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“Social Cohesion and Cultural Plurality”

*Translated from French
by Robert F. Barsky and Patricia Foxen*

Un document produit en version numérique par Jean-Marie Tremblay, bénévole,
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Abstract / Résumé

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Abstract : The notion of social cohesion implies the definition of a modern society as inclusive and founded upon a sense of communality and responsibility of its members towards each other. It therefore insists on a necessary participation to public affairs, to the labor force, to communities of life, and on a sense of societal belonging to enhance the solidarity and trust between members of a society. We discuss these ideas as well as their implications for the ethnic minorities in Canada. We try to show how the notion of social cohesion rests upon a deficient definition of the concepts of democratization, social capital, and membership to a society. We point its omission of the structural reproduction and production of inequalities, its deny of legitimacy to protests aiming at a change of power relations, its misinterpretation of the concept of social capital, and its injunction to develop a sense of societal belonging.

Résumé : La notion de cohésion sociale renvoie à une définition de la société moderne comme intégrée and basée sur une communalité entre ses membres et sur leur responsabilité sociale. Elle insiste sur la

nécessaire participation des individus aux affaires publiques, au marché du travail, à une communauté de vie, et sur leur développement d'un sens d'appartenance sociétale, autant de conditions pour accroître confiance et solidarité entre eux. Cet article discute ces différentes idées et leurs implications pour les minorités ethniques et nationales, notamment dans le cas canadien. Il montre comment la notion de cohésion sociale repose sur une conception déficiente de la démocratie, du capital social et du sens d'appartenance à une société en omettant les fondements structurels de la production et de la reproduction des inégalités et le rôle des contestations des relations de pouvoir, en limitant le sens du concept de capital social et en exigeant une allégeance à l'État et le partage de valeurs culturelles.

Introduction:

The themes of the social cohesion discourses

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The notion of social cohesion conveys the sense of modern society as an integrated and inclusive entity, a community where individualistic interests and social confrontations constitute abnormal, negative situations. Three main processes are to promote inclusion and social peace, put forth as standards :

1. Participation of all persons in political decisions or democratization, notably local, to face the faults of the representative democracy and the State bureaucracy ;
2. Reactivation of social interactions based on trust and reciprocity between members of a society ;

3. Enhancement of the ideas of common good, sharing of values, feelings of commonality and of social solidarity amongst members of a society ;

These processes have to allow for a peaceful negotiation between divergent interests, a fair redistribution of wealth, and the elimination of anomalous situations or, to use contemporary idiom, exclusion, factors which are considered to lie at the base of social cohesion. They have to limit, if not stop, the downward spiral of contemporary societies into multiple communities and atomized individuals.

We will examine these three themes of the government discourses on social cohesion and will see how they put an emphasis on individual behaviours to explain inequalities and to promote solutions to so-called social problems, reduce democratization to participation to public management, and propose a definition of societal belonging founded on an allegiance to the State and illdefined majority values. These definitions have implications for all actors, but we will look more specifically to their implications for ethnic and national minorities in Canada.

Beginning in the 1990s these three themes were advocated by the OECD States.¹ They argue about the loss of social cohesion under the influence of multiple factors created or increased by the globalization² of markets and of production. They speak about new requirements of labour market (higher qualifications and greater flexibility of the workforce), a rise in socioeconomic inequalities and social polari-

¹ Berger, 1998 ; Commissariat, 1997 ; OCDE, 1997, 2001 : Gouvernement du Canada, Patrimoine canadien, 1996 ; House of Commons of Canada, 1991, 1994 ; Senate of Canada. 1993 : Conseil privé, Réseau de recherche sur la cohésion sociale, 1998 ; Nasse, 1992 : Senate of Australia. 1991 : Commission on Citizenship, 1990 (Helly, 1999)

² Initiated by the renunciation of the gold standard by the US in 1971, and by its measures of liberalization of capital and of markets to face the lowering of returns.

zation, and change of values and ways of life.³ This argumentation ignores the role that States have played in the evolution of these factors for thirty years.⁴

1. Social Inequalities and Democratization

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One question is raised through the political debates about the loss of social cohesion in the contemporary societies : how to mobilize individuals in favour of economic, social and cultural mutations inferred by globalization ? In other words, how people will acquire sufficient awareness of their commonality to participate in these transformations, and to feel both responsible for, and engaged by them ? Two answers are given to these questions : individuals must feel responsible towards society and their social failures ; new partnership between civil society and the State must be developed to solve so-called social problems. We will present some of the consequences of these answers.

Given the social inequalities and the conflicts of interests between social categories, according to their position in the economic and po-

³ As the rise of individualism given the spread of the ideology of individual rights since the 60's ; a decline in the value of citizenship and political involvement ; the demise of official nationalism on account of non-European immigration since the 1970s ; and the growing differentiation of ways of living.

