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A Paradoxical Relationship? Regionalization and Canadian National Identity

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Regionalization tendencies have often been regarded, in academic and political debates, as a serious challenge for Canadian federalism and the national unity of Canada. This article argues that regionalism—and increased regionalization processes in the context of neoliberal globalization tendencies—is not a contradictory force that threatens federalism and national unity, but that it is and has historically been a decisive feature of Canadian civic nationalism from the beginning of the nation-building project. As a consequence, and for better or worse, processes of devolution under the current politico-economic regime will stabilize Canadian national unity rather than undermine it: regionalization can strengthen civic nationalism in Canada by adding a cultural dimension as a vehicle that negotiates between individual citizens, identity groups, and state institutions. Regionalisms—such as Québécois nationalism—are malleable structures of belonging and provide institutional frameworks (e.g., informal constitutions) and forums of dialogue that enrich the political culture of federalism. We conclude that increased regionalization can help to strengthen Canadian (and other forms of) civic nationalism by preventing them from slipping into monistic unitarism.

Keywords: regionalization; regionalism; nationalism; decentralization; neoliberalization processes

In Canada, regionalism and regionalization tendencies have traditionally been interpreted as serious challenges to national unity and to the stability of the federal state and its institutions. The fear of splitting apart is deeply engrained in the collective identity. It has been reproduced by Canadian nationalism ever since its inception in the late nineteenth century. With the ascent of Québécois nationalism in its modern form after the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s—based precisely on a territorial, institutional, and regional understanding of a separate and potentially sovereign Francophone identity—perhaps the most pertinent threats to unity have materialized in the two referendums of 1980 and 1995 (Vormann and Kolboom 2011; Lammert 2001, 2004). Since then, more often than not debates about regional fragmentation and national unity have become a coded signifier to refer to Federal–Provincial tensions and Québécois separatism in order to address them in the disguise of a more universal set of questions.

Whereas, in this text, we define *regionalization* as a processual category that denotes the formation of regions—this notion includes both a bottom-up and top-down perspective and will be detailed further below—by *regionalism*, we refer to relatively stable categories of group identity. We depart here from Ernest Gellner's classical and overly rigid definition of *nationalism* as a movement or a sentiment that insists on the desirability of a mono-national, unitarist state (Gellner 2006 [1983], 1). Rather, we argue that nationalism can be one form of regionalism, that is, one form of collective awareness

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within a larger state context that does not necessarily aspire for a self-enclosed congruency between political and cultural boundaries. In other words, Québécois nationalism remains a form of nationalism, even if it does not vie for independence. For us, then, the region offers an *analytical tool* that leaves enough room for us to understand Québécois nationalism, without belittlement, as a regional identity on par with other forms of identity, such as that of pan-Canadianism or First Nation identities. This methodological move allows us to bring into conversation different debates that tend to be led separately.

Regionalism and nationalism are not as contradictory as it might seem at first blush, however. Upon closer inspection, we can recognize a certain historical complementarity between the two. In this article, we argue that—even more than just being compatible—regionalization bolsters the legitimacy of Canadian federal institutions. We contend that regionalization strengthens Canadian civic nationalism[1] by providing a cultural vehicle to mediate between individual citizens, group identities, and the state apparatus. As a consequence, processes of decentralization under the current politico-economic regime will stabilize Canadian nationalism rather than undermine it.

We will make this case by addressing an apparent paradox, that is, that despite the fear of regional fragmentation, if we look at Canada today, it seems more stable than during the second half of the twentieth century. Even though regionalization tendencies have amplified with the devolution of responsibilities from the central government in the context of recent neoliberalization processes, Canadian identity and national unity seem more resilient than during a period that was characterized by a more centralized government. To a certain extent, this new-gained stability has been the consequence of changing social forces and imaginaries, such as changing national self-conceptions and the (seemingly) external threats posed by globalization processes and immigration. It seems safe to argue that today, given these shifts, Québécois nationalism can be accommodated in the framework of Canadian federalism (Lammert and Vormann, forthcoming). In this article, we take this argument a step further. Contrary to those who believe that regionalism drives a wedge into Canadian identity, we argue that strong regional identities fulfill an important role for Canadian nationalism.

We will make this argument in three steps. First we define the polyvalent concept of the "region" more precisely—and seek a deeper understanding of how the trajectory of regionalization tendencies relates to what some authors have identified as processes of neoliberalization (e.g., Brenner, Peck, and Theodore 2010). In a second step, taking into account different markers and sources of identity, we outline how Canadian identity, in particular, has been constructed as a strong multi-layered concept. We contend that Canadian civic nationalism offers the theoretical potential to accommodate multinational communities and other ethno-cultural groups, but that it exhibits a penchant for centripetal, mono-nationalistic dynamics. In a third and final step, we argue that concepts of the region change over time due to political, demographic, social, and economic processes. We conclude that this malleable character of regionalism, as well as the potential civic nature of Canadian nationalism, provides the basis for the functioning and survival of Canadian federalism.

