

**The Current Quebec Separatist Debate and Its Influence on the First Nations of Quebec**

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## **Abstract**

Quebec has a long history of political struggles for autonomy, stemming back to Britain's conquest of New France in 1759. Since then, tensions have increased between Anglophone and Francophone Canada. These tensions are manifested in the current separatist movements, which first gained substantial ground in the 1960's. The Parti Québécois, an influential political party in Quebec calling for sovereignty, has been the main driver for independence. The separatists want an independent Quebec, and often base their nationalism on a French-Québécois identity, including French as the primary language and a shared identity going back to the French settlers. However, as they define their own unique culture, and pit Quebec against the rest of Canada, separatists marginalize or ignore minority groups and the First Nations of the province. Despite this fact, the First Nations are crucial actors in the separatist debates, and their position sheds light on a seldom-seen dimension of Quebec separatism. The First Nations have a long history of inhabiting the region, and place great importance on the territory of their ancestors. Through the use of international standards and local organizations, First Nations vocally assert their position against separatism. Some of the main issues they see as pertinent in the separatist debates are issues of land rights, resource management, and their right to self-determination. For this reason, it becomes clear that separatism does not only concern French-Quebec and English-Canada, but that it concerns the First Nations as well. In this paper, I provide an overview of these debates, placing them in the context of the history of the First Nations, indigenous issues internationally, and current First Nations responses to separatism. I argue the Quebec separatist debates and the First Nations' responses expose the complexities of separatism and the long-standing tensions between the Canadian government and indigenous groups.

## **Introduction**

“Let us be even more clear: Quebec can decide what it wants in terms of its culture, its identity and its development, but it cannot claim sovereignty over a territory which is still, fundamentally, First Nation” (Ghislain Picard, *The Canadian Press* 1). The debates in Quebec over whether or not the province should become independent from the Canadian Federation have covered several decades. These debates are not only of critical importance to those who consider themselves Québécois, but also to minority groups and the First Nations within the province. Over the centuries since Quebec was founded in 1608, the province has developed a unique identity within Canada. Historically, tensions have existed between the Anglophone settlers and the Francophone settlers in Canada, and they continue to exist today. However, it is not as clear-cut as simply that Francophone Quebec wants to secede from the rest of Anglophone Canada. Instead, there is much disagreement between the Québécois over the idea of separation, as well as a clash of opinions between the Separatists and the First Nations.

These debates raise not only issues of cultural difference, but also issues of sovereignty, land rights, and politics. Exploring the different sides to the separatist debates, specifically the pro-separation Québécois and the First Nations of the province brings to light the importance and richness of the integration of cultures and the points of conflict between them. The history of the First Nations in the region of Quebec, the current relationship between the First Nations of Quebec and the rest of the province, common indigenous issues internationally, and the history of separatist movements in Quebec allow for the interpretation and analysis of the responses of and consequences for the First Nations in the event of Quebec’s separation from Canada. An independent Quebec would adversely affect the First Nations of the province by perpetuating the tendency of Canadian governments to overlook the needs and rights of indigenous populations;

however, the First Nations of Quebec are by no means passive in the separatist debates and would defend their rights should Quebec vote to separate. I argue the Quebec separatist debates and the First Nations' responses expose the complexities of separatism and the long-standing tensions between the Canadian government and indigenous groups.

My research explored the connection between recent separatist debates and the First Nations of Quebec through both a historical and current context. In my research, I used several different methods. Firstly, I looked at current news articles and scholarly journal articles to understand the recent debates over the separatist movement in Québec, from both the side of the Québec government and political parties, as well as the side of the different First Nations present in Québec. I then took a historical and anthropological approach by researching the history of the First Nations in the area and their interactions with the settlers. The sources I used included books, encyclopedias, and articles from scholarly journals. I also looked at common indigenous issues internationally using sources such as United Nations General Assembly resolutions and articles from journals, as well as the history of Quebec separatism. Lastly, I used primary sources including declarations by the Assembly of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador and a phone interview with the chief of the assembly, Ghislan Picard.

### **The Role of Culture and Ethnicity**

Quebec nationalism is not only a political phenomenon but also a cultural one, and as such, the idea of a distinct cultural identity comprised of language, values, and customs remains at the forefront of discussion. Many scholars have defined and discussed the concept of culture. Two of the most influential have been Renato Rosaldo and Clifford Geertz. Rosaldo discusses the prevalent ideas on culture and control, drawing on Geertz and Victor Turner. Rosaldo sees

Geertz and Turner as having similar views, specifically “that culture and society must be regarded as mechanisms of control” (Renato Rosaldo 96). However, although Rosaldo agrees with Geertz and Turner on the link between culture and control, he sees culture as more complex than this: “when the workings of culture are reduced to those of a control mechanism, such phenomena as passions, spontaneous fun, and improvised activities tend to drop out of sight” (Rosaldo 102). Therefore Rosaldo posits an expanded view on culture to cover more than simply culture as a control mechanism.

Additionally, he highlights the importance of change in society, and how cultures and societies do not remain static bounded entities like some have argued. Understanding change in a society is important in the discussion of Quebec separatism, as it is necessary to understand Quebec as a dynamic province with a unique history in order to understand the relationship between the First Nations and the province. Rosaldo emphasizes the importance of change, and negates the idea of culture and society as static entities. He argues for the “processual perspective,” which “stresses the case history method; it shows how ideas, events, and institutions interact and change through time” (Rosaldo 93). Furthermore, in his discussion of Chicano narratives, he furthers his conception of culture by remarking “the Chicano narratives speak to changing conceptions of culture, not only as a concept in social analysis but also as a vital resource for a developing politics of identity and community” (Rosaldo 149). Geertz, in a similar vein, discusses cultural patterns, which he defines as “systems or complexes of symbols” (Clifford Geertz 5). To him, a symbol is “used for any object, act; event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception; the conception is the symbol’s ‘meaning’” (Geertz 4). The politics of identity and community Rosaldo refers to above, and Geertz’s discussion of symbols relate directly to the creation of a Québécois identity by the separatist parties through

the use of a community-based rhetoric such as references to a shared history and common language. The use of a shared history and language is then discussed in terms of ethnicity, in order to further strengthen claims for sovereignty.

Ethnicity is an important concept widely discussed and defined in a scholarly context. As Jack Eller argues, ethnicity is a complex concept that varies from case to case and is not easily defined (Jack Eller 7-8). Be this as it may, he argues “ethnicity is, thus, subjective, even while it is based on, refers to, or invokes ‘objective’ or shared cultural or historical markers” (Eller 90). Furthermore, he goes on to argue that ethnicities are to some extent labels created for administrative reasons (Eller 10). This point is crucial to the discussion of Quebec and its First Nations, as the use of ethnicity creates specific groups, which can be used in political and limiting ways. Looking at ethnicity as it pertains to conflict, Kenneth Christie discusses how the creation of new nations and the increase of ethno-nationalism and nationalistic political groups around the world often lead to security threats and international crises (Kenneth Christie 3). This argument applies to the discussion of Quebec separatism, especially in terms of the rise of ethno-nationalism, as separatist political parties see the ethnic category of a French-speaking native Québécois as the basis for their nationalistic movement. Both Eller and Christie discuss ethnicity and its relationship to conflict, a point relevant to the situation in Quebec since the French-Québécois ethnic group is in conflict with other ethnicities such as the Anglophones and the First Nations, specifically over language laws prioritizing French over other languages, as well as over policies concerning land and resource use.

## **Nationalism and the Concept of Community**

Nationalism and community, both key terms used by both separatists and indigenous groups, are distinct but complementary concepts. In her book on the history of Quebec nationalism, Anne Griffin discusses specific concepts she finds pertinent to the discussion of Quebec nationalism, including those of the ideology of survival, memory, and nation. According to Griffin, “the ideology of survival, as expressed in the motto *Exister c’est survivre* (“to exist is to survive”) has characterized Quebec’s history and her relations with Canada for over 200 years, and it has left a distinct impression on the lives of her people” (Anne Griffin 19). Because of Quebec’s distinct identity and culture, the province feels as though they are fighting to survive culturally. An integral part of the ideology of survival is the concept of memory, which Griffin defines as “an instrument of survival,” as she remarks that memory defines one’s membership in a group as well as serves as an indication of belonging (Griffin 20). In this way memory plays an important role in the formation of nationalism in Quebec. Furthermore, Griffin argues that the ideology of survival and the concept of memory come together to form the idea of a nation, which she defines as “a community which comes into being when a people identifies itself in terms of a distinct history and a common commitment to the future” (Griffin 29).

Benedict Anderson takes a different approach to defining a nation, positing two definitions relevant to my research on Quebec separatism, as used together they provide a more in depth view on the concepts of nation and nationalism. Firstly, he defines a nation as “an imagined political community-and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Benedict Anderson 6). According to Anderson, a nation is imagined because every member will never know every other member, yet still has an idea of the whole community, limited because it has finite boundaries, and sovereign because of its perceived freedom (Anderson 7). In this

definition, he focuses on the nation as a political community, whereas Griffin's definition focuses on the nation as a cultural and historical community. However, Anderson does take into account the importance of history in the formation of a nation, as he provides a second definition that argues "nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it" (Anderson 12). Quebec nationalism relies heavily on the idea of an imagined political community, as separatists see Quebec as a distinct, limited, and sovereign entity. Furthermore, Quebec separatism is clearly aligned with the memory of New France before it was forcibly integrated into the Canadian Federation.