⁴ Marchand, 1992 ; Rigaudiat, 1993 ; Laville, 1994 ; Rifkin, 1995 ; Bairoch, 1996 ; Boyer and Drache, 1996 ; Cohen, 1996 ; Sassen, 1996 ; Krugman, 1998 ; Castells, 1998, volume 1. Some authors insist upon the absence of policies in the face of technological and demographic changes. Others insist upon the strengthening of globalisation by the States through the constitution of economic unions (European Union, ALENA, Mercosur, ASEAN), and their participation to international economic regulation institutions such as the World Bank, the IMF, and international litigation tribunals.

litical relations of power, it would seem to imply the consideration of structural and sociological and not of attitudinal and psychological foundations of inequalities. If not, all attempts at fomenting common values and a sense of commonality seem pointless. Nevertheless, two messages are transmitted to recreate social cohesion.

Individual factors (socialization, at home or at school, integration into closed social circles), or else an egoistic individualism, explain either poor behaviour (dropping-out, registration in welfare, crime, urban violence), or excessive judicial pleas for particular rights. This insistence upon individual factors builds the image, which is sometimes criticized ⁵, of a society made up of a central locus of successful individuals and a margin of failures. On the other hand, the image of a society stratified by structural inequalities is nonexistent, and new measures of social justice and equity are considered unrealistic given the limited financial means of the State. A responsibility for social integration, (esp. socioeconomic) is demanded of individuals who are in the grips of unemployment, the uncertainty of the job market, family problems, learning deficiencies, and so forth.

This being the case, current governments of OECD countries, mainly comprised of social democrats, envisage social inequalities by defining populations at risk, those considered unfit of an economic and social performance without social assistance. They do not aim at reducing the structural causes of the risks incurred by these populations, but rather at convincing them to change their behavior and become more qualified. This new spirit is embodied by the programs of employability adopted during 1990's in number of countries (White, 2001a), including, for example, programs for young unemployed persons (Quebec, France, Great Britain, as well as certain Italian municipalities) and the workfare programs adopted in the United States (Wisconsin, Minnesota, Connecticut).

⁵ Consultations by the Federal government : Policy Research Initiative, Social Cohesion Network, 2001.

A second unavoidable message conveyed in these discourses concerns the reform of public policies for enhancing democratization. This democratization is conceived as a partnership between public and private actors (social groups, individuals, NGOs, etc.) which will empower the citizens. It is deemed imperative in the name of everyone's responsibility ⁶ towards society, and of an increased efficiency of public policies when they take in account local, category-specific, and individual realities. It is also defended in the name of an active and responsible citizenship, one that does not consist simply of benefiting from fundamental liberties, labour laws, and of obeying laws and paying taxes, but also of respecting each one's collective social obligations (Helly, 1999, 2000c). This message is addressed especially to people who suffer from social inequalities, but also to big companies (cf. environmental protection, vocational training, "plans sociaux" against lays-off in France in 2001, refused afterwards by the Conseil constitutionnel). The idea of an active, responsible citizenship was also to explain a diminution on the part of public authorities of some of their social responsibilities in favor of private actors, generally NGOs, both in Canada and abroad. ⁷

The NGO sector said to represent "communities" was then set up as an adjuvant for public action under the aegis of the State. For ex-

⁶ Followed by academic debates on the matter (Heater, 1990 ; Turner, 1990 ; Rustin, 1991 ; Kymlicka, 1992, 2000 ; Kymlicka and Norman, 1994 ; Dagger, 1997 ; Janoski, 1998) and by definitions of citizenship other than the classical liberal one, that is juridical-political and social citizenship. There is talk of urban, local, residential, participative, corporative, and global citizenship.

⁷ Particularly in poor areas, more often inhabited by immigrants and minorities : London (Power, 1997), *Politique de la Ville* (France). US *Community Development Financial Institution*. According to the latter, since 1992, the federal State, individuals, private foundations and banks offer capital to local non-profit organizations, mostly churches, whose members don't have access to bank loans or other financial services. The State loans were at very low interest rates and amounted to \$382 million dollars in four years. The private sector added 2\$ billion. Between 1992-1996, the program allowed 350 organizations access to \$3 billion dollars to manage social programs in poor areas.

ample, in Canada, the ethnic NGO, whatever the ethno-cultural origin of their members, saw their public subsidies subject to new criteria and controls. The specific clientele which they have to serve, the objectives of their action, and the results which they have to attain, are nowadays defined by public authorities, and the NGO are transformed into agencies subcontracting state and municipal services for specific populations. The NGO sector, as a societal actor, is nevertheless supposed to represent interests and demands of groups, such as ethnic minorities, recipients of social allowances, single-parent families, residents of a district, etc., and is supposed to answer the needs defined by these groups, and not by a public authority.

