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The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations

"Small Peoples": Ethnonational Existential Uncertainty of Israeli Jews and Québécois

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The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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Abstract

This paper focuses on "small peoples," a term coined by Milan Kundera to denote ethnic communities that lack a "sense of an eternal past and future." My aim is twofold: to expose this phenomenon and to both theoretically and empirically explore its bases. I first describe this phenomenon, which I believe is invaluable to the understanding of both ethnicity and security. I further argue that in modern times, "small peoples" are marked by a heightened and historically prolonged sense of uncertainty about the viability of their future-driven *national survival* (epistemic insecurity) and the validity of their past-based *ethnic identity* (ontological insecurity). Empirically, I analyze two distinct "small peoples" — Israeli Jews and French Canadians (Québécois) — and suggest that while the former have been plagued by quandaries about survival, the latter have been no less concerned with insecurity about identity.

Introduction

> Small peoples. The concept is not quantitative; it points to a condition; a fate; small peoples do not have that felicitous sense of an eternal past and future; at a given moment in their history, they all passed through the antechambers of death; in constant confrontation with the arrogant ignorance of the mighty, they see their existence as perpetually threatened or with a question mark hovering over it; for their existence is the question.
>
> Milan Kundera

Nothing lasts forever. Individuals, families, tribes, organizations, societies, states, empires, and civilizations are all bound by this golden rule. Socio-historical science, well aware of the fact, has nourished an extensive body of literature dealing with "the rise and fall of" various human institutions. Each individual and every collective is inherently living on the edge of a gaping abyss. However, they do not all inhabit this paper, which concerns only the unique case of "small peoples" — that is, ethnic communities characterized by a prolonged and deep-rooted sense of existential uncertainty.

Over the past three decades, the study of uncertainty has made significant strides (Peat 2002). Social science, however, has largely confined its application of this concept to economics and psychology, which, despite some insightful results, has contributed little to our understanding of ethnic existential uncertainty. Indeed, the topic of uncertainty has been largely overlooked in the relevant fields of political science, ethnic studies, and international relations (IR).[1]

Lacking thus far any in-depth academic analysis, the study of political existential uncertainty requires the development of a sound theoretical

1 A notable, if problematic, exception is Cioffi-Revilla 1998.

framework as well as extensive empirical research. I believe that the concept of "small peoples," once fully explored, can provide vital insight into ethnonationalism,[2] security, and their interrelation. Due to its limited scope, however, this paper can offer but a glimpse of potential research.

The two case studies are the Israeli Jews and the French-Canadians (Québécois). The Jewish people provide perhaps the most conspicuous historical example of a "small people." Despite being one of the oldest peoples, Jews have nonetheless always been plagued by doubt about their continued existence. Indeed, one of the most vivid images of Jews is that of an "ever-dying people." Conceived by the Jewish thinker Simon Rawidowicz, this is first and foremost a self-image: each generation in the Diaspora "considers itself the final link in Israel's chain," seeing "before it the abyss ready to swallow it up" (1986, 54).[3]

This paper examines the concept of an "ever-dying people" — or, more broadly, "small peoples" — both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, I argue that the study of "small peoples" benefits both security studies and ethnic studies. By re-conceptualizing security not as defense against threats but as certainty about existence and by endogenizing ethnicity's socio-historical longevity, I argue that in modern times "small peoples" are characterized by a prolonged sense of uncertainty about their national survival and ethnic identity, encompassing what I term "ethnonational existential uncertainty." Empirically, I examine the features of Israeli Jews and French-Canadians as "small peoples." The first case focuses on the present and the second covers a broader time span to illustrate the general applicability of the concept.

2 This terminology draws on Connor's distinction between ethno-nationalism and civic patriotism — the first ascribed to the ethnic community, the latter to the state (1990; 1994).

3 Rawidowicz's study (1986) is one of a select few that consciously reflected upon this phenomenon, but it nevertheless provides more of a passing observation than a systematic academic study.

Theory

Security's Flipside: From Defense Against Threats to Existential (Un) Certainty

Milan Kundera's observation provides three useful clues to understanding small peoples. I will consider two here and the third in the next section. First, it focuses on ethnic communities ("peoples") rather than on states. This distinction naturally brings to mind IR's concept of "small states," coined during the Cold War era and revived following the Soviet Block's collapse and fragmentation into numerous would-be nation-states.[4] Although states are important to the study of small peoples, the basic research unit of this study is the ethnic community (ethnie). Kundera's second clue is his unmistakable emphasis on the subjective dimension. Whether or not the existence of these ethnic communities is actually in peril is less important (for their classification as "small peoples") than the fact that "they see their existence" as such. Here lies another departure from the study of small states, which focuses primarily on their objective condition (Baker 1998; Sutton 1993; Sutton and Payne 1993; Vayrynen 1997; Vital 1971). The notion of "small peoples," on the other hand, refers to subjective (or, more precisely, intersubjective) processes characterizing ethnic communities.[5]

This distinction has a marked resonance in the IR field of security studies. The concept of small states is an evident offspring of the traditional study of security, which, focusing almost exclusively on objectively assessing

4 Though widely used, the term is still very much contested by corresponding but incongruent alternatives, such as quasi states, mini states, micro states, weak states, and failed states. See Fearon and Laitin 2004; Handel 1990; Harden 1985; Inbar and Sheffer 1997; Jackson 1990; Rapoport 1969; Vital 1971. On the blurred boundaries of modern states see Clapham 1998.