Regions and regionalization

In academic circles, debates have often insisted on the dangers that regionalist tendencies would pose for Canadian national unity. According to P.A. Buckner, prior to the 1960s, "Canadian historians had seen as their central responsibility the need to emphasize the economic and political unity of Canada as it evolved from a colony into an independent

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nation-state" (2000, 2).[2] This was one reason why liberal as well as conservative nationalists in Canada accepted the legitimacy of the Canadian nation-state as a frame of reference, thereby minimizing or ignoring the significance of internal divisions within Canadian society along regional cleavages. Another reason, of course, was the absence, at that time, of a full-fledged national project "within the bosom" of the Canadian federal state (Durham in Craig 1963 [1839], 58). To be sure, forms of Québécois nationalism existed before the end of the Duplessis era. Fernand Ouellet is perhaps one of the most outspoken defenders of the idea that its origins lie in early struggles over resources between Francophone and Anglophone populations of Lower Canada in the early nineteenth century (Ouellet 1980). Others, too, such as political scientist Léon Dion, emphasize the importance of a conservative form of French Canadian nationalism before 1960 (Dion 1975). But these forms of nationalism, oriented toward an (imagined) past of a glorious *Nouvelle France*, lacked a distinct territorial dimension and were based, above all, on religious, cultural, and linguistic distinction.

This changed in the 1960s when the Quiet Revolution emerged as the promise for a more modern, secular, and separate Québécois nation-state. During this historical period, regionalization was driven in part by the formation of new regional identities, which, in turn, were subjected to and reproduced by academic analyses. Building on longer-standing scholarly traditions, it is of little surprise that regional studies gained epistemological momentum in the 1970s as a field of research within Canadian Studies. Spawned by the national self-assertion in Québec, historians from all regions in Canada became involved in the development of regional historiographies, soon provoking a lively debate between proponents of a unified national history and those of regional narratives of belonging.

The expression "limited identities," coined by Ramsay Cook (1967) and explored further by J.M.S. Careless (1969), has served as a landmark for this debate and has added more weight to the problematic surrounding the role of regions in the Canadian nation-building process. It is certainly true that in arguing in favor of Canada's federal, sectional, and pluralist character, Québec's assertiveness, from this perspective, could be viewed in a positive way—not as a threat to Canadian national unity, but as an expression of precisely those "limited identities." However, despite this optimistic impulse, both Cook and Careless reconsidered their positions in their later work, fearing that the importance gained by regional historiographies since the 1970s ran the risk of jeopardizing Canadian unity because they overemphasized difference. Moreover, of course, this potential opening did not mean that Québec academics and politicians were necessarily engaged in this discussion. Indeed, if Québécois nationalism was limited, in the sense of self-enclosed, within Québec debates were much more multi-vocal and dynamic than this pan-Canadian view might suggest. Within these debates, different concepts and ideological orientations of nationalism and the nation—from liberal, to social-democratic, to socialist articulations (Dion 1975)—were competing for dominance.

In the 1990s, debates about regional and national identities flared up again with national historians accusing their regional pendants of contributing to the destruction of the Canadian state. In the historical context of the second referendum in 1995, regional historiographical accounts were regarded by the former as attempts to bolster provincial demands at the peril of Canadian federalism. As a consequence, some historians insisted on the need for a more holistic understanding of the "national experience," rather than its regional fragments (Harvey 2006). In these debates among historians—which, essentially, have tended to be political debates—two sets of ideas have continued to clash up to the present: on the one hand, the idea of a federal Canada searching for "reasons in common" to explain national cohesion and nation building and, on the other hand, the idea of a

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regional Canada that sees diversity as a reflection of reality which is not necessarily incompatible with the unity of the country. Unsurprisingly, given this deep schism, other debates related to national and other group identities in Canada—for instance, recent public discussions about immigration and multiculturalism—fall into a similar pattern.

The two major strands in the Canadian debate about regionalism and national identity identified above reflect different historiographical assumptions about the Canadian nation-building project. The view that regionalism poses a major threat to Canadian national identity evolved in the period from the 1960s to the 1990s. It is no coincidence, in this context, that 1960 marked the end of the Duplessis era in Québec and with it the beginning of an ascending Québécois nationalist movement. Meanwhile, prompted by the national self-assertion in Québec, Canadian intellectuals began to interrogate the pillars of Canadian identity. In 1980, Robert Bellah diagnosed the absence of a civil religion in Canada (Bellah and Hammond 1980), an argument resonating with Seymour Martin Lipset's claim that Canada lacked inspired national leaders and ideologists (1990). Canada came to be regarded, in this process of self-reflection, as a colony that had never rebelled and that lacked a national crisis—such as the Civil War in the United States—which might have helped to build an ideology of Canadianism. As a consequence, a common understanding of the "Canadian Way of Life" or of a "Canadian identity" and a "national purpose" were found lacking—whereas the most decisive impediment to the development and the propagation of a pan-Canadian identity was (somewhat tautologically) seen in the twin dangers of regionalism and biculturalism. At the same time, this pan-Canadian indulgence in self-contemplation echoed in Québécois historiography where moments of crisis and rebellion—for instance, the 1837–38 *Rebellion des Patriotes*—could be juxtaposed to the Canadian past and reinterpreted as foundational moments of a distinct Francophone identity (Bouchard 2000; Greer 1993).

