

The consequences and the dynamic of inter-ethnic relations could be illustrated by the intricate constitutional politics of Canada. Already a multi-ethnic society, Canada has experienced important changes in the composition of its population since the Second World War. In contrast to the historic deal between the two "Founding Nations", a more complex and diverse regional and ethnic reality has emerged. If the population of Québec remains relatively homogenous (77.7 per cent of the population being of French origin), English-Canada can hardly be considered a purely Anglo-Saxon community. In 1867, when the Canadian Constitution came into effect, Canada was essentially composed of people of French and British background, with a significant number of aboriginal people. The census of 1986, in contrast, indicated that 37.5% of the Canadian population was of an origin other than French or British (for example, in Ontario, the most populous province, 44.6% of the population was of an origin other than English or French).¹²

This change in demographics has had a profound effect on the recent constitutional debate in Canada. In effect, the four Western provinces, whose populations are more than 50 per cent from other than French or British origins, are, with Québec, the main proponents of a new redistribution of powers from the central government to provinces, but have difficulties in coming to grips with the attribution of a "distinct society" status for Québec. Many Quebec francophones failed, on their part, to recognize that the "rest of Canada" is not a monolithic Anglo-Saxon bloc, and that newly arrived populations do not consider themselves part of the historical English-French duality built into the original Canadian Constitution.

The aboriginal issue also added to the complexity of the equation. The Amerindians, Inuit and Metis peoples called for constitutional recognition of their right to self-government. For somewhat different reasons, the debate in Canada arrived subliminally at a principle of "subsidiarity" not unlike that of the European Community.

In Canada, the recognition of the pluri-ethnic reality of the country, through the multiculturalism policy and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms avoided ethnic tension between the majority and newly-arrived immigrants. On the other hand, it is extremely difficult for a state, whether federal, confederal or unitary, to force both ethno-territorial and new minority groups to accept passively the central state's hegemonic authority in areas such as education, communication, general resource allocation and the delivery of public services. Here it is important to emphasize that minorities cannot be legislated out of existence, nor made irrelevant by attempts to create an homogenized society to fit the ideal of a strong central state.