The Disquieting Revolution:

A Genealogy of Reason and Racism in the Québec Press

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Abstract:

Within the past decade, a series of contentious events concerning the accommodation of different cultural and religious traditions and practices in Quebec has incited much debate in this region. Labelled the "reasonable accommodation" issue by the local press, this controversy, which has its roots in neo-nationalist sentiments born of the Quiet Revolution, has incited responses ranging from denunciations of racist discrimination to calls for more stringent measures to ensure the assimilation of non-Westerners into Québécois culture. As Monika Kin Gagnon points out, this concept has moved beyond its legal origins to become a "social discourse" in the culture at-large, in that many in Quebec are vocally expressing their anxieties over the idea that the rights of newcomers has reached a tipping point, whereby the limits of reason are now over-stretched, weakening the dominant population's values and identity. Much of this fear was stoked by certain stakeholders in the 2007 Quebec election, namely politicians and media outlets, when reasonable accommodation was highlighted as a major issue. This paper provides an analysis of that election and the campaigns leading into it, revealing how the press and the leaders of the three major political parties were complicit in transforming some negligible and private incidents into a greater menace endangering the very existence of Quebec society. By tracing the genealogy of "the reasonable Québécois", I will demonstrate how reason and racism became intertwined during the course of this debate over rights, identity, and citizenship in Quebec.

Keywords: Election; Immigrants; News Media; Québec; Racism; Reasonable Accommodation; Religion

Résumé:

Dans la dernière décennie, une série d'événements controversés concernant l'accommodement des différentes traditions et pratiques culturelles et religieuses a incité beaucoup de débats au Québec. Présentée comme l'enjeu de "l'accommodement raisonnable" par la presse, ce débat, qui a ses racines dans les sentiments néo-nationalistes nés de la Révolution tranquille, a incité des réponses allant de la dénonciation du racisme à des appels pour des mesures plus strictes pour assurer l'assimilation des non-Occidentaux dans la culture québécoise. Comme Monika Kin Gagnon souligne, ce concept a évolué de ses origines juridiques à devenir un "discours social", en ce que bon nombre de Québécois expriment leurs inquiétudes sur l'idée que les droits des nouveaux arrivants a atteint un point où les limites de la raison sont maintenant dépassées, affaiblissant des valeurs et l'identité de la population dominante. Une grande partie de cette peur a été attisée par les politiciens et les médias pendant l'élection de 2007 au Québec, lorsque l'accommodement raisonnable a été souligné comme un enjeu majeur. Ce document fournit une analyse de cette élection et les campagnes qui la précède, révélant la façon dont la presse et les leaders des principaux partis politiques ont été complices dans la transformation de certains incidents négligeables à une plus grande menace mettant en danger l'existence de la société québécoise. En retraçant la généalogie du "Québécois raisonnable", je vais montrer comment la raison et le racisme se sont entremêlés au cours de ce débat sur les droits, l'identité et la citoyenneté au Québec.

Mots-clés: Élection; Immigrants; Nouveaux Médias; Québec; Racisme; Accommodement Raisonnable; Religion

The Quiet Revolution was "a defining moment marking the entry of French Canadians into modernity and their transformation into real Québécois" (Turgeon, 2004: 54). This period in their history, while referring specifically to the 1960-to-1966 tenure of then-Premier Jean Lesage and his political and economic reforms that saw several key responsibilities transferred from the Catholic Church to the government, has taken on a life of its own in Quebec's national mythology, expanding to encompass both the 1960s and 1970s, when much of the Québécois populace was gripped by neo-nationalist fervour (Maclure, 2003: 164-165). Following "the Great Darkness", a turbulent era identified with the premiership of Maurice Duplessis and the overriding "power of the church and other forces [that] stifled intellectuals and progressive elements in Quebec society" (Ibid: 161-162), the Quiet Revolution became to the people of Quebec "a period of liberation" (Turgeon, 2004: 55) from the Catholic Church, economic oppression, and English Canadian institutional dominance. From "la survivance" to independence—this is what the Quiet Revolution has come to represent for many Québécois, a narrative that has entrenched itself in the national imaginary (Mills, 2010).

Indeed, the systemic and institutional changes introduced by Lesage and the Parti Liberale du Québec (PLQ) ignited among the Québécois a new sense of citizenship that was not only identified with civic nationalism, but was also "closely linked with the culture and language of the majority" (Karmis, 2004: 85). Karmis points out that this Jacobin[1]-influenced nationalism, which posited Quebec as a "'normal' state and, therefore, should assimilate immigrants to the language and culture of the francophone majority" (2004: 82), was crystalized in opposition to thinkers such as eventual Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who favoured multiculturalism over the recognition of "the distinct character of the identity and political claims of the nations of Canada" (Ibid: 85). This dialectic has led to some of the more intense events in Quebec and Canada's shared history, including two referenda on Quebec independence, the repatriation of the Canadian Constitution without the consent of the Quebec government, and the defeat of two major accords that would have recognized Quebec's distinct cultural status within Canada.