### **History of the First Nations of Canada**

The history of Canada is often told from an ethnocentric perspective, generally beginning with the arrival of Europeans and more specifically the French, thus ignoring the thousands of years of indigenous history and angering First Nations throughout the country (Olive Patricia Dickason 11). By overlooking this long history, it becomes easier to marginalize claims made by First Nations today. Furthermore, the history of Canada as told from an ethnocentric view also minimalizes the roles of the indigenous groups, casting them as passive partners within the European trading systems, whereas they actually played a vital and active role within these trading systems (Dickason 12). For this reason, I take a long historical perspective in analyzing the recent separatist debates, focusing in particular on the interactions between different First Nations, and between First Nations and the European settlers.

Many First Nations believe their ancestors originated on the lands they hold today, and their myths and stories of creation emphasize their attachment to the land (Dickason 21). For the

First Nations, this strong connection to the land remains an integral part of their cultures, and an important basis for contemporary expressions of political and cultural rights, especially in the case of Quebec. The most commonly accepted anthropological theory concerning the population of the Americas is that *Homo sapiens sapiens* came from Asia across the Bering Strait, when the sea level was lowered creating a steppe called Beringia (Dickason 21). In addition, the length of time the Americas have been populated often remains contested, but is likely around 25,000 years (Guy Gugliotta 2). One way in which archeologists can attempt to tell the length of time the Americas have been populated is through linguistics. Language diversification can be an indicator of the long evolution of languages, and archeologist Ruth Gruhn believes that the proliferation of indigenous languages found on the continent is due to the evolution of several languages over about 50,000 years (Dickason 25).

Many indigenous groups were initially mobile hunters and gatherers, eventually adopting a sedentary lifestyle. Groups that were mobile also tended to be egalitarian; resources were shared equally among the people, and chiefs gained power only through their ability to provide for their people, and garner their respect (Dickason 45). In contrast, sedentary chiefdoms usually had a hierarchical structure, and the chief had more power than in mobile communities (Dickason 45-46). The concept of power for indigenous groups and Europeans differed, as in Europe rulers often had absolute power and were given explicit, visible respect, whereas chiefs often had a subtler type of power and respect that was difficult for Europeans to see and understand, often leading to conflict between the two. The establishment of permanent settlements, and often consequently chiefdoms, was often correlated with the development of a specific art form, such as basket weaving, woodwork, copperwork, and hide painting (Dickason 48). Across the Americas, indigenous cultures were widely varied as can be seen by the example

of the variety of art forms, and this complexity in culture is important as it indicates a uniqueness that will form an integral part of the First Nations' role in the Quebec separatist debates.

Indigenous groups did not develop in isolation, and intercultural contacts and exchanges were crucial. It has been argued by some that there are cultural similarities between some South American indigenous cultures and Japanese and Chinese cultures, such as the fact that the Japanese and the Amerindians are the only peoples who sing death songs, and the similarities between pottery in the Americas and pottery in China (Dickason 55-57). These similarities make transoceanic contact a possibility, and show the potential importance of intercultural exchange. It has also been argued that there was contact between North Africa and the Americas around 1200 BC, as it would have been possible for sailors to cross the Atlantic with the sailing technology available (Dickason 59). Although some of the similarities found between the cultures of the indigenous groups in the Americas and Asian and African cultures may just be coincidences, the fact that some type of intercultural contact took place shows that contrary to a Eurocentric view of indigenous groups as isolated and unchanging, as they in fact were connected and dynamic.

The first known contact between Europeans and the indigenous groups of North America was that of the Norse, which occurred around 1000 AD, when many of the groups in Canada were skilled hunters and gatherers (Dickason 63). At this time, the most densely populated parts of Canada were the Northwest Coast and present day Ontario, totaling approximately 260,000 people (Dickason 63). Although the groups of the Northwest Coast are important and interesting to study, I will be focusing mainly on the groups in the east of Canada, as they are more relevant to the discussion on Quebec separatism. The most important group in the east at this time was the Iroquois, comprised of the Huron and the Five Nations. These groups were sedentary,

practiced agriculture, and lived in longhouses in villages of about 1500 people (Dickason 69). Again, it is important to note that these groups were not completely isolated from each other, and there were cultural exchanges between groups. In the sixteenth century, the Iroquois formed confederacies that would be powerful players in regional politics (Dickason 69-70). The two confederacies included the Huron Confederacy and the Iroquois Confederacy called the Five Nations. The Huron Confederacy was the largest, and therefore had control over trading routes, although they would no longer be key players in the height of European trade (Dickason 70). Trading was a main activity, which often was influenced by alliances between groups cemented by exchanging gifts: “Gift exchanges- ‘I give to you that you may give to me’ - were a social and diplomatic obligation...above all gifts were essential for sealing agreements and alliances with other peoples” (Dickason 78). Gift exchanges remained important after the arrival of the Europeans, who exchanged goods for promises of alliance.

The first substantial contact between Europeans and the indigenous peoples of eastern Canada occurred between the French and the Laurentian Iroquoians who resided in a village on the current site of Quebec City. Cartier came in contact with them in 1534, and the meeting was described as amicable on both sides, as the Iroquoians seemed pleased to meet the French, and the French gave the Iroquoian women small gifts (Dickason 98-99). However, although this first meeting was friendly, the relationship would worsen as many relationships between Europeans and indigenous groups did. According to Europeans, the indigenous peoples “who were not organized into states could not be classed as inhabitants with a recognizable title to the land,” and using this logic, Cartier believed he could claim the land he discovered (Dickason 100). As it will become apparent from the later discussion of the Quebec separatist movement and the response of the First Nations, land rights remain a contested and controversial subject, as there is

a disconnect between the European view and the First Nation view on what constitutes having land rights.

Samuel de Champlain founded Quebec in 1608 where Cartier had met the Laurentian Iroquois a little less than a century earlier. However, by then the Laurentian Iroquois had disappeared due most likely to war with the Mi'kmaq and subsequent attacks by the Mohawks (Dickason 102). Champlain instead came into contact with several different groups, and quickly began to make alliances. In 1603 Champlain made an alliance with the chief of the Montagnais, who were celebrating their recent victory over the Iroquois, by sealing “a pact of friendship with him and his people, which allowed the French to establish on the Montagnais territory but which did not involve land title” (Dickason 103). These alliances were often mutually beneficial. The French wanted to partake in the fur trade, and the Montagnais, since they controlled the area wanted to profit from the presence of the French. There was a good deal of reciprocity of early trade relations and alliances, and highlights the fact that it was as much the indigenous peoples’ decision and desire to establish relations with the Europeans, as it was the Europeans’ decision and desire. Indeed, unlike the common view that contact with Europeans effectively ruined the purity of the indigenous groups’ cultures, Dickason argues that there was not an immediate abandonment of traditional ways of doing things, but instead, “adaptations were selective and within established cultural patterns” (Dickason 104). This harkens back to Geertz and Turner’s argument that culture is a mechanism of control, as the indigenous peoples asserted control in if and how they adopted aspects of European culture.

A disconnect over territorial sovereignty is an important part in the current separatist debates, and its roots can be traced back to the historical relations between European settlers and indigenous groups. After Quebec was established in 1608, the French shifted from trading with

the Montagnais to trading with the Huron and the Mi'kmaq in fish and fur (Dickason 108).

However, there was again discord over the concept of land rights, and the position of the French on the continent. As mentioned above, the French believed they had rights to the land, as they had discovered it without any states already existing. Furthermore, as Christians, they viewed non-Christians as inferior and thus as having lesser claims to sovereignty than themselves (Dickason 109). They therefore saw themselves as the rulers, and the indigenous people as their subjects. This was not how groups such as the Mi'kmaq viewed the relationship, as they saw the French as trading partners, friends, and allies (Dickason 108).

The English also played an important role in the region, taking over Acadia from the French. They tried to win loyalty from the indigenous groups by offering more goods than the French had and giving them religious freedom, as many were Catholic from French missionary influence, in return for an oath of allegiance (Dickason 110). The French in return used missionaries who were often respected by the indigenous peoples because of their spirituality to gain the favor of the indigenous groups. This characterized relations at this time, as the French and British attempted to gain indigenous allies to fight each other for sovereignty over Canada. In response, many indigenous groups learned to play the British and French off each other for their own gains (Dickason 144). During English and French colonization of the region, there were many wars, including the Iroquois War from 1609 to 1701 fought between the Five Nations and New France, and the Mi'kmaq War fought with the British from 1613 to 1763 (Dickason 149). As can be expected, these wars shifted alliances, and changed the balances of power in the region. In addition, France's defeat in Canada by the hands of the British resulting in the Treaty of Paris in 1763 not only was disastrous for the French Canadians, but also for many indigenous groups who no longer could play the French and British off each other, but who also lost the

goods given to them by the French (Dickason 179). Overall, British and French interests in the region created a new landscape of alliances and balances of power not only between the Europeans and the indigenous groups, but also between different indigenous groups. These relationships brought new types of trade, and ultimately many wars, which had profound impacts on the indigenous peoples of the region.