By contrast, the second major strand in anglophone debates has interpreted regionalism as the main cultural and socioeconomic fact of Canadian life (Brym 1986). Proponents of this view insist that Canadians feel more attached to and more influenced by the regions in which they live than by the nation as a whole. In most cases, this has been explained by geographic realities, different historical experiences, and the distances between the different regions in Canada. A key argument of this school of thought has been that Canadian regions had been settled by different ethno-cultural groups at different times—the French in Québec, the English in Ontario, the Irish and Scottish Catholics in the Eastern Maritimes and Eastern European settlers in the Western Prairies—which has led to the emergence of significantly different regional cultures. Indeed, because of its vast expanse and the dispersion of the population, Canada does appear as a particularly useful case study for the variation of regional identities and spaces.

This does not mean that Québécois intellectuals and politicians would identify Québec as one region or province among others, of course. Rather, major debates within Québec have conceptualized Canada as a compact between two founding nations. This notion of Québec's distinct status does not stand in irresolvable contradiction to the concept of a diverse Canada. Quite the contrary, these debates have substantially informed understandings of Canadian federalism as an asymmetric federalism (Laurendeau 1970) and have equally been complicated, in more recent years, by the recognition of demands voiced by First Nations (Gagnon 2012). From this perspective, the diversity of Canada would even be the key for a successful contestation of and resistance to US–American hegemony (Bellefeuille 1990).

Whoever seeks to examine the supposed antagonism of regional and national identities in Canada needs to come to terms with the multiplicity of meanings bestowed upon the

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concept of the "region"—a multiplicity of meanings that is informed not only by different historiographical traditions, but equally by a given researcher's academic discipline. This work on definition, of course, is equally important because it raises our attention to the trap that is essentializing these regional identities and territorialities in the process of analyzing them.

Regional types and neoliberalization processes

The historian Gerald Friesen has suggested a helpful typology of ideal-typical regions which complements this understanding of the actors of "region-building"—and that serves as a methodological starting point for our argument about regionalization and Canadian nationalism. Friesen highlights three regional types, connected to three types of regional analysis: the formal region, the functional region, and the imagined region.

The *formal region* has a geo-morphological character. The Prairies, for instance, might appear to us as a separate and homogenous place (Harvey 2006). This approach, popular among geographers at the beginning of the twentieth century—an approach which is very much in the tradition of thought of Montesquieu's meteorological climate theory—has since fallen into disrepute due to its deterministic and potentially essentialist thrust.

The second type of region is the *functional region*. From this vantage point, the region is examined in its relations to other regions. For example, we can only meaningfully speak of peripheral regions if we assume there are central or metropolitan regions. The functional region implies a relationship. This is to say that "these places have been shaped as much by the coherent whole of which they form a part as by internal consistency or evident boundaries" (Friesen 1996, 166). A clearly identifiable regional space, then, is the result of historical processes enmeshed in complex dynamics of different moments, that is, economic activities, political boundaries, administrative divisions, as well as protest movements and other forms of political struggle. The Reform Party of Canada's slogan "The West Wants In" perfectly epitomizes this relational self-understanding that four Western provinces have developed in opposition to the central provinces of Ottawa and Québec (Bright 2002).

The third regional type is the *imagined region*. According to Friesen, "a place must be imagined before it can exist" (Friesen 1996, 166). Artists, writers, and intellectuals as well as historians and historiographers play a pertinent role in creating or projecting an image of the region. Indeed, it is important not to underestimate the specific role played by cultural and academic actors in the construction of regional identities. Historical analyses and the resultant discourses on regions tend to reinforce regional identities. Such discourses may also have political consequences, because the discussed concepts of regional coherence may compete or even conflict with that of national unity. One case in point is certainly Québécois nationalism, but a similar argument would apply to Scotland or Catalonia (Keating 2011; Gagnon 2012). It is also from this perspective that Eli Mandel claimed that "there is a distinctive regional prairie literature that creates a mythicized prairie world" (1973, 169).

