

Two Nations, Two Visions, One Country

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Introduction

Less than two centuries ago, England controlled English-speaking Upper Canada and French-speaking Lower Canada. Nowadays, the French-speaking and English-speaking nations have united to become the independent country of Canada. Despite being part of Canada, French-speaking Quebec does not see eye-to-eye with the rest of the country on many issues.

In this article, I will treat Quebec and Canada as two nations because they share different narratives. By Canada, I will refer to Ottawa, the federal government, and English-speaking Canada as a whole unless stated otherwise.

The goal of this paper is to analyze three conflicts between Canada and Quebec through the lens of narratives. First, I will highlight the differences between stories, narratives, and master narratives. Then, I will analyze each nation's dominant master narrative. Finally, I will apply these narratives to three conflicts.

The first battle of narratives, the Roxham Road crisis, was an immigration issue. Quebec wanted Ottawa to close an irregular migration route between Quebec and the US, but the federal government took years to act on it. The second conflict is over Quebec's controversial Bill 21 – a law preventing civil servants from wearing religious symbols. Federal politicians from both the Liberals and the Conservatives have condemned the bill and threatened to finance its contestation in the Supreme Court. The last battle is about Quebec's Bill 96 – a law to further protect French in Quebec. The federal government has a different vision of Canadian bilingualism and the protection of linguistic minorities.

Literature Review and Definitions

A story is an event or a sequence of events, while a narrative is a system of interrelated stories. A narrative can influence a target audience, especially if it hangs together and it rings true. After all, the most important battle is the battle of ideas (Schmid 2014). However, to be credible, a narrative must be accompanied by actions that are coherent with the message (Ingram 2015).

Typically, most countries and nations have a few master narratives. A narrative becomes a master narrative when it is transhistorical and deeply embedded in a particular culture. A master narrative in turn contains story forms – patterns on which stories are usually based. Lastly, archetypes are typical story characters (Halverson, 2011). I will utilize and apply all these terms and concepts to analyze Quebec and Canada's master narratives.

Next, I will apply Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle's theory on narratives from their 2013 book called *Strategic Narratives: Communication Power and the New World Order* to analyze three Quebec-Canada issues.

First, master and identity narratives are rooted in a nation's history and self-identifying characteristics. Second, system narratives describe a nation's standing in the rest of the world. Finally, issue narratives are about current events in nation(s) (Miskimmon et al., 2013).

Narratives can Explain the Roots of Conflicts Between Canada, and Quebec

In this article, I chose to focus on Canada's most crucial relationship – the ever-complicated one with Quebec. Identifying each of these nations' master narratives will help us understand how Canada navigates its diplomatic relations with its controversial province.

Quebec's Master Narrative: Quebec Separatism

Quebec separatism is a form of Quebec nationalism. It is a political ideology that advocates the separation of Quebec from Canada, most often accompanied by an economic association with Canada.

Two centuries before modern Quebec separatism became relevant, New France lost to British America in the 1759 Battle of Quebec, the city of Montreal capitulated in 1760 and New France was officially ceded to Britain in 1763. Under British rule, French Canada tried to become independent in 1837-1838, but the rebellion ended with the hangings of several leaders. Finally, at the time of the 1867 Confederation, most French Canadians were against the proposal for various reasons such as underrepresentation in the House of Commons, but the Catholic Church strongly advised French Canadians to support it. The Catholic Church had struck a deal with pro-Confederation leaders to obtain an influential position in the new country. In exchange, the Church had to persuade French Canadians to vote in favor of the project. French Canadians were thus hesitant to join the Confederation from the start.

The modern nationalist movement started in the 1960s and expanded until the election of the first separatist government in 1976.

In 1970, a small separatist terrorist organization called Front de Libération du Québec, after having committed a series of crimes, kidnapped and executed Quebec Deputy Premier Pierre Laporte. Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau sent the army to Quebec, and hundreds of Quebecers were wrongfully arrested because of their alleged ties to Quebec nationalism. At a press conference just before Trudeau's authorization to send tanks and troops to Quebec, a reporter had asked the prime minister to what extent he was prepared to go in his violation of basic rights. Trudeau replied with the now-famous catchphrase still used by Canadian politicians: "Well, just watch me."

The first separatist government organized a first referendum in 1980, and 60% of Quebecers voted to stay in Canada, while 40% wanted to negotiate a separation agreement with Canada. After the infamous repatriation of the constitution from London to Ottawa to officially sever colonial ties with the UK without Quebec's approval in 1982, Quebec nationalism remained a dominant ideology in the 1980s and the early 1990s as constitutional debates proved unsuccessful.

