

FROM SURVIVANCE TO RATTRAPAGE

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Denis Monière *Ideologies in Quebec: The historical development*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981 (Translated by Richard Howard).

This translation of *Le développement des idéologies au Québec: des origines à nos jours* (1977) by Denis Monière, a political scientist from L'Université de Montréal, will undoubtedly prove to be a useful contribution to the literature on Quebec society available in English. Monière's approach joins an emerging body of work in Quebec which may be situated between a Marxist political economy and a general critical theory. Nicole Laurin-Frenette includes the works of Michel Freitag, Jean-Jacques Simard, Monière and her own as representative of this tendency.¹ Monière's book is an attempt to outline the development of ideologies in Quebec in both their synchronic and diachronic dimensions, that is, a consideration of historical as well as social and economic elements.

Although the original version of the book has enjoyed a remarkable commercial success (more than 20,000 copies sold in Quebec alone), its reception by the academic community has been ambivalent. Controversy has evolved around three issues. In defying an almost twenty year tradition of refusing to accept federal prizes for artistic and scholarly work as a symbol of solidarity, Monière's acceptance of the 1977 Governor General's award for non-fiction in French tends to stand out. A second detail which haunts *Ideologies in Quebec*, is the well documented accusation by the Laval sociologist Nicole Gagnon, of plagiarism. Finally, a more fundamental criticism again raised by Gagnon, has to do with the question of whether or not a work can be considered as a significant scholarly contribution if it makes no claim to original research.² Monière's text is such a work. His aim is ambitious, indeed nothing short of a comprehensive review and synthesis of the major works on ideology produced in Quebec. Yet, as he states: "I make no claim to exhaustiveness or originality".³

The problem is that the data from which Monière constructs his history of ideologies are entirely secondary. Hence, there is little attempt at reconstructing the methodological assumptions of the researchers who constructed the data in the first place. Without knowing exactly why and how the data was constructed, one can make little if any claim to their validity. At the same time, however, the absence of methodological reconstruction does not negate the provisional hypotheses and questions which may be generated from the synthesis that he offers, nor its value as a guide to existing debates. This is of particular value to an English-speaking audience in that it brings to life a tradition of Québécois

thinkers, movements and activists which otherwise would remain unknown. This alone constitutes a significant contribution. Still to situate the work and to determine its larger political and social implications we must summarize the structure of his argument.

In his opening chapter Monière outlines a theoretical model for the study of ideology in a dependent society. The discussions of dependency, modes of production, class structure and ideology are presented in the tradition of Marx and Engels. Ideology is understood in terms of universal world views which are ahistorical, yet serve as rationalizing principles for the legitimization or falsification of action. Quebec, as a dependent peripheral society, in relation to capitalist centers, displays particular ideological expressions which may only be explained in terms of the historical specificity of their relations to both internal and external hegemonic processes. For Monière, such an explanation requires a consideration of the development of ideology in relation to modes of production as they emerge, assume dominant positions, decline and are replaced.

Here we must remind ourselves that it is a textbook we are reading and not an in depth look at problems in either marxist theories of capitalist development or general theories of ideology. Monière chooses to avoid the more contemporary controversies in each of these domains while at the same time he poses an alternative to traditional historiography and political science. As a result his approach is somewhat eclectic, citing Samir Amin to explain the colonial and dependent status of Quebec, Poulantzas' theory of social classes and the relative autonomy of the state to explain the transition from feudalism to capitalism, and Lucien Goldmann's concept of the *subject trans-individuel* to explain the periods of ideological solidarity within Quebec. Unfortunately the theoretical discussion is not systematically integrated into the rest of the text. Monière follows the existing literature, stopping here and there to comment, raise objections or underline certain problems. Even though he does seek out data on progressive social movements, in hopes of avoiding a study exclusively concerned with the history of dominant ideology, he has no explicit theory of emancipation. Consequently, emphasis is placed more on the absorption and domination of emergent cultural practices by the dominant ideology. This tendency is expressed in the selection of the themes which are chosen for consideration, as we see below.

