be published and to be read widely (including in France).¹⁸ Moreover, some believed that by adopting Parisian French, they could help Québécois become fully part of a great, hegemonic civilization (as France was still perceived in the 1960s). On the other hand, writing in Parisian French meant succumbing to another form of colonization and alienation since the superior Parisian norm was also deemed foreign and unauthentic to the Quebec population (Brault 1965, p. 44; Brochu 1965b, p. 58; Girouard 1963, p. 32). Thus, for *Parti pris* intellectuals, the scenario that would have been consistent with their social commitment conflicted with their cultural ambitions.¹⁹

Interestingly, this catch-22 was also expressed prior to the foundation of *Parti pris* by a young conservative cleric (Jean-Paul Desbiens, aka Frère Untel) who popularized the word *joual* (although he did not coin it) in his celebrated 1960 book.²⁰ A passionately dedicated teacher, he deplored *joual*, which he denounced as a shameful, humiliating language. At the same time, he never really came to terms with the Parisian norm that he perceived as snobbish and a source of alienation.²¹ However, he did not go so far as to blame *joual* on political inferiority or colonization and to call for radical social change. His influence was considerable but ambiguous, since this writer never overcame the contradictions described above.²² Yet Frère Untel

nevertheless blazed the trail for more radical (although not more successful) undertakings.²³

Those are, briefly summarized, the contradictions of *Parti pris*'s ideology about language. Subsidiary inconsistencies also hampered its efforts. For example, as advocates of popular culture, many important writers put themselves in a rather delicate position by using very little *joual* (or none at all) in their own poems and novels.²⁴ Others, such as Jacques Renaud (1964) in his book *Le Cass *, used *joual* and their work became emblematic of a new populist trend in fiction.²⁵ Nevertheless, *Parti pris* published very little *joual* literature during the decade. Moreover, by distancing themselves as intellectuals from *joual* and from French-Canadian popular culture, some writers were anxious about betraying their people, and even their family. For instance, Pierre Valli res (1968), the author of *N gres blancs d'Am rique* [White Niggers of America], forcefully expressed that feeling. He experienced as deeply distressing the fact that he was well educated while his father was illiterate and working as a journeyman (pp. 176, 189, 200). Similarly, *Parti pris* writers also felt discomfort or even a sense of alienation in belonging to an intellectual elite and in posturing as proletarians. This uneasiness translated into a distrust of aestheticism in literature, cast as a form of dilettantism. This was admittedly a strange stance for a group of poets and novelists (Aquino 1964; Brochu 1965a, pp. 56–57; Godin 1965b; Miron 1965).²⁶ Further, *Parti pris* authors did not display strong revolutionary convictions but featured indecisive, soul-searching, powerless, even remorseful heroes in their fiction. Their novels and essays often expressed cynicism, disenchantment, confusion, inaction, and failure.²⁷

Finally, after a failed attempt at political action in the *Mouvement de lib ration populaire* (Popular Liberation Movement) launched in 1965, *Parti pris* seemed willing to revise, if not to interrupt, its commitment to revolutionary action. An editorial announced a shift towards theorizing the Revolution rather than practising it, prompting some critics to wonder about the future of the journal and its ability to carry out its initial social and cultural agenda.

The journal's contributors also presented surprising blind spots. Amazingly, no clear definition of *joual* is to be found in *Parti pris* and other sources of the period. Rather, the journal offers various (often vague) definitions drawing on one or a combination of the following elements: Anglicisms, neologisms, syntactic improprieties or any violation of the French norm, popular language, the language of the poor, mispronunciations, impurities, the French spoken in big cities (particularly in Montr al), vestiges of obsolete seventeenth-century French (mostly in rural areas), a spontaneous language freed from any norm and censorship, the way most Qu b cois speak, the way male ("macho") Qu b cois speak, the language of the countryside, the language of a defeated people. For some, *joual* was very old, yet for others it had appeared only in the 1950s. Overall, such uncertainty was detrimental since it made it very difficult to 1) produce a rigorous explanation of the source of *joual* and 2) elaborate a strategy that would have overcome the old dilemma.