Another memorable and impactful event related to the separatist movement is the 1995 Quebec referendum. A narrow majority of 50.6% of Quebecers voted to stay in Canada, while a significant 49.4% voted to leave the country after having made a proposition to Canada to stay on good economic and political terms. This narrow escape convinced the entire country that the presence of Quebec within Canada can no longer be taken for granted.

Although support for Quebec separatism is now hovering around 30%, this master narrative remains dominant in the relationships between the federal and provincial governments. A soccer coach was recently fired for his Tweets on Quebec separatism,

having notably said he wished the 2012 assassination attempt on separatist Premier Pauline Marois had succeeded. Although not all examples are that extreme, the framing of Quebec separatism can vary widely, with news outlets going from calling Quebec independence the next logical step to others calling separatists racist, uneducated hillbillies.

Canada's Master Narrative: Multiculturalism

Probably the Canadian equivalent of America's 1776 without the following bloodbath, the 1867 Confederation represents the moment when Canada became a self-governing entity – a decentralized federation consisting of a growing number of provinces and territories. The 1867 Confederation is so crucial and historical in Canadians' minds that most Canadians wrongfully think that the country became an independent state that year. From being colonies to welcoming Loyalists after the American Revolution to being unsuccessfully invaded by the United States in 1812 to losing the Rebellions against the British in 1837-1838 to finally becoming a self-governing entity in 1867, Canada's Confederation must be seen in a context of invasion, resistance, and overcoming obstacles. The Confederation is also a story of unity between various nations and provinces that are all former colonies. More precisely, a Great Coalition between English and French speakers was formed in 1864 to resolve the political deadlock between the two nations. This Coalition ended up being behind the 1867 Confederation project. The objective of this project was to instill liberalism and put individual rights above everything else. Modern-day politicians still refer to 1867 and discuss its successes but also its unfulfilled promises, such as bilingualism. The leading figure of Canadian multiculturalism, Pierre Elliott Trudeau came into power 101 years after the Confederation and reinforced the ideology.

Pierre Elliott Trudeau and his principles of social liberalism, economic and Canadian nationalism, and social justice left a lasting legacy and shaped today's multiculturalist Canada. He envisioned a bilingual country where cultural and linguistic minorities have the same rights. He is also notorious for his reluctance to accept that Quebec is a nation within Canada.

Former university professor and editor of the journal *Cité Libre*, Pierre Elliott Trudeau rapidly rose through the ranks of the Liberal Party of Canada because of his wits and charisma and was elected Prime Minister of Canada in 1968.

However, Pierre Elliott Trudeau's cavalier response to the previously mentioned 1970 crisis only bolstered the support for Quebec nationalism.

Trudeau also orchestrated the 1982 patriation of the constitution without Quebec's consent. The entire saga, full of backdoor scheming and deception, remains taboo to this day.

A controversial figure, Trudeau's impact on Canada is immense. His son Justin can now carry forward his legacy and continue to make Canada a diverse, multicultural, and inclusive country. Ironically, but also representative of his lasting influence, Pierre Elliott Trudeau now has the Montreal airport to his name in a province where large swathes of the population despised him.

Table 1: Quebec and Canada's Master Narratives

Nation	Master Narrative	Story Form	Archetypes
Quebec	Quebec separatism	Resistance, separation, disunity, path to glory, journey (overcoming obstacles), revolt, emancipation, fight for freedom	Invaders, perpetrators, victims, rebels, obstacles
Canada	Multiculturalism	Invasion, resistance, overcoming obstacles, unity, birth of a country, colonialization, struggle for a united/undivided Canada	Colonial masters, clever hero, professor, obstacles

First Battle of Narratives – Roxham Road Crisis (Immigration)

In March 2023, the normally welcoming and multicultural Canada took the difficult decision to close Roxham Road – a road that generated extensive media coverage because it was a site of irregular migration to Canada from the United States. Joe Biden's visit to Canada prompted a new agreement stating that illegal migrants caught within fourteen days of crossing the Canada-US border would be sent back to the other country.

The crux of the Roxham Road diplomatic crisis was between Quebec and Canada. Given the country and the province's conflicting narratives, it took the Trudeau government years to fulfill the wish of its province, Quebec, to close Roxham Road, and many other immigration and identity disputes will likely arise.



Figure 1: Young girl entering Canada (photo credit: Wikimedia.org)

Canada's Narrative

Canada is known for its values of multiculturalism, inclusion, and diversity. Being an alliance of two nations and two official languages, Canada is proud of its liberalism, individual rights record, and its efforts to become a fully bilingual country. Its dominant master narrative remains multiculturalism.