The history of ideologies in Quebec begins in the 17th century wherein feudal modes of production are being replaced or dominated by mercantile capitalist modes. Monière proposes a review of the class formation and ideological expressions of New France using the concept of the petty producer mode of production. Rejecting both the Montreal and Laval schools of history (the latter seeing New France as essentially feudal and the former seeing it as essentially capitalist), he suggests that the petty producers mode within which the majority of the French Canadians participate is neither essentially feudal nor capitalist but that it contains elements of both. It is a mode of production which is dominated first by the French aristocracy and a small French merchant

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class and then latter by the British colonizers, the allied local clergy and an emerging middle class replacing the French merchants. Following Rioux and Dofny, along with a long line of others, he argues that the British conquest establishes a double class structure in Quebec. On the one hand, the habitants (petty producers) are subject to the hegemony of the British aristocracy and its middle class control over the macro-economy, while on the other hand it is also subject to the ideological manipulations of the church and an emerging middle class itself in alliance with the British in order to preserve their own immediate interests. With confederation the British aristocracy is replaced by a national anglophone bourgeoisie (the latter representing American capital) which in turn is allied with elements of the new middle class in Quebec who take control of the provincial state. Thus the double class structure is continued.

The transition from the colonizer-colonized to the dominator-dominated antagonisms forced the ideological expression of the Quebec class structure into a long century of *survivance*, a kind of inner retreat lead by Catholic corporatism. Monière traces examples, again following standard arguments, of the dominant gallicist ideology of the French regime, along with the unruly and non-Catholic behavior of the habitants, to the ultramontanist ideological expressions of the local clergy, its control over cultural institutions and alliance with the emerging middle class. The description of ideological world views is prefaced by a discussion of the structural considerations of the transformations of the mercantile, industrial and monopoly modes of production. In each transitional period new formulations of the nationalist world vision of survival emerge. The era of the Duplessis regime marks the last traditional alliance between the rural petty bourgeoisie and the church. The ultramontanist conservatism of the regime could no longer cope with the penetration of the monopoly phase of world capitalism spearheaded by American investments. The result is an increasingly organized and secular industrial proletariat and a disenchanted liberal intelligentsia who together form a provisional alliance against the regime. This opposition is expressed in the ideology of *rattapage* or 'catching up' with the industrial status of other western nations. The *rattapage* ideology ends with the "quiet revolution" wherein one faction, headed by Trudeau representing another wave of "French Power" in Ottawa, and another representing the independentist aspirations and social democratic tendencies is headed by Lévesque. The ideological formulations of the national question shift from *survivance* and autonomy to *rattapage* and finally independence.

Whereas the conclusion to the 1977 edition is highly skeptical of the actual intentions of the P.Q. and indeed calls for the formation of an authentic socialist party, there is also a kind of "wait and see" attitude. The postface to the 1980 English edition offers a different conclusion arguing that the federal state structure and the overall double class structure have placed the Québécois in a deep contradiction. On the one hand, their minority status has forced them into a nationalist ideology with autonomous if not independentist aspirations, while on the other hand, federally they are the historical captives of the Liberal party. The only solution to the dilemma is the development of a nationalist philosophy

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"which begins by exposing the patterns of domination", according to Monière.⁵

Monière's conclusion contributes very little directly in terms of 'what is to be done' in the future to attain Quebec sovereignty. Indeed he conveniently expresses a plea for a nationalist strategy without designing it.⁶ In part this conclusion is not surprising in terms of the marginality of his theoretical approach to the history of ideology in Quebec. The approach is marginal because it is situated between a political economy which emphasizes themes of repression, domination and reproduction and a general critical theory which seeks to elucidate historical specificity, spontaneity and patterns of emancipation. As a consequence the full dynamic of social change in Quebec over the last four centuries remains hidden, largely because the overall tendency of the book is towards the former of these two problematics.

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Notes

1. See Nicole Laurin-Frenette's discussion in "La sociologie des classes au Québec de Léon Gerin à nos jours", Communication présentée lors du colloque *Continuité et rupture dans les sciences humaines au Québec* en octobre 1981, Non-published manuscript.
2. See Nicole Gagnon's review of Monière's book in *Recherches*
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2. See Nicole Gagnon's review of Monière's book in *Recherches Sociographiques* XXI, 1-2, 1980, 193-98 and Monière's response in *Recherches Sociographiques* XXII, 1, 1981, 145-46.
3. *Ideologies in Quebec*, p. IX.
4. See Jacques Dofny and Marcel Rioux "Social Classes in French Canada" in Marcel Rioux and Yves Martin *French Canadian Society* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1964, 307-319.
5. *Ideologies in Quebec*, 312.
6. He does enter the debate in his more recent work. See for example his work with the new political science review *Politique: Revue de la Société québécoises de science politique* 1982 — and his recent book *Pour la suite de l'histoire: essai sur la conjoncture politique au Québec* Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1982.