However, Karmis (2004) contends that more recently, integration nationalism has not only emerged as an alternative to Jacobinism and Trudeauism, but has become a dominant presence in the political landscape. This third way claims a "middle ground" between the other two nationalisms, in that it combines "civic identity with cultural and linguistic identity of the integrationist type" (Ibid: 86), positioning Quebec as a land open to all cultures and seeks the integration rather than the assimilation of immigrants" (Ibid). In adopting this integrationist position, its proponents contend, Quebec would become less isolationist and would instead promote "the language and culture of the majority…as common goods…constitut[ing] a rallying point for the various nations and ethnocultural communities of Québec" (Ibid: 87). In essence, Quebec would become an "intercultural" rather than "multicultural" state (Ibid).

While this intercultural integrationist model has certainly become more pronounced and omnipresent in contemporary Quebec politics, recent events suggest a shift back towards more Jacobinist thinking. These events, which first came to the public's attention in the spring of 2006 despite their seemingly insignificant as well as "*private*" and "*voluntary*" (Potvin, 2010: 79, *emphasis added*) nature, involved several permissions or allowances being granted—or not granted, in some instances—to individuals characterised as "immigrants"[2]. Although initially receiving some coverage in the regional press, it was not until Quebec's political party leaders weighed in with their opinions that these incidents stirred up what Giasson, Brin, and Sauvageau (2010) call a "*tsunami médiathique*" (2010: 381, *emphasis in original*), culminating in some rather dramatic results in the 2007 Quebec election. In the months leading up to that election, with the party leaders' campaigns well under way, the news media and the politicians forged a symbiotic relationship, using each other for their own parochial purposes as they took advantage of an issue that became known as "reasonable accommodation" (henceforth referred to as "RA").

The following will examine this relationship between Quebec's party leaders and the regional press—specifically the *Montreal Gazette* and *Le Devoir*, the Anglophone and Francophone dailies, respectively, with the largest circulation in Quebec—in the context of the 2007 Quebec election. By employing, in the form of a genealogy of racism, a critical race analysis of the published quotations and writings of these politicians in these newspapers, I will demonstrate how the media and the politicians saw an opportunity to draw more readers and votes, respectively, and, as a consequence, collectively fanned the flames of racism in the public sphere. Moreover, while much has been written about RA in Quebec, little mention has been made of the role of reason in the deployment of this discourse. I will attempt to address this in my paper.

What is Reasonable Accommodation?

Bernatchez and Bourgeault (1999) remark that the concept of reasonable accommodation in Canadian law is derived from the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms: "[L]a Charte canadienne y renvoie les juges, à l'article 1, en faisant état de 'limites acceptables et raisonnables' qui peuvent être apportées aux droits et libertés 'dans une société libre et démocratique'" (1999: 162). Since judges have the authority to decide what rights are considered "reasonable", they also have some latitude in determining what counts as discrimination. As a result of a test case in 1985 that pitted Jewish employees of Simpson Sears against their employers due to the latter's refusal to allow flexible working hours for religiously observant workers, the SCC introduced two key legal innovations that had a profound bearing on the rights and privileges of minoritized subjects in Canada. First, the SCC made a legal distinction between direct and indirect discrimination: the former occurs when an employer refuses to hire someone based on a particular identity marker such as race, gender or religion; the latter, meanwhile, is "définie et décrite comme 'discrimination par suite d'un effet préjudiciable'" (Ibid). Thus, an employer, in applying across the whole company certain rules or norms that may have an unduly deleterious or restrictive effect on employees to whom such norms do not necessarily apply, could be found to be discriminating against them; consequently, the employer has an "obligation d'accommodement" (Ibid).

The Court also recognized, however, that some situations required the establishment of certain limits, specifically when the accommodation requested placed "une 'contrainte excessive'" on the employer (Bernatchez & Bourgeault, 1999: 162), such as an excessive cost to the employer or violation of other employees' rights (Ibid: 163). Thus, the second innovation, "*reasonable* accommodation", was born. Subsequent decisions have expanded the parameters of the law beyond the employment sector to include the "fourniture de biens et de services au public" (Ibid). Instead of creating a more just and welcoming environment for "immigrants", though, RA has, in the Quebec context, been twisted into something that is now perceived as menacing and harmful to the white, francophone majority, as the following chronology of events prior to the 2007 election indicates.

