

IS QC INDEPENDENCE A LIBERATORY PROJECT?

A text by the
Revolutionary Anarchist Organization



You can find this text and others on the web site
of the Revolutionary Anarchist Organization,
in the "lame de fond" section of the blog.



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*Frontiers have no place on the map of the planet,
any more than they have a place on the landscape of the mind.*

Murray Bookchin

In recent years, nationalism has been on the rise around the world. So-called Canada and so-called Quebec are no exception, especially since the fascist debacle south of the border. 30 years after the last referendum and a generation of decline, Quebec nationalism in the form of the independence movement is gaining momentum again. Calls for Quebec independence are growing, especially amongst young people, which contrasts sharply with the outdated tone of the demands. The Parti Québécois (PQ), resurrected after a period of vegetative coma, acts like it has already won the elections and the independentist committees on CEGEP and university campuses have never been more crowded. Meanwhile, the radical left is struggling to stay afloat facing a tsunami of relentless reactionary attacks, and has difficulty attracting more than a few hundred people to its protests. With the exception of a few sporadic events or when particularly vicious attacks still mobilize them, young people seem more interested in an independent Quebec than in a social revolution.

And yet, the younger independence activists (apart from certain already-old neo-nazis) are interested in issues of social equality, concerned with climate change, in solidarity with the Palestinian people, etc. They are largely on the left of the political spectrum. However, they choose to join the ranks of organizations that are primarily independentist. Whether they see Quebec independence as an end in itself or as a means to achieve a more just society, they make this issue their main focus.

The title of this text is deliberately provocative to attract the attention of those for whom the answer would be obvious. We do not claim to hold THE key to change or to understand the *meaning of life* better than anyone else. We simply wish to encourage reflection on political commitment and priorities. The text aims to be as comprehensive as possible in its analysis and attempts to explore the critical arguments against nationalism in general before applying them to Quebec independence in particular. Therefore, we are hoping to provide as detailed a portrait as possible of these issues as they deserve serious consideration. We ask for your patience and hope that you will find something here to fuel your political reflections and practices.

There can be no doubt about the sincerity and conviction of independentists. Nevertheless, we wish to ask questions, put things into perspective and broaden the debate on nationalism. This text (first published in french) is primarily addressed at independentists who identify as left-wing and want a more just and free world. What motivates involvement in the independence project? How can nationalism be defined and what place does it hold in the independence discourse? Can we explore other alternatives or points of view on this issue? Why choose to get involved in the independence movement rather than another social issue?

We have no use for the liberal arguments of the "no" camp. We do not aim to convince anyone that the current state of canada is more desirable (or less bad) than another. Our argument goes beyond the independentist/federalist dichotomy. We wish to demonstrate that this dichotomy is a false dilemma, a useless debate that needs to be reframed.

After a historical and political overview of the concepts of nation and nationalism, we will put them in relations to their uses in the quebec independentist movements, we will then examine how these notions are pernicious for any liberation struggle. They not only constitute a slippery slope towards far-right ideologies, but also a danger within the pro-independence left, even within its "civic" and "progressive" variants. We will then critique the project of creating a new state, which we would like to situate within a broader critique of the modern state as such.

While it may be useful to talk about national liberation in the context of colonialism and foreign domination, we do not believe that contemporary quebec meets these conditions. Therefore, we will discuss why it is wrong to refer to quebec as an "oppressed nation", contrary to the indigenous nations that inhabit the same territory. The second-half of this text will be focused on the anticolonial issue and, more generally, on the notion of oppression.

Finally, we will offer ideas that we believe could be more meaningful than the independence project in terms of people's emancipation. Far from having the answer to everything, we simply wish to broaden the horizons and the possibilities for collective liberation.

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**A small note of translation: we have tried to keep the spirit of the text as close to the original french version as possible. A lot of the text, especially chapter titles and subtitles, used puns or local expressions. Some where left as is because the meaning would have been lost in translation, some have been translated or modified, always having in mind the best compromise between english understandability and staying true to the text. It should also be noted that proper nouns are most often intentionally left lowercase with the explicit intent of pissing off the establishment.*

Cover image:
Serge Lemoyne, Mondou, 1977.

Historical definition of the concept of "nation"

*You've gotta die,
gotta die,
gotta die for your government,
Die for your country, that's shit.*

Anti-flag, *Die for the Government*, 1996.

The nation is more an ideological construct than a tangible reality. The concept of "*nation*" in the sense that we attach to it today has not always existed. It actually dates back to the late 18th / early 19th century, when modern states were emerging in Europe, coinciding with the spread of capitalism as the dominant economic system. It is a way of conceiving human groups that "differentiates in number, extent and nature from communities human beings have identified with over almost all historical times and imposes quite different demands" [Our translation] (E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*)

One of the historical reasons given to explain the emergence of the nation as a political category is that at the time, the ruling classes of the emerging modern States, which had to justify the often random nature of territorial boundaries, needed to infuse a common sense of the different groups of populations, often disparate, present on the territory. They had to build a fake *unity* to legitimize themselves. The nation is imposed from the top. It is a way for the ruling classes to make their interests into the interests of all. That's why millions of people applaud their national sports team. That's also why so much are willing to sacrifice their own lives in the name of "*the national interest*".

To give one example, the *french nation* is a pure abstraction that brings together (and homogenizes) distinct ethnolinguistic groups, who often did not even have a common language or customs. With the centralization of powers and the transition to absolute monarchy towards the end of the 17th century, the royal government gradually established a whole system of standardization throughout the territory, aimed at unifying the populations present under the king's aegis. But it is only after the revolution that the nation, as the legitimate source of power, really takes the form it will have for the later modern states.

Therefore, the concept of nation is not objective and it builds on a social construct of historical narratives. Ernest Gellner states that "Nationalism is not the awakening of the conscience of nations; it invents nations where they do not exist." [Our translation] (E. Gellner, dans R. Keucheyan, *The Left Hemisphere: Mapping Critical Theory Today*) The author Benedict Anderson speaks of the nation as a purely imaginary community.

This imaginary character of the nation comes from fantasized historical stories or legends that are elevated to the rank of national unitary narratives. Humanities, and especially history, are used by the dominant classes to broadcast a common narrative that embellishes the strong moments and often hides the dark parts. The common heritage is thus shaped to the tastes and in the interests of the dominant classes, when it is not completely made up to better fit into the official national narrative. Nationalism, as an ideology of the nation, plays the role of cement which holds together elements that would otherwise dislocate.

The creation of germany is another example of the ideologically constructed nature of what defines a nation. Briefly, at the time of birth of the german State, internal wars between the various kingdoms saw the emergence of the victorious prussia, which could impose its interests and vision in the definition of what constitutes the german nation. The austro-hungarian empire was therefore excluded from this definition while much of its population shared the germanic language and bordering territories, while bavarians and alsatians were part of it. There is now a "german nation" and an "austrian nation", but these two entities are more the product of accidents of history than of common national characteristics. One could very well have seen a shift in another direction, where the germanic nation would be defined according to other criteria.



No war between nations...

Nationalism is generally defined as "a principle that requires political unity and national unity to overlap" [Our translation] (E. Gellner in Hobsbawm). Therefore, it is the will to align nation and state in a nation-state. It seems legit to say that quebec's independence project is primarily based on nationalism.

But let us return to europe in the 18th & 19th centuries. The industrialization of printing and its formation as a print market helps the development of nationalism. It stabilizes and standardizes the written language; favours the disappearance of local dialects in favour of a common national language. The growth of journalism and literature that printing has allowed also contributes to the dissemination of the concept of nation as such, standardizing ideas and culture across the territories. (B. Anderson, dans Keucheyan)

Nationalism took over some of the functions formerly assigned to religion in modern times. "Nationalism is an essentialism that transforms nations into eternal entities rooted in an immemorial past and projected into an indefinite future." [Our translation] (Keucheyan) Whether a person is born in any part of the world or a nation is a pure coincidence, but nationalism allows the individual to belong to a whole that transcends it. It gives meaning to identity, which can then become a tool to legitimize the construction of the nation-state. We will return to that later.

With the french revolution and the transition from the monarchy to liberal democracy, the ruling class can no longer use only the "will of the king" or the "will of god" to justify the actions of the state. The people are becoming a factor to be taken into account in the decision-making process of the leaders. (Hobsbawm) National interest is then invoked to give legitimacy to political decisions and wars, as were religion or tribalism at other times.