The third type of region is fundamental in accounting for regional identity in general and regionalist movements in particular. At the same time, we need to keep in mind that these processes can neither be fully grasped from a purely culturalist nor from an economistic perspective. It should be evident, at this point, that there is interaction between the formal, the functional and the imagined region, and social scientists must consider this fact in explaining phenomena related to both regional identity and socio-political protest movements. The question then is how the permanent reconceptualization

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of the region with different functions, dimensions, and modes of interaction helps us understand how regionalization processes affect Canadian identity and national unity.

It is certainly no coincidence that debates about regionalization and national identity began to take center stage during the 1970s. In Canada, by that time, the Quiet Revolution in Québec had turned more radical. In the aftermath of the sometimes violent late 1960s—a watershed moment was the creation of the Mouvement Souveraineté-Association (MSA) by René Lévesque's in 1967, followed one year later by the founding of the Parti Québécois (PQ)—Québécois nationalism was institutionalized and began to articulate certain demands vis-à-vis the federal government, concerning the capacities and limits of the Québec state. This development has been regarded as a territorialization of Franco-Canadian nationalism after the end of the Duplessis era, which had been characterized by a rural economy, a dominant Church, and an arch-conservative government (Kolboom 2002). But the transition from what has retrospectively been named the era of "great darkness"—the *grande noirceur*—to a self-determined and self-confident (regional) state of Québec needs to also be understood, on a more abstract level, as the consequence of changes in government and in the economy—not just of some sort of "national awakening" on a cultural level. Regionalization and the rise of Québec can equally be interpreted as a function of neoliberalization processes (Peck and Tickell 2002).

As Bob Jessop and Ngai-Ling Sum have argued, globalization processes under the ideological dominance of neoliberalism—understood here in accordance with Jamie Peck as a historically specific set of agendas that are defined precisely by the unattainability of their objective to impose "frictionless market rule" (Peck 2010, 15–16)—have led to a "relativization of scales" under which the central nation-state has lost certain capacities to intervene, whereas other scales such as the urban, the regional, and the global have gained in political and economic importance. In this process, however, "no other scale of economic and political organization (whether the "global" or the "local", the "urban" or the "triadic") has acquired a similar primacy in the current "after-Fordist" period" (Jessop and Sum 2006, 281–2). The nation-state itself, rather than simply losing in power, has changed its organizing logics in a context of hypermobile capital flows (Sassen 2006). It becomes clear, from this perspective, that the attempt to affirm a Québécois national identity could gain in momentum precisely during a time where central governments in North Atlantic states began to alter their political instruments and agendas. The purposeful unbundling of central states in the name of free markets opened up new spaces for small nations and other ethno-cultural groups to assert their cultural practices and bolster their institutions.

Prima facie, the notion of relativized scales, seems to provide support for the argument that regionalization would fragment not only Canada's institutional unity but also its national identity. As we have seen, this is also one dominant reading of the Canadian situation. If the local and regional scales gain in political and economic importance, are these new forces not deemed to undermine the unity of the nation-state from the bottom up? We contradict this widespread notion and insist that in the specific context of Canada and its Federal-Provincial relations, in particular with Québec, and under the current political and economic regime, regionalization tendencies tend to stabilize Canadian unity.

Canada, a cultural nation?

Identity is not a unidimensional concept. Different theoretical as well as empirical studies have undergirded the assumption that a multilayered concept of identity is more adequate to capture the ways in which individuals imagine society and orient themselves in groups

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(Jasper and Poletta 2001; Stoecker 1995). If we look at it more closely, national identity in Canada appears to us as being defined precisely by its imprecision and by the multiple identities that this imprecision allows for its member groups. In an increasingly pluralistic society that seeks to maintain the inclusion of its constituencies in a democratic political process, this is not a weakness but a strength. As we argue in the remainder of this article, Canadian federalism can benefit from the structures of affect and the potentials for identification that regions offer to groups and individuals—all the while maintaining its institutional "neutrality" and national unity intact. Let us take a step back to explore this line of argumentation more fully.

From its inception in the 1860s, the Canadian nation-state has been constructed around regional and cultural differences that have led to conflict, negotiation, and compromise. Regions identified as Upper Provinces (Ontario and Québec), the Lower provinces (the Maritimes), and the Northwest, as well as cultural identities derived from indigenous, French and British populations, had been articulated by 1867 and were reflected in the British North America Act (e.g., Sections 91–95). Although Canada's territorial boundaries have remained more or less firmly fixed, the contours of its regions have shifted over time. In the course of its history, Canadian identity has been complemented and sometimes attenuated by strong allegiances with provinces and regions.

Generally, we can discern four levels of regional history in Canada: a trans-provincial regional history, a provincial history, an intra-provincial regional history, and a local or micro-regional history. A fifth dimension can be derived from a research field that has been established relatively recently and that focuses on the development of the city-regions of Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (e.g., Bourne 2011; Vormann 2013). These regional identity regimes, as malleable as they are, also orient and structure political behavior.