A Chronology of Events

RA first emerged as a newsworthy issue in Quebec on March 2, 2006, when the Supreme Court of Canada (SCC) ruled that Gurbaj Singh Multani, a young Sikh student in Montreal, was permitted to wear his kirpan, a type of ceremonial dagger, to school (Ferguson, 2007: A9). Almost immediately following this, the Quebec Human Rights Commission ruled that l'École de technologie supérieure had to accommodate requests by Muslim students for a prayer room on campus (Ibid).

No new such incidents were reported until later that year, when RA suddenly became a focal point of media attention. On September 24th, French-language daily *La Presse* reported on several conflicts arising between Quebec hospitals and pregnant Muslim women requesting to be seen only by female doctors (Ferguson, 2007: A9). Then, almost two months later, a dispute between a Montreal-area YMCA and some female members over the installation of frosted glass windows requested by a neighbouring Hasidic congregation to obfuscate their view of women exercising (Ibid) made headlines in Quebec newspapers. Coverage of a Montreal health clinic

that offered women-only prenatal classes "[i]n deference to their (sic) Sikh, Hindu and Muslim clientele" added fuel to the fire (Ibid). At this point the politicians ventured into the debate.

The first and most vocal party leader to make his opinion known was Mario Dumont of l'Action démocratique du Québec (ADQ). On November 18, 2006, *Le Devoir* reported that Dumont, criticizing the health clinic's decision, contended that RA in Quebec had gone too far, stating that for "l'équilibre entre les communautés, la cohésion de la société, il y a beaucoup de danger à laisser pourrir la situation. . . . D'établir des règles du jeu claires, ça rendrait service à tout le monde" (cited in Dutrisac, 2006: A3). Insisting that "nos valeurs communes" had to be respected, Dumont added, "Ici, au Québec, on est une majorité qui n'a pas besoin de vivre dans la peur d'être traitée d'intolérante. Le Québec est exemplaire en matière de générosité, de tolérance et d'égalité de ses citoyens" (Ibid). Following this, "nos valeurs communes" was adopted as the ADQ's rallying cry and became the basis for Dumont's platform during his campaign.

Meanwhile, newly-minted Parti Québécois (PQ) leader André Boisclair told journalists a few days after that there were "things in the [Quebec Charter] I would sweep out" (cited in Macpherson, 2006: A23). Explaining himself further, Boisclair said, "When you read the Charter and you see the way it treats the integration of immigrants, I sometimes have the impression that we're looking at a vision of multiculturalism that isn't my vision of things" (Ibid). Later, in an opinion piece he wrote for *Le Devoir*, Boisclair (2007) appeared at first to be taking a more pro-accommodation line when he criticized Dumont's statements on the topic:

> En présentant ce débat comme celui de la défense de l'identité québécoise devant les accommodements consentis aux minorités ethniques et religieuses, non seulement M. Dumont contribue à nous diviser entre 'nous' d'un côté et 'eux' de l'autre, il obscurait aussi la véritable raison d'être de l'accommodement raisonnable, qui est de permettre au plus grand nombre d'entre nous de participer au développement de notre société.
>
> (Boisclair 2007: A8)

As the letter continued, however, his language, while still diplomatic, soon exposed his disapproving attitude towards "l'accommodement raisonnable". He spoke of "la laïcisation de nos structures scolaires" (Boisclair 2007: A8), referring to the secular character of the government and public institutions, a theme that he prominently featured in his campaign. When he argued that "le comportement sexiste ou discriminatoire d'un groupe ne devrait jamais faire l'objet d'un accommodement raisonnable par nos institutions, même s'il agit d'un trait historique ou culturel de ce groupe" (Ibid), it was clear he was inferring that "immigrant" groups were the primary source of "sexist or discriminatory behaviour" in Quebec. He closed his letter by inviting readers to join him in "un contrat moral par lequel tous les Québécois s'engagent à bâtir le Québec de demain" (Ibid), echoing Dumont's "*valeurs communes*". Thus, while Boisclair made attempts to sound less inflammatory than Dumont, his position on RA was ultimately the same.

PLQ leader and Quebec Premier Jean Charest took a similar stance, contending that, "for the majority, 'recognizing the other doesn't mean effacing oneself before the other,' and that immigrants should 'enrich our culture and not subtract from it'" (cited in MacPherson, 2006: A23), suggesting that he recognized the existence of an "other" in Quebec society. Later, though attempting to curry favour with immigrant communities by supporting Muslim caucus member

Fatima Houda-Pepin's resolution outlawing the practice of sharia law in Quebec, Charest's continual emphasis on "the equality of women and men" as "extremely important" (cited in Bruemmer & Dougherty, 2007: A1) betrayed his own belief in the discriminatory and sexist nature of "immigrant" cultures. His supremacist attitude was on full display when he accepted $12.5 million in gifts to Quebec City from the Government of France. In response to France's generosity, Charest remarked, "North America belongs to the French. And we want it back" (cited in Dougherty, 2007, February 14: A10). This exposed Charest's mentality at a time when the RA debate was reaching its apex. Québécois "values" were upheld as being superior to all others; making space for "other" values would only harm the Quebec way of life.