In another vein, there was a consensual view that *joual* was the product of two centuries of colonization but, surprisingly again, there was no demonstration of this major assumption. Apart from the obvious influence of Canadian and American English on the language spoken by ordinary Qu b cois,²⁸ one wonders through what channels and mechanisms colonization distorted and impoverished the French-Canadian language. For instance, through what mechanism would this colonialism be exercised in *joual*-speaking rural regions removed from Anglophone influence?²⁹ That virtually no one seriously addressed this question may, in itself, be telling. Of course, the decolonization theory was so widespread at the time that it did not need

a demonstration. However, could it be that in the Québec context, the colonial explanation was taken for granted because it was so convenient to all? Thus, one could blame the enemy for the despised language. This approach also left intellectuals blameless and free to look elsewhere for causes of collective failure. In fact, from an opposing viewpoint, were they not guilty of destigmatizing *joual*, a language that otherwise could have been considered a normal linguistic phenomenon, i.e., the expected by-product of oral culture over several centuries? Likewise, no effort was made to substantiate the claim that decolonization would spell the end of *joual* (another major contention). Besides, democratic, universal education was never mentioned as a possible tool to change the popular language, as had been the case in France, for example, through the Republican school system since the nineteenth century.

Lastly, *Parti pris* writers themselves expressed a basic view of Québec culture as utterly contradictory, stymied by old, insuperable deadlocks. According to Paul Chamberland (1965), for instance, there was a disorder underlying the day-to-day existence of the Francophones—a basic inconsistency, “l’incohérence fondamentale” (p. 37).³⁰

EMANCIPATION THROUGH LANGUAGE: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

My thesis is that *Parti pris* intellectuals were unable to overcome their contradictions. According to a first option, they could have made clear radical choices that would have eliminated their ambivalence: choosing the approach of therapy over redemption, the social over the normative strategy, authenticity over “quality,” *joual* over Parisian French—or the opposite. They rejected that option. Under a second scenario, they could have invented efficient myths that would have worked as mediating devices and allowed them to obviate their quandaries. This, precisely, is a common function of myth: to give an apparent consistency to contradictory propositions and transform them into powerful symbolic tenets. Again, *Parti pris* intellectuals failed to do so, which a few comparative studies of nations of the New World highlight.

In the following section, Québec is compared to other countries and to other minorities of the New World, which is doubly relevant since Québec was a cultural minority within Canada as well as a collectivity asserting itself as a nation struggling for political sovereignty.

Somewhere in their past, most of the New World incipient national cultures had to face the challenge of adopting a common language that would set them apart from their European mother countries. Most of them, however, responded differently to the challenge. In order to ground their distinctiveness and to secure their autonomy, they sought in the first place to avoid the language of their mother country. As a substitute, many considered inventing a language from scratch or borrowing from the Aboriginal peoples, from antiquity (Hebrew, Greek, Latin), and so forth. None of the options worked and, finally, all of those new nations turned to the language of their mother country. The conundrum that they then confronted was: how to fabricate distinctiveness from sameness, and more specifically, how to borrow without feeling indebted and dependent?³¹

In this regard, the United States, Mexico, Australia, and Brazil were particularly successful. They retained and appropriated their mother country’s language by magnifying their (sometimes minor) lexical and syntactic differences in such a way that they could anchor and reinforce their national identity. In the United States, this was achieved through a drawn-out process initiated in 1783 by Noah Webster, who

published in 1838 the first edition of his celebrated dictionary (touted as the “found-ing” act of American English). Originally, every cultural feature coming from Great Britain was deemed corrupt but it was thought that the English language would be purified by the New World environment and by the noble uses to which it was put. Collectively, Americans exhibited a lot of self-confidence, even considering the language spoken in England as a dialect, inferior to American English. According to Mencken (1926), British and American English had become two different languages: the former was exhausted and rapidly declining, the latter was flourishing, spurred by the regenerating forces of the new land and blazing the trail for all future civilizations and literatures (pp. 34–39). Thus, a strong mythology of the New World and its great future was a key factor in this case.

