CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM AND THE FAR RIGHT


Bàrbara Molas
Canadian Multiculturalism and the Far Right examines a neglected aspect of the history of 20th century Canadian multiculturalism and the far right to illuminate the ideological foundations of the concept of ‘third force’.

Focusing on the particular thought of ultra-conservative Ukrainian Canadian Walter J. Bossy during his time in Montreal (1931–1970s), this book demonstrates that the idea that Canada was composed of three equally important groups emerged from a context defined by reactionary ideas on ethnic diversity and integration. Two broad questions shape this research: first, what the meaning originally attached to the idea of a ‘third force’ was, and what the intentions behind the conceptualization of a trichotomic Canada were; and second, whether Bossy’s understanding of the ‘third force’ precedes, or is related in any way to, postwar debates on liberal multiculturalism at the core of which was the existence of a ‘third force’.

This book will be of interest to students and researchers of multiculturalism, radical-right ideology and the far right, and Canadian history and politics.

Bàrbara Molas (PhD, York University) is a historian of, and expert consultant on, far-right ideology and radicalisation. Having published more than 20 articles and book chapters on the subject, her consulting experience is international and includes intergovernmental organisations, national prosecution services, and Big Tech companies.
This book series focuses upon national, transnational and global manifestations of fascist, far right and right-wing politics primarily within a historical context but also drawing on insights and approaches from other disciplinary perspectives. Its scope also includes anti-fascism, radical-right populism, extreme-right violence and terrorism, cultural manifestations of the far right, and points of convergence and exchange with the mainstream and traditional right.

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When I first met Professor Adrian Shubert in 2016 at the Universitat Pompeu Fabra de Barcelona to ask him about Canada, I would have never imagined that I would end up pursuing my PhD there. I also didn’t expect to write a dissertation, and later a monograph, in Canadian history – a country of which unfortunately I did not know much until 2017. Today, not only has Canada become my scholarly interest, but also my home. This wouldn’t have been possible without the unconditional support, invaluable mentorship, and advice of Professors Marcel Martel, Roberto Perin, and Adrian Shubert at York University. I would be a different scholar, but also a different person, if it weren’t for each and one of them. This book is the result of their constant care and guidance, for which I will always be grateful. 

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Acronyms

AC  L'Action Corporative
AFL  American Federation of Labour
ALN  Action Libérale Nationale
B&B  Biculturalism and Bilingualism
BUKMH  Brotherhood of Ukrainian Classocrats-Monarchist Hetmanites
CCES  Catholic Church Extension Society
CCF  Cooperative Commonwealth Federation
CIL  City Improvement League
CIO  American Committee for Industrial Organization
CLC  Classocracy League of Canada
COTC  Canadian Officers Training Corps
CPC  Communist Party of Canada
ECMI  Ethnic Canadian Mosaic Institute
ESP  L'École Sociale Populaire
LSR  League for Social Reconstruction
MCSC  Montreal Catholic School Commission
MRA  Moral Re-Armament
NCB  New Canadians Bureau
NCF  New Canadian Citizens Federation
NCFH  New Canadian Friendship House
NUP  National Unity Party
RCMP  Royal Canadian Mounted Police
UCC  Ukrainian Canadian Committee
UHO  United Hetman Organization
ULFTA  Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association
UNF  Ukrainian National Federation of Canada
UWVA  Ukrainian War Veterans’ Association
WAAJA  World Alliance Against Jewish Aggressiveness
1 Introduction

I have been asked many times why I decided to look at 30 years of the life of someone who was ultra-conservative, a white supremacist, quite unstable, and seemingly a rather irrelevant individual. Canadian historiography already says that Walter J. Bossy was a far-right Ukrainian immigrant who didn’t do much besides stirring some Nazi sympathy among fellow expats in the Prairies. This supposed insignificance could explain why none of the local newspapers in Montreal, the core of his years of activism, mentioned his passing on January 3, 1979. But Bossy contributed to the history of Canada in a way that determined how we think of this nation up to this day. He was the first to imagine a trichotomic Canada; a united nation composed of three elements: the French-speaking group; the English-speaking group; and the third force. This study follows the life and thought of Ukrainian Canadian Walter J. Bossy from his arrival in Montreal in 1931, when he was 32 years old and had lived in Canada for seven years, to his retirement from public activities in 1972. It begins in 1931 and not in 1924 or at an earlier time because it was in 1931 that Bossy began developing an interest in Canadian nationhood and governance. It is in Montreal that he began conceptualizing Canada as a trichotomic nation, and it is that specific thought that constitutes the focus and interest of this book.