As Election Day approached, more incidents were sucked into the RA storm. These include: complaints from workers at a Montreal daycare regarding the fully-paid extra days off their Muslim and Jewish co-workers received (Branswell & Coates, 2007); the instituting of a set of "norms" by the town council of Hérouxville to which new "immigrants" were expected to adhere (Hérouxville, 2010)[3]; the expulsion of a pre-teen Muslim female soccer player from a game in Laval because she refused to doff her hijab (Ravensbergen, Riga & Dougherty, 2007, February 27); and denunciations made against Quebec's Chief Electoral Officer for allowing Muslim women to wear face coverings at polling stations when casting their votes (Authier, Dougherty & Bauch, 2007, March 23).

The debate appeared to touch a chord with many voters, as well, judging by election results, which saw the PLQ win a minority government and the ADQ leaping from four seats to thirty-seven, thereby becoming the official opposition, while the PQ's numbers plummeted, leaving them a distant third. While all three leaders had inveighed against RA in their platforms, it was Dumont who had initiated the charge against it. His party's achievement sheds light on a deep fissure in Quebec society, one that runs through identities of place, gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. Thus, to diminish the impact of the hostile environment created by the combined force of Quebec's politicians and news media in their overzealous attack on RA and, by extension, "immigrants", we must interrogate RA and apprehend how it has been transformed into a weapon wielded against the disenfranchised in Quebec society.

From Reason to Racism

To begin, we must examine the word "reasonable", for its meaning has been the primary site of contention in the debate. To Goldberg, "reason" in Western cultures "furnishes the broad conditions for making meaning…and imparting sense to claims of any kind" (1993: 118). However, he adds, we cannot "insist on Reason's universality", for

> this insistence . . . denies or refuses to acknowledge the particularistic cultural embodiment necessary to reason if it is to make sense or convince within a form of social life. In this denial or refusal, "universalist" Reason veils its capacity to dominate, to repress, and to exclude.
>
> (Goldberg, 1993: 118-119)

Consequently, Goldberg concludes, "in spite—indeed, in the very name—of its universality, Reason expresses racialized exclusion" (Goldberg, 1993: 119; see also Davies, Nandy & Sardar, 1993; Day, 2000).

This contradiction between "universality" and "racialized exclusion" is particularly evident in Dumont's comments on defining and establishing *"nos valeurs communes"*. According to this logic, those who do not abide by this construction of reason are regarded as "irrational" (Goldberg, 1993: 119) by the majority population. However, Goldberg notes,

> the claim that racially characterized non-Westerners or those of purportedly non-Western origin are irrational . . . is the insistence that they fail to exhibit the values, metaphysical attitudes, epistemological principles, or cognitive style of "white males". The continued exclusions…not only turn out rational, but are advanced (often silently and implicitly) in the name of Reason itself.
>
> (Goldberg, 1993: 119)

Because irrationality is considered innate to "immigrants", then, "we may think it reasonable to restrict the freedom of [these] others for their own well-being" as well as for ours (Goldberg, 1993: 143). Hérouxville's list of "norms" exemplifies such restrictions perfectly.

It is evident that those possessing institutional power define who counts as reasonable and who does not. Indeed, for Quebec and colonial powers like it, the preferred type of "immigrant" is one who adheres to a particular discursive construction of reason.

> The preferred immigrant fits the mould of the reasonable person. But, unlike the reasonable person, who is most likely to be born in the country and who is White, the preferred immigrant tends to be a person of colour. This person does not bring conflicts over from her/his ancestral lands (sic) of origin . . . At the same time, the preferred immigrant also believes in the system, adhering to the same liberal beliefs as those of the reasonable person.
>
> (Jiwani, 2006: xiv)

If the reasonable person "makes sense", then so, too, should the preferred immigrant. However, when the preferred immigrant makes an "unreasonable" demand, he or she no longer makes sense to the reasonable person, and so the preferred immigrant is no longer preferred. In the hands of "reasonable people" such as Dumont, then, RA not only becomes a social discourse, but, as Jiwani (2006) calls it, a "discourse of domination", structuralising "formations of racialized and gendered violence" (2006: 209; see also Bannerji, 1995). Considering this, it would be instructive to create a genealogy of the reasonable person in Quebec—the reasonable Québécois—to comprehend how we arrived at this current dilemma over RA and, hence, the violence.