Issues of land rights remained prominent in the changing relationships between indigenous groups and Europeans. After gaining control of France's portions of Canada, English King George III issued a royal proclamation with regards to the First Nations, establishing a western boundary and declaring the land west of it "Indian Territories," requiring people to go through the Indian Department if they wanted to settle or trade across that boundary (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 1). Throughout the 1700's, the main goal of the Indian Department was to keep the peace between the European settlers and the First Nations, in order to continue trading and manage the British military presence. The American War of Independence and the subsequent Treaty of Versailles in 1783 recognizing American independence, and ceding lands to the Americans caused many Loyalists and indigenous groups whose lands had been ceded to migrate to Canada, causing peaceful land surrenders by First Nations to accommodate these displaced people (AANDC 1). During the late 1700's, the British in Canada were mainly concerned with maintaining military alliances with the First Nations, and this proved useful during the War of 1812 against the American colonies as First Nations fought with the British to prevent the invasion of southern Ontario. During the mid-1800's, as more settlers arrived, there was an increased need for land, which resulted in more land surrender treaties, shrinking the land First Nations had access to (AANDC 1). These actions foreshadowed future clashes over land and land rights.

After the War of 1812, military concerns diminished, thus changing the relationship between the British colonists and the First Nations. The British began implementing legislation aimed at the assimilation and control of the First Nations. Britain's expanding empire and its subsequent dealings with different indigenous groups led British colonists in Canada to take a civilizing approach to their relationship with the First Nations. At this time, the British thought themselves to be superior to indigenous peoples, one of the reasons being because they were Christians and many indigenous people were not. Therefore, policies encouraging assimilation became more prevalent. There were several pieces of legislation written to provide an incentive for First Nations to become "civilized," including the Gradual Civilization Act, which granted 50 acres of land and monetary incentives to First Nations individuals who were debt free and who agreed to give up their traditional lifestyles (AANDC 1). Furthermore, in 1860 the Indian Land Act was passed, giving authority for indigenous affairs over to the British colonies, and implementing a centralized approach to dealing with the First Nations (AANDC 1). The 1867 British North American Act created the Dominion of Canada, and the government of this new entity also continued to adhere to a centralized approach to First Nations' affairs. Another important piece of legislation was the Indian Act, passed in 1876, and amended many times. This act strengthened the control of the Canadian government over the First Nations, and further restricted the autonomy and authority they had, and banning many traditional activities such as the potlatch and the sun dance in an increased effort to assimilate the First Nations (AANDC 1). Education became another way in which the government attempted to assimilate and civilize the First Nations.

Many First Nations fought in both world wars, and after World War II, groups and organizations of First Nations began to emerge. In 1946, a joint committee of the Senate and

House of Commons reviewed the Indian Act with input from First Nations leaders, who discussed their aversion to assimilation, and their desire to be seen as equal to other Canadians (AADNC 1). However, this review did not do much to change the existing policies, although it did repeal the ban on the potlatch and other traditional activities. In 1969, the government issued the White Paper, a radical change to existing policies calling for the repeal of the Indian Act. However, there was no consultation with First Nations, and they rejected it, arguing that while they did not like the Indian Act, it did give them protection and additional rights (AADNC 1). In response the government decreased their paternalistic tendencies and helped fund First Nations political organizations. Throughout the 1970's there were important court cases, such as the one the Cree and Inuit filed against Hydro-Québec, in which the court ruled that Hydro-Québec could not begin their project until land titles were settled in Northern Quebec (AADNC 1). These portrayed a willingness on the part of the Canadian government to consider First Nations land claims.

However, there were still tensions and conflict between the Canadian government and the First Nations, which could be seen in the Oka crisis of 1990, when a group of Mohawks blockaded a road so that the town of Oka would be unable to expand their golf course onto sacred Mohawk land (AADNC 1). This crisis lasted 78 days before negotiations ended the conflict. In response to this event, in 1991, the government issued the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to address specific concerns and issues surrounding the relationship between the government and the First Nations. The government also began to promote education of First Nations by First Nations, and upon seeing the negative effect their previous education policies had had on the First Nations, they issued a formal apology in 2008. This portrayed an increasing awareness of the detrimental effects most of the government policies had had on the First

Nations, and increasing effort to create a healthier, more respectful relationship. However, a healthier, more respectful relationship did not always occur, pushing local indigenous groups and organizations to look to the international community for support.

### **Indigenous Issues Internationally**

Within the past several decades, the international community has begun to consider and formalize the rights of indigenous peoples around the world, as well as address common issues and concerns. The most common issues and concerns for the indigenous international community include inequality, land rights, and the right to have a say in local issues.

International bodies such as the United Nations (UN), as well as other organizations such as the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) have become active in documenting and advocating for the rights of indigenous peoples globally. Furthermore, the documents and declarations put forth by such groups, especially the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, are often cited in specific cases around the world to strengthen the argument of the indigenous group. By creating international discourse on the issues many indigenous groups face, these organizations not only raise awareness, but also provide tools for indigenous groups to use to advance their claims.

In 2007, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, with 144 states in favor and four against, including the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. The declaration begins by recognizing that indigenous people are equal to all others, but at the same time that all people are different and should be respected as such. It also explicitly denounces discrimination based on "national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences" (UN Declaration on the Rights of

Indigenous Peoples 2). This part of the declaration reads similarly to a declaration on human rights in general, as it discusses equality and discrimination. However, the declaration specifically mentions that it recognizes the fact that “that indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices as a result of, inter alia, their colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources” (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2). Generally speaking, the first part of the declaration discusses the importance of promoting indigenous rights, taking existing treaties into consideration, the relevancy of collective rights, and the importance of fostering respect (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2-4). Following this section are forty-six articles that cover a wide variety of topics concerning the rights of indigenous peoples, from the right to self-determination, to land rights, to the right to maintain their cultures.

The articles I found to be particularly relevant to the issue of Quebec separatism and the First Nations of the province were Article 18, Article 19, and Article 26. Article 18 puts forth that “indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures” (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 8). In the case of Quebec, this means First Nations in the province would have the right to participate in the separatist debates, since such a separation would affect their rights, specifically their land rights. As will be seen subsequently, this right to participate and to have a say in the separatist proceedings is very important to many members of the First Nations. Article 19 follows in a similar vein to Article 18, reinforcing the idea that consultation and consent are necessary for a state to implement any legislative or administrative policies that would affect an indigenous group (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 8). This article again pertains directly to the separatist debates

in Quebec, as a separation from Canada would be a legislative and administrative decision affecting the First Nations of the region. Therefore, they should be consulted and give their consent before such an action would take place. Lastly, Article 26 covers land rights, declaring that “indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired” (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 10). This point will be crucial in the discussion of the separatist debates, as the issue of the physical territory of Quebec is a major concern for the First Nations.

Although Canada was one of the four countries that did not initially adopt the declaration upon its publication in 2007, Canada did adopt it in 2010. However, in the statement put forth by the Canadian government regarding the adoption of the declaration in 2010, it is noted that the declaration is not legally binding, although it is remarked that adopting the declaration represented a re-affirmation of their commitment to work together with the First Nations in the governing of the country (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada 1). Furthermore, in October of 2014, the United Nations put forth another document pertaining to indigenous rights, which every country supported except Canada, who raised objections. This cast a negative shadow over Canada’s reputation, especially over the current government who raised the objections, and Chief Picard of the Assembly of First Nations was quoted as calling the decision “deeply concerning” (Zi-Ann Lum 1). These decisions by the Canadian government provide relevant context to the current separatist debates in Quebec, as they expose the various positions taken by the government with regards to the First Nations.

In addition to the United Nations, the IWGIA serves as an international organization dedicated to the advancement of indigenous rights worldwide. Among many other things, the

organization puts together yearly reports on indigenous people around the world, the most recent one available being from 2013. This report raises issues such as land rights, natural resource management, and legislation; issues central to the separatist debates in Quebec and their effect on the First Nations of the province. The section on the conditions in Canada discussed several issues, including the adoption of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, legislation affecting the First Nations, and resource extraction. The report mainly discussed the problems in Canada, and took a rather negative tone. In discussing the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the report remarked that “Canada unfortunately does not engage as a constructive partner in this work and continues to attempt to devalue the Declaration with statements emphasizing it is an ‘aspirational instrument’” (The Indigenous World 2013 46). This shows that although Canada did adopt the declaration in 2010, some groups feel as though it is not taken seriously within Canada, thus impeding the rights of indigenous people. The report also looks unfavorably upon several pieces of legislation including two budget bills the organization feels are detrimental to First Nations’ rights, and which were not created or approved in consultation with the First Nations (The Indigenous World 2013 47). By not consulting First Nations the government effectively ignored the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Furthermore, in this report the IWGIA argued that resources had been extracted without the proper consent of the First Nations controlling the land. This brings up the issue of land rights and the right to control natural resources discussed in the declaration. Overall, the report paints a rather negative picture of the situation of indigenous people in Canada, giving examples of instances where the government acted without regard for the declaration they had adopted in 2010.