Bossy’s idea of a trichotomic Canada emerged in a context characterized by accelerated change. Indeed, the crash of the New York stock market in October 1929 signalled the start of economic turmoil that would deeply define Canada’s 1930s. At the outset, the Conservatives under Prime Minister Richard Bedford Bennett (R. B. Bennett) attempted to deal with this unprecedented economic disaster by increasing trade within the British Empire and imposing tariffs for imports from outside the Empire. But his policies had only limited success. By 1933, tens of thousands had lost their jobs, and over 20% of the entire Canadian labour force remained unemployed. In Montreal, by 1933, there were 60,000 unemployed; counting their dependents, an estimated 250,000 people, or 30% of the city’s population, were receiving relief from the city.

In this climate, extreme left- and right-wing political movements grew. Although the latter proved less numerous than the former, during the
Depression many Canadians turned to religion for hope and direction. As a consequence, conservative and reactionary Christian groups flourished during the decade. In Quebec, Adrien Arcand founded his Nazi-inspired Parti National Social Chrétien claiming to represent the last stand of Roman Catholicism against communists and other atheists. While Arcand remained marginal, his fervent antisemitism was supported by French-Canadian nationalist organizations such as Jeune-Canada, the Ligue d’Action Nationale, and the provincial branch of the Social Credit Party of Canada. On the other hand, large sectors of the Catholic church interpreted the Depression as evidence of divine punishment for modernity, epitomized by revolutionary communism and unrestrained capitalism. Based on the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* authored by Pope Pius XI in 1931, which rejected the competitive nature of capitalism as well as the class struggle, they suggested a return to a more cooperative and Christian system inspired by the European medieval guilds. This was called corporatism.

In an era of extremes, many Canadians either created or looked for alternative ways of addressing the flaws of the existing economic and political systems. It is in this climate that Walter J. Bossy proposed a new model for the socio-economic organization and governance of Canada. The model consisted in having a small elite oversee a society structured in guilds. Inspired by contemporary elitist socio-political theories and corporatism, Bossy proposed the establishment of a Canadian state in which peoples of European descent would organize in guilds or professional units and integrate under a common Christian framework. Like many others, he was trying to achieve a third way out of the crisis, that is, a way that was defined neither by capitalism nor by communism, and that was built upon Christian principles. Thus, his early theories for the reorganization of Canada are not especially original. Yet, what was new about his approach was that he believed that the integration of Canadians through a guild system would not be possible without first ensuring the cooperation between three Canadian components: the English-speaking group, the French-speaking group, and what in 1937 Bossy called the ‘third group’. In other words, he envisioned the socio-economic reform of Canada as resulting from the integration of three national groups. Bossy understood Canada to be trichotomic almost 30 years before the idea of ‘third force’ was even employed in debates around multiculturalism.

### A history of Canadian multiculturalism

Above all, this study constitutes a contribution to the study of Canadian multiculturalism. A mechanism which seems to offer a means to combine both the recognition of ethnic differences and the continuation of unified nationhood, Canadian multiculturalism has been widely praised in Canada and abroad. Part of the reason for this is that, in principle, multiculturalism offers minorities the possibility to claim rights and recognition. It’s
a compromise by which unequal group relations are meant to be bridged, rather than reproduced, with a view to create a more unified nationhood. However, Canadian multiculturalism was shaped after Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s own understanding of pluralism, which was based on the idea that individual rights must prevail over group rights. Indeed, what Ian McKay calls ‘the liberal framework’ was an essential force in leading to the proclamation in 1971 of Canada as a multicultural nation within a bilingual framework.

For Canadian Francophones as for First Nations, multiculturalism ‘remains ambiguous since it undermines their claim for more autonomy’. Both these groups have been fighting for that since they became British subjects in the eighteenth century. At first, the British expected Canadiens (French Canadians) and Indigenous peoples to either assimilate or perish. Later in the eighteenth century, the idea of a plural nation emerged in part from the concessions given to Indigenous peoples and French Canadians through the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the 1774 Quebec Act. Those concessions were used to ensure unity against the expansion of Americans into Canadian territory; to contain the French-Canadian fact to a specific territory; and to protect the Anglophone minorities in Quebec. Seventeen years later, British authorities divided the province of Quebec into Lower Canada and Upper Canada, giving both colonies representative parliamentary institutions.

Following the 1837–1838 rebellions, however, Britain attempted to assimilate French Canada by decreeing the union of Lower Canada and Upper Canada, the use of French in the colonial parliament being initially disallowed. But the presence of two national communities created tensions that made colonial governance in the United Canadas difficult, and by mid-1800s Confederation was proposed as an alternative form of political and geographical organization. Established in 1867, the new federal government would have ‘limited control over issues at the heart of French-Canadian concerns’, like education, language, and religion. Ultimately, Confederation ‘served to solidify the power and autonomy of the largest number of French Canadians within Canada: Quebeckers … protecting French-Canadian culture and society in his home province.’