Quebec's Narrative

Interculturalism

While Canada is supremely unconcerned about the integration of immigrants, Quebec is keen on ensuring that all newcomers learn the language and culture of the province. North America's France equivalent believes in interculturalism – a doctrine promoting cross-cultural exchanges instead of self-segregation within cultures. To achieve

interculturalism, a nation must reduce immigration and better integrate its immigrants. In Quebec, this means ensuring that all newcomers learn the common language of the nation – French.

The Superpower Nation

With the decline of the French language and globalization, Quebec must act if it wants to remain a distinct and unique nation within Canada. Although Quebec successfully forced Ottawa's hand on the Roxham Road case, immigration will remain a crucial point of contention between the two governments in the near future. Canada's second most populous province remains a superpower on the national scene because of its political power and natural resources. The threat of another referendum on Quebec independence must also still be on the back of Canadian politicians. This battleground province has voted for all four major federal parties in the last decade.

The Roxham Road closure is a short-term victory for Quebec. However, the wider narratives that caused the dispute will not change in the coming years and could become even more relevant. According to Statistics Canada, Canada is the fastest-growing G7 country in terms of population. Immigration was responsible for 95.9 % of last year's 2.7 % population increase. Migration should thus remain a central issue in a country on track to double its population before 2050.

Canada has announced ever-increasing immigration levels for the coming years, an approach consistent with its welcoming, diverse, and multicultural image. Roxham Road or not, I suspect Quebec will still be reluctant to welcome a large number of migrants (illegal or not). Capacity issues, the decline of French in the province, and Quebec's

insistence to stick to an integration model (interculturalism) and not a multicultural approach are the main reasons.

While all these recent debates, laws, and policies around immigration, language, and religion have taken place under a Liberal government, it is difficult to see how a potential Conservative government would help solve identity issues between Quebec and Canada. The Conservative Party of Canada is as pro-immigration as the Liberals, and the party's right-wing agenda would not resonate well with one of Canada's most progressive provinces, Montreal. Unfortunately, the most likely outcome is that as many identity disputes between Quebec and Canada will continue to take place in the coming years, *La Belle Province* may be headed toward another independence referendum.

Second Battle of Narratives – Bill 21 (Religious symbols)

Historical Background

Before the 1960s, Quebec was one of the poorest and least educated provinces in Canada. The Catholic Church was exceedingly influential in *La Belle Province*, notably in education. In the 1960s, Quebec entered a period of modernization called the Quiet Revolution. This modernization was strongly tied to the secularization of the state.

During the 2000s, Quebec was affected by various debates about the place of religion in society. The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling authorizing the wearing of the kirpan - a Sikh dagger - in schools, among other events, prompted Quebec's Premier Jean Charest to study the issue of religious accommodation. The Bouchard-Taylor Commission, established on February 8, 2007, proposed in its report, released on May 22, 2008, that the principles of interculturalism and open secularism be enshrined in the law. Its

recommendations were a light version of Bill 21 - leaving teachers out of the religious symbols ban. After multiple attempts by three different parties over almost a decade, the current Quebec government was able to pass the highly controversial Bill 21.

The Act respecting the laicity of the State (Bill 21) is a Quebec law adopted on June 16, 2019, by the Quebec National Assembly. It is the first law to provide that "The Quebec State is secular" (Article 1). It prohibits the wearing of religious symbols by government employees in a position of coercive authority as well as public school teachers while recognizing an acquired right for those already in their positions on March 27, 2019, the day before the bill was introduced.

The French Model

Canada's nationalist province wants to protect its language and culture at all costs. As the French language is declining in Quebec and Canada, Quebec turns to France to find solutions to counter trends that could threaten the survival of the nation. Its recent secularism law stating that government employees cannot wear religious symbols was directly inspired by France. Bill 21 is now being contested at the Supreme Court of Canada, which has to determine the validity of such a law. The rest of Canada almost universally condemned Bill 21 as it does not fit Canada's multiculturalism narrative.

Reactions in English Canada

On June 17, 2019, the day after the bill was finally passed, federal Justice Minister David Lametti indicated that his government would not rule out participating in a legal challenge to the new law. On the same day, former Alberta NDP Premier Rachel Notley

posted a message on Twitter stating that it is "a sad day for Canada when racism becomes law" (Bergeron, 2019).

A few days later, her successor, Alberta Premier Jason Kenney, told the legislature that he had voiced his opposition to the bill when he met with his Quebec counterpart François Legault on June 12 (Plante 2019).

