The Natural History of a Research Project: French Canada

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RÉSUMÉ

Cet article, écrit en 1952 et qui n'a pas été corrigé depuis, traite de l'origine et du développement d'un programme de recherches sur le processus d'urbanisation et d'industrialisation des canadiens-français de la Province de Québec. Par des recherches faites dans certaines industries et communautés de types différents, on a étudié les relations socio-économiques entre les canadiens-français et les canadiens-anglais.

Robert Lamb has asked me to write something about the design of that research part[1] of which is reported in *French Canada in Transition*. His aim is to let it serve as a starting point for discussion of the several orders of social phenomena to which these sessions will be devoted, to wit: the individual, small groups, institutions (going concerns), and communities (social wholes). In telling of the course of the research, I will refer to things not done as well as to those done. I encourage you to comment upon omissions and shortcomings, the "might have beens" of this research. Will you, in doing so, remember that our aim is not so much to improve social research in French

[1] This paper was prepared for discussion at the annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, held in the summer of 1952. Robert Lamb, who had planned the programme, died before the meeting was held. The papers and discussions were consequently not published. I am grateful to the editors of *Anthropologica* for letting it see the light of day.

No additions or corrections have been made to bring the paper up to date. There has been a terrific acceleration of both social change and social research since 1952. Some of my predictions of the 1930's are most certainly wrong. On one point, however, I was right. The big thing in French Canada continues to be urbanization and industrialization with their many consequences.

A paper-backed edition of *French Canada in Transition*, with a foreword by Nathan Keyfitz on recent demographic changes, was published this year by the University of Chicago Press.

Canada, as to assess our knowledge and our methods of study generally.

The French Canada project was not, I must tell you, designed, if by design one means a blue-print complete before the work was begun. It has been a growth of some twenty-five years. One might speak of it as a social movement, for eventually many people have been drawn into it. This memorandum will be a sort of natural history of this movement.

In the late 1920's, Carl A. Dawson began to study the process of settlement of the frontier, as seen in the growth and changes of a number of communities in the western provinces of Canada. Some of these communities were experiments in settling British urban workers on the land; many were created by people of Continental European origin; others, by sects who sought on the distant prairie a haven where they could practice a peculiar faith in peace and prosperity. Dawson had thus chosen as his own one of Canada's great problems.

He had just begun this work when in 1927, I joined him in the still new department of sociology at McGill University. (We two were the staff.) I had had no previous interest in Canadian problems, and but little knowledge of the country. In the several months between my appointment and my departure from Chicago for Montreal, I read a good deal about the French Canadians whom, I knew, were to be found in Montreal in large number. I decided to study the French Canadians simply because their presence seemed the most interesting thing about Montreal and that region. By so slight a joining of circumstances, I picked Canada's other great problem, that of the adjustment to each other of the two major ethnic groups. My choice complemented Dawson's. A few years later, the Rockefeller Foundation granted a sum of money to McGill University for social research. A committee decided to spend it on study of a pressing problem of that time, unemployment. Dawson and I insisted that to understand unemployment, the basic pattern of employment in Canada must be understood, and that pattern was clearly ethnic. Our plan was not highly regarded by most of the committee, but since we had a plan and kept at it, eventually more of the money was

spent on our studies than on others. Among them were monographs on various ethnic elements (including the British immigrants) in Canadian cities, as well as on the land; eventually, I got some students subsidized to study the division of labor between French and English in a number of industries, on the plea that this too was necessary to an understanding of unemployment.

The baggage I took with me from graduate school to Montreal included two conceptions of a people such as the French Canadians. They were: 1) that of an immigrant group in course of being assimilated, and 2) that of a national minority.

In the United States, sociologists had devoted much of their effort to study of European immigrants who had come to America more recently than themselves. From simple talk of loyalty and Americanization, some of the sociologists had gone on to seek a more general set of concepts for describing the changes which take place when diverse peoples meet in the same community (country or region). Robert E. Park adapted the socialization cycle of Simmel to this problem; contact was followed successively by conflict, accommodation and assimilation. Application of this set of concepts to the contact of peoples rested upon the assumption that one people was more ephemeral than the other, that one would disappear into the other. Although other Canadians knew well that the French Canadians were not an immigrant people, but a "charter member" group, I think that generally they thought that the French would, and ought eventually, to disappear; that the English Canadian group would and ought to outlast the French Canadians as an ethnic entity. A few studies appeared now and again on the number of French who spoke English, or who otherwise appeared to be abandoning their culture. Without going into why I think the measurement of change of individual cultural traits is a false way to study the relations between ethnic groups, I will simply say that for some reason I did not in fact accept this model of the assimilation cycle and resisted the desire of some of my students to proceed with studies on that model.