## **The History of Nationalism and Separatism in Quebec**

Since the founding of Quebec in 1608, the region has been an important and unique presence in Canada. As a French colony located in a completely new territory, Quebec developed a distinct cultural identity combining its French heritage with the new lifestyles the settlers adopted. A sense of this identity has survived throughout the years, and was especially strengthened after the British took control of Canada, as their francophone identity contrasted significantly with the British presence and control. Since a sense of a shared identity and history provides a unifying force, the Quebec separatist movements built off of and emphasized this identity in their rhetoric of separation. By proposing that all Québécois share an identity beginning with the founding of Quebec, I believe leaders of the separatist movements hoped to instill a sense of collective belonging, a shared cultural identity, and thus a feeling of national unity. Creating this sense of a shared identity stemming back hundreds of years is essential in justifying claims for sovereignty not only to the Québécois themselves, but also to the rest of Canada.

In writing about the history of Quebec separatism, Anne Griffin discusses what she terms the ideology of survival, which she argues has been a main component of Quebec's history since its foundation (Griffin 19). At the beginning, the ideology of survival referred mainly to the need to survive physically in a new place, however with time it evolved to indicate a need to survive culturally in an ever-increasingly Anglophone country. Initially, the Catholic church held the role of promoting the ideology of survival, so when the church declined in dominance, the independence movement took up this ideology and served as a secular vessel for promoting identity, community, memory, and the ideology of survival (Griffin 27). Since the church had been instrumental in maintaining a sense of community, the independence movement and the

subsequent separatist political parties aimed to preserve a sense of community by adopting a similar discourse to that of the church.

In addition, Griffin discusses the importance of memory in creating a sense of national identity as she remarks “memory defines membership in a group and is a mark of belonging” (Griffin 20). The Quebec license plate that reads “Je me souviens” (I remember) also shows how the Quebec government uses the concept of a shared history and shared memory to create feelings of unity and nationalism among the Québécois. Although people do not actually have memories of this history, I believe the rhetoric of a common history and a common sense of struggle and survival become important tools for separatist groups such as the Parti Québécois to justify their wish to separate from the rest of Canada.

The beginning of the shared collective memory of Quebec starts with Jacques Cartier’s establishment of a French claim to North America in 1534 with the erection of a cross with the fleur-de-lys, an important symbol throughout Quebec’s history (Griffin 31). However, this first attempt to settle in Canada did not prove successful, and it wasn’t until 1608 that the French established the first permanent settlement in Canada, and in 1611 they established the city of Montreal. In 1663 Quebec was transferred to direct royal control under King Louis XIV, who dictated political, economic, and social policies due to his desire to create wealth from Canada’s resources and establish a sizeable French population on the continent in order to have power in the New World (Griffin 32). However, the British started to take control of large areas in Canada, and in 1759 they defeated the French in what is known as the Conquest, thus gaining control of New France. After this defeat, Quebec was isolated from France, and began to develop its own unique identity based on the aforementioned ideology of survival (Griffin 33). During this time the church became increasingly important in perpetuating a sense of cultural

identity and community in Quebec. The British attempted to govern Quebec using British policies, but soon found this to be ineffective, and so they instated the Quebec Act of 1774 allowing for the freedom of worship and the reestablishment of French laws. This however was also problematic, so the British enacted the Constitutional Act of 1791 dividing the country into Upper Canada and Lower Canada (Quebec); a period of time that Griffin argues developed Quebec's national consciousness (Griffin 35). As can be seen, tensions between the British and the francophone region of Quebec have existed since Britain conquered New France. The difficulty of deciding how best to deal with Quebec as can be seen by the various acts created by Britain continues to be a problem the Canadian government faces today as evidenced by the current separatist debates.

Griffin argues that separatism first gained ground in the 1830's, when conflict arose over bad economic conditions leading to the Rebellion of 1837, which the British put down, and which led to the consolidation of Upper and Lower Canada in 1841 and a policy of assimilation (Griffin 36-37). This lasted until the 1867 British North America Act, which created four provinces, Quebec being one of them, in a confederation. Although this act allowed for French to be used in parliament, in Quebec legislature, and in courts, the Québécois were still outnumbered by the English, and the "separateness" of French Canadian culture became even more prominent (Griffin 38). In 1885, there was a crucial rebellion in Manitoba led by Louis Riel, a Métis, which was put down brutally by the central Canadian government with his execution. Although Riel's rebellion had to do with establishing a Métis government, and protesting Anglo-Canadian expansion westward, his execution served as a symbol to many Québécois of the central government's repressive tendencies, and incited a unified outrage that Québécois Honoré Mercier harnessed to push his political party, the Parti National, into power in

Quebec (Griffin 38-39). Although there was no push for separation at this time, Quebec had become more unified, especially vis-à-vis Anglo-Canada, thus setting the stage for the separatist movements.

Mercier's Parti National did not fare well, and dissolved several years after its conception. In Quebec, the provincial government following that of Mercier was focused on Canadian unity, and the issue of nationalism did not rise again until 1936 with the election of the Union Nationale led by Maurice Duplessis. However, Duplessis initiated little reform, and took a conservative stance on nationalism (Griffin 48-49). It wasn't until the 1960's that the thought of independence reappeared. The Quiet Revolution of 1960-1966, which challenged the more passive approach to the ideology of survival, and led to the establishment of several pro-separation and nationalistic groups such as the Alliance Laurentienne, the Rassemblement pour l'Indépendance Nationale, and the Ralliement National, showed the increased interest in separatism by the Québécois (Griffin 42 and 50).

Out of the myriad of separatist groups and organizations came René Lévesque, who established the Parti Québécois, a pro-separatist political party in 1968 formed from several other separatist organizations. He was elected president of the Parti Québécois, and stressed social and economic issues as well as the issue of independence (Griffin 56). The party was defeated several times in elections, and it wasn't until 1976 that the Parti Québécois came to power in Quebec. In 1976, the party emphasized social, economic, and cultural proposals, French as the official language while protecting the rights of minorities, and a more conservative view on separatism (Griffin 59). Although independence was still an eventual goal of the party, they stated that it wouldn't happen without a referendum, and the break wouldn't be as drastic as proposed earlier. Because of this platform, the Parti Québécois was elected to power.

The idea of a complete separation from the Canadian federation was often too drastic for many people, and so Lévesque began to use the terminology of sovereignty association, and issued a white paper entitled “Quebec-Canada: A New Deal” to educate the public on what sovereignty association would entail (Griffin 68). This would be less radical than a complete break with the federation, and by proposing a more conservative option, Lévesque hoped to retain support for his party. He also didn’t call for a referendum immediately after the Parti Québécois gained power, and it wasn’t until 1980 that a referendum on separation was held, and a majority of the Québécois voted no. This outcome could be attributed to the fact that many Québécois felt as though the Parti Québécois’ government had been ineffectual, and “has emphasized only its determination to win a referendum on sovereignty” (Richard Mackie 1). Although the referendum was unsuccessful, Lévesque remained optimistic about the future possibility of sovereignty, and remarked, “à la prochaine fois (until next time)” (CBC Digital Archives 1).

### **Recent Separatism in Quebec**

The next time as foreshadowed by Lévesque came in 1995 with another vote on a referendum. In the months preceding the vote, several firms conducted polls to gauge the potential outcome. In their analysis of the polls, Fox, Andersen, and Dubonnet present the results of the twenty-three polls taken in the two months before the vote; ten out of the twenty-three polls show that fifty percent or higher of a sample size of approximately 1,000 would vote yes on the referendum (Fox, Anderson, and Dubonnet 414). As support for sovereignty had been gradually rising, the possibility of a majority yes vote looked promising. However, ultimately, the referendum did not pass. Fox, Anderson, and Dubonnet argue that the reason for this was

due to the fact that many of the undecided voters during the polls voted no during the actual vote (Fox, Anderson, and Dubonnet 422). The data from these polls and the closeness of the actual vote however shows that support for the separatists was higher in 1995 than in 1980, and most likely higher than it is today.

In order to garner the support they did, the separatists had several strategies in the months before the vote including creating a public presence and using more moderate language when discussing the referendum. The separatists also had a very clear slogan, “Le Oui Va Gagner” (the yes will win) (CBC 1). This slogan illustrated the separatists’ belief that they would be able to garner enough support to pass the referendum. Another slogan was “Oui, et ça devient possible” (Yes, and it becomes possible). This slogan as illustrated below uses several discursive strategies to advocate for a yes vote on the referendum. I believe the coin represents the separatists’ belief that a sovereign Quebec would mean a stronger Quebec economically. The coin thus symbolizes economic sovereignty and freedom for an independent Quebec. The depiction of the person working could symbolize the increase in jobs, or the increase in Quebec’s productivity should the referendum pass. I believe the peace sign signifies the separatists’ desire for a peaceful transition in becoming a separate nation, and the globe signifies Quebec’s desired



Separatist Slogan 1995

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Separatist Slogan 1995

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entry as a new nation on the international stage, and its commitment to maintain and develop international connections and relationships. Taken together, these images paint a positive picture of Quebec's independence.