The historical links between nationalism, capitalism and militarism are unequivocal. The leaders of modern states use this notion of nationhood to justify imperialist wars, "to turn the countryfolk into workers and soldiers, to turn the motherland into mines and factories..." (F. Perlman, *The Continuing Appeal of Nationalism*) To use our french and german examples, the revenge exercised by the two nations towards each other are among the causes of the two great world conflicts of the 20th century. The nation thus replaces religion as the legitimization of the existing power and as the driving force behind population's participation in

wars. That's how napoleon was able to send two million people to be massacred during his imperial campaigns in the name of the "greatness of the french nation".

No peace between classes

A consequence of the "imagined" character of the nation is its randomness. The case of the german nation we have just described is one example, but it is true of any group of individuals. Why not talk of a gaspé nation? The population of the peninsula has its own customs, its dialect (probably as far away from the quebecois language spoken in drummondville as the scottish language is from the english spoken in london, and yet scottish nationalism is well recognized as legitimate) and covers a territory larger than armenia. Seeing a cultural, genetic or geographical heritage as a source of pride is comparable to being proud of having blond hair or being born in 2004. Moreover, the traits used in nation-building are also random. Language, religion, skin colour, territory, any common trait, is used to constitute a nation only if it is useful to the ruling classes and excluded if it is not. (Perlman, 1984, p. 13)

What does a madelinot fisherman and a beauceronne woman entrepreneur have more in common than a moroccan waitress and an uber delivery driver in paris? The four speak french, the four come from different cultures, only three of them are in the popular class, two are women, yet some would recognize a filiation only between the first two, but not between the others. Sharing a language, a territory or a common history is not the only thing that can bring people together. Why should we prioritize these traits rather than socio-economic belonging, material experience, gender identity, political opinion or even belonging to humanity as a whole? If we are going to choose random traits to unify us, might as well choose ones that truly promote emancipation and social progress, rather than basing them on retrograde traditions or what the ruling class will have decided for us.

As such, any independentist will agree that the "canadian nation" is a fantasy; the national characteristics being so disparate that they do not correspond to any concrete reality. Canadian propaganda is so vulgar that everyone sees it through: it is an identity built from scratch to establish the legitimacy of the colonial project of resource extraction across a vast territory. "If [canada] did not exist, no one would want to invent it. Nothing in its form, boundaries, symbols, or aesthetics imposes itself

as a necessity on the mind, as soon as one imagines it is absent from its historical evolution." [Our translation] (A. Deneault, *Bande de colons : une mauvaise conscience de classe*) We are only pushing this thesis to its logical conclusion by stating that the same applies to the quebec nation, as well as to any other nation. We will return to the cases where it may be useful to talk about "nation" and national liberation to evoke popular liberation, but let us simply say here that referring to the nation is not the best way to conceive the community.

Based either on essentialist or traditionalist characteristics, nationalism can hardly bring about social progress; it is more often than not on the side of conservatism. Especially since the supposed brotherhood among fellow citizens is used to justify the worst atrocities and exclude anyone outside or inside the borders that does not share the random unifying criterion. Nationalism is not just an innocuous attachment to a shared folkloric past, it contains exclusive and retrograde characters, which must be abandoned if we are to progress towards more just and free societies.



Nationalism as the exclusion of the Other

*Louons le Seigneur,
Cent piastres par semaine.
Aimez-vous les uns su'es autres.
Ma patrie ou une autre.*

Richard Desjardins, *Charcoal*, 1998.

Another characteristic of the concept of nation is its restrictive character. No matter what criterion the nation is based on (language, culture, religion, values (whatever that means), skin colour, territory), there are people who will be excluded, because they do not possess this criterion. "No nation is - even potentially - coextensive to all humanity." [Our translation] (Keucheyan) Exclusion is therefore an integral part of the nation's formation process. The definition of "us" implies the construction of the otherness, which becomes the repulsive of "our" identity. There is only a fine line between the apology of the nation and xenophobia, between affirming national pride and the rejection of any difference. By focusing on the unique characteristics of the nation, nationalism actually divides more than it unites.

For Rudolph Rucker, nationalism is a system of power, that is, it separates beings according to their place between the holders of privileges and those who do not possess these privileges. (R. Rucker, *Nationalism and culture*). In the nationalist ideology, by making the nation the focal point and the supreme political value, one comes to regard the specific identifying characteristics that make it up (characteristics which, it should be noted, are historically contingent and not immutable essences) as objective facts, as the only possible or valid way of life. One's own nation becomes the barometer with which others are judged. As a result, the characteristics of one's own nation come to be considered better or even superior to those of the other nations. Patriotism, then chauvinism, are only forms of nationalism pushed to the extreme. They are already latent within its very logic. (Hobsbawm) By constantly focusing on the importance of preserving "our" nation against "the others", we come to view it as superior to all others.

By nationalism, I mean the habit of identifying with a single nation, of placing it above good and evil, and of recognizing no duty other

than that of promoting its interests. [...] Nationalism is a thirst for power tempered by blindness.

[Our translation] G. Orwell, Notes on nationalism.

When two nations claim the same territory, the minority nation ends up being treated as a prey. (Perlman) If nationalism has fulfilled its function of exclusion and dehumanization of the Other, we find ourselves in a genocidal situation. This was the case in armenia, in bosnia, in rwanda... This is currently the case in palestine, sudan and china, among others.

It is also this sense of superiority that is responsible for the genocide of indigenous people in america. This feeling has not disappeared with the recognition of rights and "reconciliation". The sudden outbreaks of racism in the general public whenever an indigenous nation attempts to assert its ancestral sovereignty over its territory is enough to be convinced of this. From the white riots during the oka crisis to the nehirowisiw aski in 2025, quebec is racist and does not accept the self-determination of other peoples than itself. Quebec nationalism does not permit the affirmation of the Other on its territory. We will return to that later.

Tokébakicitte!

Nationalism is a slippery slope towards the hatred of the other. As mentioned above, the existence of a dominant cultural identity is essential to the creation of nation-states and serves as a legitimation for its territorial control. This has been the case since the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, and there is no indication that it would be different with the creation of a quebec state. After all, why would we want to separate from canada, if not because quebecers are "different" to the point of deserving their own state. This is the main argument – historically and to this day – used to justify the need for sovereignty: the dominant culture in the territory of quebec is different from the culture of the rest of the country. Therefore, to maintain its legitimacy, the independence project must constantly reaffirm the numerical superiority of quebec's national identity on the territory.

Consequently, anyone who differs even slightly from the dominant culture is suspicious. Immigrants are accused of all evils of society. Depending on the media's current obsession, they are either blamed for the housing crisis, stealing jobs, driving up crime, killing the french

language, corrupting the youth, or outright being rapists. It is this discourse that feeds the debates on "reasonable accommodation", "charter of values" and "secularism". That's what makes Legault say that "*in quebec, that's the way we live*" (understanding: if you're not happy then get out). The contradictory aspect of basing supposed secularism of the state on christian values does not seem to disturb those who sing its praise. In fact secularism, with its fixation on the scarf of muslim women, serves as a pretext for islamophobia more than anything else. Intolerance is no exception, it is the norm of nationalism. This discourse, repeated in loop by the ruling class and the mass media, leads straight to hate crimes and genocide.

In the far-right discourse inspired by nationalism, foreign immigration is seen as eroding the dominant identity – in other words, a loss of power. The nation is viewed as a zero-sum entity: there is “us” and there are “the others.” If there are more of one group, the other group has less influence. With immigration, the dominant culture faces the threat of losing its numerical superiority – and thus its dominant position – according to the absurd “great replacement” theory. We can then understand why anti-immigration rhetoric is so popular among nationalists. We go even further by asserting that it is the logical consequence of the separatist ideology, which, let us recall, must constantly reaffirm the numerical superiority of a distinct quebec identity to justify its relevance.

