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Quebec's Heart of Darkness: a review article of Daniel Poliquin's essay on Quebec Nationalism, *In the Name of the Father*, Published by Douglas and McIntyre; Translated by Don Winkler, 2001, \$22.95, 222 pages. Initially published as "Le Roman colonial," Les Editions Boreal, 2000

by Julian Samuel

It is with unpretentious erudition and unbridled courage that Franco-Ontarian Daniel Poliquin looks at this object called Quebec "nationalism" - and picks it apart. For a fuller understanding of Poliquin's courage this "nationalism" ought be contextualized.

Radio-Canada, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the editors-in-chief of our provincial media, ex cathedra, reject in-depth criticism of Quebec "nationalism". Quebec's old-stock anglophones and the French-Canadian intellectual classes are wholly responsible for practicing cultural apartheid: there is not a single "visible minority" in a key position within any of Quebec cultural institutions. In Quebec, there is wall-to-wall white, pre-rational modernity. This aggressive/defensive class of technical media intellectuals (both old-stock anglos and white francophones) will not publish any historical, political or cultural criticism. Occasionally, to placate the muses of Liberal Democracy a few critical articles or programmes will make it past these gate-keepers. Fully co-operative "visible minorities" do get jobs.

Jean Bernier, chief-editor of Les Editions Boreal says that since its inception in 1963, they have published the work of one black writer. Currently there is not a single black writer on its editorial board. One black in 38 years. Most Quebec journalists would not voluntarily expose so blatant an abuse of public funding. One of the goals of the PQ is to make craven those who might openly criticize things as they are: The fatherland is infallible.

Quebec society is more censorial than the rest of Canada. Le Devoir, Quebec's "right-thinking" "nationalist" (read ethnic nationalist) newspaper does not have a single minority in an editorial position, and it rarely publishes articles that are antithetical to its raison d'etre: the partition of Canada. The Montreal Gazette, backward on the question of Palestine et cetera, frequently published the uglily written separatist tirades of Josée Legault (whom Poliquin ridicules ad infinitum).

In 1995, after losing his referendum, Jacques Parizeau indirectly encouraged physical violence against "ethnic voters". That night, at the microphone, I remember watching him frothing at the mouth: They lost the referendum because of money (read Jews) and the ethnic vote. Yves Michaud recently scoffed off the holocaust, while Premier Bernard Landry intimidates and throttles the anglophone minorities.

It is in this suffocating, censorial atmosphere that Daniel Poliquin has the courage to criticize Quebec's "nationalists". He was trashed in the local press. So was Esther Delisle, author of "The Traitor and the Jew: Anti-Semitism and the delirium of extremist right-wing nationalism in French Canada from 1929-39," (1993) - it is now impossible for her to get a teaching job in Quebec.

Why has it taken so long for Canada to secrete a social critic of Poliquin's stature? Why all the centuries of silence in our "few acres of snow"?

Through insightful anecdotes Poliquin expresses himself without masturbatory post-modernist flatulence -- rather an accomplishment given the susceptibility of French-Canadian intellectuals to be pulled into the vortex of Parisian jargon-ridden incoherence - - Baudrillard et al., ad nauseam. His honest prose turns Quebec's official history on its head in a tragico-comedic way. In my estimation, since 1759, Poliquin is the second or third (if one counts Pierre Vallières) French-Canadian intellectual to so do.

He exposes provincial "nationalists" as "self-colonized" hypocrites. Poliquin connects Jean-Marie Le Pen, the elegant French racist, with the PQ who are not nearly as elegant in the French language but comparable in other ways. By corollary, Parizeau can be seen as George Wallace, the dead white ex-governor of Alabama, segregationist par excellence. The continental French left, he writes,

"...prefers Canada, a space more congenial to its European point of view. It has reason to be wary, especially when it sees Le Pen making common cause with the PQ...Ever since, there has been no doubt: an independent Quebec is for the French left a reactionary aspiration, just as were the origins of New France. Some things never change." p 154

My first quibble with Poliquin is that there is no such thing as Quebec "nationalism." The term 'nationalist' cannot be used to describe Quebecois separatists. In political nomenclature, parties such as the *Partie Québécois*, *Bloc Québécois* are not at all nationalists: they are, properly speaking, revolutionary Provincialists (read ethnic nationalists). The term "nationalist" is far too connected with political victories to be firmly applicable to the people Poliquin inexorably ridicules: Jacques Parizeau, Pierre Bourgault, Monique Simard, Guy Bouthillier, Lucien Bouchard,

Philippe Paré, Bernard Landry et cetera. If the Vietnamese General, Vo Nguyen Giap -- who devastated French imperialism at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 -- is a Nationalist then are Lucien Bouchard and Monique Simard nationalists as well? No. Are they in anyway like the brave Algerian Nationalists who achieved liberation in 1962? Only a true revolutionary

Provincialist would put Jawaharlal Nehru, or the eloquent Black Nationalist Malcolm X in the same league as Guy Bouthillier, head of the "right thinking" Société St-Jean Baptiste de Montréal and the "right-thinking" Lise Bissonnette, ex-editor-in-chief of *Le Devoir*. In Poliquin's book these intellectuals are portrayed as "right-thinking". Why not "right-wingers"? Fear of law suits?