In their new role, the NGOs can still re-appropriate issues related to the populations they represent, but can they henceforth pass on the demands and needs of these populations to public authorities ? Doesn't their new financial and political status expose them to consider the citizens as simple services users, rather than as partners involved in decision-making for issues which concern them (Germain, Morin and Sénécal, 2001 ; White, 2001b) ? Doesn't their new status infer a search for cooperation rather than confrontation, and forced NGO leaders to pay attention to the continuity of their public financing ?

At best, we find ourselves to face an ambivalent dynamic, a form of "conflicting collaboration." Either the NGO either don't want to, or cannot, become entirely dependent upon political authorities and risk financial loss (Germain *et al*, idem), either they are induced to ignore contest emanating from civil society. Besides, given the importance of the administrative management tasks required by this new role for the NGO sector, its bureaucratization is bound to follow. This evolution is justified in the name of an effective and rational use of public money. From then on, a significant fraction of the civil society's autonomy seems either reduced, or susceptible to State control, while civil society should remain a source of oppositions and critics, and the State does not appear to be the agent for a more active citizens' participation

in decisions concerning them, but rather as the agent for an economic definition of the common good.

The conception of the "political" (Mouffe, 1993) proposed by this definition of democratization is that of a more efficient division of power through increased participation of individuals in the management of social deficits, but not in decisions relating to structural reforms which might reduce these deficits. Nevertheless, to speak of a more egalitarian community seems disingenuous and ineffective, as long as the structural foundations of the social and political inequalities are not addressed. And the denial of equality to the exercise of power would not seem to be resolved by an 'empowerment' of citizens under the aegis of the State.

As Rancikre (1995) or Walzer (1984) wrote, such democratization is simply born of the desire to manage social tensions. It is not a political one, that is to say, rooted in the right of every citizen to participate in all political decisions and to transform power relations. In the history of modern democracies, the reproduction of inequality has been permanent and this process more than described. We know that the principle of equality has been respected only after political struggles, often violent, as those who don't possess wealth, power and influence but only freedom and equality, find themselves not only deprived but also erased from the democratic scene. A number of authors even consider that citizenship, the principle that lies at the heart of democracies, is essentially discriminatory (Okin, 1979 ; Pateman, 1988 ; Wallerstein, 1995).

Politics is always based on disputes about the question of the equality, and a political act can be only an act "of rupture of the logic of domination, according to which some have the right to govern" (Rancikre, 1995 : 85 ; our translation). In other words, politics exists only when a group demonstrates the injustice that it suffers, and places itself in a position of equality with those who are not affected by this injustice. Such were the case, when women questioned

whether domestic work or maternity were private or social affairs, when Black Americans declared themselves full citizens, or when workers, from the 19th century onwards, showed how they were absent from the definition of what was otherwise called the "common good" or "national interest." Such is the case today when movements contesting globalization hamper the holding of the OMC forums. And this could be the case if unemployed persons and welfare recipients rise up to contest their diminished social benefits. and the failure of programs supposed to allow them to get back, permanently, into the labour force.

But, governmental discourses and programs relative to social cohesion don't aim at recognizing social protests, or promoting a more egalitarian sharing of power, but rather at creating a successful and mobile workforce ⁸, as well as at reducing the costs of social programs. Individualization of factors deemed at the roots of a poor socioeconomic insertion, and demands for responsible collaboration to the State measures become the means to fulfill these objectives.

2. Social Capital

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The notion of social cohesion is also based on the ideas of a necessary and strong social participation and involvement in networks, communities of life or organizations, and of a sense of trust and of solidarity, which would facilitate cooperation between citizens, help to reduce problems such as poverty, crime, increase political participation and allow for a better government. The expression of social

⁸ For example, these lines in an OECD report (2001) : "does economic progress damage the ties that hold societies together ? And are those ties essential to the acquisition of skills and attitudes that help the economy to flourish ?"

capital is used to explain this proposition, as much by international (World Bank), and national and local authorities.

We will look at the interpretation of the concept of social capital by public discourses on social cohesion, and at the way they instrument it to enhance individual social deficiencies or failures.

2.1. Trust, Reciprocity and Cooperation

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The sociological concept of social capital aims to account for the foundations of collective action, and of cooperation among anonymous individuals (Axelrod, 1984 ; Coleman, 1990). It is defined as an attitude of trust which a person develops towards others who are not familiar to her, and which leads her to establish relations of reciprocity, collaboration, and social cooperation (Levi, 1996 ; Boix and Posner, 1998 ; Newton, 1997 ⁹). It is not synonymous of social participation but used as such to promote the notion of social cohesion.

The literature on social capital raised, among others, two questions : Is trust a central factor of cooperation among anonymous individuals ? How does an individual acquire an attitude of trust ?