The second conception was that of a territorial national minority, such as one finds in Europe where a political boundary

is shoved over in such a way as to leave some people in the wrong country. The people thus marooned may then seek to have the boundary put right so that their citizenship and ethnic identity will again correspond; or, if a whole people has been deprived of sovereignty, they may seek to found a new and separate state. The French Canadians were made into a people and a minority in precisely this way; but there was no movement among them to join France, and there appeared to be no major or persistent movement to seek political separation from Canada. They did show minority behavior in their insistence on a certain autonomy, and in their constant resistance to alleged encroachment on their rights. I found the national minority model of use, but as I read the voluminous literature, it appeared to me that political objectives, as such, were relatively unimportant to French Canadians. The most constant plaint was that French Canadians get less than their fair share of good positions, wealth and power in the economic and political institutions. The great battle cry, along with that for cultural autonomy, was *parity,* — a share in all positions commensurate with the French proportion in the population. But parity implied not separation, but integration into a larger whole. I find in my notes that I quite early came to the idea of studying just what the place of French and English was in the larger whole of which both are part, and especially of discovering the ethnic division of labor (or of economic function), both in its major outlines and in its subtleties.

In the course of following up this lead, I read a good deal on the establishment of industries in Quebec. That led to the labor movement. Now the Catholic Church had early tried to keep the French labor of Quebec out of unions, and especially out of unions which were "neutral" as to religion. A few good pieces of work had been done on the movement to organize Catholic labor syndicates. This led me to a literature I had known nothing of — that on the various attempts to establish a separate Catholic labor movement in various parts of Europe. A good deal of this literature dealt with the German Rhineland, where Protestant entrepreneurs from outside the region had brought heavy industry to utilize local resources and had mobilized local Catholic peasants as their labor force. Protestant labor

leaders had followed the entrepreneurs to organize the local labor (exactly as in Quebec). As I followed up this case, I got more clearly into my mind the model of the region or community industrialized by outsiders, cultural aliens. The local region furnishes labor and/or raw materials and/or power. The newcomers furnish capital, enterprise and technical knowledge. In course of the development, the native non-industrial middle and/or upper class finds many of its functions usurped by the alien industrial leadership. In fact, the community now has two sets of leaders, one traditional and "spiritual," the other new, secular and technological. The strain between the two has many repercussions in politics and in local institutions. To rise in the new order of things requires new skills; but the educational institutions are geared to produce those qualities and skills valued in the pre-industrial regime. To re-tool the schools and universities for the new order quickly would require the calling in of even more cultural aliens. Similar dilemmas occur in other institutions: trade and labor organizations, local government, religious organizations, charities, and even in families and cliques. As I got into this it appeared to me there were essentially two kinds of industrial communities (or regions): 1) those in which by some social and economic chemistry local people themselves initiated the great changes of industrialization, eventually drawing a supply of labor from outside (this is the kind of situation to which the assimilation cycle concept may be applied with some reason); and 2) those to which industry is brought by outsiders who exploit local labor, and who undertake as many social changes as they think necessary for their purposes, within the limits of their power as counterbalanced by that of the local society. England and New England are of the first kind; the Rhineland and French Canada are of the second. Since the agents of social change in the Rhine country differed from the native people in religion but not in language, it seemed promising to examine this region so that I might better sort out the aspects due to ethnic difference from those due to the industrial invasion and to differences of religion. I did, in fact, spend more than a year in Germany digging up the story of industrialization there, and trying out with data of the German occupational and religious censuses various schemes of tabulation which I might

use in analyzing the division of labor between French, English and others in Canada. The study of the Rhine case did indeed fix in my mind more clearly the model of a whole region undergoing that series of changes known as industrialization, with one ethnic element as the active, enterprising agent of change, and another in the position of having to adjust itself, although resisting them, to these changes.

When I got back to Montreal after the German excursion, I started a few students on the ethnic division of labor there. William Roy went to a number of industrial concerns and got the data which he worked up into tables showing the proportions of French and English among their employees of different kinds and ranks. From these tables we got several characteristic patterns. In heavy machine industries, a solid core of old-country British skilled workmen apparently could keep the French out of apprenticeships. In industries with mass production, and with great use of semi-skilled operators, the working force was almost completely French. Fiduciary functions were apparently kept closely in English hands, even including the faithful pensioners so often kept on as night watchmen. If there was need for extensive contact with the public, and especially the little people of the city and region, the French got their chance.