The Reasonable Québécois and Identity

The most appropriate starting point for such an analysis is, of course, identity. Just as "race matters" (West, 2001: xxvi), so too can it be said that identity matters. It matters because, as Hall notes, it offers a sense of stability, "a kind of guarantee that the world isn't falling apart quite as rapidly as it sometimes seems to be" (1996a: 339). Moreover, our identities help us to relate to other human beings through a process of identification, which, Hall says, "is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or

group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation" (1996b: 3).

For example, the "values talk" of Quebec's politicians has served to define the Québécois as a coherent subject while simultaneously constructing a dialectical other whose own values oppose those of the Québécois and, thus, Québécois identity itself. Charest declared that Quebec "has values, solid values, including the equality of women and men; the primacy of French; the separation between state and religion. These values are fundamental" (cited in Dougherty, 2007, February 9: A1). Boisclair was more specific about where those values could be found, saying, "I hear Quebecers . . . who are worried—who see things moving fast and seek to anchor their Quebec identity. . . . There is only one anchor that holds…the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms" (cited in Authier, 2007, March 24: A11). Dumont, meanwhile, proposed that Quebec create its own constitution "afin de renforcer les valeurs communes déjà existantes" (Lévesque, 2007: A3).

However, while the Québécois may imagine their peoplehood as cohering around such values, this does not take into account "the ways in which members of a culture are shaped through interactions between multiple modes of identification" (Dhamoon, 2009: 34). Thus, "Québécois" as a collective identity is a construction, signalling the inherent heterogeneity of the term. When politicians such as Dumont, in their quest to mobilise the Québécois around the RA issue, speak of "nos valeurs communes" and, consequently, hail their Québécois identity, they actually engage in a political process that, Brah contends, "entails the *creation* of a collective identity out of the myriad collage-like fragments of the mind" (1996: 124, *emphasis in original*).

The Reasonable Québécois and Difference

Constructing the self/collective and the other through this process of dialectical identification, however, is contingent upon its "articulation with a discourse of difference" (Brah, 1996: 125), in that an identity only gains its meaning through its positionality relative to other identities within the same social matrix that have undergone the same process of differentiation, but have been distinguished by their own particular "material circumstances and cultural practices" (Ibid: 118). Furthermore, inherent to this process are "systems of power underlying structures of class, racism, gender and sexuality, and so on" (Ibid: 88). In this light, "difference" is always already hegemonic and, consequently, can be "asserted as [both] a mode of contestation against oppression and exploitation" and "the vehicle for the legitimation of dominance" (Ibid: 90).

In the context of the Quebec election, "difference" was applied in the second sense. With the focus on the RA debate, difference was constructed around the idea of who was and was not a reasonable person—the former being *pure laine* Québécois with their common values and collective history, and the latter being "immigrants" who could not adapt to Québécois culture. The party leaders convinced themselves and many voters that the difference of non-Western "immigrants" gave the Québécois license to push these "minorities" and their apparently sexist and anti-democratic way of life to the margins. As André Drouin, the councilman behind the Hérouxville resolution, stated to *La Presse*, "We have to make sure that the people who come here want to live like us" (cited in Editorial, 2007, January 30: A20). In short, difference itself was unreasonable, and therefore had to be reined in.

The Reasonable Québécois and Racialisation/Culturalisation

In separating the same from the different, the reasonable from the unreasonable, race and culture were mitigating and immanent influences in the RA debate. From these concepts emerged two processes that served to differentiate "immigrants" from the Québécois majority: racialisation and culturalisation. According to Blum (2002), racialisation refers to "the treating of groups as if there were inherent and immutable differences between them; *as if* certain somatic characteristics marked the presence of significant characteristics of mind, emotion, and character; and *as if* some were of greater worth than others" (147, *emphasis in original*). In this regard, racialisation depends upon the presence of whiteness, which "continues to structure life chances and opportunities in every domain of social existence" (Ibid: 149). Reason in Western culture is bound up in whiteness, and so is factored into the racialization process. As a mode of differentiation, racialisation arbitrarily takes perceived attributes of a select group of people in order to mark them and distinguish them racially from white people. The Hérouxville resolution exemplifies this process perfectly, with its not-so-subtle insinuations of Muslims as oppressors and torturers of women and as veiled threats, all markers of their unreasonableness. Here, whiteness becomes guilty of what Leonardo calls "'hidalguismo,' or son of God status" (2002: 34)—a kind of racial hubris that positions and privileges whiteness as *the* superior racial discourse in Western culture.