5 On intersubjectivity see Carrithers 2001; Percy 1958; Vaitkus 1991. Regarding its relations with we-belief/we-attitude see Tuomela 1995; Tuomela and Balzer 1999.

military threats to a state, has regarded security as defense (Geser 1992; Sheffer 1997; Walt 1991). The immediate result of this approach is the *security dilemma*: as each state seeks greater security by increasing its own military force, other states increasingly fear that this force will be turned on them and augment their own military power, contributing to a vicious cycle of fear, force, and insecurity.[6]

Although security and insecurity are indeed crucial to our understanding of small peoples, the traditional view of security is not particularly useful. Objectively assessing military threats to the territorial integrity of a state tells little of small peoples. Unfortunately, this is the case with regard to most of the novel approaches to security. The political upheaval of the early 1990s saw a proliferation of new definitions and analyses of "security," which consequently became an "essentially contested concept" (Gallie 1962), encompassing both the international system as a whole and each individual (see Booth 1991, 1997; Klare and Thomas 1994; Krause and Williams 1996; Rasmussen 2004; Wyn Jones 1999).

Although they broaden the scope of security, these new approaches still fail to address the unique position of small peoples. First, by utilizing security as a leverage to bring about a political change, they formulate exclusive interpretations, ignoring scientific precision and universal usability (Tarry 1999). Second, because they favor the state and the individual as the basic research units, ethnicity remains at best a secondary object of analysis (Cederman and Daase 2003; Cederman 2002). Third, these approaches only vaguely demarcate the referent object and (even more so) the threatened value; they focus on features of existence (such as regime and territorial integrity) rather than on existence itself. Fourth, all of these approaches still subscribe to the predominant interpretation of security as defense against threats, a concept that is inherently objective.

A critical review of the literature to date makes it clear that a consideration of small peoples requires a comprehensive reframing of security. This undertaking does not propose to negate the traditional interpretation, which is still of the utmost importance, but rather to complement it: focusing on

6 The concept was first introduced in Butterfield 1951; Herz 1951.

security not as protection against threats, but as certainty about existence. Thus, this approach acknowledges the value of objective threat assessment, and at the same time emphasizes the equivalent value of the intersubjective dynamics of perception. Herein lies the essence of small peoples' security problem: not in the actual balance of power, but in the extent of the uncertainty of their members about the collective's very existence.

If, as I have attempted to show, security studies can benefit from the study of small peoples, the reverse is also true. The latter's emphasis on intersubjective dynamics bears a resemblance to one of the most innovative approaches in security studies: the Copenhagen School.[7] This approach, shortcomings notwithstanding, offers a sound epistemology and methodology for the study of small peoples. To understand ethnic existential insecurity (read uncertainty), we must first understand our own: as researchers, we cannot presume to know the minds of others. We can, however, exercise our imagination when examining their external expressions in the form of public opinion polls and discourse (artistic, intellectual, political, and public) that reflect and refer to ethnic existential insecurity.

The analysis of security through discourse is central to the Copenhagen School, which defines "securitization" as an "intersubjective establishment of an existential threat with a saliency sufficient to have substantial political effects" (Buzan et al. 1998, 25). Using speech act theory,[8] it focuses on the discursive modes through which an "issue is presented as an existential threat" (a "securitizing move") and, if accepted as one, is labeled with the charged concept of security, paving the way for "extraordinary measures" (and thus crowning the "securitizing move" as successful).[9] A thorough critical discussion of the Copenhagen School's approach is far beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to mention that in addition to the above-mentioned general flaws of contemporary approaches to security, the Copenhagen School overemphasizes the elite's ability to manipulate the masses, oversimplifies

7 Important works of the school include Buzan and Waever 2003; Buzan et al. 1998; Waever 1995; Waever et al. 1993.

8 About the concept and its evolvement see Allwood 1977; Smith 1990.

9 For more on security as a "discursive formation" see Huysmans 1998a; Williams 2003.

the complexities of discourse dynamics, fails to address the normative aspects of securitization, and artificially dichotomizes state and society.[10]

Losing Ground/Losing Face: Ethnicity's "Secret of Success" and the Survival-Identity Complex

The third important point in Kundera's concise description of small peoples is the existence (or lack thereof) of a "sense of an eternal past and future," a fact that bears upon one of the most perplexing (if neglected) problems in the study of ethnic communities. Although scholars disagree upon a definition of ethnicity, its manifestations are always based on a socio-historical sense of sameness based on an awareness of kinship — of belonging to an "extended family."[11] This type of collective identity poses a "simple question: Why do ethnic attachments regularly prove to be more potent than any other type of group membership? Why are so many people ready to die, or even more strikingly to kill, for their ethnic kin and so few for their trade union or golf club?" (Malesevic 2002, 206).[12]

Based on a critical reading of social psychology, my suggestion is that ethnicity's "secret of success" lies in its dual capacity of furnishing man with an appropriate context not only in (cultural-social) space but also in time — allowing us to plant our feet in quasi-eternity.[13] Ethnicity thus provides a social frame that promises both meaning and a timeless presence — a vital coping mechanism and a buffer against our innate sense

10 For more on the Copenhagen School and its contesters see Balzacq 2005; Buzan and Waever 1997; Guzzini and Jung 2004; Knudsen 2001; McSweeney 1996, 1998; Neumann 1998; Williams 1998.

11 This is a central definition in the studies of prominent ethnicity scholars. See Connor 1972, 1994; Geertz 1963, 110–111; Weber 1978, 389.