When one speaks about cooperation within groups producing a collective good, as associations of parents, residents, unemployed, environmentalists, etc., one has to think of the figure of the free rider. The free rider is the person who knows she will enjoy advantages obtained by a group, even if she is not a member. It follows that in such cases of cooperation, an attitude of trust could facilitate the assembly of persons defending a same interest, but it does not found it. The free

⁹ Newton describes the different academic definitions of social capital.

rider don't show any of these attitudes and sees his interest defended. It also follows that the defense of interest is not the primary factor of cooperation. In the case of cooperation which produces a private good (leisure clubs, churches, etc.), the figure of the free rider has no place ; but it is not trust which motivates individuals to meet others, but, rather, the search for personal satisfaction. Trust as a foundation of cooperation remains a question. As for the reverse affirmation that cooperation or social participation produce mechanically trust, it seems naive.

Concerning the origin of social capital defined as an attitude of faith in the possible reciprocity of others, and as the capacity for appreciating such a reciprocity, it is considered as a relational ability acquired by primary socialization. And Hardin (1993) argues that this ability could be acquired by secondary socialization. Indeed, the nature of known or perceived, past and present, social relations could play a role, because social relations are not developed by abstract individuals, without either memories or interests. Therefore, if one does not see how a government could effectively act to change processes of primary socialization which lead to an attitude of distrust towards strangers, one can see how social experiences can be affected by State interventions.

Nevertheless, political debates on social cohesion and 'social capital' are not taking into account these questions and conclusions. We will give some examples.

It is advanced that good government and strong individual 'social capital' (social participation) are bound, because if individuals trust themselves, they will cooperate and watch and sanction public policies, and better governmental management would be assured. First question : how cooperation would appear and be strengthened ? Second question : how could increased cooperation within society engender good government, in terms of efficiency, cost and representativeness ? Or in Levi's terms (1996 : 49), how can sufficient interpersonal

trust allow citizens to organize, and then effectively penalize governments that are not performing well ? Is not it necessary to consider the factors that lead to the lack of coalition and cooperation ? One factor frequently invoked in governments discourses is the lack of individual concern for the political and public life. In that case, sociological conditions seem to be active. Don't political institutions themselves (periodical elections, representative democracy), as well as media coverage, the actions of politicians, and other factors produce this lack ? Levi (1996) reminded us that "today, politicians are more likely to target particular populations, than to encourage wide-scale organization. The effect is a decline in turnout and political membership."

According to Putnam (Putnam et al., 1973) in his study on the foundations of a good government in Italy, heavy participation in associations and clubs explains the more advanced economic development and the sense of the egalitarianism amongst the populations in Northern Italy. But Putnam never explained this difference of participation, except in general cultural terms. Could it not be due to the historical political connections between the Northern and Southern regions of Italy (Boix and Posner, 1998 : 687 ; Sabetti, 2000) ? A number of Italians in Mezzogiorno have a negative perception of their influence on and participation to power, which is anchored in an interpretation of their historical relations with the Northern regions.

Another related question : has social cooperation always a positive social impact ? How can one believe that social cooperation could not be the work of anti-democratic factions, and individuals who have no investment in general concern ? As regards to propositions that postulate a civic function for active, associative or political participation, one can object that associations or local assemblies of people are not necessarily schools of civil virtue. They could be schools of conformity, authoritarianism and intolerance, places of retreat for the community, or places where coalitions of selfish interests prevail.

According to an idea upheld since the 1980's by American political analysts (Helly, 2000a), membership and active participation in associations (leisure activities, cultural, religious, charitable, etc.) (Walzer, 1974, 1980, 1984), or political activities, especially local assemblies (Barber, 1984), should favor mutual trust, a sense of responsibility, and a vision of the common good, an idea also illustrated by Putnam (Putnam *et al.*, 1973 ; Putnam, 2000). According to Barber, local assemblies, as well as national forums, would establish a "strong democracy" or "participatory democracy," and a sense of nonconsensual, non-conformist, but friendly community, because it would be built on conflict and dispute. They would transform solitary individuals into responsible citizens who agree to discuss their discords, thus making them aware of the superiority of collective questioning about individual preoccupations.¹⁰ "But Walzer (1992 : 106-107) and Barber (1984 : 227) hold to the principle of the respect for individual freedoms, and the need for State intervention to reform associations or assemblies too authoritarian or inegalitarian. Participation which is deemed beneficial to the common good would imply a democratic correction by the State.

How would cooperation between unequal parties be assured ? Can it be through the support of the values of equality, charity, and humanism by the more affluent social categories ? Modern history seems once again to say that conflict, or the need for concessions, were the factors that induced the application of more egalitarian measures, of which the State was the agent.

Individuals with power and individuals without power can indeed regroup on the basis of a common objective (the pleasure found in leisure, the defense of particular interests, similarity of customs or values). How can one change scale, and think that such a coalition

¹⁰ Children, criminals who abandoned the principal of political discussion, and immigrants who don't have the right to vote and must acquire the desire to participate are excluded (Barber, 1984 : 228).

would apply to a common social objective and would tend to defend more general interests ? Increased cooperation between citizens could, on the contrary, give rise to a multiplication of lobby groups.