Entwined with this process of racialization is that of culturalisation, which Razack (1998) describes as a strategy whereby white society, to mask its racism and sexism (60), deploys a discourse defined by "the values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs that exist in a timeless and unchangeable vacuum outside of patriarchy, racism, imperialism, and colonialism" (Ibid: 58). Culturalisation has allowed people like Drouin to "switch from talk of races and immigrant groups to talk of ethnic groups and ethnic identity" (Dominguez, 1992: 32). Put another way, they can claim that they are "not racist". Trepagnier (2001) contends that three things are implied when people label themselves "not-racist": 1) they are uncertain "about what is racist and what is not"; 2) they do not want to be "perceived as racist"; and 3) "important differences within the 'not-racist' category, such as level of race awareness, are suppressed" (156). Thus, culturalisation is also an exercise in avoidance; it enables "hegemonic institutions to signify race by using terms such as 'immigrants' and 'foreigners,' and to refer to those who are constructed as Others in terms of their language, ethnic origin and practices, or religion" (Jiwani, 2006: 91). In this way, culturalisation is a technology of power used to inferiorize unreasonable "immigrants" who find themselves outside the norms of white culture (Razack, 1998: 83).

We saw this strategy surface repeatedly throughout the Quebec election, wherein the RA debate was always framed in terms of immigration; the conflict was constantly described in terms of culture clash; and religion, particularly Hasidism, Islam and Sikhism, was presented as the greatest danger to Quebec's "secular" culture. In effect, what was being practiced was what Balibar (1991) has termed "cultural racism", which assumes "that the historical cultures of humanity can be divided into two groups, the one assumed to be universal and progressive, the other supposedly irremediably particularistic and primitive" (Ibid: 25). That Charest, Dumont, and Boisclair claimed their problem with RA was one of religion and culture and *not* race was merely a diversionary tactic, for, as Young observes, "Race has always been culturally constructed. Culture has always been racially constructed" (1995: 54).

The Reasonable Québécois and Essentialism

Thus racialised and culturalised, the newly-defined identities foisted upon unreasonable "immigrants" by the reasonable Québécois were subsequently essentialised. Essentialism is, according to Fuss, "a belief in true essence—that which is most irreducible, unchanging, and therefore constitutive of a given person or thing" (cited in Jhappan, 1996: 28). Any social structure can be subject to essentialism. In the context of gender, for instance, Harris (2003) says essentialism points to "the notion that there is a monolithic 'women's experience' that can be described independently of other facets of experience like (sic) race, class, and sexual orientation" (34). Essentialism, therefore, is a mechanism deployed within a given system of power to fix particular identities, reduce them to certain attributes, and freeze them in history so they cannot shift, mutate, or evolve with the passage of time. Accordingly, both "immigrants" and the white Francophone population became essentialised categories during the press's coverage of RA and the election after undergoing their respective processes of racialisation and culturalisation, with the former characterized as innately backward, primitive, oppressive, and unreasonable and the latter as the very model of reason, morality, and modernity.

Harris (2003) believes that one of the main reasons why essentialism has gained such currency in identity politics is that it "carries with it important emotional and political payoffs" (34-35). Staunæs (2003) concurs, noting, "In the practical, political arena . . . there seems to be a tendency towards fixing categories and identities and using the concepts in certain ideologically informed ways" (103). Indeed, there was clearly a political motivation behind Dumont, Boisclair, and Charest's essentialisation of both the "immigrants" and the reasonable Québécois: more votes. The party leaders took advantage of the sudden explosion of publicity surrounding the various RA controversies by fully engaging in essentialising rhetoric to woo the "moral majority" to cast ballots in their favour.

In systems of domination, essentialism establishes a standard by which Others are judged. Those who do not meet or match this standard are considered to be different and not worthy of accessing power. In this sense, essentialism is a hegemonic tool. It permitted Quebec's power brokers to define in absolute terms what constituted the reasonable Québécois; hence, it also empowered them to set the criteria to determine what requests could or could not (or would or would not) be accommodated by Quebec society.

The Reasonable Québécois and the New Racism

The most distinguishing essentialised characteristic of the reasonable Québécois is his or her commitment to embracing Quebec as a nation. Until recently, the nationalist movement in Quebec has been almost exclusively a white Francophone movement due to the patterns and politics of immigration in Quebec since joining Confederation (see Anctil, 1996). It is only within the past few decades or so that they have had to concern themselves with the implications of the relationship between race and nation. Linking the nationalist cause with (culturalised) race further delimits how the reasonable Québécois is signified. Gilroy's (1987) term for this phenomenon is "the new racism". As he explains,

> The new racism is primarily concerned with mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. It specifies who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously advances reasons for the segregation or banishment of those whose "origin, sentiment, or citizenship" assigns them elsewhere.
>
> (Gilroy, 1987: 45)

This leads Gilroy to conclude that "statements about nation are invariably also statements about 'race'" (1987: 57). This conflation of race and nation can have a detrimental effect on "immigrants".