12 For rephrasing of the same basic question, see Friis 2000; Theiler 2003.

13 This observation draws on several well-established theories of social psychology: social identity theory (Abrams and Hogg 1999; Hogg and Abrams 1988; Tajfel 1970); uncertainty reduction theory (Berger 1979; Berger and Calabrese 1975, and in the context of ethnicity see Hale 2004; Theiler 2003); optimal distinctiveness theory (Bauman 2001; Brewer 1991; Brewer and Gardner 1996); and terror management theory (Castano et al. 2002; Pyszczynski et al. 1999; Pyszczynski et al. 2003).

of mortality. From this vantage point we can reassess the oversimplified divide between constructivism and primordialism. Indeed, key figures in the alleged primordial school, such as Shils and Geertz, assert that the question of whether or not an ethnie has primeval origins is much less important than its believing that it has them (Geertz 1963, 108–113; Calhoun 1997. See also Grosby 1994 in reply to Eller and Coughlan 1993).

Thus, as Kundera suggests, the overwhelming majority of ethnic communities are characterized by "that felicitous sense of an eternal past and future" — by both a timeless conception of a distant past and a sense of eternity stretching far into the future. Nonetheless, just as some communities struggle to lodge their formation in a quasi-timeless past, others have long been waging a desperate struggle to anchor their existence in an eternal future.

With this in mind, I wish to distinguish between the two core dimensions of ethnic existence: the community's physical-political survival and its socio-cultural identity. I propose that whereas an ethnic identity derives its power of attraction and authority from a supposedly timeless past, its physical-political embodiments endow it with the promise of a timeless future. Small peoples are thus characterized by a heightened and historically prolonged sense of uncertainty about the viability of their future-driven, physical-political survival and the validity of their past-based, cultural-societal identity.

Seemingly self-evident, the concepts of survival and identity are far from obvious. To understand their role in the lives of small peoples, we must specify their meaning. "Thinking about how to survive," Herz stated over four decades ago, "means thinking about international politics" (1962, 3) This may be true, but the reverse is most certainly not: thinking about international politics has rarely meant thinking about survival. International Relations largely continues to shun the study of survival, particularly in the field of intersubjective ethnicity (see Howes 2003; Odysseos 2002; Paul 1999).[14]

14 Thus, for example, the study of "survival politics" is usually restricted to the examination of regimes and organizations, focusing mainly on coercive and utilitarian mechanisms and assuming mass manipulation by élites (Clapham 1996).

The simplest manifestation of ethnic survival uncertainty relates to physical existence — survival as the continuation of life itself. Its corollary is fear of collective annihilation, a metaphoric recurrence of the Deluge, though on a narrower, ethnic, scale. The physical alone, however, does not exhaust the meaning of survival. To fully comprehend it, a wider spectrum is needed, conjoining the physical and the political in various manifestations of a "body politic." Across the range of this spectrum — spanning from subordination to domination (whether suffering from subjugation, enjoying equality, or practicing national sovereignty; whether in a homeland or in the Diaspora) — small peoples are prone to seeing their political survival as imminently in peril, their future existence incessantly losing ground.[15]

The concept of identity is no less complex. Ethnic identity, as all collective identities, involves a spatio-temporal sense of sameness, of imaginatively forming a human cluster across historical time and geo-societal space, of drawing boundaries between those who are like us (Self) and those who differ (Other). What distinguishes an ethnic identity from other collective identities is the sense of belonging to an "extended family" beginning with present generations and reaching back into time immemorial.[16] Thus, existential uncertainty about ethnic identity has a dual basis: a break in temporal continuity and a breach in spatial unity. Both are salient in times of high insecurity regarding the ethnic identity. Temporal continuity between past and present is poised between resonance and dissonance. When uncertainty rises, the balance shifts towards dissonance with the past; the present no longer seems to reflect the society's past. Spatial unity is positioned between inclusion and exclusion. When uncertainty rises, the boundaries of the community are redrawn to reflect its re-conceived identity. One potential sign of this process is an increase in collective shame: the community's

15 A comprehensive and sorely needed explanation of this typology (to which I visually refer to as the ethnosphere model) extends beyond the scope of this paper, and will therefore be treated elsewhere. Here, I focus mainly on the domination side of the spectrum: namely, national survival.

16 This is a central definition in the studies of prominent ethnicity scholars. See Connor 1972, 1994; Geertz 1963, 110–111; Weber 1978, 389.

members are ashamed of events in time and groups in space.[17] Losing face, they may also lose their sense of a collective self.

This conceptualization is facilitated by the ontological security approach, which employs current sociological studies on the individual need for preserving self-identity routines but attempts to shift their findings to the state level (Catarina 2004; Manners 2002; Mitzen 2005; Steele 2005).[18] Reading security as existential certainty, one can further distinguish between ontological insecurity and (Cartesian) epistemic insecurity, designating the first to identity and the second to survival (Marshall 1998).

Survival and identity are interdependent. A community deprived of identity is a "hollow community;" identity without a surviving community is a "dead letter." The gloomy collective perception of lacking a "sense of an eternal past and future" is the basic feature of small peoples. By constituting an exception to the rule, they serve to illustrate it. "Living on the edge," they can be seen teetering on the gaping abyss of cultural, political, and, at times, physical ruin. Both the abyss within (identity) and the abyss without (survival) influence the unique socio-historical trajectories of every "small peoples."

17 On collective shame and its distinction from the concept of guilt see Branscombe and Doosje 2004; Piers and Singer 1971; Scheff 2001.

18 This literature draws mainly on Giddens' theory of modern identities (1991). In the field of IR, the forerunners for the advancement of the approach are Huysmans 1998a; 1998b; McSweeney 1999.

Empirical Analysis

Jews as a "Small People"

Moving from theory to practice, we can now establish the "smallness" of the Jewish people, and examine whether they are more prone to existential insecurity about survival or about identity. Rawidowicz's image of the "ever-dying people" provides a clue — by describing uncertainty about future survival rather than identity. Although each generation might indeed "consider itself the final link in Israel's chain," it does not doubt its present role in continuing the past-based Jewish identity (Rawidowicz and Ravid 1997).