Stuart Jamieson worked on the professions, and found that not only were there marked differences in choice of profession as among French, English and Jewish, but that in the same profession each of the groups tended to practice in a certain way, the professionals of each group performing not only the peculiar services wanted by their own peoples but also some special part of the professional services of the larger system of which all were part. Thus French and Jewish lawyers tended to practice in small firms, while a very large majority of the English lawyers were gathered into a few huge firms. A leading figure in each such large firm was a member of the boards of a group of powerful corporations. Each such English firm had, however, one or two French members, apparently to act as liaison with French people and to plead before French judges. It thus became clear to me that it was much too simple merely to say that the French preferred certain occupations and the English preferred

others, and that the English discriminated against French in appointing people to positions of authority in industry (although these things were doubtless true). One had to regard the whole thing as a system in which the interaction of the two peoples had brought about a division of function which was, in some points, quite subtle.

While we were working away on this line, I had some conversations with my close friend and associate, Robert Redfield, who had a crew working on a series of communities in Yucatan; he hoped to learn something of the change from what he called folk culture to urban civilization by studying simultaneously a series of communities each of which was assumed to present a point in this kind of change. It seemed to me that if we were to understand fully what was happening in metropolitan Montreal, we had to find a base line from which to gauge changes in French-Canadian culture and institutions. I began to think of a series of community studies with a village with no English people in or near it at one end, and with Montreal (where about one-fifth of all French Canadians live) at the other. Each community was to be picked for some special combination of the forces which might be at work on French Canadian institutions and mentality.

Somehow, in the midst of this, Horace Miner, an enterprising graduate student of anthropology at the University of Chicago, got himself a field fellowship to study the base-line rural community. After much search of statistics and maps a community — St. Denis de Kamouraska — was picked as being likely to show traditional French-Canadian institutions operating in full force. It was remote, but not back-woodsy or poor. This turned out to be an excellent choice, for it became clear that many of the traditional customs and practices depended on prosperity. A daughter of the house could not be kept at home spinning and weaving, on her own loom and with wool and flax from the family farm, unless the family land was plentiful and fertile. Farmers on back-country, poor and hilly farms had to go out to work in lumber-camps and their daughters had to go to towns to work, too; thus the common phenomenon of proud preservation of traditions by a prosperous peasantry after they are lost by the

agricultural laboring class. Mr. Miner's work is published and well-known. A couple of years ago he spent a few weeks there and published some notes on change since his first study in the American Journal of Sociology.

It was our intention to study a series of rural communities, at various distances from the cities and from English people, with varying terrain and soil. The notion was that each kind of situation would tend to produce its own pattern of functional connections with the larger industrial and urban world outside. Léon Gérin, a French-Canadian sociologist who studied under LePlay, had done a series of rural communities some forty years earlier, and Raoul Blanchard, the French geographer, had given a basic description of the soil and terrain, modes of agriculture, and movements of populations. We used these works in tentative choice of kinds of communities to be studied. Some rather superficial studies of new northern settlements have been made since then, but no detailed studies to determine the flow of people and goods from country to city and from farm to industry, or the flow of fashion and other changes from city to country.

The middle term of the series was to be a small industrial city. Now there were many such in the province of Quebec. We worked over government and business statistics with great care before choosing the first town, which my wife and I were to study ourselves. In the north and on the mountainous fringes of Quebec are towns with pulp-mills, company towns where various non-ferrous ores are mined, and a few where colossal power-developments have brought aluminum smelters (which require cheap power) far out into the back-woods of yesterday. In some of these the industry created the town. Some are seasonal; some hire men only, and so on. Since we wanted to see what effect the newer industry had on French-Canadian institutions, we chose as the starter a community in which those institutions had all been in existence well before industry came and in which there were local French families of a wide variety of occupations and of all the commoner social classes, and in which consequently there were French Canadians accustomed to the roles of political and economic leadership. The problem was not defined primarily in terms of English and industrial influence on, let us say,

the language spoken by people, but in terms of the operating social structure. Again, as in the case of Miner's work, this study is published and may be seen.

It may perhaps be well to tell the plan of the book. In the foreword and first chapter I say some of the things I have enlarged upon in this memorandum. Then I described briefly the rural family and parish, for these are the cradle of the industrial labor force of the cities, and are the institutions which undergo change under the influence of industry and the English. After considering the larger series of industrial towns and cities, I go on to our chosen community. In order to understand the industrial town of today, it seemed to me that we had to know its past, the rise and decline of enterprises, institutions and families through more than a century. With this setting in the reader's mind, we took him directly to the division of labor, in and outside industry. In the case of industry, we were able to describe pretty exactly, I think, the division of labor, and to account for the details of it. Subsequent studies in other industries and cities have revealed very little deviation from these patterns.