A similar situation was found in Mexico. According to an old national myth, this young country would spearhead a powerful movement towards a new race— even a “cosmic” race (Vasconcelos 1925)—and an unprecedented civilization, through intense miscegenation. As Bouchard (2008) writes, like the United States, from the nineteenth century onward, Mexico had less a past to celebrate than a future to build (pp. 153–181). From the late nineteenth century onward, Australia shared the same optimism. According to Baker (1945), while the English of England had become “inadequate or effete,” the Australian language was new, original, inventive, and unique, and it was revitalizing English (p. 6). In Brazil, the same self-confidence led the elites to distance themselves from Portugal in the second half of the nineteenth century. They felt that they deserved a more prestigious and more progressive mother country, so they turned to Western Europe, particularly to France as the source of the great culture to imitate, starting with the French language which became the hallmark of distinction and a second national language among the dominant classes of Brazil. As for the Portuguese language, it became during the same period a truly Brazilian language, the year 1865 being a major landmark with the publication of *Iracema*, a mythical novel by Jose de Alencar. This stance was subsequently bolstered by the powerful myth of anthropophagy through which Brazilian intellectuals were able to reconcile their attachment to their indig-enous roots and their aspiration to universality embodied by the prestigious Euro-pean, especially French, culture. Indeed, according to this metaphor crafted by Oswaldo de Andrade (2001) in his 1928 *Manifesto Antropofago*, all cultural norms or patterns that were imposed upon Brazilians as foreign or “other” should be eaten, devoured, and metabolized. As a result, the European culture was appropriated and it strengthened the Brazilian identity without igniting a feeling of alienation (Bou-chard 2008, pp. 163–164).

The short history of Ebonics (the term was coined in 1973) in the United States offers another example of self-assertiveness, although not on the same scale and in a quite different context. In this case, for African Americans, the shame associated with the practice of a so-called lousy, inferior language disappears once it is assumed that there are two different languages at work. Indeed, linguists such as Smith (1998), O’Neil (1998), Rickford (1998), and others have provided support for this linguistic duality myth.³² Historians have also unearthed the roots of Ebonics in old African languages, as opposed to American English, which belongs to the Germanic linguis-tic family. Some argued that as a result, Black children do not have to feel guilty if they get poor marks at school since they were not taught in their mother tongue. Overall, what is remarkable is that a group of African Americans were able to invent and to sustain the myth of Ebonics as a language in and of itself despite the risk of isolation from the powerful American mainstream culture. Indeed—and this is fur-ther testimony of the power of myth—studies have shown that young Blacks who had

enrolled in Ebonics classes (or in classes that took into account their vernacular language) performed better in standard English, thus proving that somehow Ebonics can favour integration rather than isolation (Perry and Delpit, 1998, pp. XI, 19, 146).

One can argue that, finally, Ebonics did not succeed in significantly upgrading the African American culture and putting it on a par with the American English. Nevertheless, Ebonics remains an interesting episode of assertiveness that, at least for a moment, opened a way out of the double bind.

Other examples could be evoked, illustrating discursive ways to transcend apparent symbolic deadlocks at the level of vernacular language. In Haiti, for instance, the cultural elites adopted Parisian French, despite their reluctance to borrow from a former colonizer that had crushed their Republican revolution and restored slavery on the island. To overcome that feeling, they invented the “pirating” myth, meaning that they had stolen the French language as if it were a spoil of war or more precisely, an act of piracy. This imagery was all the more appropriate since it resonated with the turbulent history of the Caribbean and the folklore of Haiti.³³ As to the “spoils of war” metaphor, it is also widely used in former French colonies in Africa in the same spirit, namely in the works of the Algerian activist Kateb Yacine.

Lastly, again in the French Caribbean islands (more specifically in Martinique), the “créolité” metaphor (introduced in the 1930s by Aimé Césaire and further developed in the 1980s by Édouard Glissant, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant, Jean Barnabé, and others) proved quite successful. It calls for a syncretism of indigenous and French inputs, as well as the oral and the literary, aiming at a cultural reinvention that preserves the local and the universal. As a result, most of the Caribbean writers have been able to use Parisian French (and to publish most of their works in France) without feeling alienated (Barnabé et al., 1989). Concurrently, they also promoted the oral and written uses of creole, again without feeling torn between two incompatible options (Aguila 1980). In that sense, their endeavour was successful compared to what happened in Québec.