Rawidowicz's words, written in 1948 about the Diaspora, continue to be true of the modern Jewish community in Israel/Palestine. "We must never forget," wrote Ben-Gurion in 1958, "that the security problem Israel faces is unlike those of any other country. This is not a question of borders, sovereignty — but a matter of physical existence per se" (1964, 237). And indeed Israeli Jews still remember. "The Israeli self (and the Jewish one before it) is an existential hypochondriac," writes Israeli poet David Avidan in *Yedioth Aharonoth*, "It requires, as part of this hypochondria, double and triple safety belts, both physical and psychological, to ensure that the holocaust will not recur" (5 September 1986) There is little doubt that the holocaust continues to plague the community's collective memory, discourse, and behavior.[19] Former PM Menachem Begin, for example, in an Israeli Cabinet meeting on June 5, 1982 justified the invasion of Lebanon by claiming this was the only way to avoid "the alternative, which is — Auschwitz; our resolution is clear — there will be no other Auschwitz."

19 Evidence is plentiful. Recent accounts of the Holocaust's prominence (and usage) in Israeli discourse include Michman 1997; Segev 1993; Zertal 2005; Zukerman 1993.

Twenty years later, from the opposite end of Israel's political spectrum, author David Grossman echoes these words in *Haaretz*: "What most frightens me is that I am no longer confident of Israel's existence. That doubt was always there. I think that everyone who lives here also lives the alternative that maybe Israel will cease to be" (7 January 2003). Two years later, journalist Benny Zipper asks in *Haaretz*, "Can Israel cease to exist? ... It might not happen in my lifetime, but it can certainly happen in one or two generations" (13 January 2005).

The last five years, marked by the Second Intifada, have seen new peaks in Israeli-Jewish existential insecurity.[20] It is commonly assumed that the Israeli public perceives the military-physical threat as the single, most important one,[21] but opinion polls prove this wrong.[22] A scrutiny of Israel's media on any given day suggests that almost any important issue on the country's agenda may be perceived in one way or another as existential. Thus, on one uneventful day during the Al-Aqsa Intifada (14 November 2003), *Haaretz*'s Op-Ed page featured three columnists describing what they consider the real existential threat: Yoel Marcus termed the bankruptcy of law enforcement in Israel an "existential danger from within;" David Landau depicted the Diaspora's silence in the face of radical right-wing activities as shirking historical Jewish responsibility for the "future of the country and its survival prospects" while *de facto* accepting the imminent possibility of the destruction of the current Jewish commonwealth; and Elia Leibovitch presented the immanent assaults on Israel's academic institutions as endangering "the most vital foundation for our survival as a Jewish state in the Middle East." Almost half a century later, the words of Israel's first

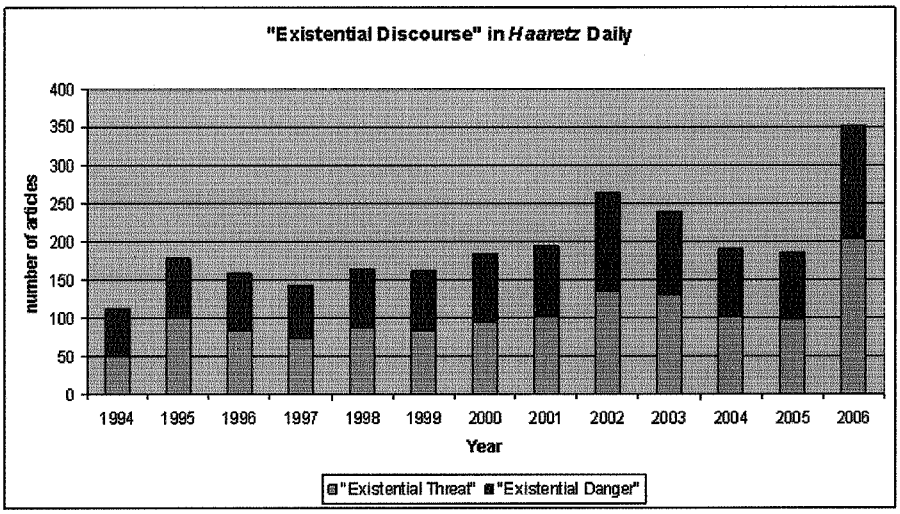
20 Opinion polls consistently indicate that most Israelis believe that Israel's existence is acutely threatened. See for example *Maariv*, 14 September 2001; *Haaretz*, 15 September 2004.

21 The emphasis on military physical threats dominates research on Israel's survival, from both objective and subjective perspectives. See for example Arian 1995; Dror 2001; Yaniv 1993. Some scholars stress Israeli "Gevalt Syndrome," the unwarranted tendency to view the situation as bleaker than it really is. See Dowty 1998; Merom and Jervis 1999.

22 See for example public opinion polls in: *Maariv*, 14 September 2001; *Haaretz*, 15 September 2004; Arian 2003; Sagiv-Shifter and Shamir 2002.

PM continue to capture one crucial aspect of the outlook of most Jewish Israelis.

