The Structure of French Canadian Acculturation

1759 to 1800

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RÉSUMÉ

Les Franco-Canadiens ne furent pas assimilés dans les années qui suivirent la conquête mais on ne peut nier que leur vie sociale subit tout de même des changements profonds. — L'application par l'Auteur d'un modèle d'acculturation, aux faits connus de cette époque, met en lumière un certain nombre de facteurs (surtout démographiques, écologiques, et administratifs) et de relations conjonctives entre français et anglais qui empêchaient l'assimilation. — La réaction adaptive qui s'en suivi fut marquée par des phénomènes d'acculturation aussi communs que: la rigidité, les mécanismes d'autocorrection et de maintien des limites. Il en est résulté un pluralisme qui prépara en quelque sorte l'orientation actuelle du Canada Français.

INTRODUCTION

The era of the Conquest, 1759 to approximately 1800, was a vital period in the history of Quebec. It was at this time that the pattern of future relations between French and English was determined.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the structure of acculturation in Quebec following the Conquest — the nature of the conjunctive relations between French and English at contact, some of the characteristics of pre-Conquest French Canadian society which affected the course of acculturation, and the reactive adaptations which occurred in the French Canadian community as a result. Acculturation refers to "culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems" (SSRC 1954:974). "Conjunctive relations" refers to the "intercultural role networks that not only establish the framework of

contact but also provide the channels through which the content of one cultural system must be communicated and transmitted to the other" (SSRC 1954:980). The term "reactive adaptation" indicates the accentuation of elements in the French Canadian community in response to the presence of the English.

The attempt to understand the Conquest in terms of structural changes provides valuable insights. Too often scholars have merely stated that there was no assimilation of French Canadians because of the small number of English-speaking immigrants in Quebec, or, because "French Canadian institutions were too deeply imbedded". To adopt such a viewpoint is to lose sight of two important aspects of French-English relations. First, this was an acculturative setting and as such was a complex process involving many interrelated factors. More important, merely to state that there was no assimilation, completely overlooks the very real changes which did occur in French Canada. When two social groups come into contact several results may occur. One group may adopt characteristics of the other group, both groups may do this, neither group may change, one group may be completely assimilated, or one group may change by accentuating previous characteristics which are different from those of the impinging group. Some writers have looked only to assimilation as an all-or-nothing-at-all process. This attitude fails to realize that while a people may not be assimilated, they may still change radically in response to the presence of the other group.

The past twenty-five years have seen a marked increase of interest in French Canadian history. Contemporary historians have sharpened the tools of investigation left them by their predecessors whose interests were sometimes as much literary as historical. Several geographers and demographers have studied the history of French Canada from a fresh new viewpoint. Recently, sociologists have added still another dimension to Quebec historiography. And yet, an examination of this historiography suggests that scholars have concentrated on times when the colony was an active entity. They have written on New France, on broad panoramic interpretive schemes of development, or upon periods such as the nineteenth century political movements, when Quebec was reacting to the British. More attention has been paid to the study of attempts to "escape the yoke of

British domination" than to the study of how and if this domination occurred in the first place. It is not because French Canadian institutions were too deeply imbedded that assimilation failed, for it was not until after the Conquest that many of the institutions took their final form.

This article does not attempt the complete explanation of the phenomenon of French-English acculturation. This is impossible at the current state of knowledge of the period and of social change in general. Rather, a conscious effort is made to build a model, accurate if possible, but largely no more than a means of ordering classes of facts, figures, events and trends within a broad interpretive framework of acculturation theory. This paper relies heavily on the acculturative model suggested by the Social Science Research Council (1954:973).

When an attempt is made to analyse the nature of the contact between French and English and the changes which subsequently occurred, the years following the Conquest, from 1759 to approximately 1800, emerge as an era, the study of which is necessary to understand subsequent trends. This paper will progress from an examination of French-English conjunctive relations to the reactive adaptations which occurred as a result in the French Canadian community.

FRENCH-ENGLISH CONJUNCTIVE RELATIONS

An examination of the conjunctive relations between French and English brings into perspective the intercultural role networks which constituted the framework of contact, or, more simply, the ways in which French and English "came up against one another". Obviously, there would be many facets to any type of contact and the type of contact would be all-important in determining the nature of the acculturation which might occur. A large amount of the contact was of a rather strangely directed variety. Even if the military governors doubted its feasibility, the official policy of the British Government was the ultimate complete assimilation of French Canadians. It is true, of course, that the British Government wanted to retain the loyalty of French Canada in

the face of the growing hostility of the thirteen colonies. Partly for this reason, but largely, it appears, through complete inadvertence, the military government took several steps, which, assuming that assimilation was the goal, had the unintended consequence of largely preventing the very assimilation which was desired.