> [N]ativist movements tend to flourish when the country's social and economic situation is unsettled and then take one of two broad forms. Society enacts restrictive immigration laws and policies to keep foreigners . . . out. And it enacts measures aimed at making things difficult for those who are already here.
>
> (Delgado, 1999: 247)

From this view, "immigrants" are eternally identified as strangers, though, as Bauman (1997) says, "each kind of society produces its own kind of strangers, and produces them in its own inimitable way" (46). Nothing could be closer to the truth when applied to nationalist societies. In such societies, "immigrants" become entangled in what Torgovnick (1992) refers to as "the politics of the 'we'" (43), whereby "citizens" are universalized as the "we" in nationalist ideology, while "immigrants" are constructed as the "you", the perpetual outsiders. As "diasporic collectivities", the immigrant "you" are then "demonified as a threat to the integrity of the" national "we" (Brah, 1996: 243)—a construction immanent to the new racism.

Again, we can see how this dichotomy played out during the debates over RA in Quebec. From Charest's declaration that "North America belonged to the French" to Dumont's criticism of Charest that he was "*trop faible pour défendre et affirmer l'identité du Québec*" (cited in Robitaille, 2007: A1) to Boisclair's statement where he said, "When I talk about plain common sense, what I see is the strength of Quebecers" (cited in Authier, 2007, March 24: A11), each leader interpellated his national identity as a *Québecois* in a way that distinguished it from the identities of "immigrants". These comments indicate that Charest and his rivals were aligning themselves with a "Westphalian model of state sovereignty", which, according to Benhabib (2004), "presupposes that there is a dominant and unified political authority whose jurisdiction over a clearly marked piece of territory is supreme" (4). That authority in Quebec, as implied by the three party leaders, is held by the white French Canadian population, and will always remain inaccessible to "immigrants".

The Reasonable Québécois and Mediatisation

The construction of the reasonable *Québécois* is finally cemented into the public consciousness through what Cottle (2006) calls "mediatized rituals", which refer to media representations that "*sustain and/or mobilize collective sentiments and solidarities on the basis of symbolization and a subjunctive orientation to what should or ought to be*" (415, *emphasis in original*). This is demonstrative of the way in which mediatisation as a process influences society to "[submit to, or become] dependent on, the media and their logic" (Hjarvard, 2008: 113). Moreover, mediatisation:

is characterized by a duality in that the media have become *integrated* into the operations of other social institutions, while they also have acquired the status of social institutions *in their own right*. As a consequence, social interaction—within the respective institutions, between institutions, and in society at large—take place via the media.

<div align="right">(Hjarvard, 2008: 113, *emphasis in original*)</div>

Thus, the convergence of the media with other institutions such as the state and, by extension, political parties, can create a powerful force within the public sphere. The news media are particularly illustrative of how such power is exerted over consumers, in that the former "actively (re-)construct" news events due to the influence of "[c]orporate interests" (van Dijk, 1989: 203), favouring "(privileged) voices" (Karim, 2008: 58). In this way, the mass media, including the press, produce and reproduce not merely "dominant ideologies", but more specifically in racist, nationalist, and imperialist contexts, "ethnic ideologies" (van Dijk, 1989: 221). Such ideologies frame ethnic relations and, in particular, immigration as a dialectic of "us and them, between those who want to get in and do not belong here, and those of 'us' who belong here" (Ibid: 219). Thus, "[t]ext and talk about the Others" contribute to "maintaining and legitimating [the] dominance" of ethnic elites in racist societies (van Dijk, 2000: 49).

   With respect to RA, Potvin (2010) argues that the news media was instrumental "in transforming the debate into a social crisis", observing that "[n]ot only was media coverage disproportionate to the actual number of cases of accommodation, but many newspapers…increased the number of incidents 'revealed', thereby setting the stage for one-upmanship and media hype" (2010: 79). My own research supports Potvin's remarks. Using the search terms "reasonable accommodation" and "Quebec", a quick scan through the Canadian Newsstand database of articles published in *The Gazette* between September 1, 2006 and March 31, 2007 yielded 87 hits. Similarly, a search through the *Biblio Branché* database, plugging in the same dates and the same terms translated into French, produced 46, 74 and 59 hits for *Le Devoir*, *La Presse* and *Le Soleil*, respectively. These are extraordinary numbers when one considers the short time frame and relatively low profile of the issue prior to September 2006. Given that an election was on the horizon, however, it should come as no surprise that the media pounced on RA as a story. With candidates seeking publicity wherever and whenever they could, Quebec's news media could always rely on political stakeholders to provide them with meaty quotations pertaining to the RA debate.