The chart below reflects trends in the framing of threats and dangers as "existential" according to *Haaretz* daily newspaper over the last thirteen years. It provides a quantitative illustration of the salience of discourse of existential uncertainty in Israeli Jewish society. Note the rise during the height of the peace process and the assassination of PM Rabin (1995), the intensification after the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the erosion following the "Homat Magen" Israeli military operation (2003–2005), and the peak during and in the aftermath of the Second Lebanese war, also due to the growing perception of threat posed to Israel's survival by Iran's nuclear project.[23]



But if security (or insecurity) has meant the physical-political survival of Israeli Jews, does this necessarily negate the flipside of ethnic existential uncertainty? Are Israeli Jews free of existential uncertainty about their

23 Although phrases such as "existential threat" and "existential danger" were also used to depict the state of the "cellular industry," "the Negev region," "the local soccer league" etc., such connotations were relatively marginal, consisting of no more than a tenth of these expressions.

past-based identity? Admittedly, the longevity of the Jewish people provides a sound basis for the perseverance of its socio-cultural identity. To some extent, this prolonged past-based identity can account for the ability of Jews to withstand equally abiding anxieties about the future.[24] Nevertheless, this age-old community seems unable to completely avoid ontological insecurity.

Events of the last decade illuminate the survival-identity nexus. Since the 1970s, the predominant source of identity dissonance has been the ongoing tension between Jewishness — ethnically belonging to an extended Jewish "family" — and Israeliness — participating in the Israeli civic state.[25] Naturally, the function and position assigned these identities varies. Some perceive themselves more Jewish than Israeli, or vice versa; many disagree about the values these identities embody. Nevertheless, as long as the two are perceived as compatible, a balance can be maintained: one can be ethnically Jewish and an Israeli patriot.[26] However, the past decade has seen a gradual shift, with the two identities becoming almost inimical. The 1996 elections, following Rabin's assassination, presented perhaps the discernible turning point in this shift. Netanyahu's winning campaign slogan was "Netanyahu is good for the Jews." The Left, on the other hand, countered with the weaker, "Israel is strong with Peres." In a follow-up interview after his defeat (June 1996), Peres did not hesitate to claim that the Jews had overpowered the Israelis (Ben-Simon 1997). Two years later, Netanyahu, now prime minister with waning public support, was caught on tape whispering to a populist Cabbalist Rabbi, "The Left, Rabbi, has forgotten what it is to be Jews" (*Haaretz*, 22 October 1997).

In retrospect, this exchange seems like a prelude to the recent and vehement discourse on disengagement. In this, the use of Holocaust symbols and referents by anti-disengagement activists became popular. Echoing the infamous montage of Rabin in an SS uniform is the depiction of the Israeli

24 German poet Heinrich Heine denoted the biblical tradition as a "portable homeland" for the Jewish people (Whitfield 2002, 214).

25 Liebman and Don-Yihya (1983) regard Ben-Gurion's era (up to 1963) as the pinnacle of Israeliness.

26 On the "decline of Israeliness" see Kimmerling 2001 For more on this socio-political trend see Ben Rafael 2003.

government as a reincarnation of the pro-Nazi Vichy government, and the IDF soldiers as its messengers of doom (see for example *Haaretz*, 4 November 2004; Ynet, 9 February 2005). An apocalyptic overtone pervaded public discourse, as each side accused the other of jeopardizing the fate and faith of the Jewish state.[27] Survival and identity were conceived and presented as inherently and profoundly entangled. The anti-disengagement slogan, "A Jew does not Expel a Jew," demonstrated this complication. Quickly gaining momentum and becoming widespread, it implied that by obeying the orders of Israel's democratically elected government, one is no longer a Jew but is in effect expelled (by self-proclaimed Jews) from one's Jewishness.

"Contrary to the temporary political victory of the Jews in 1996," suggested one commentator in *Ynet*, "the Israelis of 2005 headed by Sharon decided to forcefully outdo the Jews" (21 April 2005). In the aftermath of the disengagement, a Jewish settler from Hebron asserted, "We are two different peoples... We are the Jewish people and you are the Israelis. We have nothing in common, and eventually we'll win...We will defeat you with the wombs of our wives" (*Haaretz*, 21 October 2005). A popular singer observed: "[I]t looks like the Israelis want a state without Jews. We are living in an anti-Jewish state" (*NRG*, 22 September 2005). The survival-identity nexus, however, is not confined to right-wing discourse. Many disengagement supporters also felt survival was at stake, but for opposite reasons: undermining the Jewish state would undermine Jewish identity. As another singer remarked, "They, the descendants of ancient zealots, who twice already brought about our downfall, want only one thing: to bring about destruction and exile for a third time... I and they are not of the same religion" (*Yedioth Aharonoth*, 22 July 2005).

Despite a peaking public salience, uncertainty about identity still lags behind uncertainty about survival. Evidently, there is a growing sense of collective shame among many Israeli Jews. Some attempt to refrain from identifying as Jews, or wish to strip others of that identity, while many others

27 See for example *Haaretz*, 26 January 2005; *Haaretz*, 10 April 2005; *Maariv*, 20 July 2005; *Haaretz*, 16 August 2005. In a public opinion poll about half of Israelis regarded a rift among the people as imminent (NRG, 20 April 2005).

labor to reframe Jewish identity. However, for most in the Israeli Jewish community, the sense of ethnic sameness, of belonging to one "extended family," remains intact — even though more fragile than ever before (Levy et al. 2002).

Québécois as a "Small People"

Prima facie, Israeli Jews and Québécois have very little in common. Residing continents apart, their origins and historical evolution seem to defy comparative analysis, as English historian Arnold Toynbee acknowledges. Describing Jews as a "fossilized people," he argues that "whatever the future of mankind in North America, I feel pretty confident that these French-speaking Canadians, at any rate, will be there at the end of the story" (Toynbee 1948, 161). Nevertheless, as this section will demonstrate, this certainty in the existential prospects of the French-Canadians has not often been shared by the community's own members. This makes them not only a potential small peoples, but also comparable to the Jews in general and the Israeli Jews in particular.