Given the central value of equality in the discourse of democracy, the cooperation between unequal parties seems to be based on the fact that expectations of reciprocity are upheld. The reduction of social inequalities by public policies seems to be a more real source of better social relations between citizens than any increased cooperation among them. State measures and State programs aimed at a real equality, a symbolic recognition of all persons, as well as an effective participation in political decisions, are all at issue. As regards to ethnic minorities, one thinks of interventions which could transform their social experiences, or their perception of the social experiences of fellow citizens. One can mention credible measures to fight against discrimination, large programs of affirmative action in the private and public sectors, more open policies of immigration, programs of linguistic insertion, fair validation of foreign diplomas and working experiences.

Finally, a last question : how to change well-entrenched perceptions of non-cooperation ? Levi (1996 : 48) reminds us that a number of Canadian French speakers consider that whatever promises the federal government make, it will not come through. Would increased social cooperation of these French speakers change this perception ? One could easily think the opposite.

Neither Putnam, nor Fukuyama (1995) offers answers to the abovementioned questions ; solutions, for them, begin with increased cooperation within civil society. To explain the decline of associative participation that he observes in the United States ¹¹, Putnam (1995, 1996, 1999) postulates at the same time a lack of political will, and the negative impact of new behavior and lifestyles, notably the role

¹¹ A highly contested idea : Ladd, 1996. Paxton, 1999 : Forse, 2001

that television plays in society. According to him, State grants for associations, the promotion of mutual aid, and the creation of a new body of social services agents would enhance cooperation. The stakes in debates about social capital, good government, and social cohesion seem to be about the role of the State.

2.2. 'Social Capital', Clusters or Networks of Social Relations

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The discourses on social cohesion ignore other problems or limits of cooperation when they speak of 'social capital' as social participation and assume that clusters or networks of social relations are useful for the social insertion of a person (such as access to employment, assistance during critical events, economic performance, health, and success). According to this affirmation, the notion of 'connectedness' is created as an indicator for the appearance of a sense of the common good or, at least, of social responsibility. A value is ascribed to multiple individual inscriptions in clusters and networks, because the stronger one's cooperation, the stronger his protection against risks.

Inquiries were undertaken to know why in poor districts, notably American black ghettos, the rates of delinquency were lower. According to one very publicized study (Sampson, Earls, and Raudensbusch, 1997), it was found that an informal social control was exercised by the residents (surveillance of streets, mutual aid) because of reliable relations which they had built among them, without us knowing how these relations were established.¹² The other example often given re-

¹² Sample of around 8 000 persons living in poor areas of Chicago, and asked about their perception of collaboration with their neighbors. Example of questions asked. Is it very likely that your neighbors will intervene if your children hang up in the street ?

garding the efficiency of social insertion in a network is that healthy persons have more friends. Certainly, but what does this mean sociologically, and what if a government wants to intervene to assure better health for the population ? A report of the OECD (2001) explains in that case :

Human capital - skills and knowledge- and social capital -networks - and shared values that encourage social co-operation are closely linked to each other and to well being. Better education goes with better health : more educated people smoke less, take more exercise and are less likely to be overweight (people take 17 minutes more exercise a week for each extra year of schooling). Education seems to go with greater happiness, although social ties and good health are even more important. These, too, are connected : old people without friends or relatives appear to have a higher risk of developing dementia or Alzheimer's disease. ... Higher education goes with more volunteering and social participation and social and civic involvement appears to be stable or rising in most OCDE countries.

A question must be asked : How does an individual acquire the ability to built a network or a cluster of social relations ? Clear answers are given by the literature (Charbonneau and Turcotte, 2002). This capacity is a form of knowledge, and a personal disposition acquired through primary socialization (Jones 1985 ; Montgomery *et al.*, 1991 ; Nurmi *et al.*, 1997). Besides, the perception of having a network has an influence as great, if not greater, than the objective reality of the network (Cutrona, 1986). In these conditions, any measure aimed at multiplying the social relations of an individual in view of his better insertion into the labour force is of little value.

Another conclusion drawn by Forst (2001) following a review of the literature on the subject : social capital, understood as insertion into networks, is redundant of the social origin. Following works by Granovetter (1982) on "weak links", that is links with persons not closed to a person, Lin (1982) showed that weak links provide access to better jobs. He proposed an explanation : weak links connect circles and persons of different social status, while strong links are weaved among individuals of same environment and status. The first, unlike

the second, can modify a hierarchical structure and increase the social status of a person. Forsé (2001 : 196) raises a question : if social participation has an effect on the level of social status attained, does it constitute a resource in itself, or does it double the effects of the social origin' ! An INSEE inquiry (1998), which included a question about the network used to search for a job, suggested an answer. 36.4% of the 10.901 referees of any age resort to personal ways (sending a CV, classified advertisements), 18.1% to employment agencies, 17.5% called on weak links (colleagues, neighbors, friends, etc.), 5.5% on kinship and 4.3% turned to school. It flows from the analysis that persons from underprivileged environments and showing low level of schooling resort mainly to kinship, and obtain lesser jobs. Their appeal to weak links is not more effective. In these conditions, if a government seeks more equality and social and economic performance, then it should increase human resources, schooling and continuing education, and not aim for a growth in individual social capital.