   Regarding the content of the coverage, Potvin remarks that "[r]equests were often covered from the angle of privileges or abuses, rather than from the standpoint of equality rights or negotiated agreements" (2010: 80). These requests were usually framed as religious in character, which, in the eyes of many Québécois who had only recently unburdened themselves of the Catholic Church's oppressive rule, automatically positioned the requesters as "cultural outsiders" (Lefebvre & Guyver, 2009: 141). Not content with merely culturalising the religiosity of these individuals, however, the news media racialised them, as well.

> In contrast to the media's attentive depiction of Sikhs, Jews, and Muslims, the portraits of Jehovah's Witnesses or Protestant Christian denominations, who frequently request accommodation for religious practices, are altogether absent in the media. This absence further reinforces the perception of accommodation as a problem created solely by visible religious minorities.
>
> (Lefebvre & Guyver, 2009: 141-142)

Thus, just as the press privileged White voices and their perspectives on Others, so too did it favour their absence when it suited the overall narrative, which was controlled by the media as well as the politicians who sought to profit from it.

As a product of the discourse of the new racism enshrined in the public realm through Quebec's media outlets, the reasonable Québécois, in his or her current construction, will most certainly continue to exclude and marginalize "immigrants" as long as the media and politicians have something to gain by involving themselves in the RA debate. Those in power as well as their supporters will simply maintain this façade of a unified collective Québécois identity by positing those identities presumed not to correlate with the corresponding value system as different, as Other, as not of Quebec.

The irony here, however, is that this value system, wherein democracy and equality ostensibly rank at the very top, actually results in the undemocratic and inegalitarian treatment of "immigrants". Manufacturing reason according to Western principles and conceptions of modernity and then universalizing and deploying the resulting construction ultimately establishes criteria for achieving citizenship that "immigrants" can never satisfy. At the same time, the RA debate will persist and remain a divisive force in Quebec society so long as Quebec chooses to be part of this world, since "[g]lobalization draws the administrative-material functions of the state into increasingly volatile contexts that far exceed any one state's capacities to influence decisions and outcomes", including those concerning immigration (Benhabib, 2004: 4). Therefore, the very notion of citizenship itself becomes unsustainable in light of Quebec's interpretation of RA.

Conclusion

In the time since the RA debate first took root, there have been a few major developments: esteemed scholars Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard were recruited by the Quebec government soon after the 2007 election to head the Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences; in late 2008, another election was held in Quebec that saw Charest and the PLQ retain power while Dumont's ADQ plummeted to single digit representation and third party status; and in 2010, the Quebec government introduced Bill 94, which seeks to forbid women from wearing face coverings for religious reasons when accessing public services (Assemblée Nationale du Québec, 2010). While Dumont's spectacular electoral defeat appears to indicate a change in social attitudes towards racialized difference, the introduction of Bill 94 just over a year later and the continued support for it signify otherwise. Although these latest events fall outside the scope of my analysis, suffice to say they continue to reify the discourse of the reasonable Québécois that has been sanctified in the nationalist imaginary since 2006.

Meanwhile, this debate has diverted attention away from more significant issues, such as poverty, homelessness, and unemployment—issues that affect the everyday lives of the

disenfranchised in Quebec. In sum, "immigrants" have been multiply harmed by this debate—directly through the new racism, and indirectly through neglect of life-and-death issues. It is not merely "spirit murder" (Wing, 1997: 28) being committed here; the assault is physical, as well.

Notes

1   Jacobin nationalism, which originated in France, "has openly advocated assimilation to a culture and language that pretend to universality and cannot be separated from French republicanism" (Karmis, 2004: 75).

2   I have placed quotation marks around this word to indicate the conflation in Quebec/Canadian society of both recent settlers here and their Canadian/Quebec-born descendents as "immigrants", and employ this device throughout the rest of the essay. This decision was inspired by Bannerji (2000), who remarks, "Expressions such as 'ethnics' and 'immigrants' and 'new Canadians' . . . encode the 'us' and 'them' with regard to political and social claims, signifying uprootedness and the pressure of assimilation or core cultural apprenticeship. The irony compounds when one discovers that all white people…become invisible and hold a dual membership in Canada, while others remain immigrants generations later" (112).

3   The Hérouxville website (http://municipalite.herouxville.qc.ca/histoire.htm) features a less inflammatory version of the resolution in French. The town's blog (http://herouxville-quebec.blogspot.com/), however, includes the original resolution.

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