The seigneurial system of New France was the Canadian counterpart of the feudal system of land holding found in France before the revolution of 1789. Land was held and distributed through a hierarchical pyramid of statuses. The Crown, at the top of the pyramid, empowered seigneurs to distribute units of the land which then were granted to farmers. There existed a system of contractural rights and duties between the seigneur and the Crown, mostly of a military nature. Equally, there was a system of rights and duties between the seigneur and his enfeoffed land holders. The habitant paid various duties and rents, mostly in kind, in return for his land and various other rights, such as the right to use a mill constructed by the seigneur. In actual practice, the seigneurial system of New France was not as rigidly organized as that of France, being an adaptation to New World conditions. Parishes were first instituted in 1727. The Church was intimately involved in the seigneurial system as it held almost two-sevenths of the granted lands in New France (Munro 1907:182). The "fabrique" was the local ecclesiastical parochial political unit commonly found throughout the Catholic Church.

The area of public administration clearly illustrates one example of unintended consequences. An examination of the structure of political power reveals several interesting facts which helped determine the type of acculturation which occurred. To a greater or lesser extent, the British merely took over the existing structure of power. Table 1 is designed to show the changes which occurred from the French to the English regime, and also to show the ethnic origin of persons occupying various statuses in the English administration. While the seigneurial system of land holding was retained, English seigneurs were not appointed. The captains of militia, previously the effective local power of the Crown, were abolished. Because the seigneurs were never very influential, the status of the Church in the administrative

chain of command increased as the military government used it more and more. As the populations became somewhat more concentrated, the fabrique became a more visible method of local administration. It is to be remembered that local governments did not occur in Quebec until the 1840's. The type of administration which thus emerged left administrative relations between French and English extremely diffused. The only English persons in the administration were at the top of the pyramid of power. Administrative policy was diffused through French seigneurs and, more important, through French curés. Because the community level was left almost completely untouched by this administrative structure, there were virtually no face-to-face relations between French and English at the level of the parish or seigneury. This had an obvious effect on the nature of the acculturation which occurred. Assimilation would be impossible without face-to-face relations.

Certain demographic factors also seem to have kept face-to-face relations at a minimum. When the United Empire Loyalists came to Quebec after the American revolution, they preferred the freehold tenure of land which they had previously enjoyed, rather than the seigneurial system which the military government had perpetuated. Consequently, they settled largely in new areas, away from the established population concentrations. Thus, there was a great deal of physical distance between French and English. In addition, the majority of the French Canadian population was strung out in sparse rural conglomerations, as opposed to being concentrated in urban areas. It is difficult to deduce from the available census information reliable French-English rural-urban ratios (Henripin 1965: personal communication) and, indeed, it is difficult accurately to define the terms rural and urban as they relate to this period. It seems safe, however, to suggest that had the French Canadian population been more concentrated in urban areas, a far different form of acculturation would have resulted.

An examination of Table 2 reveals two important points. There were very few English-speaking immigrants in the years immediately following the Conquest. Murray estimated them at 450 in 1765 (Langlois 1935:132). By the time a larger number of immigrants had arrived, the acculturative pattern had already

been largely defined. Secondly, it is apparent that at all times in the relevant period there were many more French than English-speaking persons in Quebec. Any degree of assimilation would therefore be unlikely, as Brunet (1964:196) has pointed out. But this does not in itself explain the phenomenon. This attitude again presumes that acculturation is an all-or-nothing-at-all phenomenon. It was not only the ratio of French to English which was important, but also the numbers of members of the two groups which were in effective contact. For example, there would still have been little assimilation, in all likelihood, during the post-Conquest period to 1800, even if there had been a larger English concentration in the urban areas, since the French were concentrated in rural areas.

The economic structure of the colony also figured importantly in determining the nature of the acculturation which occurred. While there were some early British agricultural interests, many of the British who first came to Quebec were interested in running the flourishing fur trade. French Canadian merchants were kept out of the fur trade and, indeed, from most specialized economic activity which was not of an agricultural nature (Brunet 1964d:49 *et seq.*). This fact resulted in the rather surprising unintended consequence of a boundary-maintaining mechanism imposed by the British on the very people whom they wanted to assimilate. A boundary maintaining mechanism refers to the means by which a "system limits participation in the culture to a well-recognized in-group" (SSRC 1954:976). Usually the term is used to indicate a feature imposed by the group being acculturated. In this case, the opposite was true. In other words, while it might have been the British Government's official policy to encourage assimilation, the actual practice of the British was the subtle exclusion of French Canadians from the lucrative fur trade, again minimizing the face-to-face, and also the indirect, contact between the two groups. Furthermore, there was no practice of relying on seigneurial agricultural produce. This had the effect of stifling seigneurial productivity and of decreasing French-English interaction.