3. Common Values and Societal Belonging

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To stir up a sense of commonality and societal belonging is another major subject of discourses regarding social cohesion. On this point, the Canadian government, more than other OECD States, emphasized the need for loyalty to the State, a sense of societal belonging, and a sharing of common values. The difficulty that the federal government has had historically to build an image of Canadian unity and a Canadian nationalism explains this fact (Helly, 2000,b,d). Given this emphasis on societal belonging by the Canadian governments since the 1990's, we will describe it more extensively and see its implications for ethnic and national minorities.

A societal link in contemporary democratic societies can take one or several of four main forms (Helly and Van Schendel, 2001) :

- A. A juridical-political link, or citizen link. Citizenship or enjoyment of political equality and fundamental liberties was considered for a long time THE societal link in a modern democratic system. According to liberal and republican philosophical theories, to be a part of a society it is to participate in the State, the representative authority in matters of common good, and in the protection of equality, political rights and liberties. So every State is appreciated differently according to the peculiarities of its political and legal system (in Canada, this includes the parliamentary and federal systems, the Charter of rights and liberties, and the decisions of the Supreme Court).

- B. A civil link, that is, the appreciation for the nature of social relations and the quality of life within society. A number of aspects which support this link are codified by State and legislative action, but only partly, because they depend on attitudes and on behavior shaped by the history, mentalities, and power relations between cultural groups, linguistic groups, and social categories. So all OECD States adopted anti-discriminatory legislation, but the respect shown to these laws by specific societies varies. The basis of such a societal link is not taken up by sociologists or political analysts, while it is more and more a determining factor as individuals accord much importance nowadays to such issues as quality of life, social relations, identifications, and ways of living.

- C. A State link, that is, an attachment to a State on account of its always and still particular policies (economic, employment, school, social, fiscal, international, cultural, etc.).

- D. A national link, in terms of the conceptual meaning of the nation, that is, a community rooted in history, language(s) and culture.

Three forms of societal links are very active in Canada, notably the citizen, State and civil links. Indeed, a number of Canadians say to be proud of being members of one of the most progressive societies in the OECD, where respect for liberties, level of consuming, social welfare and civil peace are assured (Conseil privé, 1998, chapter 4 : 21). And this pride is consolidated with the high rank that Canada consistently obtains in UN ratings. When Canadian government authorities speak out on the foundations of "Canadian belonging", they refer to its political-political regime (esp. the Charter of Rights), social policies, treatment of minorities, civil peace and, sometimes, to the peaceful role that Canada plays on the international scene. Typical of any speech about community, they try to build the image of similarities amongst Canadians rather than speak of differences, such as an increasing rate of poverty, demands on the part of Natives and Québécois, disagreements on environmental policy, and the debates on the reform of the Canadian federal and parliament ¹³ systems.

However, some questions remain to be settled when governments speak of social cohesion and sharing of values.

Firstly, do shared values or consensus in a society eradicate antagonisms and confrontations and enhance social cohesion ? The passion for equality in modern societies, as Lipset said (1964), has been at the base of confrontations ever since the creation of democracies. Equality constitutes the central reference for a matrix of divergent interpretations of social relations and statuses. It is this open character of the modern interpretation of social hierarchy explained by personal merit, individual's histories or political or economic domination be-

¹³ Because it concentrates power into the hands of the prime minister, head of state, leader of the house, and head of his or her party.

tween classes or social categories, which opens spaces of change in modern societies.

Half a century ago, Turner (1953-54 in Padioleau, 1999) noted that an agreement on common values by members of a society does not insure social peace and consensus. The values of equality and success oppose each other. One cannot ignore the contradictions generated by the values of freedom and equality, as they turn out to be the very sources of conflict in the democratic systems. Democracy is not consensus ; it is the right to express differences of opinion, and to protest domination. Then, does a sense of societal belonging flow mechanically from the sharing of common values such as equality' ?

Secondly, does any value granted to norms and practices of a politico-legal system, State policies and life in civil society correspond to a sense of belonging to that society ? Or is it only a reasoned, instrumental appreciation of these standards and practices ? A society can be perceived not as a community, but simply as an environment convenient to one's way of life and interests. Why mention, or hope for, a sense of belonging, an attitude that refers to a loyalty, an allegiance, an emotional affection, or a personal involvement ? The only obligation a person has towards the society in which s/he lives is the respect for the juridical link, and for laws and rules ; s/he is not under any obligation to develop a sense of belonging to this society. This possibility, this right, of indifference, non-conformism or difference of opinion, has to be maintained, at the risk of opening of a space in which individuals come to be categorized according to a normative scale. Under such a scenario, persons might be deemed "authentic Canadians" on account of their strong investment in Canada, its institutions, and of their customs, while others could be seen as cold and self-interested residents.