The politicians in favor of the referendum spent a lot of time interacting with the public, especially targeting groups who were more resistant to separatism. One such group included people over sixty, who generally wished to remain a part of Canada. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) followed separatist campaigners including the Parti Québécois Cultural Affairs Minister Louise Beaudoin in 1995 as they went to the Golden Age Club to discuss the referendum. The campaigners spent time engaging in activities with the community in order to present themselves as more human-like and less radical (CBC 1). Despite their efforts, it became clear that the majority were adamantly against any idea of separation. When interviewed, several people brought up issues of money to pay pensions should Quebec separate and the issue of passports, and it became clear that they believed they had everything they needed in Quebec (CBC 1). The separatist campaigners attended many similar events across Quebec in the hopes of showing people that they are normal people too. By interacting at a personal level with the people of Quebec, the separatists could seem less like distant politicians, and more like regular people. This active approach differed from that of the federalists, who did not do as much active campaigning and preferred to take a more defensive approach, convinced that their position would sell itself.

The second strategy of the separatists was to use moderate language when discussing the referendum. In the 1980 referendum, people voted on sovereignty association, a term which meant separation from Canada while still retaining some ties. This was supposed to be more moderate than simply voting on complete separation, yet as can be seen by the results of the

vote, it was still unpopular. In 1995, the separatists were careful to distance themselves from the goal of a complete break with Canada. In doing so, they used the term sovereignty instead of separation or independence in order to appeal to the moderate Québécois. John Trent, a professor at the University of Ottawa, argues:

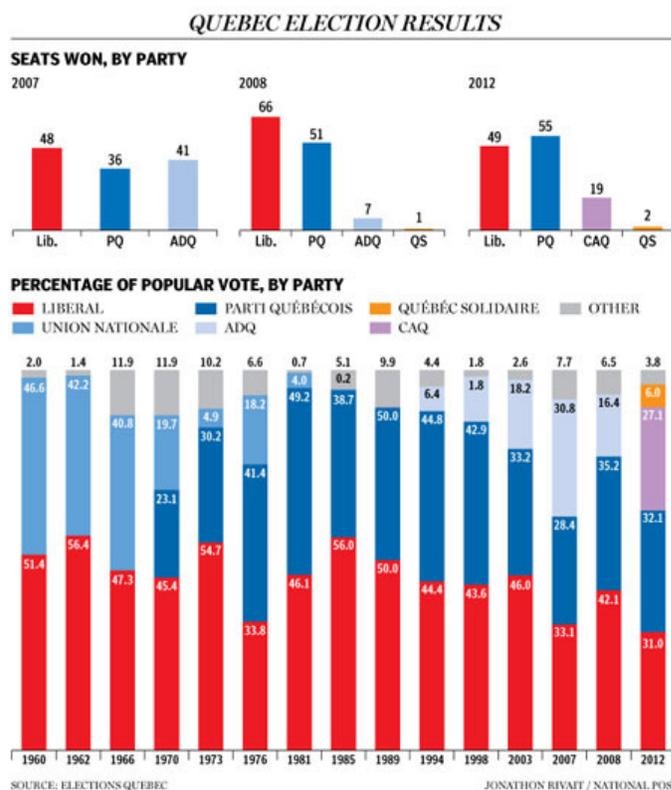
Sovereignty is a ‘soft’ word used to confuse people. For instance, the usual definition of federalism specifies that each order of government, the federal and provincial, is ‘sovereign’ within its own jurisdiction. Thus, ‘sovereignty’ can mean varying degrees of political autonomy and that is exactly why the nationalists use it rather than ‘independence’ or ‘separation.’ (John Trent 2a)

By using a word that could be construed to mean anything from a small degree of autonomy to complete autonomy, the separatists hoped to appeal to a larger audience within Quebec. As Quebec already has a form of sovereignty within the Canadian federation as explained by Trent above, people could interpret the referendum to be asking only for small changes within the already existing structure. This interpretation proved to be common, and the confusion over the term as argued by Trent resulted in the fact that polls showed “some 53 per cent of those who say they support sovereignty think it does not mean separating from Canada” (Trent 2a). By making it seem like separatists were not asking for a vote on complete separation, people felt more comfortable voting yes. However, despite an active public presence and the use of softer words in discussing the referendum, a majority, albeit a small one, of the Québécois voted no, and the referendum did not pass. Even so, the hope of eventual separation from Canada remained present within the province.

After the 1995 referendum vote when the majority of the population voted against sovereignty-association, the Parti Québécois declined in power. In 2003, the party only won forty-five seats, losing political control to the Liberal Party, and in 2007, the party only won thirty-six seats (Encyclopedia Britannica 1). As can be seen by the chart below, in both 2007

and 2008 the Parti Québécois held fewer seats than the Liberal Party, and it wasn't until 2012 that they held more seats than the Liberal Party. This decline in the Parti Québécois' power resulted in less discussion on separatism. However, in 2012 there was another election called. The Parti Québécois' platform under the leadership of Pauline Marois in 2012 included the theme of confrontation with the Canadian government in Ottawa, the intent to create a "Quebec citizenship," and the intent to demand a transfer of power from Ottawa on issues such as employment insurance, copy-right policy, and foreign assistance funding (Alexander Panetta 1). However, Marois was careful not to run with the explicit intent to call for another referendum in order to appeal to the more moderate Québécois.

Clearly the Parti Québécois' platform appealed to many Québécois, as the party achieved a majority of seats in the National Assembly, which allowed the party to form a minority government with Pauline Marois as its leader (Encyclopedia Britannica 1). As the chart below shows, the Parti Québécois held fifty-five seats in Quebec's National Assembly, just shy of the sixty-three seats needed for a majority government. The formation of a minority separatist government created the opportunity to again discuss Quebec's separation from Canada, although a majority



<http://news.nationalpost.com/2012/09/04/parti-quebecois-win-quebec-election-2012/>

government would have allowed them to make a more substantial impact on policy.

Encouraged by the party's success in the 2012 elections and popular support for its proposed secular charter, Marois called for an election for April 7 2014 in the hopes of gaining a majority government (CBC News 1). Although the race for Marois' seat was close, she lost it to Caroline Simard, a member of the Liberal Party. Many other Parti Québécois members lost their seats as well, and the Liberal Party ultimately won the election. As a result, Marois stepped down as the leader of the Parti Québécois, remarking, "We had so much to offer, so much to accomplish for Quebecers. We are very proud of our 18 months as government. In that short period, we did a lot of good and great things" (CBC News 1).

The loss of Marois as their leader and their loss of the election substantially weakened the Parti Québécois, and thus the separatist movement in general. By electing the Liberal Party, it became clear that a majority of people were not inclined to consider independence at that time. However, although the Parti Québécois has lost power, the idea of Quebec sovereignty has not completely died, and is unlikely to anytime soon. According to Jonathon Kay of the Canadian National Post, "with rare global exceptions, separatist movements don't just collapse. Moreover, separatism in Quebec isn't just a "movement" with a defined goal. It's a sort of posture meant to indicate resentment toward Ottawa and all things Anglo-dominated. That political reflex will never go away completely, at least not within my lifetime" (Jonathon Kay 1). This argument illustrates how engrained separatism has become in Quebec, and how it transcends politics to carry social weight as well. Although separation from the Canadian Federation hasn't occurred, Quebec remains in tension with Anglo-Canada, and retains a distinct cultural identity.

## **Potential Consequences of Separation**

The potential for Quebec's separation from the rest of Canada led to much speculation over the consequences of such a break. As could be expected, the most concern and speculation over Quebec's potential independence came around 1976 when the Parti Québécois first gained power, around 1995 with the second referendum, and again around 2012 and 2014 with the Parti Québécois' return to power. Becoming a separate nation would clearly have consequences not only domestically, but also internationally. Just as people in Canada are split over whether or not Quebec should separate, they also have very different opinions on the consequences of such a separation. Some people believe Quebec's separation would be beneficial to both the province and the rest of Canada, and others argue it would be detrimental to both.

The argument that separation would be beneficial to both Quebec and the rest of Canada is typically argued from a social and cultural position. The differences in language, culture, and history are seen as reasons why Quebec would be better off separated from the rest of Canada. Furthermore, many Canadians outside Quebec feel as though Quebec complains too much, and receives too much from the government as a form of appeasement. According to Charles F. Doran, "part of the argument is surely cultural, namely, that English speakers can better communicate and defend their culture without Quebec; culture will unite. With Quebec gone, Ottawa will no longer be obliged to decentralize authority, and English Canada will survive as a unit and probably flourish" (Charles F. Doran 1). Doran explains that those favoring separation typically argue from a cultural standpoint, believing that separation would allow both French culture and English culture to consolidate. In addition, writing in 1977 one year after the Parti Québécois first came to power, Peter C. Dobell writes:

Québec is a viable entity. It is physically large, well endowed with many natural resources and it has excellent lines of communication to international markets...in short,

using the United Nations as a standard, it is better prepared than at least half of the current members of the world organization to become an independent state. (Peter C. Dobell 151)

Dobell is arguing that the formation of Quebec as a separate nation is not an impossibility given the preceding cases. However, many do not share this opinion, as the vast majority of Canadians view the consequences of a potential separation as overwhelmingly negative.