On June 26, 2019, Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister in turn denounced the Quebec law, calling on all of his Western Canadian counterparts to denounce a "dangerous, un-Canadian law that deserves to be opposed. "(La Presse Canadienne 2019). On July 18, hours after a Quebec Superior Court judge refused to suspend contested sections of the Secular Act, Brian Pallister publicly invited Quebec civil servants who were uncomfortable with the law to move to Manitoba, which has a severe shortage of bilingual civil servants (Desmarteau 2019). On November 27, the Manitoba government placed advertisements in French-language newspapers in Quebec, inviting Quebecers who felt they had been wronged by Bill 21 to move to Manitoba (Radio-Canada 2019).

The controversy around Bill 21 is a battle between interculturalism and multiculturalism. France's burkini ban was not anti-religion or concerned about clothing. It was about being different and about choosing one's identity over one's adopted country's identity (Taub, 2016). Similarly, Bill 21 wants newcomers to integrate themselves into Quebec society by adhering to its secularism narrative.

However, Canada's multicultural approach includes religious freedom as one of its core pillars. While secularism legislation affects a much smaller number of Canadians and

migrants than immigration laws, its widespread coverage across the country suggests that internal identity disputes about how to integrate new Canadians remain unresolved.

Regardless of what the best approach is, based on the French experience, it is unlikely that Quebec's Bill 21 will have a significant impact on immigration numbers in the coming years.

Third Battle of Narratives – From Bill 101 to Bill 96 (French Language)

The Charter of the French Language (commonly known as Bill 101) is a 1977 Quebec law that makes French, the mother tongue of the majority of the province's population, the official language of legislation, justice, administration, labor, commerce, business, and education.

The adoption of the Charter prompted a debate in Quebec between supporters of a free choice between French and English and those of French unilingualism, as the law made French the usual language of education, commerce, work, and public administration.

In explaining its legislation at the time, the separatist Quebec government emphasized the challenges posed to French by the considerable influence of English in the province in general and in Montreal in particular. It generally insisted on the need to make French the common language to safeguard the uniqueness of Quebec culture and to prevent the assimilation of Quebec within Canada.

This persuasion campaign affected most French-language newspapers that supported the Parti Québécois' position. However, the newspaper *Le Devoir* opposed the bill proposed by the PQ because it felt that the rights of English-speaking people were being oppressed. The 1977 bill had the support of 80.6% of Francophones. However, the

law did not meet with unanimous approval from business and political leaders, including the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who said that the PQ was seeking "the establishment of an ethnic, monolithic society dominated by a single language" (Bilodeau, 2016, p. 34).

Bill 101 was amended several times, and every single amendment was controversial. In the last few years, statistics have shown that the proportion of French speakers has declined in Quebec, mostly due to immigration (Statistics Canada, 2022). The latest amendment to strengthen Bill 101, Bill 96, the *Act respecting French, the Official and Common Language of Quebec*, was adopted on May 24, 2022. In the process, the Quebec government had to use the notwithstanding clause to override the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Bill 96 created the Quebec French Language Ministry, reinforced French training for those not obligated to go to school in French, forced commercial signage to include French even for non-French trademarks, etc. While none of these provisions significantly differ from Bill 101 and this new amendment had overwhelming support from Francophones, Anglophones but more importantly the Trudeau government heavily criticized it.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau embodies the same master narrative as his father, a narrative of multiculturalism and bilingualism. He believes that Canada must become bilingual and that all provinces should strive for bilingualism and protect their linguistic minorities by offering services in both languages. Just like Pierre Trudeau decades ago, Justin Trudeau has repeatedly compared the situation of francophone minorities in the rest of Canada to the situation of anglophones in Quebec (Bergeron, 2022).

Quebec has always rejected this comparison, claiming that English is not threatened in the province. The Quebec government argues that Canadian bilingualism will turn Quebec into a new Louisiana. If Quebec is bilingual, the attraction to English in North America will lead to Quebecers abandoning French (Authier, 2022).

While amendments to Bill 101 such as Bill 96 will keep on being controversial due to the nature of having a government imposing rules on the language its citizens must speak, study, or work in, I think politicians and journalists on both sides exaggerate the impact of a single amendment. The effects of Bill 96 should be mild. On one hand, the Quebec government portrays it as a crucial victory for French in Quebec even though it could be an electoral tactic by the government to play the defender of the French language and to seek support from frightened nationalists. On the other hand, Bill 96 opponents claim that basic rights are under attack. As with Bill 21, internal narratives amplify the attention around a not-so-life-changing law.