The French Canadians, like the Jews, also exhibit the cognitive duality of ethnic existential uncertainty — about both their survival and identity. Evidence of pervasive self-doubts regarding the community's viability and validity can be found from the early eighteenth century to date. The longevity of this quandary has led sociologist Marcel Rioux to wonder, "Over 400 years have passed since Jacques Cartier discovered Canada (1534), and it is almost four centuries ago that Champlain founded Québec (1608)... Why then is there, today more than ever, a 'Québec question'? ... We need to explain, why a group of New World Frenchmen are still asking, in 1969, the question 'To be or not to be?'" (Rioux 1978, 3, 8) Nearly four decades later, the answer still seems to elude the community.

As with the Israeli-Jewish case, capturing the essence of French Canadian existential insecurity requires a discursive scrutiny of the survival-identity complex. Delineating the three distinct phases through which the community has developed clearly illustrates the reciprocity between survival and

identity. In each of these phases, both the community's perception of its survival prospects and its definition (and naming) of identity have altered considerably.

The first phase begins with the French colonization of New France (*la Nouvelle-France*) in the early sixteenth century, continues with British conquest and control of the colony (1759–62), and ends with the failure of the 1837/8 revolts and the "Union Act" (1840) (Eccles 1998; Moogk 2000). This phase saw the descendents of French immigrants gradually drift away from the old continent's *French* identity to form a distinct ethnic identity — *la nation Canadienne or simply Canadiens* (Elliott 1888; Monière 1981, 46–53). Herein lies one root cause for their sense of uncertainty about identity. Unlike the Jews, the Canadiens cannot base their identity on time immemorial. The importance of this short-term collective memory is evident in Fernand Dumont's concluding remarks to his classic treatise: "There are peoples that can refer in their past to some great action founder: a revolution, a declaration of independence, a bright turn which maintains their certainty. In the genesis of the Québécois society, there is nothing similar. Only one long resistance" (Dumont 1993, 331, 336. See also Maclure 2003, 78–81).

But the *Canadien* phase was not yet a time of resistance in the name of survival. At the outset of British rule, Canadiens enjoyed an absolute demographic hegemony, reaching a total of 55,000 inhabitants by 1754. There seemed to be no reason to contemplate extinction either by force or by assimilation. The casualties from the conquest and occupation were relatively minor, and British Parliament's "Québec Act" (1774) offered official recognition of French culture, civic law, and Catholic faith. "The Canadiens knew that they constituted an immense majority of the population, and everything seemed to indicate that this would always be the case... [they] did not doubt that sooner or later they would regain political and economic control of the country... belonging to them by right" (Brunet 1969 [1954], 285). The flight of British loyalists from the victorious American rebels (1775–1783) caused some anxiety, but the Constitutional Act of 1791 was reassuring.[28] The colony was divided into Upper Canada (the western

28 Concomitantly, the French Revolution had set the stage for a further deepening of the

part, now Ontario) and Lower Canada (the eastern part, mainly Québec), where Canadiens maintained a clear majority. The 1830s, however, saw rapid change when about 220,000 immigrants came to the colonies, diminishing the French majority and exacerbating the already tense relations between the Canadiens and the British. The evolving strife finally erupted in the 1837/8 Rebellion in Lower Canada. Led by Louis-Joseph Papineau, the rebel *Patriotes* represented the first national expression of Canadien ethnicity, and they attempted to forge it into a liberal-democratic creed (Ouellet 1969 [1962]; Rioux 1978, 43–52). It was short-lived.

The crush of the Rebellion in Lower Canada marks the beginning of the second phase of the community's survival-identity complex. Militarily subdued and demographically diminished, the community's survival prospects took a turn for the worse (Bonefant and Falardeau 1969 [1946], 23). Signaled for gradual assimilation by Durham's Report (1840) (Durham and Craig 1963, 146), the community's leaders, most of whom came from the ranks of the increasingly strong Catholic Church, called for a defensive strategy aptly named *la survivance* — survival (Turgeon 2004, 53). The *la survivance* ethos became the hallmark of the society and its discourse: a collective mission, an all-encompassing ideology (Rioux 1973).

The cognitive shift from a secure future as a majority nation to one of an insecure minority coincided with yet another renaming of the community. If the British were to rule the country, by might and number, the Canadiens could no longer dismiss them as foreigners, *Bostonians* or *Londoners*. The conclusion of Lafontaine, a one-time supporter of the *Patriotes*, was clear. His 1840 electoral manifesto asks his fellow men "to give up the idea that only they could be called Canadians" (Brunet 1969 [1954], 287). It is of interest to note that in discussing the British North America Act (1867), which stipulated the formation of the confederation (though de-facto federation) of Canada, a proposal was made to follow "Australia" (of the south) and call the new country "Borealia" (of the north). Had it been accepted, the Canadiens could have retained the name of their ethnic

rift between the Canadiens and Europe's French (Rioux 1964 [1959], 170–176 and also Bourassa 1985 [1902], 178; Falardeau 1964 [1952], 350–351).

identity, while relating (either positively or negatively) to the civic-patriotic Borealian identity. The importance of such terminological clarity cannot be dismissed.[29] Without a unique designation of their ethnicity, the community resorted to a hyphenated identity: French-Canadians.