In the section on non-industrial occupations I attempted to set up a scheme for analyzing what will happen in an inter-ethnic community to those service and business enterprises which are subject to daily small choices of customers and clients, rather than to the major policy-choices of large executives. It seemed to me that one could posit that there are some services and goods wanted by both ethnic elements in identical form, while others are wanted by one more than by the other. Further one can suppose that there are some things which people insist on getting from people of their own kind, while they are relatively indifferent about the hands from which they get other things.

From there we go on to consideration of institutions, distinguishing those areas of life in which there is but one set of going concerns (institutions) operated by and for both elements of the population, and noting the changes brought about in them by industrializing, and the part played in them by French and English. Business, sports and government showed but a single

set of institutions. In religion and education, there was almost complete separation of the two ethnic elements, but it turned out that the English as well as the French schools and churches had been profoundly affected by the new people of industry. The Catholic parishes and their auxiliary institutions have shown great modification to suit industrial and urban conditions.

In the later chapters we presented the less formal aspect of things; or perhaps, I should say the livelier side, for the French have a rich ceremonial calendar; informal social contacts, public gatherings, amusements and fashions. The book closes with reference to Montreal, the metropolis. It was our aim to continue with studies in Montreal, but I left Canada at this point.

There are some bad lacunae in the study and in the book. While we present some data concerning cliques in the chapter on Social Contacts, and have a good deal more in our field notes, we did not adequately analyze the operation of small and informal groups in the town and in the industries. I am reasonably sure that there were no inter-ethnic small groups to speak of in the industries, but we should have got the data on small-groups and informal understandings and controls. Our knowledge of informal organization of industry was confined to the upper levels of the hierarchy.

The analysis of the more intimate life of the masses of the people of the town is sketchy. The story of the working-class family, — the internal stresses and strains of such a family newly come from farm to town and factory, — is not more than touched upon. We did not get adequate case material on this point. In fact, what the family as a going concern is in Cantonville, what crises it meets in its ongoing life, we did not find out. M. Jean-Charles Falardeau of Université Laval, is in the midst of studying the families of a large working-class parish in Quebec City. He has already published one article on the contingencies and life-cycle of urban French-Canadian families. We still do not have adequate knowledge of the changes in consumption patterns of individuals and families of the various classes of urban French-Canadians. Such knowledge is necessary to an understanding of family objectives and of conflict between the family and its individual members.

Just before I left Montreal, I began to have some conversations with a psychiatrist who was analyzing some young people of the sophisticated classes of French Canadians. Although he had some rather ready clichés about them, he was really interested in learning the structure of French-Canadian personalities. I had run into a number of restless, uneasy French young men, who knew that they had been trained for a world that was passing, and that they had not the nerve to break away from their protective families far enough to start over and take the ego risks of a new kind of learning and a new kind of career; the contingency of being bred a gentleman a little too late had caught them. This aspect of the industrialization of this region has not been studied; the personality problems, the psychological risks. The most recent information I have shows that the French graduates of the French-Canadian engineering schools still tend to seek the cover of semi-bureaucratic jobs. Whether they do it before or after a rebuff or two in industry, before or after a minor failure, — I don't know. But the whole structure of the family, the church-controlled educational system, etc., as they operate to produce people geared to certain patterns of risk and security, with certain balances with respect to reaching out and travelling far as against digging in and staying near home, with certain capacities for aggressive interaction and for tolerating criticism, this should all be studied. And it should be studied by some combination of observing and analyzing personal careers with use of the devices now available for delving deep into the dreams and nightmares of people. The question may be this: Will the French-Canadian middle class personality ever gear into the interactional systems of industrial line organizations; or will they skirt the edges catching a slight hold only in certain liaison or staff positions which they hold precisely because they are French? In that case, it might be that if French-Canadians do rise in the line organization of industry they may be people of some new class created by industry itself. The story of the individual in French Canada, of the forming of his personality, and of his meeting the new big world as a series of career-crises demanding fateful decisions on his part, that has not been told either in my study or in any other.

The program for studying a whole series of industrial communities was not carried through. The great recent development in Quebec has been that of new towns around new industries in the far north. In such towns there is no established French middle class, no set of local businesses and institutions, around them is no established *habitant,* or farm-owning class. It might be argued that we should have studied a north-country boom town in the first place, but I still think it served our purpose better to start with a town in which the French-Canadian institutions and a French-Canadian society were in full operation before English people brought industry. Yet, the whole region will not be understood until someone takes a good look at what kinds of social and political structure grow up where the new industry with an English management builds a town with French labor, but no counter-balancing French social élite except the clergy.