Historically, the french-canadian nation, with the encouragement of the local catholic clergy, used a natalist strategy to maintain its numerical superiority in the face of the waves of immigration that took place after the british conquest. That's what we called the "revenge of the cradles." The traditional family is seen as the pillar of the nation. We can still hear from the mouth of nationalists who *rêvent la nuit d'une grande*

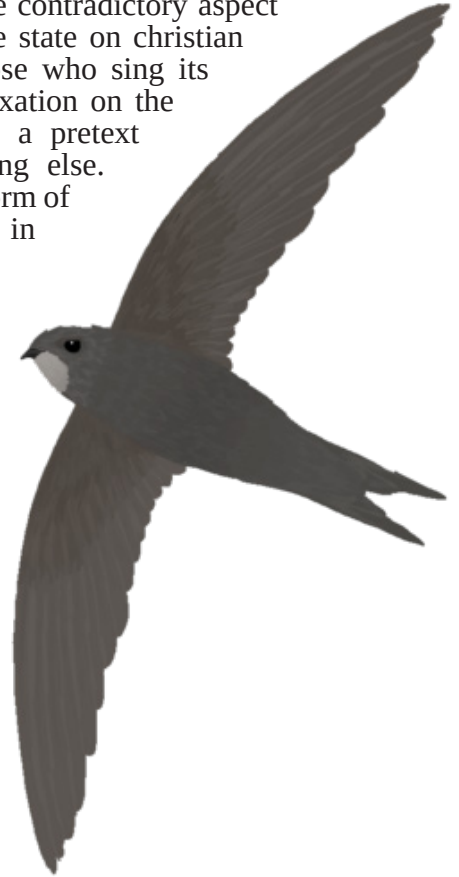


table entourée d'enfants, the need to "make (white) babies" to ensure the survival of the nation. This natalist strategy places the fate of the nation on fertility and women's ability to have several children, locking them in the role of a stay-at-home mother. The body of women is conceived as a mere birth tool for nationalist purposes, which is deeply misogynistic and patriarchal.

The nationalist far right is fascinated by the past. It believes that things were so much better back in the days of *ton arrière-arrière-grand-père il a défriché la terre*, and that we need to return to that long-gone era to save ourselves from imaginary moral perils. It seeks to bring back the good old traditional values: order, labor, religion, family, and the homeland. "Make America Great Again" is the embodiment of this in the united states of america. In quebec, the patriotes' rebellions of 1837–1838 exerts an almost mystical attraction on nationalists and are part of the nation's founding myth. The most beloved intellectual figure of quebec's far right is lionel groulx, a priest, historian, and notorious scumbag, whose major work is titled "*notre maître, le passé*" (our master, the past). Here again, the bridge between a nationalism that celebrates a shared heritage and the far right that fantasizes about the greatness of a lost past is easy to cross. *Heureusement que dans' vie certaines choses refusent de changer.*

With slogans such as "blood and soil", which call for the supremacy of a supposedly superior "race" and its purity of blood on a territory, the fascist far-right is an outgrowth of the nationalist ideology that promotes the unity of the nation based on common characteristics in a defined territory. The "*québécois de souche*" (which literally translates to stump quebecer, or quebecer to the roots) is the quintessential expression of this emphasis on origin, of a common ancestor, within quebec identity. Far from the idea of saying that any independentist is necessarily a white supremacist, but it is essential that progressive and leftists independentists be aware of this slippery slope in order to remain on the right side of history.



The identity poutine

Nationalism, just like its manifestation in the quebec independentist movement, is rooted in the subjective aspect of identity. That is why this issue is so emotionally charged. The appeal to people's emotions explains the prevalence of a romanticised view of independence. It also shows why populism can so easily co-opt this issue; they speak the same language and strike the same emotional chords. By focusing attention on cultural or ethnic differences, nationalism diverts the debate away from economic inequalities and class struggles.

The PQ, par excellence vehicle of the movement for independence, has now fully embraced the logic of the populist far right: fear of immigration, creation of imaginary enemies, moral panic, and fear of losing one's identity. This is not surprising, given what we have just outlined. But left-wing independence advocates should ask themselves this question: "How far am I willing to abandon my ideals, to betray my principles, to advance the cause of independence?" The PQ's plan is now the one most likely to come to fruition. Is this the plan we want? The question arises: if a third referendum takes place under these conditions, will we accept the unacceptable in the name of independence?

While the independence project have once been carried out by left and far-left groups, it must be noted that it is now playing the game of the identity-based right. The FLQ era is over. The social democrats were so eager to distance themselves from its legacy, that they, from René Lévesque to Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, leaned more and more to the right and the far right populists finished off burying its cold corpse.

As long as the quebec independence is placed *before* other political considerations, the *oui quebec* movement, the *front pour l'indépendance nationale*, the *st-john-whatever society*, and other "movements for the purity of the french language," along with the *nouvelle alliance* and similar groups will find themselves on the same side, regardless of the anti-fascist or anti-racist stances taken by the former. To achieve its ultimate goal, the pragmatic independentist left will have to compromise with reactionary ideologies. That's what gave birth to the PQ and it partly explains Québec Solidaire's (QS) shift toward populism and the political center. This is also what allows supposedly left-wing podcasts to invite Mathieu Cock-bôté to spew his hate speech into their microphone without seeing any contradiction. In doing so, separatists lend legitimacy to the rhetoric of the worst scum of the far right under the pretext that THE

overriding common cause is independence and that this cause is more important than any coherent vision for society.

As long as left-wing separatists do not prioritize the struggle against capitalism – from an anti-authoritarian perspective and in the name of social and climate justice – OVER the national cause, they will continue to call for voting for the lesser evil – ironically, the same losing strategy that liberals have adopted for the past 50 years. Choosing the lesser evil is still choosing evil, and it often amounts to supporting the worst. What’s more, even if an independist party takes power, it will still result in – following lévesque’s anti-union measures and bouchard’s zero-deficit policy – piss-pipi’s anti-immigration policies or QS’s spinelessness. Nothing a third referendum could make us forgive.

After passing through various stages: liberal republicanism with the Patriotes’ rebellions, ultramontane conservatism with the chanoine groulx, petty-bourgeois liberalism during the quiet revolution, then the far-left felquist movement, and finally the PQ’s “sovereignty-association”, the new, fashionable version of quebec nationalism describes itself as center-left: it is civic nationalism.

It is no longer a matter of claiming the country on ethnic or linguistic grounds, but simply on legal and geographical grounds. The main reasons cited for seeking independence have shifted from economic and cultural oppression by the english bourgeoisie to a lack of representation in the canadian constitution. This neo-nationalism advocates for equality before the law (individual rights), tolerance (pluralism), and freedom (in the liberal sense of the term) as moral foundations. The cause of independence would now transcend identity issues and be more inclusive of the diversity that makes up quebec. Everyone can be part of the beautiful and great quebec nation! This is undoubtedly the solution that progressive independentist have found to ease their consciences in the wake of parizeau’s “unfortunate” statement on “money and the ethnic vote” following the second referendum defeat. It represents the profound disconnect between the humanist and universalist ideals of a movement that claims to be inclusive and the current state – firmly entrenched on the right – of nationalism in quebec.

That being said, this neo-nationalism is no less problematic than identity-based nationalism. Its attractive trappings do not allow us to overlook the characteristics inherent in all forms of nationalism, whether identity-based or civic. From the “revenge of the cradles” to the prioritization of white, french-speaking immigration, the same desire to preserve a

shared national identity is evident. Attempts to broaden and include others within this shared identity remain highly problematic. Even if we no longer consider only the place of origin – the “roots” – in defining who is quebeçois, identities that deviate too far from the norm – whether moral, cultural, or economic – are still ostracized.

Pluralism is an illusion of liberalism that advocates for the integration of diversity rather than its exclusion, without challenging the cultural and moral hegemony of the dominant identity. Under the pretext of recognizing diversity, only its superficial aspects are retained – those that do not clash too much with the dominant culture – while the national narrative continues to be promoted. The figure of the “neo-quebeçois” thus created serves both as a legitimization and a foil. Furthermore, the so-called values of equality and freedom mask other forms of domination that still exist in our societies; for example, it is false to say that women and gay people are no longer under the grip of patriarchy and heteronormativity – one need only consider rape culture, feminicides, and the rise of intolerance to be convinced of this. Civic nationalism is deeply hypocritical, if not dissonant. It perpetuates a dynamic of domination at the cultural, political, and economic levels. It is merely a liberal form of sovereignty that centers its social project around a new – supposedly – welfare state, rather than a fundamental critique of the identity-based relationship to the nation or of capitalist and colonial power relations.



A country: the solution to what exactly?