The geographically defined Prairie Provinces have recently been incorporated into a politically defined West that includes British Columbia (Bright 2002). When Newfoundland and Labrador joined Confederation in 1949, the Maritimes morphed into Atlantic Canada. The empire provinces, Ontario and Québec, differ greatly in history and culture and each operates as a region in its own right. Nonetheless, together they constitute the "imagined" region of "Central Canada" that has since the founding of the Canadian Federation dominated the development of the nation-state. The territorial north, to name the last example of a region in flux, was significantly reorganized with the creation of Nunavut in 1999.

As this admittedly brief overview of regional histories and identities in Canada shows, regions are complex and latent structures that are the subject of endless revision. As we have seen, they can be narrowly defined as a metropolis and its immediate hinterlands or as broadly defined as Atlantica, the name given to the imaginary space occupied by the New England States and the Atlantic provinces. Rather than calling into question the notion of a given region as a functional and imaginative entity, Margret Conrad (2006) argues that these transitions, oscillations, and shifts underscore the resilience of the region as a protected and playful space between the bounded nation and the unbounded individual. Conrad contends that "without a shifting regional stage on which to play out dreams and frustrations, to forge alliances, and to plot strategies, Canada's constitutional structure would almost surely burst asunder" (Conrad 2006).

Indeed, it seems as though Canadian nationalism lacks cultural reference points and identity markers—which, in turn, increases the need for such mediating regional identities. Of course, given the growing diversity of the Canadian population, this is a debate which is likely to persist. Still, as Marshall McLuhan once emphasized, "Canada is the

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only country in the world that knows how to live without an identity" (quoted in Wilson-Smith 1995, 23). We agree with this latter statement only if we restate it as follows: Canada is a country that knows how to live without *one ethnic national* identity! And, to take this argument one step further: Canadian *civic nationalism* has survived successfully not despite but because of its regional identities.

However, the civic nature of Canadian nationalism can easily turn into a self-laudatory version of an exclusive mono-nationalism that subjugates other groups under the pretext of an inclusive multiculturalism. As Alain-G. Gagnon and others have argued, identity regimes tend to be starkly uneven, despite the rhetoric of equality and civic inclusiveness, majority nationalisms often have the power to impose their political view on other ethno-cultural and national minority groups (Gagnon 2012, 80). This argument is backed by substantial empirical evidence, also when we look, more broadly, at the ways in which power struggles between the Canadian federal government and Québec have been carried out over the past decades (e.g., language policy, immigration, fiscal federalism, representation in international organizations).

This is why we need to be very clear on this point: We are not arguing that such a version of a purely civic Canadian nationalism exists in reality. Indeed, we would affirm Donald Forbes' argument that "the rationalist dream of a purely 'civic' nationality is just that, a dream" (Forbes 2007). What we are arguing instead is that regionalization is the core element of a potentially more inclusive model of social identification because it approximates the underlying ideals but unrealistic precepts of Canadian multiculturalism. In so doing, it strengthens the core values of federalism, not as a unitary state, but as the basis for an "emancipated society" which, to use Theodor W. Adorno's words, is "the realization of universality in the reconciliation of differences" (Adorno [1951] 2005, 103).

Reconciling regionalism and Canadian identity

An important aspect of Canadian identity is the distinct and sometimes unique way in which it can accommodate different identities. As Will Kymlicka (2003) has noted, questions about the nature of Canadian identity tend to focus on how "being Canadian" relates to various sub-state group identities such as Québécois, indigenous, or immigrant groups. His conceptualization of Canadian identity as having an external and an internal dimension is a helpful point of departure for understanding how regionalism and Canadian identity can be reconciled in the present political and economic conjuncture.

According to Kymlicka, the *external dimension* of national identity relates to its situation within a larger regional or geopolitical context—in the case of Canada, for example, this would refer to its being part of the "New World," part of the West or part of a global community. Each of these aspects shapes Canadian identity. Being Canadian, from such a perspective, is just one identity within a much larger set of different identities. One common element of a Canadian identity that accrues from this external dimension is Canada's secular, constitutional, liberal democracy with a market economy and a welfare state. Moreover, being part of the "New World" has led Canadians to think about their country as a young, modern society, free from the old hierarchies, cultural prejudices, and embedded traditions of the "Old World."

Within that "New World," differentiation from the United States dates back at least to the American Revolution. For much of Canadian history, it has been common to distinguish a "deferential" and "communitarian/conservative" Canadian identity from a "revolutionary" and "liberal/individualist" US–American identity (Vormann 2012; Grabb and Curtis 2005). Certainly, these different identity markers and the contrasts between the two

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countries are continually shifting and not a matter of primordial or essentialist differences, as this description might misleadingly suggest. Nonetheless, these strong nationalist discourses have been reproduced in political practice shaping political and economic imaginaries, helping to fathom the boundaries of legitimacy in political action, and adding a meaningful narrative to otherwise arbitrary political decisions.