Language played a role intimately connected with these economic factors. Clearly, the nature of the acculturation between two groups will depend upon the breaking down of lin-

guistic barriers, or the failure to do so. For example, linguistic assimilation or at least bilingualism, would be a necessary preliminary step, or at least in a symbiotic relationship with, social assimilation. For several reasons this did not occur. As mentioned above, there was virtually no opportunity for the French to participate in the British-operated fur trade. Moreover, the British had little need to rely on or participate in the French socio-economic world of the seigneury. Consequently, few people of one language knew the other. Few people had the impetus to learn the other language which economic inter-dependence would have supplied.

Thus, largely as a result of the conjunctive relations between French and English, the acculturative process took a definite form. Assimilation did not occur. What did occur was a stabilized pluralism — two cultures existing side by side, but almost completely independent of one another. French Canadian culture did, however, react to the impinging British culture, and it is to the changes in French Canadian society, to the nature of this reactive adaptation, which we now turn.

REACTIVE ADAPTATION

When two social groups are placed in contact with one another what are the several different forms which acculturation may take? It is possible that neither group may change. One or both groups may adopt characteristics of the other, partly or completely. Also, one or both groups may change in response to the other group by developing new characteristics or by accentuating old ones. Two factors largely determine the type of reaction which occurs: the structure of the conjunctive relations between the two groups, and the characteristics of the groups themselves (SSRC 1954:973). As we have seen, the nature of the conjunctive relations between French and English tended to discourage any assimilation during the period from the Conquest to roughly 1800. What did in fact occur was a reactive adaptation in the French Canadian community caused in part by the prexisting structure of French Canadian society. Again, it is important to emphasize this fact. While there was no assimilation, there were

definite changes which did occur. Largely by varying and accentuating previously existing characteristics, French Canadian culture became something new and different.

This fact is clearly illustrated by the socio-economic classes existing after the Conquest. As mentioned previously, French Canadians were excluded from the major entrepreneurial activity of the time — the fur trade. The nature of the class structure of New France has recently been the subject of a great deal of controversy (Eccles 1961). This controversy need not concern us here. What is important is that while there may or may not have been a trading middle class bourgeoise before the Conquest, there was no such French Canadian class after 1760 (Brunet 1964d: 49 *et seq.*). While there were some coureurs-de-bois fur traders travelling in the interior and some professional men such as doctors, lawyers and priests, by far the outstanding class of the period was the habitant — the farmer tied to the ground.

This fact, which saw the large majority of the French Canadian population engaged in agricultural activity, was one of the major characteristics of the era. The seigneurial system continued to be the method of land distribution for a population whose rate of increase remained at a high 100% roughly every thirty years (Henripin 1965:207). As previously mentioned, the seventy odd thousand of 1765 were over 150,000 by 1800. This rapid rate of increase meant that a slight amount of land pressure was beginning to be felt by 1800. For a while, virtually all the increase was thrown back on the land. Towards the end of the century, however, towns were beginning to appear and, along with them, the first signs of a more complex economy (Roy 1906:182).

The application of Redfield's model of a folk-urban continuum to French Canada, as used initially by Miner (1939) and Hughes (1943), has recently been the subject of critical reappraisal (Garigue 1964; Rioux 1964). The application of this model to this period in particular provides some illuminating insights. Redfield's typology utilized a scale mainly emphasizing four features: isolation, homogeneity, self-sufficiency and size. At one end of the continuum, the tribe is isolated, homogeneous, self-sufficient and small. The larger heterogeneous unisolated

town is dependent on the relatively nearby peasant community. The peasant community is more homogeneous than the town but is dependent on it socially and economically. The controversy involved in interpreting all of French Canadian history in the light of a folk-urban continuum need not concern us here. However, it is useful to apply some of the analytical tools of the scheme to the period under consideration. While the years 1759 to 1800 were marked by a more than doubling of the population in Quebec, the French Canadian community was more homogeneous, in terms of occupations, than at any time after 1800 or even during the thirty or forty years prior to the Conquest. During the period under consideration, the towns — Montreal, Quebec and Trois Rivières — had English entrepreneurs as the dominant commercial class. There was very little social or economic inter-dependence between these towns and what might have been their agrarian hinterland. While seigneurial agriculture was self-sufficient it produced little surplus for sale in the towns.