We might expect to find the leitmotif of survival in the chronicles of all small peoples, and as demonstrated above, the Israeli-Jewish discourse abounds with references to the survival of the ethnic community and of its political institutions. However, the French-Canadians place a different emphasis on survival. For Jews, survival has never been the cornerstone of collective belief. Rather, it was posed as a reason for action, not a *raison d'être*. Thus, for example, in the late nineteenth century several ideologies diagnosed modern Jewish existence as perilous and suggested remedies. The discourse revolved around the type of strategy, not around the need for one. That survival was crucial and endangered was perceived as a given rather than as an issue to rally for — as in the French-Canadians case. Their immersion in the survivalist ethos clearly echoes in the following statement by Olivar Asselin: "After 175 years of gradual and sometimes imperceptible slipping back into an inferior position... we should now be able to show the world that there is at least one thing we have acquired that we so sadly lacked in the past: the instinct of preservation" (1969 [1928], 187).

The community's emphasis on survival as *raison d'être* seems to correlate to the above-mentioned lack of historical longevity. Lacking a secure ethnic identity founded on a long-distant past, the French-Canadians are required to justify their survival ethos by concomitantly inventing their own identity, their own history. The tremendous difficulty in realizing this goal and its repercussions resonates in the following words by Lionel Groulx, one of the community's leading intellectuals during the 1920s and 1930s: "An imprudent break with history and the past, the influence of those who wish to uproot our entire nation... these are the causes for the almost complete annihilation of national feeling in our people... at times it almost seems as if our nation has lost its instinct for preservation... what is there still lacking for

29 On the importance of names for the development of national movements in Canada see Jenson 1993.

us to feel attached to this land and to determine to stay here at home?" (1969 [1919], 192) Groulx's frustration clearly indicates the complex connection between identity and survival: without a past there will be no sense of need for a future, and thus there will be none: "We have to be French through and through, intransigently, energetically, audaciously — otherwise we shall cease to be" (cited in Chennells 2001, 168).

The dual epistemological and ontological meaning of the French Canadian existential question — "to be or not to be" — continues to characterize the community in its third phase. The secular "Quiet Revolution" of the early 1960s marks the beginning of the end for French Canadians as an ethnic community. While the first phase laid the socio-historical foundation for the community's construction, and the second phase was marked by a strenuous effort to develop a positive cognitive relation to the community by forging an ethnic collective memory, the third phase has seen an increasing breach in the community's ethnic sense of sameness, in both time and socio-geographical space. The most conspicuous sign of this is again a change of name: *Canadiens* turned *French-Canadians* have now become *Québécois* (Johnson 2004, 251). In geo-societal space, this shift signifies the exclusion of French-Canadians living outside of Québec from the community. Temporally, it manifested a growing sense of collective shame. Early in the Quiet Revolution, this shame was directed at the present, particularly at the socio-economical subordination of the community to the English, and was leveraged to facilitate the urgent need to become "Masters in our own house." However, as initial enthusiasm waned, collective shame was gradually redirected at the community's past, believing that "the past will have to be denounced in the name of the future" (Vadeboncœur 1962, 56). Ethnicity itself was being denounced, which changed the meaning of *Québécois*: until the 1980s the term was limited to the Quebecers of French Canadian descent; thereon it applied increasingly to all residents of the province (Bouchard 2000, 169–171).

Many modern Québécois intellectuals lament this process. "Despite the Quiet Revolution," asserts Dumont, "we are still characterized by flight from the past" (Maclure 2003, 43). This "oblivion represents a collective

memory crisis in which both the identity and the future of the nation are at stake," writes Serge Cantin. "What is hidden behind this epistemological rupture whose consequences fill the shelves of our libraries? Shame of being ourselves? Shame of our past?" (cited in Cantin 2000). According to Dion, "[T]he French Canadians, especially among the upcoming generations, experience modernity (or postmodernity) in the uncertainty of a poorly anchored identity, an uncertainty just as sterile as and even more pathetic than in the past" (1995, 469). And Vadeboncœur, titling his book *To Be or Not to Be*, concludes, "[A] people that does not assert itself will perish" (Maclure 2003, 76; Vadeboncœur 1980). Alluding to the same process of collective shame and omission, other thinkers regard them as a blessing, evidence of pioneering cultural pluralism: "A primary characteristic of the Québécois identity has become its refusal to resolve the contradictions inherent to overlapping identities and nationalities. This is how most Quebecers see themselves, this has become a national characteristic of Québec and most Quebecers are comfortable with these overlapping identities" (Mendelsohn 2002, 90).

The dynamic identity process that turned French-Canadians into Québécois was perceived as a means of redemption, of liberating the community from the claws of *la survivance* by substituting socio-economic revival for ethnic survival, which was now seen as a barrier against progress. During a brief period in the 1960s, it seemed to be working. "*Vive le Québec libre!*" cried Charles de Gaulle on July 24, 1967 (the centenary of Canadian confederation), in front of a cheering crowd of fifty thousand in Montreal's city hall. Many believed it was not only possible but inevitable. Surveys conduced among youth at the time revealed a high level of confidence that "Québec will one day be independent" (Rioux 1978, 6). Demography played a crucial role. "Francophone Quebecers tend to oscillate between the self-perception of a minority and that of a majority" (Karmis 1997, 8). By reframing their identity's spatial dimension to focus solely on Québec, the community regained the majority status it lost more than a century before, potentially securing future survival.