If we look at the *internal dimension* of Canadian identity, this commonality in views about Canada's place in the world is counterbalanced by a deep disagreement about the management of diversity within Canada. According to Leslie Laczko, for instance, Canada is a statistical outlier among Western democracies in its degree of ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity (Laczko 1994). Kymlicka, by contrast, argues that the external aspects of being Canadian are largely shared across ethnic and linguistic lines *within* Canada. It is not necessary to go into more detail about Canadian national and ethnic diversity at this point, but let us keep in mind that the post-Benedict Anderson dictum of the nation as a socially constructed imagined community turns a blind eye on the empirical reality that social and political actors still operate within the rationale of a "Canadian mosaic," on the one side those groups that have been there before the British, namely the French Canadians and the indigenous populations, and on the other side the continuing inflow of people from other countries via the system of integration. What makes Canada exceptional, from this practical perspective, is the way in which its political framework accommodates this diversity. Also, Canada is distinctive in the extent to which it has not just legislated, but also constitutionalized practices of accommodation. Notwithstanding ongoing struggles over its meaning and potentials, for instance, Canada is the only country where the political principle of *multiculturalism* is enshrined into constitutional law. Accommodating diversity has a symbolic salience in Canada that is not matched in most other Western countries. Kymlicka calls this a mixed blessing (2003, 375). The self-confident affirmation of diversity at a symbolic and constitutional level has probably helped provide members of various groups in Canada with a stronger sense of security and comfort; perhaps it gives them a sense of belonging to Canada despite their cultural distinctiveness. On the other hand, the preoccupation with symbols has also heightened opposition to these changes.

What is it, then, that turns the crazy quilt of ethno-cultural diversity, as Kymlika has called it, into a coherent functioning country? How can the center hold in the face of increased regionalization? Is it possible to forge a pan-Canadian national identity—or better, is a pan-Canadian national identity at all necessary for a political discourse to evolve that reflects the social realities of pluralism?

Does Canadian federalism depend on national unity?

Let us emphasize right away that to lead this debate on the right terms is crucial—and it is nearly impossible to not take a firm normative stance in this context. We contend that a political culture of disagreement is closer to the democratic ideal than one of unitarist consent. In recent years, some authors have criticized the notion that assimilation into a monistic national framework is something political actors should strive for. Alain-G. Gagnon, Daiva Stasiuli, and Yameen Abu-Laban, for instance, claim that the politics of multiculturalism have tended to ethnicize political relationships in Canada, thereby discouraging an integrative (not integrationist!) political discourse (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992; Gagnon 2012). We agree with these authors in their assertion that pluralism and a multiplicity of political voices is a virtue, not a vice.

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Nonetheless, of course, many commentators in Canada insist on the need for a strong sense of identification with Canada as a political community, which, in order to persist, has to be stronger than centrifugal forces of sub-group or regional identities or the forces of transnationalism and globalization. And we do find a long history and changes in the ways in which the Canadian central government has tried to construct such a common national identity (Bashevkin 1991; Chennells 2001). It ranges from Canada as an outpost of British Culture to the recent images of the Canadian jewel that can be found on official government publications and that appropriate notions of diversity and multiculturalism in Canada. What we can also witness throughout the second half of the twentieth century, as a counter-movement to Québécois nationalism in particular, are the attempts to strengthen Canadian identity by symbolic tokens such as the Canadian flag and the Canadian national anthem, and the incorporation of a Charter of Rights and Freedoms into the Canadian constitutional framework.

These attempts at redefining Canadian identity to accommodate internal diversity have had mixed results. In the Rest of Canada, there seems to be no alienation from the British–Canadian element. Canadian nation-building strategies seem to have been fruitful in the sense that many Canadians remain steadfastly patriotic and their attachment to Canada has actually grown since the 1960s. Moreover, within immigrant groups, a pan-Canadian identity is getting more dominant. Economic reasoning certainly plays an important role here, but different studies show that many high-skilled workers chose to come to Canada because it was and is seen as a more welcoming country for immigrants than others, not because of its economy (e.g., Docquier and Marfouk 2004). Finally, immigrants tend to also adopt the English language that they often see as a *lingua franca* that offers them the possibility of social upward mobility (Gagnon 2012).

On the other side, however, the construction of a pan-Canadian identity among Québécers seems to have failed. In the 1960s and 1970s, the number of Québécers who identified themselves as "Canadian" rather than "Québécois" in surveys and opinion polls steadily dropped (McRoberts 1997, 2). The referendums of 1980 and 1995, even though they did not succeed, are further proof for this failure. At the turn of the twenty-first century, only about one-fifth of all Québécers called themselves federalists (Mendelsohn, Parkin, and Pinard 2005).[3] This failure has led to discussions about other, non-cultural sources of a pan-Canadian identity such as shared constitutional values that might, nonetheless, provide the smallest common denominator for a unified national identity. The basic argument has been that as long as all Canadians share a commitment to the basic political values enshrined in the Canadian constitution, they should identify with Canada as a country (Shabani et al. 2002).