The relative independence of the rural community or communities and the towns during the forty years following the Conquest raises the problem of communications in French Canada. There were only a couple of newspapers with a fairly small circulation. As noted, there was very little inter-dependency between town and countryside. Relatively speaking, it seems that during the post-Conquest years there was not much communication at all among the various members of the French Canadian community. The Church is the one obvious instrument of dissemination of knowledge. Through its intimate involvement in the socio-political parochial groupings it had an opportunity to express its attitudes as the one centralized French Canadian institution. The various "mandements" (pastoral letters) are overt evidence of this type of dissemination of ideas. It was, in fact, at the level of the Church and the parish that some of the most important aspects of French Canadian reactive adaptation occurred. As previously mentioned, an examination of the administrative chain of command shown in Table 1 shows that the military government relied heavily on the cooperation of the Church to administer policy. In fact, the Church was the effective local conduit pipe of British policy. In this regard, the Church, in its role as a major French Canadian institution, exhibited the characteristics of a

"self-correcting" mechanism. It was able to "shift function and adopt internally, irrespective of its outer protective devices" (SSRC 1954:977). In this way the Church helped to prevent assimilation and, largely unconsciously, to direct the course of acculturation towards the reactive adaptation which occurred. The process was in part moulded by the fact that the Church in Canada had always been more authoritarian than its European counterparts (Fallardeau 1949:359). Thus, we see in the Church another clue as to the reasons for this reactive adaptation. The original French Canadian culture was such that an integral part of it was able to adapt its role to fit the new circumstances. In this way, the culture as a whole was aided in perpetuating itself.

It was at the level of the parish that the Church had its greatest effect. The importance of the parish during the period under consideration has been briefly discussed by Garigue (1965: 130). It was during the post-Conquest years that the parish achieved a large part of its importance. The fabrique was the parochial administrative unit in the agrarian community or communities. Its influence increased immensely in this era when most of the local administration was carried on by the Church. It is to be remembered that there was no local government, aside from the fabrique, until several years after Lord Durham's report.

If one examines the ways in which individuals became integrated into society, two integrating mechanisms come sharply into focus. First, the extended family, using the devices of the seigneurial system, provided the relationship between land and family (Guindon 1965:147). Aside from the extended family, it was the parish which was the social, political, and economic focus of the French Canadian community. Communal gatherings occurred largely as a result of being members of a parish. The fabrique was the realistic local unit of government. Economically, it was the fabrique which often decided local financial matters. In short, through the parish, individuals were integrated into society.

The importance of this concept is illustrated by examining the growth of the power of the Church in post-Conquest years. Table 1 shows how it was the effective local conduit pipe of British policy, as a result of its position in the administrative chain of command. Through the practice of "mandements", ser-

mons, and through the influence of the local curé in the fabrique, the Church was powerful in the sense that it could develop and implement policy. In short, it could get things done. In addition to this, however, the Church developed a far more subtle power in the sense that almost all individuals became members of society through its various integrating devices — schools, church, and fabrique. People commonly referred to themselves not as members of a small village or of seigneury, but as members of a parish. Thus, in this manner, the Church grew powerful in the same sense as such an innocuous institution as the Home and School associations are powerful today. People are integrated into the community through them. Ideas are learned and opinions formed in them.

The foregoing analysis, illustrating how the Church's influence spread into a far greater sphere of activity, points out another reason why assimilation failed and why a reactive adaptation occurred. Before the Conquest, French Canada was a very rigid society. Rigidity refers to a small and well defined number of authoritarian controls, avenues of prestige, ascribed statuses and clearly defined interpersonal relations. Where there are "relatively few key or command values in its hierarchy, a system is likely to be rigid and self-consciously resistant to alteration on contact, since it is already organized defensively probably as a result of external or internal challenges in the past" (SSRC 1954:977). This phenomenon of rigidity is illustrated by examining the relationships between several important structural components of French Canadian society. There were two basic relationships. The family was functionally related to the seigneurial system, since it acted as the distributing agent for land. The Church integrated religion, local government (the fabrique) and the local unit of social identification (the parish). Rigid social systems tend to perpetuate themselves unless the integrating relationships (in this case the Church and family distribution of land) are destroyed. These relationships were not completely pre-Conquest phenomena. However, to a large extent the means existed by which French Canadian society might shift by accentuating old patterns. Finally, in presenting this analysis of the influence of the Church, it is not being suggested that the Church was uninfluential before the Conquest. What is suggested is that

the Church achieved its unique dominant position of power as a result of the type of acculturation which occurred immediately after the Conquest.