*Tu veux bâtir des cités idéales,
Détruis d'abord les monstruosités.
Gouvernements, casernes, cathédrales,
Qui sont pour nous autant d'absurdités.*

Charles d'Avray, *Le Triomphe de l'Anarchie*, 1912.

No gods, no masters in our own house

The quebec independence project aims to create a new nation-state on the territory of the current province of quebec. This poses several problems that we will try to set out in the next lines. First, the independence of quebec would not in itself solve any social problems. "To give yourself a country is the best way to transform society," says QS platform in 2022. Independence is no longer seen as *an end in itself*, it has become a *means* to achieve a better society. From all the political, socio-economic, ecological issues that affect our current societies, from imperialist wars to the ravages of colonialism, from the housing crisis to the rise of intolerance, to the repression, alienation and exploitation of workers, that of the independence of quebec is far down the list of the most pressing issues. To the progressives who make the independence of quebec their main involvement, we ask: why fight for independence if what affects you are social issues? The independence project only adds one more step (a step that lasts for 60 years and counting) to the achievement of your goals. And it is far from guaranteed that the governments of this new republic would really tackle social problems. We have every reason to believe that it would not even change anything. There are better ways than "creating a country" to achieve your ends.

The constitution of modern states was based on an accumulation of power and capital. Under the impetus of the bourgeoisie, they emerged as legislative groupings controlling vast territories through powerful armies and legal systems legitimizing private property, expropriation and exploitation of land and accumulation of capital. When we talk about creating a country, we talk about creating a state, which is inevitably based on the same political and legal foundations that have allowed for centuries the domination of a small group over the whole of society and nature. We do not see how this process could be emancipating.

Furthermore, the historical evolution of capitalism towards what we know today has rendered the nation-state obsolete as a political form. Multinational corporations have become more powerful than states and can dictate national policies as they see fit. Not to mention the pressure exerted by international organizations such as the IMF and the WTO to ensure that neoliberalism prevails everywhere. Neocolonial empires no longer need to invade territories militarily to control their economies, resources, and virtually the entire political class. It has become cliché to say that real power no longer lies in parliaments, but it is absolutely true. In this context, quebec's political independence does not address the fundamental issue of capital's omnipotence over our lives. It would merely paint a blue facade on a house owned from basement to attic by bankers.

What's more, quebec's independence is not a project of popular emancipation; it is a project driven by the elites. We are not referring to the grassroots activists who champion the cause, but to those who would truly benefit from independence. It is this class of capitalist parasites that will profit most from the political opportunities opened up by independence. It is also this class that seeks to capitalize and secure a better position in global markets. Just as the settler served as the colonizer's useful idiot by adopting the interests of the ruling class to place themselves above the colonized, so too does the independentist play into the hands of the ruling classes by promoting a project that would do nothing to change their condition of subjugation. (On the concepts of colonizer, settler, and colonized, see A. Deneault, and originally A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*) This petty-bourgeois nationalism merely reaffirms the violence of capitalism and private property. It runs counter to the interests of the vast majority. We can be sure that the elimination of a level of government will immediately be offset by a tax increase for the general population, while corporations and investors receive tax breaks to "attract capital."

By placing leaders of "our own" at the helm of the state, an independent quebec is supposed to better represent the expression of the national will. But the composition of the political class will not change overnight after a victory of the "yes" camp. It will be the same opportunists, the same populists, and the same capitalist millionaires as today who will lead the new state. Policy decisions will still be made behind the closed doors of exclusive private clubs. Trusting an elite – no matter how local – to manage a country's destiny is like trusting the wolf to guard the sheep. Should we trust a billionaire more if he speaks french than if he speaks

english? On the contrary, we assert that the nationality of those who rule us changes nothing about the fact that they rule us!

Before independence, the leader generally embodied the aspirations of the people: independence, civil liberties, and national dignity. But in the aftermath of independence, far from concretely embodying the people's needs, far from championing the people's true dignity – the kind that comes through bread, land, and the handing over of the country into the sacred hands of the people – the leader would reveal his true role: to be the president of the society of profiteers eager to enjoy that constitutes the national bourgeoisie.

[Our translation] F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*.

No homeland, no state..

It is the very nature of the modern state that is at issue here. Its functioning, its bureaucracy, its representative democracy, its authoritarian nature, its intrinsic links with capitalism. States – all States – are tools for maintaining systems of oppression and exploitation. The welfare state tried to patch up the holes left by unbridled capitalism, and then neoliberalism made them insurmountable trenches. Fascism – both that of the past and the form we see today – is not an anomaly in history, but the authoritarian nature of the state brought to its tragic conclusions. Even with the best intentions in the world, a progressive, left-wing, or center-left party that were to – purely hypothetically – come to power would never succeed in changing the fundamental nature of the State. As Murray Bookchin says: "Founding a state means giving power to a centralized, professional and bureaucrat system that exercises a social monopoly on institutionalized violence, especially in the form of the police and the army." [Our translation] (M. Bookchin, Murray Bookchin, *The Next Revolution*) Is that really what we want as an emancipation project?

By adhering to the framework of bourgeois legality – that is, by operating under laws enacted by those from whom we must free ourselves – the independence project dooms itself to having no impact. Seeking institutional (or constitutional) recognition within the existing order helps to lend it legitimacy. It is illusory to seek liberation without questioning the foundations of our subjugation.

Just as the concept of the nation dehumanizes individuals by classifying them according to supposedly shared characteristics – thereby stripping them of all individuality and turning them into anonymous citizens who are merely part of a formless mass – so too does the state disempower communities and stifle horizontal mutual aid by centralizing power and the legitimacy to act. Democracy as conceived by the modern state in no way represents the real interests of the people.

For Abdullah Ocalan, in his *Principles of Democratic Confederalism*, the State is actually an obstacle to national emancipation :

The right of self-determination of the peoples includes the right to a state of their own. However, the foundation of a state does not increase the freedom of a people. The system of the United Nations that is based on nation-states has remained inefficient. Meanwhile, nation-states have become serious obstacles for any social development.

A. Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism*.

No quebec, no canada!

Yes, but here we have strong values; we'll have a government that listens to the people, one that's progressive and environmentally conscious. Really? First of all, given which side the public is voting for and the increasingly discouraging opinion polls, one is entitled to ask how the quebec government could suddenly be more left-leaning than it is now. Second, the government is not the guarantor of freedom, equality, and social justice. There is no reason to believe that a new state entity, whatever its form, would be more inclined to address social problems than the current government is. Neither the political platforms of all pro-independence parties combined, nor the supposedly more social-democratic nature of quebecers, nor the goodwill of its political class guarantees that this would be the case. The state will always side with the wealthy, and a quebec state would be no exception.

Even nationalization, viewed as the ultimate reclaiming of the people over the resources and economy of the territory, actually serves only the dominant. Nationalized societies remain (State-)capitalist corporations, operate within the framework of international competition and must respect the imperative of profit. Nationalization of land by a colonial

or national state means "using the law to appropriate land that will then be made available to large private owners." [Our translation] (Deneault) Nationalization is not the re-appropriation by the people, but a seizure by the state apparatus. It would be different if we talked about *collectivization*..

The economic arguments put forward in favour of quebec independence strike us as the weakest and least meaningful. A fewer tax bracket – is that really a vision for society worth dreaming about? Is canadian equalization unfair and should quebec be able to decide what it does with 100% of its revenues? Fair enough, but to achieve that, we'd have to abandon capitalism. We are told that economic independence would allow quebec to finally do whatever it wants with "its" wealth. According to left-wing independentists, all it would take is to become a country to magically become a socialist utopia. As if the disinvestment of public services and neoliberal austerity policies had not been put in place by each successive quebec government since lucien bouchard's PQ administration. As if an independent government would not replicate the extractive model that transforms nature into goods and renews the free-trade agreements that destroy local communities. As if being independent would change anything in the primacy of capitalist economy over politics.

Catalonia is often cited as a similar case to quebec. Cultural differences don't show the whole picture. Since the past decades, catalonia has a population that is mostly wealthier than the rest of spain and wants to separate for primarily economic reasons, so as no longer "subsidize" the rest of the country. Is it emancipatory to seek secession for these reasons? Similarly, one might wonder whether the self-determination of albertans, who would like to create a new oil-rich petro-state to free themselves economically from canada, is an acceptable vision for



society. The economic arguments for the independence of the quebec are fraught with the same contradictions.