But the survival-identity complex dictates otherwise. Those who had

difficulty with the new identity ambivalence found themselves more lost than ever before. "The destiny of the Québécois collectivity," writes Vallières, "had often seemed to me to be that of a people doomed to slow death or to prolonged mediocrity. Of course I did not really dare believe that, but unconsciously this vision of destiny of Québec was preying on my mind" (1971, 198). For others, the emerging co-dependency between the new identity and the vision of survival through political independence portrayed a gloomy future: "Faced with the possibility of national collapse and our disappearance as a people, independence will either be attained or it will not be. It will not happen easily, and the odds are against success. People are anxious, questioning, in doubt. Some would like to go into exile; some do it" (Vadeboncœur 1985 [1976], 428). Moreover, the Québécois' newfound secularism prescribed lower birth rates, which became the object of a heated debate "that looks increasingly like the next 'national question', the real 'to be or not to be' of the Québécois" (Bissonette 1987). Coinciding in the 1990s with new waves of immigrants, demographics once again looked highly uncertain. More than a decade after the last failure of Québec's sovereignty movement (in the 1995 referendum), we see an extensive erosion of the community's sense of shared kinship, almost rendering the Québécois a small people no longer, at least in the ethnic sense.

Conclusions

Recent years have witnessed resurgence in the study of "small states," an apt scholarly reaction to the growing salience of these polities in contemporary global politics.[30] This endeavor, however, perhaps does not exhaust the potential of the field, which is still somewhat limited ontologically, epistemologically, and methodologically. Small state scholarship remains confined to the study of only one type of polity (the state), discerned by one main criteria (objectively assessing the state's "smallness"), and almost always considered as an exogenous variable. This paper attempts to redraw the borders of research about the "smallness" of polities by endogenizing ethnic communities and analyzing their intersubjective perception of insecurity (as existential uncertainty). I have argued that small peoples are ethnic communities characterized by a prolonged sense of uncertainty regarding their own existence, and that in modern times this sense has a dual base: ontological insecurity about ethnic identity and epistemic insecurity about national survival. Unlike other ethnic communities, small peoples are prone to perceive themselves as incessantly losing face and/or losing ground.

The two case studies presented in this paper are Israeli Jews and the French-Canadians (Québécois). Although they are very distinct, I have attempted to show that the communities nonetheless share one common and important socio-historical trait: both are small peoples. They exhibit the cognitive duality of existential uncertainty about national survival and ethnic identity — facing the "abyss without" and the "abyss within" — and losing both ground and face at different historical conjunctures. This basic similarity

30 The numerous papers and sessions devoted to this topic in the forty-eighth Annual ISA Convention in Chicago (28 February — 3 March 2007) and in the sixth Pan-European Conference on International Relations in Turin, Italy (12–15 September 2007) attest to this fact.

should not, however, obscure important differences. While both Jews and Québécois exhibit high levels of epistemic insecurity, the origins, modes, and meaning of their uncertainty about future survival are substantially different. More importantly, the two communities differ in the level of their ontological insecurity. Whereas Jews experience existential uncertainty about identity only marginally and lately, the Canadiens/French-Canadians/Québécois are characterized by a continuous difficulty in forging and maintaining a viable ethnic identity. The comparison indicates four key factors that shape the properties and prospects of small peoples.

First, ethnonational existential uncertainty is relational in both time and space: it is subject to "identity-tension" vis-à-vis non-ethnic collective identities, as well as to "survival-tension" vis-à-vis non-national political alternatives. Whereas most Israeli Jews have not believed they have sufficient "degrees of freedom" to detach themselves from their ethnie, in recent generations many Québécois have begun to believe precisely the opposite: that if they so wish, they can eschew their ethnie in favor of other collective identities (or none at all). Moreover, while most Israeli Jews perceive their sovereignty as a vital means to both physical and political survival, the Québécois remain divided on the question.

Second, ethnonational existential uncertainty is heavily influenced by the Self's perceptions of the Other's intentions and capabilities. Both communities tend to assign malevolence to their "significant Other," but whereas most Israeli Jews believe that Arab and Muslim intentions and capabilities violently threaten their physical and national survival, most Québécois believe that English Canadians are seeking to peaceably deprive them of their right of self-determination by confining them to their (now discredited) ethnie, much to the dismay of the Québécois themselves.

Third are the shifts in geo-demographical and economical balances. Both communities retain a collective memory of political geo-demographical dominance: the ancient Jewish kingdoms and the French-Canadians prior to the British conquest. Today, both communities are (and perceive themselves as) a majority in one, confined, geopolitical space (Israel and Québec) but are a diminishing minority in the entire country (mandatory Palestine

and Canada) and region (the Middle East and North America). However, whereas Israeli Jews have been relatively economically independent of the Arab markets since the 1930s, Québécois, until recently, have perceived themselves to be very much dependant upon the economy of the rest of Canada.

The fourth factor is the normative dimension. The rise and fall of small peoples occur not only through blood and fire, but through oblivion and shame. Small peoples reside beneath a volcano that steams an ethical-political lava. The French-Canadian community joined modernity too late for its own preservation. By the time the secular Quiet Revolution triumphed, the negation of ethnonationalism had already begun to strike roots in the West. Conversely, by the late nineteenth century the Jews had already reframed their collectivity as an ethnic community with a secular right of self-determination. However, contemporary Israel still struggles to meet its own vision of a just society and polity, faced with growing criticism from both within and without.

This investigation does not exhaust the topic of small peoples. Further elaboration of these case studies (with reference, for example, to their diasporas) alongside analysis of other ethnic communities that span the existential uncertainty spectrum will continue to enhance our understanding of this important socio-historical phenomenon. Intersubjective analysis, moreover, tells only one side of the ethnic story. Equally significant is the way in which ethnicity relates to objective, socio-historical processes. Describing "Octavia" in his *Invisible Cities*, Italian author Italo Calvino suggests that although "suspended over the abyss, the lives of Octavia's inhabitants are safer than those of other cities; they know the net will only last so long" (1978). Is this true of small peoples? The above comparison suggests otherwise, but further research is needed to establish the nature of the relationships between small peoples' intersubjective sense of insecurity and their objective chances of survival.

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