THE FAILURE OF *PARTI PRIS*: AN EXPLANATION

These narratives of vernacular languages share a defining feature. Favorable power relations and self-confidence prove to be key factors in their survival in that it allows a population to make clear, sometimes radical, choices and to be comfortable with them. As we have seen, the production of robust supporting myths that unleash energy and incite collective mobilization is another defining factor. In contrast, Francophone Québécois were unable—and perhaps could not afford—to make that kind of choice. From a linguistic point of view, they could have endorsed the duality thesis by drawing on the lexical and syntactic idiosyncrasies of Québec French. But they stopped midway in that direction. This was the case for *Parti pris* writers who like most other Québec intellectuals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, felt intimidated by the towering figure of France, the powerful, prestigious, and authoritative center of international *Francophonie*. Unlike the New World intellectuals mentioned above, they failed to invent and to promote the myths that would have resolved the quandary. Although there was no shortage of candidates, none of them prevailed since they were just mentioned fleetingly, without being seriously pursued. This is the case, for instance, of the idea of a wild unfettered French (“un français sauvage”) set forth by Godbout (1974), or the idea of the adaptable language of “Cantouques,”³⁴ or the figure of the bastard’s language, free, averse to imposed norms, nurtured on day-to-day experiences, always at home,³⁵ and so on.

A number of *Parti pris* writers navigated among those contradictions and conflicting options without addressing them squarely to offer a plausible account. To be sure, they realized their difficult position and they certainly suffered from it. But their deep feelings remained unspoken. However, some of them developed an awareness of their quandary and the challenge to find a way out. Andr  Brochu (1965b), for example, wrote about the need to achieve a synthesis of *joual* and Parisian French rather than to oppose them (p. 59). As to how this synthesis would be accomplished, he said only that it had to be the outcome of an internal dynamics of liberation contingent on the forces of Qu bec society. Others were less optimistic. As quoted by Gauvin (1974), Jean Basile, a literary critic at the major quality newspaper *Le Devoir*, asserted that *Parti Pris* failed to create the synthesis that would have freed *joual* from its unsavoury character while preserving its roots and vitality (p. 103). Somehow, this failure is epitomized by the narrator of the short story *Peau neuve* (Major 1965b) who, confronted with the challenge of inventing a new language between *joual* and Parisian French, simply gave up.

As a result, even today, Qu bec is believed to be one of the very few nations in the New World that has not yet settled its national language question.³⁶ Why?

Qu bec history provides a twofold answer. First, Francophone Qu bec is a minority culture in North America and, since 1763,³⁷ it has had to wage a constant battle to resist assimilation attempts and to secure its future. Francophones have fought in the political arena to obtain legal protection of their linguistic rights and to be recognized as a nation. But Anglophones often depicted them as having no culture and as speaking not a real language but a *patois*, or slang. Thus, they were perceived as not deserving to be treated as a nation and their so-called dialect was not entitled to legal protection by the Canadian government. That is what the Governor, Lord Durham, had stated in an infamous 1839 report: advocating the assimilation of Francophones into the superior English race, he referred to them as “a people without history and without literature” (pp. 112–113). As a strategy to counter that argument, Qu bec elites chose to define their nation as a cultural part of France in America. On this basis, they could claim that Qu b cois shared the same prestigious legacy and were parties of the same *grandeur*. The strategy worked quite well but, in return, it fostered a deep dependency on the mother country and an acute sense of fragility. The relationship to France became an umbilical cord. Like their forebears, *Parti pris* intellectuals were reluctant to sever that tie. They did not muster the resolve to set Francophone Qu bec on a course of its own. In that sense, there was no *manifest destiny* for Qu bec, only an ambiguous and uncertain future.

Qu bec history teaches us a second lesson. Each society relies on a set of *founding* or *master* myths, that is, basic, comprehensive, and relatively stable symbolic configurations that act as a matrix. At the secondary level, these matrixes dictate the production of *derivative* myths that are more amenable to change (Bouchard, Forthcoming). In keeping with the ever-changing contexts and conjunctures, every society must occasionally retranslate its set of derivative myths in order to articulate them more clearly or attune them more closely to the particular challenges of the time. In the long run, master myths also undergo some change but at a much slower pace. Besides, derivative myths can themselves act as master myths (at a third level) insofar as they give rise to other derivative myths. As a result, the structure of a collective imaginary can be seen as a complex pyramidal architecture comprising two or more layers of myths, master and derivative.