As for the argument that "one less level of government is a step further towards popular self-government", that by removing the federal element from the equation there would be one less government to abolish and therefore the revolutionary overthrow would be easier to achieve, it strikes us as ludicrous and it would be superfluous to seriously respond to. Creating a new "national legitimacy", new borders and the need to defend them with a new army, new coercive apparatus and new bureaucratic infrastructure does not bring us closer to social liberation.

Finally, we must note that the very concept of *sovereignty* is not without its problems. First, it involves a notion of control over a territory: is sovereign whoever controls the territory, its wealth, its resources and the people who moves through it. This also involves border control, entry and exit of both goods and human beings. The sovereignty of a nation-state can legitimize the domination of a majority over internal minorities (indigenous peoples, cultural minorities, migrants, etc.) Finally, we wonder who exactly is sovereign. Is it the people, the government, the republic? In the case of nation-states, those who possess power are the true sovereigns, not the people, who have very little to say in political management.

The answer to the rise of united-states nationalists and their slide toward fascism is certainly not to counter them with another form of nationalism. Similarly, replacing canadian nationalism with quebec nationalism doesn't fundamentally change anything. We must transcend national divisions, do away with the State, its borders, its police, and capitalism; only then can we speak of freedom and equality.

What oppressed people?

*Si c'est ça l'québec moderne
Ben moi j'mets mon drapeau en berne
Et j'emmerde tous les bouffons qui nous gouvernent.*

Les Cowboys Fringuant, *En berne*, 2002.

We qui?

One cannot deny the existence of a quebécois nation (white and French-speaking) or even the common cultural heritage of the majority of its population. However, we can question the criteria of eligibility for the nation put forward by the sovereignists, even in the left. Is it enough to be born on the territory (what about new comers?), to speak french (what about all the non-francophones who were born here?), to share "quebec's values" (gender equality (except for non-binaries and trans), the nuclear family, private property, cars and hockey; and *what about* everyone for whom the values of western modernity are not the pinnacle of universalism?), or simply to live on the territory of quebec (do acadians and francophones outside of quebec not deserve self-determination as well?). In the contemporary proposals of quebec sovereignty, the criteria are so vague that the very relevance of the project is lost. We want independence, but why and for whom?



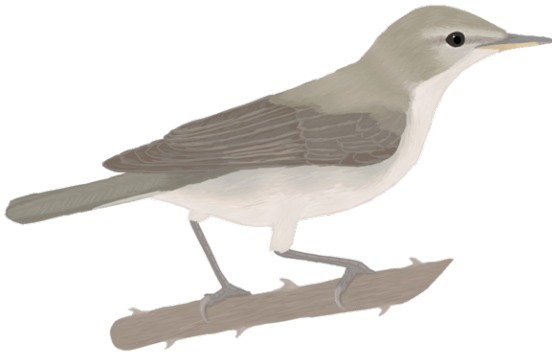
Rudolph Rucker sees nationalism and culture as two incompatible poles: the former seeks to freeze, standardize and instrumentalize culture in the service of power, while the latter is constantly evolving and the product of collective and spontaneous freedom (Rucker). In other words, popular culture naturally emerges from the bottom-up, while nationalism tries to impose cultural traits from top-down. In order to protect the cultural heritage of a people, it is therefore necessary to put an end to nationalist stagnation and standardization and to give free rein to mixtures of influences, diversity, experimentation and creativity. By bringing everyone together according to common criteria, regardless of their content, nationalism level and also erases differences in other aspects of identity. And it is always the dominant who decide what the common criteria are; universalism is for white men (G. S. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*).

However, due to its limited and exclusive nature, the nation has specific interests that inevitably conflict with those of other groups, whether or not they are included on paper in the definition of the nation. As we have seen earlier, nationalism requires the exclusion of another; no nation represents all of humanity. Thus, by defining the nation by the traits of the majority, minority communities are necessarily excluded (B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*).

Quebec society, like most contemporary societies, especially in the west, is very heterogeneous. Even in a so-called democratic regime, all dissenting voices struggle to be heard. Under current conditions, it is the dominant voices that set the tone for all others; the interest of the dominant is passed off as the national interest. Quebec culture is hegemonic in its territory, unlike acadian culture in its territory, for example. But even if – as many left-wing independentists seem to prophesize – the quebec nation was coextensive with the entire population in all its diversity, some groups would still be excluded in practice, their interests not overlapping with the dominant national interest or conflicting with it. This is, among others, the case of indigenous nations on the territory of so-called quebec (Coulthard). Let's set these questions aside for now and return to quebec identity.

Bonjour, Hi : The complex of queb identity loss

Sensationalist news articles and increasingly alarming editorials about the decline of french in tiohtià:ke periodically remind us of the fragility of the quebec ego. For 60 years, we have been told the same stories and shown the same statistics to reaffirm that the french language is on the verge of disappearing forever. *Mommy, mommy, please tell me once again* (as the french song goes) that we are about to disappear; it will give us a good reason to rally around a common cause. Nothing like an announced peril to whip up the troops. When it's not the english in power in ottawa, it's the penniless immigrants seeking a better life.



If 250 years of english rule and assimilation attempts have not erased the french reality in america, could it be that the panic of language purists is slightly exaggerated? Hybridization, exchange, and creolization are the normal destiny of living languages. Every language transforms and adapts by borrowing from others. There should be no competition between languages – and thus between the social groups that speak them – but rather collaboration! It's totally fine to borrow from other languages to co-construct a spoken language and make oneself understood; it is the nature of a living and evolving language, it is the nature of all human culture. *Bécosse*, *boucane*, and *crissement* are a few words that make queb speech unique. *Wesh*, *flex*, and *slay* are just as much so (On this subject, see the pamphlet by Les Linguistes atterrées: *Le français va très bien, merci*).

There has long been in quebec a permanent feeling of persecution and insecurity relative to the rest of canada, to anglophones in the province, and to the rest of the world. Everything that is not *born and bread* ("*de souche*") is seen as a threat. Canadian multiculturalism: a conspiracy

to drown french! Waves of immigration symptomatic of globalized capitalism: barbarian invasions, genuine civilizational perils! A public figure who does not speak french: an assimilation attempt, *Speak White!* Quebecers are victims of racism, a subjugated and colonized people, the punching bag of canada, whose national sport is quebec-bashing.

If there was indeed a real racial and socio-economic class distance between french canadians and anglophones of british descent before the 1960s, this distance has since faded. We have witnessed the development of what has been called "quebec inc.," the transfer of capital into francophone pockets, the expansion of a local bourgeoisie, and its disproportionate enrichment. However, the emergence of a quebec capitalist class has not solved the problems of capitalism; it has exacerbated them. Although the standard of living of the majority increased with the welfare state and despite the expansion of the so-called middle class, economic inequalities have never been as glaring since the disappearance of feudalism. For us, these are much more pressing problems to solve than the question of quebec sovereignty – and they will not be solved by it.

It is certainly not insignificant that the leader of quebec Inc., pierre karl p eladeau (PKP), the CEO of the largest media company in the country, has openly sovereigntist allegiances and was even – for a miserable period of less than a year – the supreme leader of the PQ. The weight of the quebecor machine has undoubtedly helped the resurgence of quebec nationalism in the public sphere in recent years. PKP is often contrasted with his federalist liberal alter ego paul desmarais, owner of power corporation, which owns, among others, the daily newspaper la presse. But we have difficulty seeing how the former is any better than the latter; why, in short, it would be less bad to be hit with a baton in french, rather than with a stick in english. PKP does not represent the interests of quebecers; he represents the interests of billionaires.

Regardless of how some people define it today, quebec is no longer an oppressed people, neither economically, racially, nor culturally. Economically, it is part of the so-called "developed" countries, and its population is among the richest in the world. As westerners, even the quebec proletarian class benefits in



some respects from the ravages caused by the global capitalist system (See J. Sakai, *Settlers: The Mythology of the White Proletariat*). Quebec, even as a province of a larger state, occupies a good place near the top of the global economic scale. The population of quebec is also a privileged population socially and culturally, compared to others in the world. It is predominantly white, it predominantly speaks french, a colonial language. Is this what we want to promote in the identity affirmation of the nation?