A melliferous chapter entitled, "Already Yesterday," with grace, humour, and intelligence removes one layer of lies after another. It is because of this chapter that Poliquin was attacked by the technical intellectuals who fear historical truths. Reactionaries from France re-emerge in New France:

"For the most part those who thought and wrote in New France were closer to the Restoration than the Revolution." (p. 140)

And,

"But the French Revolution, decried by our clergy, shipped us for the most part emigrants like Abbé Calonne, who forgot nothing and learned nothing. Our intellectual elite, though titillated at times by the advanced ideas of the age, was for the most part four-square for the reactionaries, just as it has earlier stood for the apostolic Counter-Revolution." (p. 140)

The theoretical sections "In The Name of the Father" are "cartoonish" political science. They are comical and more or less consequential to Poliquin's central thesis. Of course, Poliquin is no Louis Althusser. Another culture made Althusser. Poliquin shows how "nationalist" French-Canadians still cling to the tactical model offered in Albert Memmi's "The Colonizer and the Colonized". Here is a bit on their tragic mal-adaptation:

"With Mimmi's thesis as a guide, Quebec history was reinterpreted, and the new historical school of the 1950's that has already, under Groulx's influence, dropped Providence as a historic force, now transformed Quebec into an occupied territory and the Québécois into a colonized people in need of liberation... ..Quebec got modernity and entered the Third World at the same time." (p. 118)

And,

"The problem is, there was a problem. May be even two. The first is that Quebec was not Memmi's Tunisia. Miron, the Aquin brothers, and the FLQ all made the mistake of applying a foreign model to the Quebec situation. The second is that their decolonization was accompanied by a recolonization by the same forces that

were supposed to be avenues to freedom. And so the same Quebec of these thinkers was a unique arena in which decolonization and recolonization, in parallel, generated a confusion that was fertile, dramatic, and farcical. In that order." (p. 120)

The following lines must have stung ethnic nationalists such as Pierre Bourgault:

"The Quebecois were neither Arabs nor the Blacks of Frantz Fanon, they were closer to being Pied Noir themselves. Colonizers more than colonized." (p. 121)

On the successful 1995 referendum Bourgault said, I remind readers:

"That the No vote among Jews, Greeks, Italians and other non-francophones was a 'straight racist' vote." "Jews" "Greeks" "Italians"-- are they not Canadian citizens first?"

On language Poliquin is relentless:

"For instance, Monsieur Bouchard likes to say that he's s'est peinturé dans le coin - has painted himself into a corner. There are plenty of days when you have to know English very well in order to understand the protector of Quebec French."(p 75)

There is no real or great difference between the French spoken by Lucien Bouchard and that of prime minister Jean Chretien who gets picked on simply because he is not a revolutionary Provincialist.

TV interviews with Quebec film-maker Pierre Falardeau are so cluttered with "tsé (tu sais); low, low; (la la) tu vu tu (tu vu) " that his "French" becomes a kind of avant-garde music. For continental French TV and for French cinema audiences Quebec films (Falardeau's in particular) require French subtitles to render them somewhat comprehensible.

Poliquin is aptly critical of Falardeau, projecting him as hick-supreme whose narrow-minded films expose the wooden cogs working in his mind. "Right-thinking" Quebec intellectuals would put Falardeau in the same league of film-makers such as Gillo Pontecorvo, whose 1966 film, "The Battle of Algiers" confronted both French imperialism AND the pitfalls of Algerian nationalism itself. Since birth, Falardeau has known only one side. Poliquin's targets don't require much in the way of analytical paraphernalia to demolish: Falardeau, Jacques Godbout, Lucien Bouchard, Lise Bissonnette, Josée Legault -- thunderous challengers?

Despite the intense veracity of his arguments, Poliquin has blind spots. There are only a few. He is a supporter of Bill 101. This makes him a soft Quebec "nationalist". This wretched legal instrument is continually used by the Quebec government to keep most

cultural institutions and Quebec culture at large free of blacks, "immigrants" (Canadian Citizens) and Jews. Bill 101 is White Affirmative Action Gone Wild.

"Visible minorities": the current provincial government has hired fewer than 3 per cent. "Les autres" constitute 18.5 per cent of the provincial population and a significant part of the tax base. Poliquin has not exposed the fact that the tax contributions of "les autres" are snatched and funneled into the white French-Canadian cultural machinery. Should not Poliquin's analysis touch on economic fundamentals? This would be only fair.

He does not go far enough in his critique of Quebec's ethnic nationalists. Social critics of quality do not fear immolating sacred cows. That is what the cows are there for. His blatant exclusion of a full discussion on the repercussions of a continually hybridizing Quebec is based on an obsession with French-Canadian history, culture and politics. He is blind to "les autres" in Quebec. French-Canadians - at their critical best - ignore them. Of course, many of these 'others' do not care if they are ignored. They just want a fair crack at key positions and money. Poliquin is pusillanimous on this issue. The unassailable parameters boldly state: Even Soft ethnic nationalists Must Not Attack Bill 101.

Europe and America are continually confronting the idea of evolving, multiracial societies, with mixed success. BBC and Channel Four contain minorities in important positions, not just well-paid fools. If Poliquin is not willing to open up these issues for the French-Canadian mind then who will? They won't listen to the 'outsiders'. He, like those who came before him, talk incessantly of their own culture as something detached from a multiracial Canada which is expanding, not narrowing its definition of citizenship. "Visible minorities" are still considered "immigrants" by the PQ and BQ. Surely, there is a fear that The Outsider within will outdo The French-Canadian in some way? Or is it simply a question of keeping the jobs and money in white old-stock anglo and French-Canadian hands? We are invisible for a tactical reason. A subsequent book might breach those unassailable parameters that have limited Poliquin's current work on Quebec's ethnic nationalists.

Film-maker and writer Julian Samuel has made a four-hour documentary on Orientalism and has published a novel, *Passage to Lahore*, [De Lahore à Montréal]. He is currently working on a documentary on the destruction of libraries. You may contact him at jjsamuel@vif.com

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