For the purpose of this essay, I want to highlight two of the master myths that have sustained Qu bec culture since the second half of the eighteenth century. First, there is the myth of the fragile, uncertain, threatened minority culture, always

struggling to secure its future and in constant need of protection against the powerful Anglophone (Canadian and American) culture, and now against globalization. There is also the master myth of the oppressed, colonized, humiliated nation in search of emancipation and affirmation and dreaming of a reconquest in various spheres of collective life.³⁸ While the latter myth incites individuals to bold undertakings that seek to repair the trauma, such as the Quiet Revolution or the sovereignty movement, the former inspires fear, restraint, and even withdrawal. Thus, these two powerful symbolic forces tend to contradict each other; one galvanizes and pushes forward while the other holds back.

With this key in hand, one can revisit and shed a new light on major episodes in Québec's history, constantly alternating between collective expressions of energy and lethargy. The *Parti pris* endeavour must be analyzed through that lens. Ultimately, continuity prevailed: *joual* was left to the popular classes while the young revolutionary intellectuals grudgingly came to terms with the French linguistic norm, renouncing their dreams of authenticity, decolonization, and cultural autonomy through language. But they felt deeply uncomfortable with that option. Finally, the prestigious French connection mattered too much as a foundation for the Québec nation, a lesson that Québécois had learned since Lord Durham. That makes *Parti pris* and its struggle for a true national language an example of unfinished destigmatization and emancipation processes. More broadly speaking, the same analytical framework accounts for the fact that the Quiet Revolution was just that: quiet, unfinished (in terms of social policies, secularization, political autonomy, and so forth). In a nutshell, the minority master myth (the impediment) trumped the other (the booster).

However, as influential as it was, this cultural thread was embedded in a web of power relations wherein Québec was heavily disadvantaged. A cultural breakaway from France would have dramatically weakened the status of this Francophone collectivity dreaming of recognized nationhood and of political sovereignty. One must also consider that the *joual* option set forth by *Parti pris* was met with strong opposition within Québec elites. And finally, in addition to its difficult relationship with France, this small nation was also heavily dependent politically (Canada) and economically (United States). All in all, that accounts for the inability of *Parti pris* writers to make a bold decision.

Québec in this regard is reminiscent of New Zealand, a small "Western" nation stranded in the Pacific that established itself as a direct extension of Great Britain, a choice that was reinforced by churches, political and educational institutions, the legal framework, and language. Most of New Zealand's past was dominated by the mother-country complex and by a fair amount of inhibition, which is particularly obvious in the way New Zealanders talked about themselves in novels, poems, and so on. Added to that was the shame surrounding the emergence of an idiom of sorts, specific to New Zealand (the nasal "colonial twang"), which was shunned by the educated. At school, for instance, the students were taught that "those who talk through the nose think through the nose" (Bouchard 2008, pp. 275–290; Gordon 1989; Gordon and Deverson, 1998).

The experiences of Québec and New Zealand bring to light the predicament of many small nations when confronted with major dilemmas.³⁹ They also illuminate the impact of culture on the course of a society, and more specifically the strength of what I have called the master myths. This suggests that in order to understand a culture, one would be well advised to first identify the small body of master myths that govern the symbolic foundation framing both the social link and the power relations. Finally, a key factor that is also expected to heavily affect the course of a society is the extent to which those master myths contradict or complement each other.

This paper shows how language, as a social and cultural marker, can be used as a tool for destigmatization and collective emancipation. Comparison also establishes that it can work both at the infranational (cultural minorities) or the national level. However, two types of destigmatization come to light. Qu bec, New Zealand, Ha iti, and other nations exemplify equalization strategies aimed at promoting a vernacular language and freeing it from the domination of the prestigious language of the mother country. In other cases such as the United States and Brazil, we observe what Fleming (2011) calls a “reverse stigmatization” (resulting from a “normative inversion”) in that the language of the mother country itself is cast as inferior. Needless to say, it was not the case in Qu bec where the *Parti pris* intellectuals proved unable even to equalize the Parisian French and *joual*. This remark draws attention to the uneven efficacy of the symbolic destigmatization strategies, as instantiated by the comparison.