From Gravy to Brown Shirts

If we consider that anti-white racism does not exist in our white-supremacist societies, because structurally, whites always benefit from the system in place (C. W. Mills, *The Racial Contract*), then can we speak of anti-quebec racism? Of course, racism towards populations now considered white has existed before, for example with the irish and italian immigrants. The process of racialization is a social construction that categorizes social groups by assigning them a "race" and thus makes exclusion and domination possible based on this belonging. The populations of irish and italian immigration who were racialized upon arrival gradually "became white" in north america, but to some extent, there are still parts of the world where white people are marginalized and discriminated against. This is certainly no longer the case for quebecers in the current state of the canadian federation.

We leave to others to dissect the highly problematic nature of independentist claims that quebecers would be "White N* of America," according to the expression of pierre vallières, and we will simply say that if belonging to the french-canadian nation, to the catholic religion, or speaking french in north america were once factors of poverty, exclusion, and discrimination, it is no longer the case. The systemic racism present in quebec institutions testifies to the reversal of the burden; from an oppressed people, quebecers have moved to the status of oppressor.

As mentioned above, the nation is an imagined community that attempts to group a mass of individuals according to common characteristics. In the case where these characteristics place those who possess them in an advantageous position within systems of domination, can we really see the national liberation struggle as emancipatory? In our view, it more closely resembles a struggle to preserve power and perpetuate privileges. Thus, to be placed in the conservative, even reactionary, camp.

Thanks to the economic development of quebec society and quebec inc., we have moved from an inferiority complex – water boy syndrome with a scarcity mindset – to fear of immigration and systemic racism. We can thus speak of current quebec nationalism as a form of white supremacism: being proud of one's nation, when one is white and in a position of domination, is white pride and nothing else. Far be it from us to fall into white guilt, but just as there should be no legitimate straight pride, being part of a dominant national identity should not be a source of pride beyond the claim of belonging. It is normal to be attached to one's own culture and where one comes from, but when nationalism takes hold, it becomes obsessive and dogmatic; one mythologizes the glorious past, considers one's homeland better than that of others, and that is highly problematic (Rocker).



The anticolonial question

*Di yaayam di baayam di léép
Loo xamné maanaam warnakaa
Mana doon adunabi yaye nii la taaroo*

Les Colocs, *Paysages*, 2001.

Je me souviens, me neither

The general definitions of the concept of the nation and of nationalist ideology, whose broad outlines we sketched at the beginning of this text, obviously apply to their canadian and quebécois equivalents. The founding of the quebécois nation passed through the same stages and required the same vigor in creating a shared imaginary. The canadian federal state developed a veritable rewriting of history to achieve the construction of the national narrative (J. Green, *Self-determination, Citizenship, and Federalism: Indigenous and Canadian Palimpsest*). But the quebec state, at least since duplessis, has also greatly contributed to a specifically quebécois national sentiment. This imaginary implies the innocence of quebecers regarding the indigenous genocide and a sense of historical oppression in the face of the british conquerors. (J. Grandmont, *L'innocence québécoise*)

The history told to quebec children about the origins of the nation is somewhat romanticized to align with the national narrative. The arrival of french settlers in new france destabilized the balance of power in the region (Deneault). The myth that the french were "gentler" to indigenous peoples than the british is based on anecdotes, maybe the number of wars and political alliances, not on the actual relationships that existed between the two peoples. French settlers were no less racist, contributed no less to the extermination of indigenous peoples, and were no less complicit in colonial violence.

Also constitutive of the quebécois national narrative are the two major historical defeats: that of the french colonial army at the hands of the british army on the plains of abraham in 1759, and that of the patriots' rebellions of 1837-1838. These two historical events are still told today as defeats of "us" at the hands of a conquering power. These are, again, founding myths to conveniently illustrate the persecution and oppression of the quebécois nation by the british invader. Not only does the

french-canadian people of that time have little in common with today's *québécois*, but framing it in these terms helps to obscure the fact that france was also an invading imperial power in this territory. As Alain Deneault says, the french-canadian settler "did not have a world stolen from him; rather, he was frustrated at not being able to create his own, in place of the colonizer".

The myth of the brave pioneer clearing the land, the tenacious lumberjack at work, or the courageous *coureur des bois* exploring the territory, are other examples. However, they are based on a historical reality: the colonizers appropriated and transformed the territory for the purpose of its exploitation, with an ideology based on the domination of nature.

The constitution of the quebecois nation, like that of all nations born from settler colonialism, required an intensive reorganization and settlement of the territory. Several waves of "internal," white, and francophone colonization took place during the 19th and early 20th centuries, bringing settlers to establish themselves in the backcountry and more remote regions of the province. This internal migration is seen as a way for french canadians to preserve their language and culture by moving away from the anglophone immigration settling in the cities. It is the continuation of the survival strategy based on mass procreation, which we discussed earlier. The clerical elites played an equally important role, encouraging the development of the nation through the exploitation and transformation of the natural resources present on the territory (Grandmont).

The last great wave, incidentally, dates back to the 1920s in abitibi. The government, with the help of the clergy, encouraged quebecers to go en masse to this territory, then considered "virgin," in order to populate it with good, hard-working catholics and bring it into "civilization". The mining boom and the unbridled extractivism that accompanied it were, of course, major factors in this colonization. Towns were built around the mines and belonged to the mining companies, as did the subsoil (Deneault). But as we know, the territories were not "vacant"; colonization and resource extraction involved the assimilation and displacement of the indigenous communities present.

Charles W. Mills, in *The Racial Contract*, develops the concept of "white ignorance": a way to absolve oneself of the atrocities that allowed the current order to exist and to invalidate the oppressions that stem from it. By appropriating the status of the "colonized," by placing themselves at the forefront of the stage, proclaiming their innocence and crying out about

their own persecution, quebecois sovereignists hide the true colonized: the indigenous person. Silencing the appropriation, exploitation of the territory, assimilation, and exclusion of the communities that lived there.

Official history also silences the racism suffered by black communities (see M. Aurélien & T. Rutland, *Out To Defend Ourselves: A History of Montreal's First Haitian Street Gang*), the antisemitism and racism towards immigrant communities who nonetheless helped build today's quebec, not to mention the rampant Islamophobia in quebec society in recent decades. The myth of the welcoming and benevolent quebecois nation must be reconsidered in light of these inglorious deeds.

The colonial history is not over; we are right in the middle of it. And if quebecers have no longer been playing the role of the colonized for a long time, they still play the role of colonizer. They enjoy the privileges granted by this status, regardless of their good intentions (A. Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*). White ignorance, by constructing an alternative narrative of the past, allows the colonizer to feel less guilty about their privileges, to remove responsibility and innocence from the crimes of colonialism and racism, which are still ongoing today.

Another example of the colonial character of the construction of the quebecois nation: the nationalization of hydroelectricity is today considered a decisive step in quebec's acquisition of its national consciousness, its economic emancipation, and its political affirmation – finally masters in our own house! How can we not see an invisibilization of indigenous peoples when national emancipation is associated with the appropriation and exploitation of the territory that was theirs? (Grandmont) Progressive discourses depicting hydro-québec as an eco-responsible, democratic, economically profitable state-owned enterprise belonging to everyone, etc., obscure the colonialist character



of the nationalization. Here we see white ignorance, which we discussed earlier, directly at work.

The contemporary quebecois nation (formerly French-Canadian) is the heir to the colonization process we have just described. In the name of a strategy of resistance and survival in the face of the british conquest, it seized the lands of indigenous peoples and claims them as its own. It has naturalized its occupation of the territory and rendered invisible the uses and lives that were already present there. But unlike other places in the world, such as algeria or indochina, the indigenous peoples present before the arrival of the settlers did not succeed in expelling them to gain their independence. And it is ironically to these decolonization movements that quebecois independantists refer when they seek models for national liberation struggles.

Irritable colons

National liberation movements have gone through two major distinct phases in history. A first moment of struggles for independence took place at the beginning of the 19th century, especially on the american continents, with the forerunners of the united-states war of independence (1775-1783) and the haitian revolution (1791-1804). This first phase was marked by the gradual withdrawal of european powers, but did not mean the end of colonialism. The colonial powers turned towards asia and africa and initiated a second wave of international colonization (R. Lughari, *Histoire du colonialisme*).

The second moment is that of the national liberation struggles of these newer colonies. These struggles led to declarations of independence immediately following the second world war, but saw a sharp increase during the years 1950-1960 and up until the turn of the 1970s. They are often characterized by massive popular support and armed resistance against the invading colonial powers. These are the liberation struggles of the so-called *third world* countries (we would say the *global south* today) and the anti-colonial movement proper, one of the high points of which was the bandung conference in 1955.