CONCLUSION

The pattern of conjunctive relations established between French and English, along with certain characteristics of the French Canadian community itself, resulted in a reactive adaptation and in the complete failure of assimilation. French Canadian society adopted few aspects of the impinging British culture. Rather, it underwent certain changes in response to the British presence. These changes cannot realistically be traced to "how deeply French Canadian institutions were imbedded", or to the "genius of French Canadian society in resisting English domination". Concrete factors were operative, such as demography, administrative policy, economic characteristics, socio-economic classes, and internal structural changes, especially in the sphere of influence of the Church. Such common acculturative phenomena as boundary maintaining devices and self-correcting mechanisms occurred. Before and after 1760 French Canadian society was very rigid. As a result, French and English lived side by side in a stabilized pluralism. The two cultures in contact failed completely to lose their autonomy.

The reactive adaptation which occurred resulted in an equilibrium in the period between the Conquest and approximately 1800. The population was tied to the earth, to the seigneurial system, in more or less a subsistence rural agrarian economy. The sphere of influence of the Church increased dramatically. However, just as Miner (1939:237) has said of the entire panorama of French Canadian social evolution, even more so for this period in particular, the equilibrium which was reached was, by its very nature, a short run adjustment.

Changes were inevitable in French Canadian society by roughly 1800. The population had more than doubled since 1760. The Church, with an effective monopoly on the educational system, was beginning to produce educated people with little oppor-

tunity to take advantage of their educational background. The land available under the seigneurial system of tenure was beginning to be scarce. It is hardly surprising in the face of deprivation of social and economic opportunities that the growing class of educated French Canadians should have aspired to a share in the political control of the community and in its economic activity. This was especially true now that the number and populations of towns were increasing rapidly. What had been a relatively small and homogeneous society was now becoming larger and more heterogeneous in terms of trades, classes, education, and aspirations. Assimilation had failed. By the end of the century the initial structure of relations between French and English had been defined. The changes which had produced a short-term equilibrium were themselves beginning to change. An era had come to an end.

TABLE 1 — POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIONS.

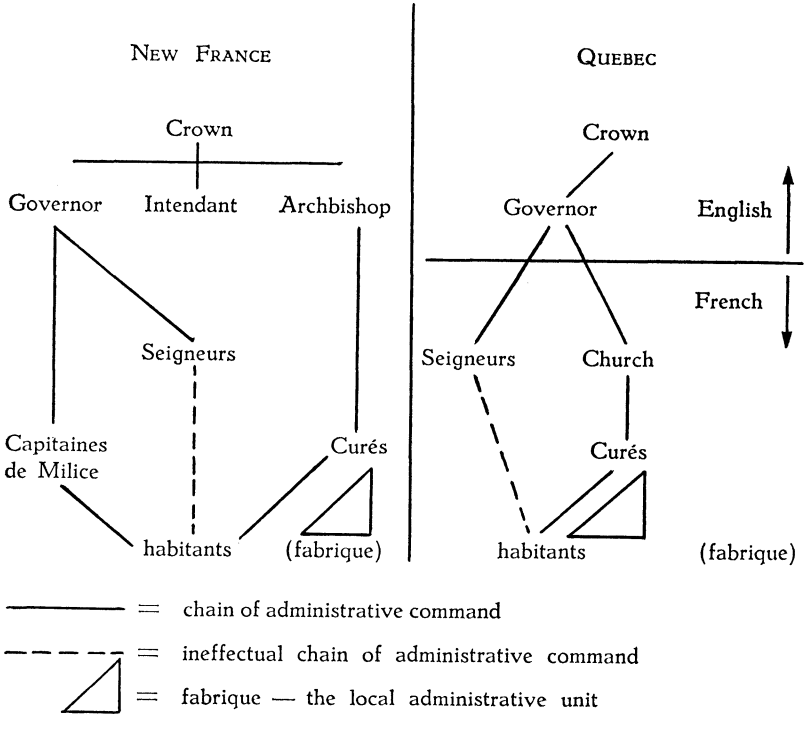

TABLE 2 — POPULATION OF QUEBEC.

	English	French
1765	450[1]	70,000[3]
1790	15,000[2]	146,000[4]

[1] estimated by Murray (Langlois 1935:132)

[2] Caron 1923:143

[3] Census of 1765 (*Census of Canada,* 1871, Vol. IV:65)

[4] Census of 1790 (*Census of Canada,* 1871, Vol. IV:77)

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