Finally, the analysis suggests that somehow competition and contradiction are inherent in the use of language for destigmatizing a minority or a nation. In the first case, the “local” language is challenged by the national language; in the latter case, it clashes with the language of a dominating nation (usually within a colonial framework). One way or another, the destigmatizers find themselves in a double bind that some of them are just unable to break. However, the sheer balance of power in favour of the stigmatizers is not the only factor at play. Internal divisions can prevent the predominance of one option. And, as we have seen in Qu bec, the antinomy may be compounded by the fact that a society is already handicapped by multiple dependencies.

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NOTES

1. This research has been made possible by the Canada Research Chair Program. The author also wishes to thank Alain Roy and Yannick Roy for their invaluable intellectual contribution.
2. Before the Quiet Revolution, among the major ethnic groups across Canada, only the Italians and the Aboriginal peoples fared worse than the Francophones in terms of education and earnings. The latter were underrepresented in the public administration; 83% of the managers in Qu bec private corporations were Anglophones; even among employees with similar levels of education, the average salary of Francophones was equivalent to 52% of Anglophones' salaries, and so on. Moreover, the situation had been worsening in the preceding decades (see the various tables produced by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1969a, pp. 15–77, 406–425; 1969b, pp. 447–462).
3. The first attempt to cast off British colonial rule, between 1770 and 1790, was crushed by the Governor's police. A second attempt followed during the first decades of the nineteenth century, culminating in the failed Rebellions of 1837–1838, defeated by the British/Canadian army. From then on, the idea of a sovereign Qu bec has subsided, although it resurfaces periodically.
4. On the foregoing, see: Trofimenkoff (1982); Dickinson and Young (2003); Berthiaume and Corbo (2011).
5. The name of the journal (more or less: “taking sides”) expressed a firm commitment to the emancipation of the Qu bec society.
6. Among the popular classes, and particularly in rural areas, “*joual*” was a phonetic deformation of the word “cheval” (horse); from the 1960s onward, it became emblematic of Qu bec vernacular French. The word was coined in the 1930s but became known only in the late 1950s (Gauvin 1975, p. 63).
7. According to this approach, antiracism is construed as “the rhetoric and strategic resources deployed by individual members of stigmatized groups to rebut the notion of their

- inferiority in the course of their daily life” (Lamont and Fleming, 2005, p. 40, note 2). The approach draws on Goffman’s (1963) definition of stigmatization as a discrepancy between virtual social identity (stereotyped imputations of attributes and category) and actual social identity (real attributes and category). Overall, it is closely connected with the notion of empowerment. See also Lamont (2000); Lamont and Mizrahi (2011).
8. The others came from upper-middle-class families (physicists, professors, scientists, and so on).
 9. At a different level, they were also readers of pessimistic writers such as Louis-Ferdinand Céline and Norman Mailer (Cloutier 1966).
 10. For a clear expression of this idea (among others), see Godin (1965b).
 11. This section draws on a close reading of *Parti pris*’s contents. It also borrows from thorough analyses by Reid (1972), Gauvin (1974, 1975, 1976, 2000), Gervais (2000), and Larose (2004). Readers should note that to avoid excessive references, I will mention only the most representative excerpts or articles.
 12. Founded in the early 1960s, this clandestine terrorist group had been active until 1970, the year of the so-called October crisis, during which a British commercial attaché was abducted and a Québec government minister was assassinated. See Fournier (1998).
 13. On this issue and many others questions addressed in this essay, see Bouchard (1998).
 14. The reader will find more about the foregoing in Gauvin (1974, 1975) and Major (2000, p. 80). Unexpectedly, the self-therapy approach failed. Ordinary people were pleased with what they saw as an official recognition of their language and somehow felt vindicated. The incredibly enthusiastic reception of the play *Les Belles-soeurs* (Michel Tremblay 1968) is emblematic in this regard (Gauvin 1976, pp. 85–86). Nowadays, the play is regarded as a great classic of Québécois culture.
 15. In a similar way, Gérald Godin (1965b) stated his intention to accomplish the “rédemption” of *joual* (p. 57).
 16. This is an idea that was also expressed elsewhere by conservative intellectuals including Léger (1962) although in terms of remedy they did not go beyond very conventional moral recommendations (to love and be proud of French, to pay attention to grammar, to continue the long fight waged by the forebears, and so on).
 17. Beyond *Parti pris*, it is worth noting that quite often in those years, the Catholic Church and France were also seen by leftist intellectuals as part of the colonizing process; see, for example, Lalonde (1974, poem written in 1968) and Bélanger (1969, 1972).
 18. Besides, this was the best scenario; it assumed that *joual* finally had been freed from the Anglophone colonizer’s stigmatization.
 19. Among all of the writers at *Parti Pris*, Gérald Godin may be the one who best embodied the quandary (Larose 2004, pp. 296–298).
 20. *Les Insolences du Frère Untel* was reprinted repeatedly and became one of the biggest success stories in the history of Québec publishing.
 21. “. . . [S]o-called International French is a fiction,” it is “another way to alienate ourselves” (Frère Untel 1972, p. 12; my translation).
 22. In 1973, adding another twist to an already tortuous itinerary, he praised *joual*, acknowledging its legitimacy as well as its deep significance (interview in the daily *La Presse*, quoted in Gauvin 1974, p. 94, note 7).
 23. My analysis focuses on *Parti pris*’s writers but one could make the case that the contradictory stance was far from new, that it had, indeed, been at the heart of French Canadian literature from the outset. See Gauvin (1975).
 24. For instance, Paul Chamberland professed his inability to master *joual* (interview in Cloutier 1966, p. 27) while André Major did not believe in *joual* as a literary language (Reid 1972, p. 158).
 25. Although, in a subsequent novel (Renaud 1970), only the characters use *joual*.
 26. For an insightful analysis of the foregoing, see Gauvin (1975, pp. 33–34, 41, 43–44, passim).
 27. These are the traits exhibited by central characters such as Antoine in *Le Cabochon* by André Major (1964), the narrator in *La Chair de poule* by André Major (1965a), Ti-Jean in *Le Cassé* by Jacques Renaud (1964), Émile Drolet in *La Ville inhumaine* by Laurent Girouard (1964b), Claude in *Le Chat dans le sac* by Gilles Groulx (1964), and François Galarneau in *Salut Galarneau!* by Jacques Godbout (1967). Cloutier (1966) also stresses the fact that even in their private lives, the writers neither looked nor behaved like revolutionaries.
 28. Between 1830 and 1930, close to one million French Canadians emigrated to the United States, of whom about one third came back, contributing to the dissemination of various Anglophone cultural patterns (Roby 1990; Chartier 1991).