What does it mean to develop a sense of social belonging if the political-political link is not enough to define one as Canadian ? How can the quality of being Canadian be defined ? Would it be by stan-

dards, such as social solidarity and social responsibility, as is so often suggested in discourses about social cohesion? If so, why not organize a public debate on these matters, and register the right to work or to a minimal income in State laws and programs (Schnapper, 2000)? Or do we have to believe that the societal link would be defined by conformity to majority values, practices, and opinions, such as customs, religion, a defense of federalism, or the practice of one of the two official languages?

Symptomatic of this possibility was a proposed reform of the Canadian law of immigration, in 1999. The reform was aimed at imposing on every landed immigrant a *continuous* residence in Canada of three years or more, before he or she could be eligible for citizenship, because, it was argued, an immigrant had "to know the customs of the country" before deserving to become a citizen. The reform also proposed that it would be an obligation for every newcomer to speak one of the official languages. The right to live in Canada would be contingent upon the ability to speak French or English, because this knowledge was deemed indispensable for adequate participation in society. If this is a sociological reality, and it is, then why not adopt a law obliging any private company and any public institution to offer programs to teach these languages, and propose State financing to make this possible?

In fact, the invocation of a necessary Canadian belonging seems a palliative to the absence of political decisions in domains where equality is at risk, as well as a return to the valorization of majority cultural and linguistic customs, practices, values and standards.¹⁴ Changes made to the policy of multiculturalism are illustrative.

Since 1995, in addition to equality, liberty, respect for cultural plurality and the dignity of each person, Multiculturalism must promote

¹⁴ This vision is more and more subject of criticism, see for example PRI Social Cohesion Network, (2001).

inter-ethnic relations and responsibility and social participation as means of anchoring a common Canadian identity and a sense of loyalty to Canada (Government of Canada, Canadian Heritage, 1997). What does this new mandate mean, and what is the value of the programs adopted since 1995 ? Three aspects should be considered : the objectives of community participation, the intensification of a sense of societal belonging and racial equality.

Since 1995, the mono-ethnic NGOs are offered restricted access to financing because of the need to create links between all society and ethnic minorities and to foster a sense of societal belonging, as though ethnic heterogeneity and social cohesion were in opposition.¹⁵ Preference in terms of financing is granted to multiethnic NGOs, or NGO formed of members of one of the two cultural majorities. Furthermore, only certain activities of monoethnic NGOs (fight against discrimination, insertion into the job market, women and generations equality, socialization of young people, etc.) are accepted, while cultural activities are ignored. It has been suggested that historically entrenched communities are integrated culturally, and that communities formed since the end of 1970's have more difficulty with social than cultural insertion. It follows that the mono-ethnic NGO has to assume the financing of any of its cultural activity, and that the promotion of respect for cultural difference is no longer a central objective of multiculturalism.¹⁶ Interethnic cooperation and the adoption of customs allowing a better social insertion are.

This objective could be praiseworthy, but how would it strengthen a sense of Canadian belonging amongst immigrants and their descendants ? All studies have shown that almost 90% of immigrants and their descendants develop a strong link to the Canadian State. A num-

¹⁵ This suggests that social capital is more developed in communities ethnically, culturally and socially homogeneous.

¹⁶ It remains to be seen whether similar regulation is applied, and not reduced to a discursive category by bureaucrats and ethnic lobbying (Helly and Mc Andrew, 2000-2003).

ber of inquiries (Whitaker 1992 ; Kalin 1996 ; Kymlicka 1998 ; Mendelsohn 1999 ; Helly and van Schendel 2001, as well as polls) also show that identification with a minority culture, or with a Quebecois nation, is generally accompanied by, or reinforces a deep identification with the federal State. On the contrary, inquiries in the United States (Glick Schiller *et al.*, 1992 ; Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc, 1994) illustrate how the perception of non-acceptance in a society favors immigrants' identification with transnational communities and the country of origin. Besides, any attempt to see a sense of belonging to only one society at the forefront of people minds, seems to be valid for those not involved in binational or multinational networks (Featherstone, 1990 ; Robertson, 1992 ; Featherstone *et al.*, 1995 ; Hannerz, 1997).

One of the most genuine forms of social equality and roots of Canadian belonging for ethnic minorities would be the absence of daily and systemic discriminations. One of the last studies on the status of visible minorities in the Canadian labor force shows how they suffer from a deficit of wage income with regard to the rest of the population, a deficit entirely attributed to racism (Pendakur 2000 : chapter 5). It's hard to imagine how such a disparity could consolidate a strong sense of Canadian belonging, or a sense of solidarity, and equity. Nor is it clear how the increased participation of NGOs in social projects, and the preference accorded to multi-ethnic or 'national' umbrella NGO working with immigrants will modify racist or xenophobic behavior.