Quebec's independence movement of the 1960s was strongly influenced by these movements, and even today one often hears comparisons between quebec and former colonial states. But quebec is neither algeria nor vietnam. Quebec is also not ireland, and certainly not palestine. The

project of quebec sovereignty is different from anti-colonial liberation movements for the reasons we have outlined above: quebec nationalism is white and colonial – yes, even with its woke branding – and the quebecois nation is not a subaltern class in the sense understood by postcolonial theorists.

On the other hand, even when the struggle for national independence is legitimate from an anti-colonial and anti-imperialist point of view, it is not in itself a guarantee of positive social change. The Western left and far-left of this era supported anti-imperialist struggles almost unconditionally, because their strategic importance – in the name of the fight against the empire – outweighed considerations of their concrete political content. Beyond national liberation, what societal projects did they carry? What type of regimes did they wish to replace the colonial states with? What forms did the structures of the organizations leading the struggle take? If popular uprisings influenced by socialism participated in ousting the old colonial regimes, the new nation-states that replaced them more often than not bore the stamp of authoritarianism (not surprising coming from authoritarian communist parties, one might say). The quebec radical left was no exception; at the time, it gave its unwavering support to authoritarian regimes, such as those of mao, castro, or gaddafi, in the name of anti-imperialism. For anarchists, however, this support is problematic. Fredy Perlman considers that nationalism is not the antidote to imperialism, but on the contrary, its cause. Turning comrade lenin's words onto their feet, for him nationalism is the highest stage of capitalism.

After independence, if it is not the authoritarian left that seizes power, it is the new national elite that installs a neoliberal regime. The local bourgeoisie appropriates decision-making positions and economic levers, but does not hesitate to collaborate with foreign multinationals and the governments of the former colonial powers to line their own pockets. Anti-colonialism then becomes neocolonialism; the peoples are still oppressed and exploited, independence having only added the intermediary of a local ruling class (Fanon).

Let us again quote Murray Bookchin, as he poses the problem better than we could:

Presented as a national liberation movement, nationalism rarely brought about major social change, often failing even to recognize the need for it. [...] For many national liberation struggles, victory meant nothing more than the establishment of an independent state,

but paradoxically, one just as subject to the forces of international capitalism as the old empires had been.

[Our translation] Bookchin, *The Next Revolution*.

These arguments echo those mentioned above regarding the form the new national regime might take and remind us of the necessity not to place the will for sovereignty before the will to combat (other) systems of oppression.

To value collective livingness, to touch and know life fully, to know life that is not in some way predicated on and subsidized by the suffering of another: I suspect that this is what liberation is.

R. Maynard & L. B. Simpson, *Rehearsals for Living*.

Land back tabarnak

According to the criteria we have just set out, indigenous nationalism can be considered a legitimate decolonial struggle. The assertion of indigenous territorial sovereignty is obviously not a colonial claim. African american nationalism (black nationalism) can also be seen as such in that it demands the emancipation of black people from the oppression of white supremacy. The same cannot be said of quebec sovereignty. Let us also note that these struggles are not oriented towards the creation of a nation-state and carry different conceptions of the nation. This is why one cannot draw a parallel between all national liberation struggles.

For a long time, canadian (and quebec) politics were openly assimilationist. Today it is officially in favour of "reconciliation" and "recognition," but in reality, on the ground, in their experiences and their material conditions of existence, indigenous peoples are still victims of colonialism (Coulthard). The fact that a local oil company makes a symbolic territorial acknowledgment before undertaking its activities of ravaging the territory does not change the fact that it is participating in neocolonialism. No good intentions or pious wishes will change this fact: we are on stolen land.

Independence proponents want a free quebec, but free from what? For whom? The desire to possess the territory is deeply problematic and rooted in a capitalist, colonial, patriarchal, and dominating vision of nature. One does not possess a territory; one lives in it. The resources found there are not possessions that one could control. They belong to no one. A truly free quebec would be rid of the power relations constitutive of our current societies, and without a complete questioning of these power relations, one cannot claim liberation.

It is essential to debunk another persistent myth of quebec identity: that of *métissage* (mixed ancestry). If the blood of first nations and that of the settlers did indeed mix during the long history of the colonies in north america, especially in the north of canada in what is now called manitoba, it is false to say that all queb people have an indigenous ancestor, as is sometimes heard. This romanticized vision of the colonial past today serves to justify a barely disguised racism and to assert that, in fact, indigenous nations and the quebec nation have more in common and therefore compatible interests. We see a direct link between this myth of *métissage* and the vision of the nation as *diverse* and *multicultural* held by civic nationalists today. Under the pretext of "speaking on behalf of everyone," the dominant culture imposes its interests, which are in reality incompatible with those of marginalized groups. The melting pot they are trying to sell us poorly conceals the colonial, racist, and genocidal heritage still present in quebec. Not to mention the "eastern métis," this nation created from scratch by white people to exploit the loopholes in the colonial system by literally appropriating indigenous culture and identity.



Systemic racism and everyday racism in quebec will not disappear a day after a "yes" victory. We must first fight these scourges before we can claim to have a movement that truly carries freedom and equality. Sovereignty can only be a project of popular emancipation if it restores full sovereignty to the original peoples of this territory, which contradicts its very reason of being. An anti-colonial quebec sovereigntism is, for us, a contradiction in the terms. Either one is a sovereigntist, or one is an anti-colonialist.



Mutual interdependence & solidarity between peoples

*Je n'aime pas le lys, je n'aime pas la croix
Une est pour les curés, et l'autre est pour les rois
Si j'aime ce pays, la terre qui m'a vu naître
Je ne veux pas de dieu, je ne veux pas de maître*

Corrigan Fest, *Je suis fils*, 2007.

Let us clarify in conclusion that we are obviously not against the self-determination of peoples, nor national liberation, nor cultural diversity, regardless of the nation in question. On the contrary, we believe it is fundamental for every population to decide its own destiny. We want to reaffirm the slogan "all power to the people"! We must reiterate that liberation will not be achieved through the state, but by abolishing oppressive structures – of which the state and capital are the most prevalent. Likewise, if we don't have the solution to the crisis of the revolutionary subject that the left has faced for 50 years – whether it be class, the people, the individuals, the multitude, the commons, or other variants – we can affirm without hesitation that it is certainly *not* the nation, and especially not a privileged western nation. Pride and the hope necessary for our common emancipation are not to be found in nationality.

Let us also clarify that we have not found the magic recipe to solve all social problems. We humbly formulate criticisms informed by historical and conjunctural reading, our ethical sense, and our political convictions. Here we want to offer some food for thought that can lead to action, but we do not claim to indicate the only right path to follow. If we find ourselves resolutely in the camp of those who wish to see a total overthrow of systems of domination, we believe that any action aimed at collective liberation, any act of resistance against oppression, is justified.

So, can the fight for independence be a liberatory project? It is revealing to note that, except in rare exceptions, the left, whether socialist, social-democratic, or anarchist, considered nationalism and the national question to be reactionary issues and took very little interest in them before the second half of the 20th century. Indeed, throughout the 19th century, nationalism remained mainly the preserve of European ruling classes and was mobilized within the population only for conservative or reactionary purposes. It was only after the second world war – the pinnacle of right-wing nationalism if ever there was one – with the anti-colonial and third world movements, that nationalism began to be carried by the population for emancipatory purposes.

For a social struggle to be progressive and liberating, it is important to have a project that tackles the sources of inequalities and improves the conditions of an oppressed population while not reproducing these oppressions on other groups. The project should also aim for, if not the abolition, at least a weakening of hierarchies and aim to build more horizontal, solidarity-based relationships devoid of power dynamics.

It can also be useful, in judging the legitimacy of a struggle, to look at whose side we are on and who we are fighting against. Are our allies authoritarian and intolerant groups? Are they in a position of strength or vulnerability, oppressed or dominant in social relations? On what basis are we coming together? What are the sources of conflict and antagonism at the root of our struggles? What separates "us" from "others"?

The relevance of the Quebec independence project must be judged by the content of its proposals not only politically, but also socially, economically, and ethically. Yet, it contains no critique of the capitalist way of life, power relations, or production relations, and does not seek to radically transform society.