29. It should be noted that Fr re Untel's crusade against *joual* originated in one of the regions (Lac Saint-Jean) where he was a teacher.
30. In the same vein, according to Ferron (1973, p. 85), Qu bec in itself is an intellectual difficulty.
31. On this question and the following section, see Bouchard (2008).
32. See their respective chapters in Perry and Delpit (1998).
33. One is also reminded of what Aim  C saire, the Martinican poet, called "les armes miraculeuses" (C saire 1946).
34. From the English *cant-book*, a tool used in lumber industry to handle logs. G rard Godin liked to stress its polyvalence and, as a metaphor, its ability to convey various feelings. In 1967, he published a collection of poems titled *Les Cantouques*.
35. This was a powerful wide-ranging metaphor introduced in 1967 by Brault ([1975] 1995, pp. 192–193; 1989, p. 18). On various occasions, the novelist Jacques Ferron expressed a similar idea (see, for example, Michaud 1995, pp. 146–148).
36. This statement is borne out by the lingering controversy over Qu bec's specific accent, the Qu bec or French dictionaries to be used in the school system, as well as by the uncertainty over the type of French that should be promoted. See, for instance, a recent book by Meney (2010), in which the author presents an overview of the controversy along with a denunciation of what he calls "linguistic separatism" (my translation).
37. Most of the first European settlers to Canada came from France at the beginning of the seventeenth century. In 1763, following a military defeat on the Plains of Abraham in Qu bec City, France relinquished its colony, which became part of the British Empire. From then on, French immigration came to a halt and the population of Canada became more and more Anglophone.
38. In keeping with this schema, many Qu b cois believe that their nation is still awaiting its "founding act," i.e., the political independence that would at last accomplish the reconquest.
39. Outside of the New World, the modern history of Greece offers a similar example. When the nation became independent in 1827, the ruling elites tried to impose the "pure" language of classical Greece and to restore the linkage with glorious antiquity, but they did not succeed in crushing the popular language. As a result, this nation has been linguistically divided up to the present day. See Browning (1983) and Horrocks (1997).

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