While the argument for the positive consequences of separation is mainly social and cultural, the argument for the negative consequences is mainly concerned with politics and economics. To begin, there is a possibility that if Quebec seceded other provinces would also secede, creating a fragmented Canada. Doran writes “politics can sometimes overcome physical distance, but even the most benevolent independent Quebec would not be able to create a sense of geographic union between central and Atlantic Canada once it is breached” (Doran 1). He is therefore arguing that the lack of geographic unity in Canada would make political unity difficult to maintain, thus leading to further fragmentation within Canada. Furthermore, he notes that “once the glue of federalism is gone, the rich provinces -- British Columbia, Ontario, and Alberta -- would no longer have incentives to subsidize the poor provinces like Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba” (Doran 1). This example further strengthens the argument that once Quebec becomes independent, other provinces will no longer wish to retain the same practices of federalism potentially leading them to separate as well. According to Ron Charach, a reader of The Star who responded to their letter on the positive consequences of separatism, “federalism, the division of powers, represents a core principle that would be severely undermined if Quebec were to vote for separation” (The Star 1). By breaking away from the federation, Quebec would set a precedent for separation that could lead to the separation of other provinces. Although

many Canadians do not view this as a likely outcome of Quebec's separation, it is still within the realm of possibility.

In addition to the aforementioned potential political consequences if Quebec separated, there is also a myriad of economic consequences of separation for both Quebec and the rest of Canada. Firstly, debt would be an issue of contention should Quebec separate. Quebec already has its own debt, but if it separated it would most likely have to negotiate with the federal government as to its share of the federal debt. By taking on a portion of the federal debt, Quebec “would increase its debt-to-GDP ratio to 92 per cent. At that point, Quebec would be more indebted than France, Spain and the United States, and just below the level in Italy” (Christopher Ragan 1). This would be a lot of debt to deal with as a new nation, making the transition even more difficult. Such a large debt would likely force the Quebec government to substantially raise taxes, making them less popular with their citizens. Furthermore, Quebec produces approximately twenty percent of Canada's economic GDP, and if Quebec separated, the rest of Canada would potentially face an economic recession (Jared Milne 1). Overall, Quebec's separation would increase debt in Quebec, and potentially cause economic difficulties not only within the region, but also within the rest of Canada.

Secondly, the Québécois as part of the Canadian federation pay taxes to the federal government in Ottawa in exchange for the benefits of federal programs. However, if Quebec separates, they would no longer receive benefits such as Employment Insurance and Old Age Security, and the new Quebec state would be hard-pressed to offer these services due to the increase in their debt (Ragan 1). Again, the Quebec government would have to either increase taxes, or cut other areas of spending in order to be able to offer those services. Even though the

region has many natural resources, the financial burdens it would accrue in separation would make it difficult for Quebec to prosper, at least initially.

Lastly, there is the issue of Quebec's monetary policy should it separate. According to Ragan, a writer for the *Globe and Mail*, Quebec would have two options to choose from: either keep the Canadian dollar, or create a new currency and bank of Quebec, both of which he believes are not very attractive (Ragan 1). Retaining the Canadian dollar would mean continuing to be reliant on the Bank of Canada and thus not having much control of the monetary policies. Furthermore, Ragan argues that by keeping the Canadian dollar, Quebec "would then have no monetary policy with which to stabilize its economy" (Ragan 1). Already carrying substantial debt, being unable to stabilize the economy would add to Quebec's economic difficulties. The second option proposed by Ragan would be to create a new currency and bank of Quebec. However, he argues that this option is problematic, since "if Quebec introduced a new currency at par with the Canadian dollar, uncertainty and market pessimism would likely create a large depreciation, thus increasing the price of all imports" (Ragan 1). As can be seen, this option also leads to financial insecurity and economic problems in Quebec. When taking into consideration the increase in debt, the loss of federal benefit programs, and an unclear monetary policy, separation from an economic standpoint appears to pose serious problems for a newly independent Quebec. Although the consequences for separation are certainly not all negative, it is important to keep all consequences, good or bad, in mind. Upon consideration of Scottish separatism and the recent referendum for independence, parallels to the situation in Quebec can be drawn. The Canadian Federation would be fragmented should Quebec separate, as would the United Kingdom should Scotland become independent. Furthermore, both Quebec and Scotland would have to deal with debt allocation and currency issues (The Week 1). Therefore, Scotland

and Quebec would both experience similar consequences should they become independent. However, unlike Scotland, Quebec must consider how the First Nations fit into their picture of independence.

### **The First Nations of Quebec: Impact and Reactions to Separatism**

As discussed above, there are various potential consequences to Quebec's separation from the rest of Canada. Although I primarily discussed the political and economic consequences, there are also crucial social consequences to separation. Clearly, cultural and social issues form the basis for the separatist cause, as separatists believe that their francophone culture and history is at odds with a predominantly Anglo-Canada. But as they define their own unique culture, and pit Quebec against the rest of Canada, separatists often forget or ignore minority groups and the First Nations of the province. Quebec is by no means uniform culturally or linguistically, and although separatists often paint a picture of a united Quebec versus Anglo-Canada, Quebec is in fact not as united as they make it seem. As shown by the long history of First Nations in the province, with much preceding European contact, the First Nations of the region lived on and had a relationship with the land. Land rights and land ownership remain contested topics today, and play a large role in the impact a separate Quebec would have on the First Nations of the province. There are several ways in which a separate Quebec would affect the First Nations of the province, including through cultural and linguistic policies, new territorial boundaries, and Québécois governmental policies.

Quebec's desired separation from Canada, although motivated by political and economic reasons, is based in a cultural understanding of difference between francophone and Anglophone culture. As discussed above, culture is often used in shaping identity and community politics,

and separatist groups such as the Parti Québécois most certainly take a cultural angle to justify their politics of separation. However, separatists create a cultural identity for Quebec, one that leaves little room for interpretation and that often excludes many Québécois. One of the dominant aspects of how separatists perceive Québécois identity and culture is the French language. Language is a very visible indicator of cultural difference, and separatist groups such as the Parti Québécois purposely use language as a way of illustrating Quebec's tension with the rest of Canada. Therefore, separatists employ strict language policies in an attempt to unify the province, which also end up severely alienating many Québécois. Around the time of the second referendum in 1996, Quebec language laws required families whose first language was not English to send their children to French schools. Several First Nations speak their language first, and English second, and therefore this law became problematic for many groups. As Paul Williams remarked in his 1995 article, "the language legislation can be seen as one more message that in today's Quebec, protection of French language and culture leaves little room for aboriginal realities" (Paul Williams 2). By focusing on the French language as a unifying force in Quebec, First Nations and other minorities are excluded and marginalized. As such groups already are minorities within the province, should Quebec separate, they would become minorities within a nation, leading to their further marginalization. The French language and francophone Québécois culture become the defining factors in an independent Quebec.

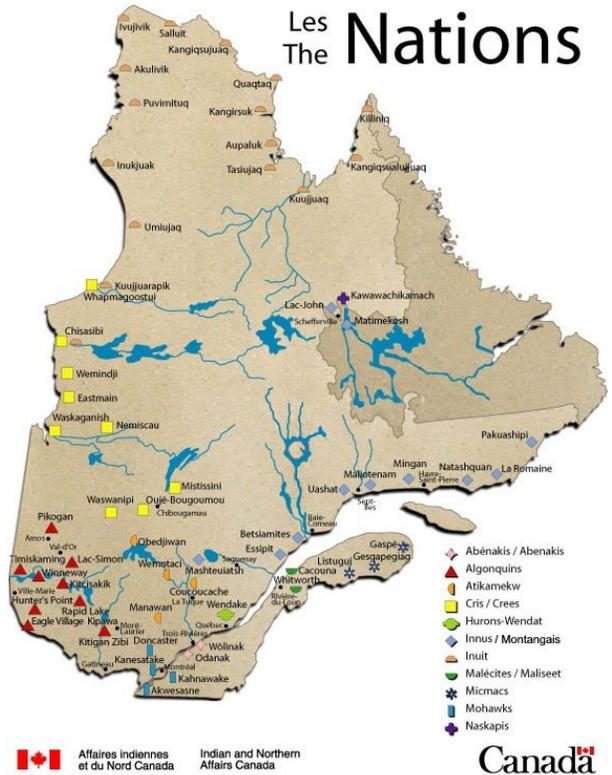
Not only does language serve to alienate and marginalize First Nations, but the creation of a Québécois ethnic identity does so as well: "Quebec's nationalism seems increasingly to be 'ethnic' rather than 'civic.' That is, it seems to be based on bloodlines- on the idea that to be a "real Quebecois" you should be a descendant of the white French colonists who arrived over the past 300 years" (Williams 2). This concept of nationalism clearly excludes minority groups and

the First Nations, as they are not descendants of the French colonists. As discussed above, Eller postulates that ethnicity “invokes ‘objective’ or shared cultural or historical markers” (Eller 90). The separatists’ use of the shared history of Quebec beginning with Quebec City’s foundation in 1608 and their emphasis on the French language create a Québécois ethnicity distinct from all others in the province. Should Quebec separate, this national and ethnic identity would remain strong in an attempt to justify their separation from Canada. Living in a separate nation would sever any support minority groups had received from the federal Canadian government,