Aiming for the emancipation of a people without contesting the conditions and structures that created its oppression can only reproduce other oppressions.

The Quebecois nation was built on the appropriation and destruction of natural habitats, indigenous genocide, the capitalist exploitation of workers, and a patriarchal structure of domination. These traits are not merely



historical; they are still present and constitutive of the quebec nation today. Social liberation must be at the heart of the national liberation project, otherwise it is merely a reactionary, or useless movement. The independence movement must not only be aware of this, but explicitly and firmly position itself for the abolition of these power structures and constantly renew this stance, if it wants to claim to still be in the camp of liberation. It must be critical of the majority nationalism that draws on traditionalist, xenophobic, and anti-immigration discourses, reject these discourses, and place class antagonism and opposition to all forms of oppression at the heart of its struggle. It must be uncompromising in its ethical positioning against racism, capitalism, patriarchy, and domination.

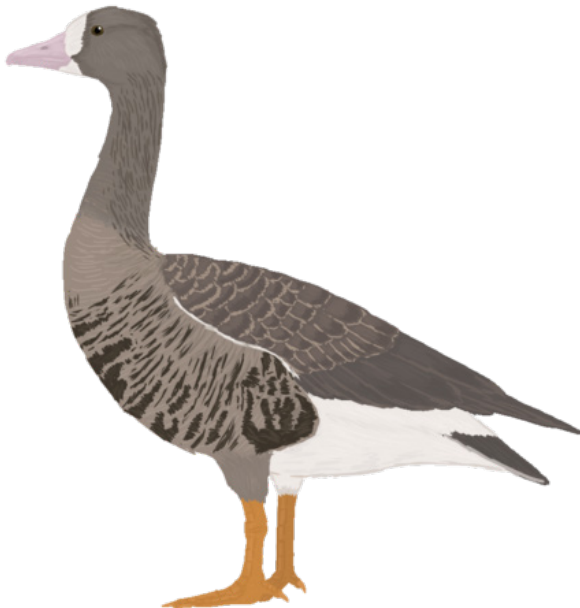
This also implies not denying conflict, but carefully and consciously defining our enemies. A westmount millionaire is not our enemy because he refuses to speak french or vote "yes" in a referendum; he is our enemy because he actively participates in the reproduction of the established order and the domination of capital over all that exists. Moreover, our enemy is the system itself and not a few individuals who represent it. As long as this system remains in place, we cannot be truly free.

Let us also clarify that as white people, settlers, privileged individuals, it is not up to us to decide the direction that anti-racist and anti-colonial liberation struggles will take—just as it is not up to cisgender men to decide the direction of feminist or queer struggles. However, it is necessary to abandon the posture of innocence that absolves us of responsibility, to position ourselves alongside our siblings in struggle, and to act to the best of our abilities to support them in the face of oppression and repression. The best posture we can adopt as quebecers (who are moreover young, white, middle-class, etc.) is a posture of humility and listening, but also of attack and direct engagement of our bodies in liberation struggles (*Indigenous Action, Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex*).

The zapatista uprisings in chiapas and the kurdish uprisings in rojava are contemporary examples of liberation struggles that claim both the protection of cultural identities and collective autonomy as well as international solidarity, while adopting decentralized, anti-authoritarian, and horizontal principles and practices, along with a radical questioning of the state, capitalism, colonialism, and structures of domination. They offer concrete models of resistance that go far beyond the simple demand for a nation-state. A liberation struggle in quebec could draw inspiration from them on a political and tactical level by establishing alternative

decision-making structures now, popular assemblies coordinated among themselves within autonomous federations, or networks of cooperation and mutual aid. Far from being unattainable utopias, these goals are achievable if we organize collectively. We should not limit ourselves to political independence as the horizon of possibilities on the pretext that it would be more pragmatic.

Activism can take so many paths that it seems trivial to focus only on national independence in one's political engagements. Groups already exist in Montreal that fight on various concrete issues, organize horizontally, carry within them the seeds of a better society, and achieve real gains here and now. To name just a few: **SLAM**, **FLIP**, **Entrave**, and **Tiohtià'ke Strike**, on housing issues; **Pink Bloc**, **Front Rose**, and **FAGS**, on queer issues; **Rage Climatique**, **Soulèvements du Fleuve**, and **Justice Climatique Montréal** around ecology; **Désinvestir pour la Palestine**, **PASC**, **Solidarité sans Frontières** for international solidarity issues; let us also mention **CLAC**, **Front Antifasciste Populaire**, the **IWW**, and of course **ORA**. This list is far from exhaustive but demonstrates the plethora of organizing spaces that exist if the desire to get involved in a social cause comes to you.



Nationalism emerged at a time when the sense of community was crumbling, even disappearing under the effect of capitalism. It is an erroneous response to very real problems of loss of meaning. We must strive to rebuild this sense of community, not by basing it on the nation, but on feelings of belonging directly experienced by human beings; at the level of their daily experience, their neighbourhood, their work, their shared material conditions, and on a truly human scale. Political involvement in one of the groups mentioned above can fulfill both the need to make sense in the disgusting world we live in, to help change it, and the need for community. We must also appeal to experiences universally shared by humanity: belonging to a totality, to the entire human species, to the living world, and inhabiting a planet in the midst of a climate crisis.

National identity, whether racial, linguistic, or religious, is a political concept whose time has passed. While demands based on territorial identity can still be vehicles for emancipation, national identities are almost always mobilized for reactionary purposes and belong resolutely to the right, even the far-right of the political spectrum. For people who want emancipatory social change, whether revolutionary or reformist, national identity may not be the most relevant way to engage in the political field in the 21st century. Seeing the world through the lens of nationalism means evoking traditions as a vision of the future. We must evolve our conceptions to make the concept of nation, like that of the state, obsolete. We must think in terms of humanity, in terms of the living world, in universal terms.

We therefore call for thinking about and shaping a movement that goes beyond nationalism. This could involve internationalism, but it is important to ensure that this does not mean the standardization of all cultures nor the hegemony of one over all others. To avoid cultural homogenization, our internationalism must be different from that of globalized capitalism. We must celebrate local cultures and traditions without ostracizing others, celebrate differences and diversity as much as what unites us.

One of the historical tasks of the left is to bring back an alternative revolutionary imagination,



to revive the hope for radical change and a better world. Independence responds to a need for a societal project but remains confined to political conceptions of the past. We can do so much better than "a country like any other." We need to propose more, to have better projects, meaningful projects that imagine broader, see bigger. We must inscribe ourselves in history and truly become co-creators of our future.

We could develop a sense of community that starts closer to human groupings than the national scale and that transcends the exclusive characteristics of the nation to reach a global level of integration. Every city, every neighbourhood, every street, deserves to be autonomous in its decision-making regarding the organization of work, land use planning, the production and distribution of goods – in short, everything that involves commons. And at the same time, they should be interdependent and supportive of one another to face the colossal challenges ahead of us. Let us abandon the logic of national sovereignty in favour of horizontal and self-managed structures. Let us build solidarity networks that transcend ethnic and geographic boundaries. Let us develop both local autonomy and global solidarity, promoting an ethic of complementarity.

Let us ensure that the "we" is no longer exclusive, but inclusive. The flourishing of humanity comes not through withdrawal into oneself, but through overcoming the identity crisis. By moving beyond the liberal notion of inclusivity, which involves recuperating anything potentially emancipatory in demands and integrating them into the logic of the state and capital (and power itself). Moving beyond representativity, therefore, to achieve a real democracy that would be participatory, include everyone, not just the majority, and led directly by the people concerned. Confronting capitalism directly, rather than masking its contradictions behind a new flag. Strong communities can stand together to prevent the resurgence of power from taking root again. They are the rampart that separates us from fascism.

The constitution of this radically inclusive "we," subversive to the established order and carrying truly emancipatory potential, does not come through the creation of a new state. We must abolish the state, not create new ones; we must tear down borders, not add new ones.

We must move beyond citizenship and electoral representation to attain a relationship of belonging to the world unmediated by institutions. A direct relationship with nature and the production of goods essential to our survival and our individual and collective flourishing. We need political forms that truly respond to the needs, desires, and aspirations of everyone. Interdependence is perhaps the slogan that must replace independence, in a world where we must collaborate and help each other to get out of the gaping hole into which we are sinking.

That's pretty much it.

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