Even on the rural front, the full variety of typical communities has not been studied. Aileen Ross of McGill University has done one good study of the social processes of ethnic succession on the frontier between French and English in the eastern townships of Quebec.

The third kind of community was to be metropolitan, Montreal. I had started there, and most of the work done by the few students I got interested (they were just beginning to flock my way when I left) was centered there. I carried some of the material to Chicago with me and with the aid of a research assistant whom I brought along, — Margaret McDonald — a couple of articles got published on the ethnic division of labor. A few students came along and carried out small bits of work which fitted into the general scheme.[2]

The plan was to work out the whole scheme of division of labor with as much detail and subtlety as we could. It had already become clear that the Jewish people had to be drawn into

[2] Aileen Ross, for instance, found that the girls in the English Junior League were largely from very wealthy business and industrial families, while the girls of the corresponding French class were of landed, professional, and high-bureaucracy families, all much less wealthy than the English.

the scheme. The fact that the English and French are so clearly marked off from each other, and that they have so many separate institutions made the Jews and Jewish institutions more visible than in many communities; they are a kind of third term in the local system. We also planned to watch changes in the larger institutional systems (philanthropy, education, etc.) of the French world in Montreal, and to see what kinds of connections might grow up between French and English institutions as the city grew.

My hypothesis concerning charitable institutions, for instance, was that the French would adopt the English institutional forms — raising money by city-wide campaigns, distribution of money and services by professional social workers, etc. — but that the French-Catholics and English-Protestants would continue to maintain fully separate systems of going-concerns in this field. The English Protestant institutions are those developed to replace, under urban and industrial conditions, the earlier parochial charitable institutions. It seemed almost inevitable that the French, finding their own parochial institutions inadequate to the new conditions, would follow the only available model. Aileen Ross has been studying further the English philanthropic structure, but I do not believe anyone is studying the further adaptation of the French. I do know that French and English are sharing some of the faculty of their schools of social work.

Some parts of the study as originally conceived are being carried out by Prof. Oswald Hall and his students. They are studying hospitals and one of his students, M. Jacques Brazeau, did a penetrating study of the career contingencies of French-Canadian physicians. This group and some other people are studying the inner organization of industries which have personnel of the two ethnic groups. (Incidentally, a little observation in a large company in Montreal suggested that the reason all their dietitians had nervous breakdowns in a few months after being hired was simply that they hired progressive English dietitians to feed French-Canadian pères de famille. Think of a compulsive English-speaking Protestant spinster dietitian trying to feed a bunch of hearty peasoupers!) They are also studying the induction of French and English recruits into the Canadian Army, with emphasis on small group formation as a factor in adjustment.

But there is not quite, I think, a studied and persistent effort to build out the model of study of Montreal that we had thought of.

But a most interesting and unforeseen thing has happened. I had early concluded that the future of French Canada lay very much in the great national headquarters city, Montreal, and that Quebec City, the older and more purely French headquarters of French Canada, would have a minor role in the new industrial society. I visited down there occasionally, because it was picturesque and because I wanted statistics from provincial bureaus. But I did not take Quebec City seriously.

No sooner had I got settled in Chicago than I began, in one way or another, to meet people from Quebec City. Eventually I was invited down there for a semester as visiting professor at the Université Laval (I had never been invited in any way to the Université de Montreal, although I had tried to make contacts there). Laval had established a very live faculty of social sciences. I found there an active group of people engaged in a variety of movements of a "take the bull by the horns" spirit with respect to the industrialization of Quebec. A metropolicentric (sic) Montrealer, I knew almost nothing of the people or the movements in Quebec. Since then my contacts have been with the young social scientists of this faculty, nearly all of whom are continuing work on the economic and social changes accompanying industrialization of the province. I certainly did not create this group, nor did I design their research. Yet I have been a part of the movement of which they are also part, and the general design worked out in course of my study has been, in general, followed out in their work. What interests me much more than the influence of this model on their work or on any one's work, is an incidental implication of some importance for applied social scientists. At a certain point in the history of Quebec, an outsider came there under circumstances which made it a most intriguing and natural thing to start study of the bi-ethnic community and region, and to turn that study toward the changes wrought by industrialization. I, the outsider, for a long time got little or no interest from English students of the region. The first to work with me on the problem was a New England boy, born of French Canadian parents; he looked at the whole thing

with interest but as from a slight distance; the next was a Western Canadian who looked on the whole world from a slight distance. This combination kept the work going for some time. Perhaps it was inevitable that, if the work was to be continued, it should be done by the French Canadians themselves, the people most affected by the changes. What good is a research design which does not include some reference to those who will execute it?

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