Map of Quebec

[https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1440&bih=696&q=Map+of+Quebec&oeq=Map+of+Quebec&gs\\_l=img.3..0110.10606.15136.0.15856.13.8.0.5.5.0.121.679.6j2.8.0.msedr...0...1ac.1.64.img..0.13.698.nyd-J1JG7hg#imgdii=&imgcr=FZGRcismPfeTSM%253A%3BKvMj8Jg9AiCSHM%3Bh ttp%253A%252F%252Fmembers.shaw.ca%252Fkci1%252Fmmap%252Fq.jpg%3Bh ttp%253A%252F%252Fmembers.shaw.ca%252Fkci1%252Fmmapq.html%3B595%3 B717](https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1440&bih=696&q=Map+of+Quebec&oeq=Map+of+Quebec&gs_l=img.3..0110.10606.15136.0.15856.13.8.0.5.5.0.121.679.6j2.8.0.msedr...0...1ac.1.64.img..0.13.698.nyd-J1JG7hg#imgdii=&imgcr=FZGRcismPfeTSM%253A%3BKvMj8Jg9AiCSHM%3Bh ttp%253A%252F%252Fmembers.shaw.ca%252Fkci1%252Fmmap%252Fq.jpg%3Bh ttp%253A%252F%252Fmembers.shaw.ca%252Fkci1%252Fmmapq.html%3B595%3 B717)



Map of First Nations in Quebec

[https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1440&bih=696&q=Map+of+Quebec&oeq=Map+of+Quebec&gs\\_l=img.3..0110.10606.15136.0.15856.13.8.0.5.5.0.121.679.6j2.8.0.msedr...0...1ac.1.64.img..0.13.698.nyd-J1JG7hg#hl=en&tbm=isch&q=Map+of+First+Nations+in+quebec+today&imgdii=&imgcr=WrBi75vFiB4qhM%253A%3B8\\_BXLXtesy4sM%3Bhtp%253A%252F%252Fwww.apnql-afnql.com%252Fen%252Fportrait-communautes%252Fimg%252Fcarte-nations.jpg%3Bhtp%253A%252F%252Fwww.apnql-afnql.com%252Fen%252Fportrait-communautes%252Fcarte.php%3B432%3B609](https://www.google.com/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbm=isch&source=hp&biw=1440&bih=696&q=Map+of+Quebec&oeq=Map+of+Quebec&gs_l=img.3..0110.10606.15136.0.15856.13.8.0.5.5.0.121.679.6j2.8.0.msedr...0...1ac.1.64.img..0.13.698.nyd-J1JG7hg#hl=en&tbm=isch&q=Map+of+First+Nations+in+quebec+today&imgdii=&imgcr=WrBi75vFiB4qhM%253A%3B8_BXLXtesy4sM%3Bhtp%253A%252F%252Fwww.apnql-afnql.com%252Fen%252Fportrait-communautes%252Fimg%252Fcarte-nations.jpg%3Bhtp%253A%252F%252Fwww.apnql-afnql.com%252Fen%252Fportrait-communautes%252Fcarte.php%3B432%3B609)

weakening their position within Quebec. Therefore, the cultural and linguistic policies of Quebec serve to illustrate how Quebec's separation from the rest of Canada would negatively impact the First Nations in the province.

Land has always been a contested issue between the First Nations and the Canadian government, and continues to be so in the recent separatist debates. Clearly, should Quebec separate from the Canadian federation, the separation would be physical as well as political, economic, and social. Therefore, a separate Quebec would take with it a large area of land. However, this is where the problems begin, as the First Nations in the province believe they hold the rights to some of the land in Quebec, and therefore the Quebec government would have no right to take the territory with it. As illustrated above, many of the old treaties between First Nations and the colonists, whether they were French or British, are not honored today. During the conflict over Hydro-Québec in the 1970's the Cree and Inuit filed against Hydro-Québec and took the case to court (AADNC 1). In a legislative hearing in Massachusetts on Hydro-Québec, the Cree representative, Matthew Coon-Come began his discourse in Cree, even though only a few people there could understand what he was saying. Ronald Niezen postulates that such a strategy:

Was ultimately an argument for self-determination: the Cree language represented a people with a living heritage and a political organization that had selected and sent a representative to participate in a legal process in another country in defence of territory and livelihood. (Ronald Niezen 82)

This example illustrates how the First Nations employ different strategies to draw attention to their rights and sovereignty as a people. In the end, the court ruled that Hydro-Québec could not begin their project until land titles were settled in Northern Quebec (AADNC 1). This ruling shows that land rights still have not been completely resolved in Quebec. Although some groups have been able to win land rights in court, other groups still live on small reserves. On this issue

of land rights, Williams remarked: “A Mohawk spokesman in Kahnawake said that if the Quebecois leave Canada, they take with them ‘only the land they came here with -- the little bit of dirt between their toes’” (Williams 1). This comment illustrates how the First Nations view the land in Quebec as historically and fundamentally theirs. As will be seen below, territory and land rights are one of the main reasons why the First Nations oppose Quebec’s independence.

Not only would a separate Quebec mean the taking of First Nation land, it would also create new international boundaries, further fragmenting First Nations groups. As it stands, several groups such as the Mohawk community of Akwesasne are already split across national and international borders, with territory in New York, Quebec, and Ontario (Williams 2). An independent Quebec would mean an additional international border to contend with. Being split across borders makes it difficult for a First Nation group to self-govern efficiently. Furthermore:

The borders present jurisdictional nightmares for the average person and opportunities for the lawless. They separate and divide families, make difficult the delivery of community services and the enforcement of laws, and allow the neighboring governments each to claim power without obligation or responsibility. (Williams 2)

Fragmentation of First Nations communities weakens their power, and allows the various governments of each region with members of the First Nations community to assert control over the lands, yet shirk responsibility for the well being of its indigenous peoples. Spread across domestic and international boundaries, a First Nations community has less leverage to advocate for their rights than a group within one province or nation. This leads to their further marginalization. This issue of territory and borders thus feeds into the problem of governmental policies concerning First Nations should Quebec separate from the rest of Canada.

As was explained above, the relationship between the First Nations and the European colonists evolved with time, from a mutually beneficial trading relationship, to one of domination and assimilation on the part of the settlers. Furthermore, historically the imperial or

national government had been more likely to value native allies, whereas provincial governments had been more interested in acquiring their land (Williams 2). More recently, the Canadian federal government has been attempting to provide programs to benefit First Nations communities, including “special structures and programs in fields like education, health, and housing” (Williams 2). These programs are designed to lend support to First Nations communities, and as they are implemented from the federal level, they tend to be potentially more effective. However, should Quebec separate from Canada:

Such programs might disappear if the responsibility passed to any of the provinces. A provincial government with its own cash problems might merge aboriginal programs into its more general operations, claiming that the quality of service should be the same for all citizens. Provincial governments continue to covet the land and resources still held by aboriginal peoples. (Williams 2)

As one of the potential consequences of Quebec’s separation is increased debt in the new nation, supporting programs concerning the First Nations would not likely be a top priority for the Quebec government. Furthermore, Quebec is territorially rich in natural resources; natural resources that the new nation would want to control and use to increase their revenue.

Consequently, there would be further conflict over land and land rights, as Quebec would want control of First Nations territory to grow economically and be viable as a separate nation. An independent Quebec would adversely affect the First Nations of the province by perpetuating the tendency of Canadian governments to overlook the needs and rights of indigenous populations, and as language, cultural, and political programs as well as territorial disputes would further marginalize and weaken the agency of these groups. In addition, if Quebec separated, it would be too preoccupied with its own survival to properly support the First Nations.

First Nations leaders and organizations in Quebec have taken an active part in the separatist debates since their conception, and are prepared to respond should Quebec become

independent. The Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL) has been and remains an integral organization and advocator of First Nations' rights in the discussion of Quebec separatism. The AFNQL was founded in May of 1985, representing ten Nations and forty-three communities, and it is a regional chapter of the larger assembly in Canada that consists of 634 Nations. Chiefs from various Nations come together approximately three to four times a year unless there is an urgent matter, to discuss common issues, mainly environmental and natural resource concerns (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). Unlike other similar assemblies throughout Canada, the AFNQL conducts its business in both English and French, and several of the press releases and statements put forth by the organization reflect this practice. Chief Picard remarked that the Assembly is not a corporate body, and is loosely structured and not formally organized (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). In addition, there are also administrative units in education, public health, social services, labor market, and ad training.