Furthermore, the Canadian and the provincial governments don't always regulate in a fair way the standards of equivalency of foreign and national diplomas and working experiences of immigrants, and they do not give them access to numerous useful training programs. By acting this way, they uphold both the reality and the image of some immigrants as inadequate and expensive elements in the workforce, an image that prevents the acceptance of immigration and the sense of societal belonging of these immigrants. Finally, programs of

positive action in Canada have shown little in the way of convincing results, compared with the similar programs adopted in United States (Bowen and Bok, 1998).

As for national minorities, the notion of social belonging is totally ineffective in the face of regional or secessionist demands. These contestations do not apply as much to socio-economic and cultural inequality as to political equality, in the sense of a sharing of power. Globalization has shown the degree to which these contestations are more political than cultural.

By increasing access to foreign markets, and by showing the importance of international economic dependency, globalization reduces and aggravates links between the central States, the regional states and the national minorities ; it revives historical conflicts and shows the falseness of the so-called "global village." Access to wider markets, continental and global, reduces the dependency of regional economies on national markets and States. It favors the development of the regions more able to integrate international markets, and it consolidates questioning about nationally planned economies. It also strengthens criticism of the pyramidal and centralist structure of the States, and of their technocracies, and it offers arguments to regional or secessionist contestations. Economic dynamics are local, subsidiarity and decentralization help economic development and integration in the world market, all arguments invoked at present by regional and secessionist movements, as well as the right to reproduce an historical or cultural specificity (Wales, Scotland, Basque country, Catalonia, Flanders, Quebec, and the Franco-Italian transalpine coalition).

As for deciding if nationalist contestation generates a harmful social and national fragmentation, there is no question. Nevertheless it is necessary to demonstrate that they do not correspond to a process of democratization and of a more fair distribution of resources between

regions and between individuals.¹⁷ During the 1960s and 70s, nationalist movements were seen as democratic contestations of State centralism and uneven modes of economic development (Cahen 1994). They are subjected to mockery now, as residues of tribal and ethno-cultural cosmogonies that question the principle of universality and this according to an approach that doesn't respect their political orientation, and their modalities of action.¹⁸

In the face of nationalist, regional or secessionist protests, to speak of social cohesion, societal belonging and responsible citizenship seems futile. These actors are organized, cooperate, and possess political institutions that are for the most part capable of defining their necessities.

Conclusion

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The actual notion of social cohesion updates a conception of society as grounded in multiples communities linked by some societal and political values according to a sociological tradition (Comte, Durkheim, even Weber, when he speaks of the disillusion of modern society). It turns policy into a negotiation about how to distribute resources and wealth of a society, defined within the framework of shared common values and not of social struggles. Other conceptions could be put forward.¹⁹ One also active today, neo-liberal and utili-

¹⁷ For a definition of the conditions of legitimacy for secessionism see Buchanan (1995).

¹⁸ Autonomist or secessionist pacifist movements (Baltic States, Scotland, Catalonia, Quebec), armed insurrections (IRA, ETA) and warring movements invoking ethnic purity (Croatia, Serbia) are assimilated into a single universe of destruction of the citizen link, the Jihad (Barber, 1996).

¹⁹ Without mentioning the conception of social link and social order based on violence and domination (Marx) or on constraints accepted by actors in exchange for a protection by the State (Hobbes). In the latter case, the weaken-

tarian, conceives the political sphere as a contract, an agreement between categorical, corporatist and individual interests, but it insists upon the respect of the free will and initiative of individuals, and personal freedom of choice remains its most important principle, even if it overturns the egalitarian principle. Social cohesion is not its preoccupation and it considers that any weakening of collective links between members of a society touches upon their overall freedom, and that any public aid must be subjected to criteria of performance (Mead, 1997).

For us, 'the political' in a democratic society is the unveiling and questioning of the unequal distribution of resources and wealth produced by economic, cultural, symbolic and political balances of power. So, any idea of sharing of values, societal belonging, enhanced cooperation, or strengthening of communities does not address this form of conflict and does not serve equality and democracy. On the contrary, it hampers the very foundations of democracy by omitting the role and legitimacy of political struggles and social protests expressed beyond the parliaments' scene.

Besides, one cannot oppose community, societal or contractual links and political struggle. Neither of these links is valid except to the degree that it satisfies the aspirations of actors who adhere to it, or who submit themselves to it. When they produce or reproduce inequalities and marginalization, they loose their efficiency and lead to demands for new rights and links ; or else, to retreat into deviance, delinquency, or crime. These demands and behaviors, violent or not, cannot be considered as a degeneration of the societal link, but rather as a rejection of a collective link perceived as deficient. To want to restore a societal link by ignoring these demands, or by being unaware of them, while demanding an heightened social responsibility and

ing of societal links is seen as a failure of public policing and of the State, and the remedy consists in State measures of repression and assistance.

higher degree of membership in society, creates a false community (Farrugia, 1993 : 216).

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