Will Kymlicka and other social scientists and public commentators disagree with this notion of a constitutional pan-Canadian identity: "In the past 40 years, we have seen a clear convergence between English and French on basic political values, such that political values are virtually identical in the two communities," argues Kymlicka—yet, at the same time, less and less Québécers define themselves as Canadians (Kymlicka 2003, 378). Given these empirical contradictions, congruence between politico-constitutional accordance and group identities seems unlikely—even more so because many would actually disagree that the constitutional path can hold what some think it promises (e.g., Gagnon 2012). The fundamental question that should rather be posed, then, is whether such a focus on constructing a strong sense of pan-Canadian identity among all citizens is at all necessary (Kymlicka 2003, 379).

If we look at the history of the Canadian state that has now been rather stable—despite abovementioned crises—for over 140 years, a strong argument can be made that the basic

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functioning of Canadian federalism has not been adversely affected by the gradual decline in Canadian identity among Québécers or other identity groups. According to the UN Development Index—and many other sources—Canada outperforms many other western democracies. A strong Canadian identity does not seem to be a precondition for citizens to cooperate in the functioning of pan-Canadian institutions. Even though in 2012 most Québécois still identified more with their own province than with the federal state, over 7 out of 10 Canadians were satisfied with the country's system of government. Even in Québec 62 percent of all respondents were "somewhat" or "very satisfied" with the federal system (see Environics Institute 2012, 5). What seems to be more important for Canadians is whether these institutions are trustworthy, that is, if they operate according to certain standards of the rule of law, human and minority rights, democratic accountability, constitutional safeguards—and if they can help in producing economic well-being.

According to Kymlicka, even Québec nationalists who do not feel strongly for Canadian identity acknowledge the fact that Francophones are generally treated fairly in federal decisions about government contracts, civil service hirings, and public service delivery (2003, 380). If a pan-Canadian identity does not seem to be essential to most Canadians—if even Québécois nationalists can find a common ground, however limited, with Canadian federalism—regionalization, as a result of changes in the economy and political organization, can help both to maintain an active political debate among plural actors and to provide a sense of recognition and identity for groups and individuals.

In order to make this final point, it is important to realize that a nation is more than an imagined community. Although debates on nationalism since Benedict Anderson's seminal book (1983) have tended to emphasize the constructed nature of nationalism, what this theoretical perspective loses sight of is that nations and nationalism still matter. Nationalism does not disintegrate upon deconstruction—neither do other group identities, such as urban or regional identities.

If, on a theoretical level, nations need to be understood as socially constructed, we must not forget that these collective identities still orient and rationalize social behavior in empirical reality. To use Durkheim's famous dictum, we need to understand nations as a *social fact*. Nations matter because they provide a social infrastructure for individuals to understand their place in the world and go on in it. As Craig Calhoun has argued, nationalism also binds individuals to the state in that it helps them to give meaning to society and their place in it (Calhoun 2007). Indeed, despite a historical tendency for ethnic forms of nationalism to be exclusive and to repress groups and individuals, nationalism's history of emancipation should not be completely ignored in academic debates. Nationalism should not simply be brushed away as a residue of the nineteenth century that we have long overcome.

At the same time, however, nationalism—in its most civic and multicultural guises—does favor certain groups of people over others. In the case of Canada, despite certain gestures of openness—think, for instance, of Stephen Harper's motion to acknowledge Québec as a nation in 2006—politicians in Québec and Ottawa have stuck to the politics of the day rather than addressing more fundamental questions of how to share political competencies and to thereby foster a federal political culture worthy of that name (Gagnon 2012, 82).

The decisive point for a functioning democracy, then, would not be to do away with nationalism, as though such a thing was at all possible, but to constantly question and critique existing arrangements of power between groups in a given social context. In other words, if civic nationalism in Canada is not to slide into a self-righteous unitarism and a monistic model of social integration and if, at the same time, it wants to provide structures

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of affect and identification for its citizens, the emergence of a truly democratic political discourse depends on a multiplicity of voices and structures of belonging. Regionalism, in its various shapes and forms, its shifting landscapes and narratives, provides exactly such a socially productive multivocality. Viewed from this perspective, regionalization might actually save Canadian federalism and its national unity from itself.

Political scientist Alain-G. Gagnon has suggested a procedural framework in order to attain such a new federal culture which could, indeed, build on the merits of regionalization. Québec would have a key role to play in such a project. As Gagnon argues, Canadian federalism would benefit if it recognized those institutional elements as an informal constitution that have already emerged over the past decades—such as the *Charter of the French Language* and the *Québec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*—and that provide common points of reference for the government of Québec, its political actors and its civil society. This informal constitution, which would provide just one way among others to attain the ideal of a functioning Canadian federalism, would be based on different citizenship and language regimes so as to both accommodate the diversity of society and benefit from it rather than try to assimilate it (Gagnon 2012, Chap. 3).