Ghislain Picard has been the chief of the AFNQL since 1992, and has been reelected every three years to the position. As he has been the chief of the AFNQL for so long, he has witnessed Quebec separatism in its several different forms. According to Picard, he is the spokesperson of the Assembly, coordinates the actions of the Chiefs in the Assembly, follows up on resolutions and promotes positions made by the chiefs on issues such as natural resources and politics, and works with public education (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). As can be seen, many of his duties are PR related, and his public presence allows for the opinions of the Assembly and the First Nations of the province to be heard. During the interview, he outlined the First Nations of Quebec's stance on separatism, including the importance and necessity of a First Nations voice in the debates, their belief that the Québécois have a right to self-

determination but not to the territory, and their readiness to take action should Quebec vote to separate without their consultation.

Historically, the voice of the First Nations has been suppressed or largely ignored, and continues to be with regards to Quebec separatism. As discussed above, separatists often ignore and exclude those who do not conform to the image of a tradition Québécois, namely those who are not descendants of the French settlers, when discussing an independent Quebec. Their exclusion from deciding the fate of Quebec is one of the First Nations' main concerns. As early as 1994, the AFNQL put forth press releases concerning separatism and their right and need to have a voice in the proceedings. In a declaration in October of 1994, the AFNQL asserted, "Only we, the Indigenous Peoples, will determine the future of our children on the principle of equality and peaceful co-existence," and "Any change to the political constitutional framework requires Aboriginal consent" (Declaration of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador 1994 1). These statements show the insistence that the First Nations be consulted in the issue of Quebec separatism, as they are an integral part of the province, and would be greatly affected should Quebec separate. In a statement from a chief's meeting one year later in 1995, the AFNQL reasserts their insistence on being included by stating "We have the inalienable right to determine our own futures and our relationships with one another and other peoples," and "Our free and informed consent is required for any change in the relationships we have with other Aboriginal Peoples, and with the governments of Canada and the Province of Quebec" (Chief's Meeting 1995 4). These statements are very similar to the ones put forth one year earlier, and again stress the importance of agency and their right to be consulted in matters that would affect their futures.

In 2007, clearly unhappy with the continued lack of consultation on the subject of Quebec separatism, the AFNQL put forth a press release entitled “The First Nations Call on the Political Parties to React: The First Nations are Essential to the Future of Quebec.” This press release clearly and strongly addressed Quebec’s political parties’ lack of consideration for the First Nations of the province, this time calling for an active response:

Without taking sides for any of the provincial political parties, the First Nations become vocal to warn all the political parties that a situation of status quo is no longer acceptable and that the next government of Quebec will be expected to review radically its political relationship with them, particularly in regards to the management of territory and resources. (AFNQL Press Release March 2007 1)

This statement is directly aimed at the government of Quebec, demanding an equal relationship and recognition of the needs and rights of the First Nations. Continuing with a direct and forceful approach, in a press release in May 2007 Chief Picard announced his dissatisfaction with the silence of the Quebec government toward First Nations issues, and his intent to take the issue internationally: “In all evidence, the First Nations are not a priority to Quebec. The silence maintained by Quebec leaves us no other choice. We must step up our efforts to have our rights recognized and bring the government to honor its obligations towards us” (Ghislain Picard Press Release May 2007 1). Picard’s statement shows the AFNQL’s intent to be an active participant in the province and their refusal to allow the Quebec government to continue ignoring them. The AFNQL in March 2014 put out another press release again reasserting their position that the First Nations have the right to determine their own future, and that the decision for Quebec to separate would not be able to be made without their consent (AFNQL Press Release March 2014 1). Similar sentiments were echoed in Canadian News articles of the same time period, showing Chief Picard’s public voice and insistence that the voices of the First Nations be heard. The repeated assertion that the First Nations of Quebec need to be consulted and considered in

Québécois politics and policies reinforces the argument that without substantial change, Quebec's separation would adversely affect the First Nations of the province.

The issue of territory and land rights in these debates illustrates one of the historical and integral conflicts between First Nations and the various governments of Canada. Should Quebec separate, it clearly intends to take with it the territory of the province. However, the First Nations view the territory as fundamentally theirs, and thus not available to take. According to the AFNQL:

Our historical and traditional territories transcend the boundaries of the Province of Quebec, into other provinces, countries, and offshore. The integrity of our societies, lands, territories and waters is a fundamental right that must not be adversely affected by unilateral changes to the constitutional and political landscape around us. Forcible inclusion of our peoples into any new independent state is contrary to international law and we will oppose it. (Chief's Meeting 1995 4)

This statement from an AFNQL Chief's meeting in 1995 discussed the territories of the First Nations as separate from the boundaries of the province and that their land is considered a right for the First Nations that cannot be taken away. Furthermore, international law is cited, showing again their willingness to call upon international policies and doctrines such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples mentioned above. Speaking on the provincial election in 2007, Chief Picard notes "If this new government wants to initiate a movement towards the independence of Québec, it will necessarily have to face the issue of the territorial rights of the first peoples of this territory" (AFNQL Debate 1). The idea of the territory as fundamentally First Nation is not something discussed much publicly by the separatist political parties such as the Parti Québécois. This shows the lack of consideration of the First Nations in Quebec's plans for sovereignty, and foreshadows a continued lack of consideration should Quebec vote to become independent.

In addition, self-determination plays an important role in the separatist debates for both the Québécois and the First Nations of the province. Evidently, the separatists employ the rhetoric of self-determination in their argument for sovereignty, since they argue that their distinct culture, history, and language justify their desire to be independent from the rest of Canada. Similarly, the First Nations also employ the rhetoric of self-determination, citing the same reasons as the separatists. However, due to the long history of marginalization, the First Nations' assertion of nationhood and sovereignty are often ignored. In a newspaper article published by the *Windspeaker* in April 2014, Chief Picard says "It was true then, it is even more true now with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: our peoples have the right to self-determination. That right is not superseded by the rights of others" (David P. Ball 10). Chief Picard is alluding to the fact that Quebec holds a double standard with regards to sovereignty, as the separatists believe they are justified in calling for sovereignty, yet by doing so they ignore First Nations' rights to self-determination and sovereignty. He also supports Quebec's right to self-determination, but remarks in a newspaper article, "Let us be even more clear: Quebec can decide what it wants in terms of its culture, its identity and its development, but it cannot claim sovereignty over a territory which is still, fundamentally, First Nation" (CBC News First Nations Weigh in on Quebec Sovereignty Debate 1). He is supporting Quebec's right to cultural, political, and economic self-determination, but clearly stating that Quebec cannot claim the physical territory as that remains under First Nation control.

Seeing as the various governments of Quebec have historically not given much consideration to the First Nations of the province, Chief Picard mentioned in the interview that the First Nations "are ready to assert their land rights in the case of a yes vote in a referendum" (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). He strongly asserted, as did the press releases, that Quebec

does not have the ability to determine the fate of the land as it is under aboriginal title. He was not concerned that the First Nations would be unable to prevent Quebec from taking the land should they separate, as he cited the precedent in British Columbia where the Supreme Court acknowledged First Nations land titles (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). Using this precedent, the First Nations are prepared to assert their claims to the land should the need arise. Furthermore, Picard noted in a newspaper article in 2014 that during the 1995 referendum, both the Cree and the Inuit held separate referendums to vote on the question of Quebec sovereignty, and both Nations voted strongly against (CBC News First Nations Weigh in on Quebec Sovereignty Debate 1). Should the question of Quebec's independence be put to a vote in the future, the First Nations would again hold their own referendums. Overall, Chief Picard was not overly concerned that Quebec would be able to achieve sovereignty without First Nation consent, also noting that the separatist movement has been severely shaken by the defeat of the Parti Québécois in April 2014 and by Pauline Marois' subsequent resignation, and therefore will take time to become strong again (Ghislain Picard Interview 1/23/15). The First Nations of Quebec, represented by the AFNQL and Chief Picard, have been and continue to be vocally against Quebec's separation should that mean the taking of First Nation territory.

## **Conclusion**

The Quebec separatist debates mark a long history of tension between Francophone Quebec and Anglophone Canada. Many Québécois see themselves as culturally distinct from the rest of Canada, and politically and economically marginalized. Since Britain conquered New France in 1759, Quebec has felt isolated within Canada, thus leading to the desire of many Québécois to assert self-determination and attempt to become independent. Yet within their

struggles against Canada, Quebec separatists forget or ignore the First Nations of the province. Ironically, just as Quebec separatists denounce being marginalized by the rest of Canada, they in turn have been and continue to ignore and marginalize the First Nations of Quebec. However, the First Nations are crucial actors in the separatist debates, and their position sheds light on a seldom-seen dimension of Quebec separatism. Chief Picard, the leader of the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, has been the voice of the First Nations with regards to separatism. Although the First Nations believe the Québécois have the right to self-determination, they do not believe they have a right to the territory or the right to separate without consulting them. Quebec separatism thusly concerns not only Quebec's desire for independence from Canada, but it also concerns issues of land rights. The debates expose the long-standing tensions between hegemonic western governments and indigenous groups, and show a more complex side to Quebec separatism. Issues of land rights, resource management, and the First Nations' right of self-determination underlie the Quebec separatist debates, and should Quebec vote for independence in the future, these issues will be brought to the forefront by the First Nations.

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Sincerely,

<Thesis advisor name>  
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