Table 2: Quebec's Narratives

Master & Identity Narratives – How Quebec views itself	System Narratives – How Quebec views the World	Issue Narratives – How Quebec views the issue	
	Interculturalism	Quebec does not have the capacity to welcome all these migrants.	Religion has held Quebec back for too long.
	Nationalism		
	Separation between the state and religion	Immigration has contributed to the decline of French in Quebec.	The Montreal Anglophone elite used to rule over Quebec.
	Belief in the importance of nations to preserve their culture, language, and heritage.	Bill 21 helps protect Quebec values and culture.	French is threatened in Quebec due to globalization and pressure from the US and English Canada.
Importance of France to identity			
Superpower on the national scene			
Welcoming to immigrants who are willing to assimilate.			
Affirmation of Quebec as a nation within Canada.	Nations should protect their own interests first.	Quebec is on track to become the new Louisiana.	

Table 3: Canada's Narratives

Master & Identity Narratives – How Canada views itself	Issue Narratives – How Canada views the issue	
Peaceful, stable, democratic country just North of the US	Bill 21 is a racist, dangerous, un-Canadian law that deserves to be opposed	Anglophone rights are not respected
Welcoming		Nationwide bilingualism would solve language disputes
Leader in tolerance; lead by example	Bill 21 is ruining Canada's reputation as a tolerant country	Linguistic minorities across Canada deserve equal treatment.
Historic immigration success		
Normal country putting human rights before own interest	Bill 21 does not respect basic human rights such as religious freedom	Canada needs migrants.

Solutions and Recommendations

All three case studies presented above demonstrate the impact of narratives on the countless battles between Quebec and Canada. Immigration, religious freedom, and language all play into Quebec's narrative of interculturalism and protection of the nation's culture and identity. These three themes also tap into Canada's multicultural and bilingual narrative.

To reconcile both sides about immigration, I think Quebec should welcome a large number of French-speaking migrants. Quebec would protect its language while fulfilling Ottawa's immigration targets. Both narratives would be satisfied, and federal and provincial governments could claim victory.

The law preventing civil servants from wearing religious symbols is a trickier issue. Multicultural Canada could try to persuade Quebec by demonstrating how France might have gotten it wrong on secularism. It is common knowledge that the current Quebec government is inspired by France on many issues. If Ottawa can somehow reuse statistics about how a disproportionate number of ISIS fighters come from France, Quebec could change its mind. In 2015, Brookings Institution researchers Chris Meserole and Will McCants established that the most powerful variable in predicting a country's jihadi production is whether French is spoken in that country or not. Digging deeper, the researchers concluded that the reason why France, Belgium, and Tunisia have higher rates of ISIS fighters is their respective campaigns against the veil (Wallace-Wells, 2016). Unless Canada brings up these statistics, Quebec will continue to put forward the dying culture of Quebec as a justification for a secularism law such as Bill 21. Could Quebec tap

into Canada's multiculturalism narrative to illustrate the fact that Quebec should choose how it wants to exist within Canada – as a distinct nation and culture?

Finally, language laws are inevitably controversial in a bilingual country. Quebec must engage with Canada's narrative to protect the language rights of minorities across Canada, including the Anglophone community in Quebec. Canada must however realize that the situation of French in Quebec is unique in North America. If it wants Quebec to be respectful of its Anglophone minority, it must lead the way by expanding French services across the country, starting by making the federal government truly bilingual.

Conclusion

Narratives enable policymakers to evaluate conflicts in a comprehensive manner. Nations have their own sets of interrelated stories that cause them to view the world in a certain way. Master narratives are transhistorical and remarkably difficult to abandon. Multicultural Canada thinks that the West should welcome migrants from all over the world. Multiculturalism is incompatible with intercultural Quebec, as seen in the Roxham Road case – a battle over identity. Quebec relentlessly strives to protect its nation's culture and language by ensuring that all newcomers speak French and adopt Quebec culture.

Canada's narrative is the strongest. As we will witness Canada doubling its population, the country will coast through the challenges of mass immigration with ease because its population outside of Quebec strongly believes in the multiculturalism narrative. Quebec's largest city, Montreal, is slowly buying into that narrative, so I suspect it is only a matter of time before the rest of Quebec follows suit. Could the two nations become multicultural?

Another more cooperative scenario would let Quebec choose its immigrants, provided that the province welcomes enough of them. Canada would also respect Quebec's democratic choice to pursue secularism and protect its language. As with any other narrative battle, both sides should explore which narratives drive each other's policies and attempt to use them to make their point. The next federal election, featuring Trudeau and its controversial opponent Pierre Poilievre, should be fascinating. Will any of them try to garner political support in Quebec by using narratives?

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