Of course, the fluidity of regional identity regimes cannot completely do away with the irresolvable tensions that exist between common rights and public goods on the one hand and individual rights and freedoms on the other. However, as we have argued, the always incomplete and malleable character of regional political regimes provides both possibilities to sustain an open political discourse that reflects social diversity and prevents the erosion of political culture in a mono-nationalistic framework. In such a way, regionalization tendencies can be regarded not as a threat to federalism but as its guarantor.

Conclusion

Regionalization has for a long time been seen as the essential danger for Canadian federalism and national unity. If we take this perspective, the stability of Canadian federalism in the second half of the twentieth century poses a conundrum, given increased regionalization tendencies under neoliberal globalization and their concurrence with a heightened stability of Canadian federal institutions. We have argued that Canadian federalism has become more stable not despite but because of the increased strength of regionalization. The reason for this is that regionalism fulfills a double function for Canadian federalism. On the one hand, it provides groups and individuals with a sense of belonging and orientation in an otherwise purely civic institutional framework. This window of opportunity is historically specific; a majority of Canadians have become indifferent toward a pan-Canadian national identity because of its economic and political success. On the other hand, the co-existence of multiple regional identities and political voices prevents Canadian civic nationalism from slipping into mononational exclusivity, because they constantly put existing power arrangements into question.

Despite longstanding fears of fragmentation, as long as the Canadian federal framework allows different regional and national groups to contest one another and to debate political and economic issues, pan-Canadian institutions can serve as forums for democratic dissent rather than as integration machines. If, however, Canadian civic nationalism emerges as a monolithic Jacobinic in disguise, the politics of multiculturalism will function as a force of fragmentation.

In this sense, Canada might also serve as a model for other multinational and ethnoculturally diverse political entities to accommodate difference. In a similar way—and

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perhaps more importantly in the face of a global financial crisis than ever before—building a stronger European community would have to build on both the trust in political institutions and strong regional, subnational identities and other cultural identities. An interesting distinction in the European case is that there, national communities would need to be re-imagined as regional entities within the larger framework of a European civic nationalism. In Canada, by contrast, the task for a functioning federalist political culture is to reimagine its civic nationalism as a forum for the political debate of regional and other ethno-cultural groups.

Notes

1. Nationalism is an ideology, a system of ideas that orients and rationalizes the social process of nation-building and that legitimizes its outcome (Calhoun 2007). The ideological system can be more or less theoretically elaborate, more or less grounded on historical evidence—real or fictitious—and more or less rich in symbolic and ritualistic expression. Nationalism, according to Raymond Breton, is "a component of the process whereby a particular kind of socio-political entity is constructed, maintained, expanded or otherwise transformed" (Breton 2005, 104). The nation-building process involves, on the one hand, the acquisition of control over resources that tend to be territorially based. This is the instrumental dimension of society building. On the other hand, the construction of a community or society also entails the definition of a collective identity, its content, and the forms through which it is represented. This is the cultural-symbolic dimension of social formations. Both components are distinct, but closely interrelated (Vormann, forthcoming). Even though nation-building processes and related nationalistic ideologies usually contain both dimension—the instrumental and the cultural-symbolic—the emphasis placed on them can vary considerably. Some forms of nationalism are based primarily, and even exclusively, on economic and political considerations, whereas the content of others refers mainly to values, customs, and traditions. On the spectrum between these polar extremes, it is possible to analyze the evolution of collectivities in terms of two ideal-typical forms of nationalism. In the first type, the society and institutions that are constructed are seen as founded on cultural unity. The basis of inclusion and exclusion is ethnic, and therefore, the type may be called *ethnic* or *cultural nationalism*. The second type emphasizes the instrumental dimension of societal institutions. Societies are constructed in order to acquire control over resources, to solve problems, and to defend members against enemies. The basis for inclusion and exclusion is civic—it is transmitted on the basis of legally established criteria and procedures. This type of nationalism is called *civic nationalism*.
2. While this generalization certainly would not stand the test of a more nuanced account of historiographical tendencies, we deem it safe to argue that this urge for unification was a dominant strand of Canadian historiography that was even bolstered by attempts to undermine its strength. This holds true for Québécois forms of melancholical nationalism (Maclure 2004) as much as it does for tendencies of anti-national multiculturalism (Vormann and Kolboom 2011, 22).
3. However, here too, collective identities are multi-dimensional. In the same survey, another 22 percent called themselves both federalist and sovereignists and another 25 percent believed to be neither (Mendelsohn, Parkin, and Pinard 2005).

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