Critical of French-Canadian claims to a special status within Confederation, postcolonial scholars like Eve Haque, Richard Day, or Himani Bannerji argue that the federal state remains a mechanism of subordination of minorities of descent other than British and French that facilitates the perpetuation of colonial structures to the benefit of the ‘two founding nations’ only. Questioning postcolonial assessments on Canadian multiculturalism, Marcel Martel and Martin Pâquet, as well as Kenneth McRoberts or Guy Laforest, stress that the idea of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework in fact leads to cultural relativism, as it divorces language from culture, and language alone can’t protect the structures that ensure the development of a society. As a consequence, they argue, Canadian
multiculturalism undermines French-Canadian claims to rights and recognition as a national entity within the federation.

French Canadians had relied on the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (and especially on co-chair of the Commission André Laurendeau), established in 1963, to amend the relationship between the so-called ‘two founding nations’ and ensure that Quebec’s hopes for equal demographic and economic development would be addressed. When Trudeau’s Liberal Party ignored Laurendeau’s recommendations on bilingualism and biculturalism and declared Canada a multicultural nation in 1971, those hopes disappeared. McRoberts insists that, before Trudeau, neither the Pearson Government nor the Royal Commission had seriously questioned the bicultural character of the country. The establishment of official bilingualism and biculturalism was thus the attempt by French Canadians to reject the effects (economical and cultural) of a colonial power rather than to impose new unequal power relations over other minorities as postcolonial scholars suggest it does. In fact, many francophone Canadians argue that Trudeau’s multiculturalism was deliberately designed to obscure Quebec’s constitutional agenda and bury its demands under an ever-growing pool of ethnic minorities. Indeed, it is widely accepted that ‘in practice multiculturalism helped … to undermine [Quebec’s] distinctiveness in terms of its history and place in the Confederation’.

Since 1971, many have tried to suggest alternative frameworks to multiculturalism that would allow to approach the Quebec question in a better (and less conflicting) way. In 1995, Guy Laforest suggested multi-nationalism. Building upon Henri Bourassa’s compact theory, he argued that asymmetry would work more effectively than multiculturalism because it would be able to protect group identities attached to specific territories like Quebec. This theory, however, is difficult to apply to Indigenous peoples, as the dispossession of their lands has led to geographical dispersion, as Will Kymlicka argues. Despite supporting the idea that what he calls ‘national minorities’ (which Kymlicka identifies as Quebec, and Indigenous groups) deserve unique rights by nature of their historical role in Canada, Kymlicka states that asymmetry could lead to secession, as it is based on the idea of separation or two distinct nations rather than on the idea of union and plurality. Trying to re-conceive the place of Quebec within a plural Canada, Jocelyn Maclure suggests the establishment of a political framework in which Quebecers can freely express the ‘polyphony’ of their identities and their processes of (historical) memory. He is, however, not too specific about what this framework should look like besides saying that it would reflect neither the sum of different ethnic enclaves nor the sole object of national identification for all its members. Neither does he fully explain what the place of ethnic minorities of descent other than French who do not identify with what Maclure calls Quebec’s ‘common denominator’ would be.
A history of far-right multiculturalism

This book focuses on the historical efforts of one ethnic minority spokesperson to redefine Canadian identity, and the place of ethnic groups in it, decades before Trudeau’s liberal multiculturalism was conceived. Specifically, it traces the ideological roots of the ‘third force’, a concept whose inception is believed to signal the origins of Canadian liberal and contemporary multiculturalism. I argue that this belief is a misconception caused by the absence of studies that interrogate the changing nature of the concept and, as a result, the changing nature of the socio-political perceptions that the concept has allowed for to this day. This study represents a first attempt to change that. It also constitutes a first attempt to understand the meaning of the ‘third force’ from the perception of individuals belonging to ethnic groups other than English- or French-speaking. In doing so, I am actively responding to Marcel Martel’s call to switch our focus from politicians to ethnic groups in our study of Canadian politics and political thought, bringing new voices into the study of interwar and early postwar debates on Canadian multiculturalism.

The existing literature on Canadian multiculturalism argues that concerns over the integration of minorities emerged from the experience of the Second World War among the political left. I demonstrate that these were first expressed in the 1930s by Canadian of Ukrainian descent Walter J. Bossy, a reactionary fellow who promoted the establishment of a Canadian totalitarian state defined by white and Christian supremacism. Indeed, it is among Bossy’s papers that we find the earliest use of ‘third element’ (later ‘third force’) as a concept in 1937, including efforts to define and mobilize it. This discovery also challenges previous understandings of multiculturalism in Canadian scholarship which relate its ideological or conceptual origins to the establishment of policies and programs of the Canadian Citizenship branch in the 1940s; to the ‘multicultural movement of the 1960s’; or to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism between 1963 and 1969. In particular, it shows that the conceptual origins of the ‘third force’ are intimately related to the interwar ‘corporative wave’, or the transnational impact of Pius XI’s encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. Thus, this book questions that the idea that the Canadian nation is composed of three groups or national forces as opposed to two founding nations resides in liberal secularism, while also rebalancing overly Eurocentric approaches to the study of corporatism.

In learning that the conceptual origins of the ‘third force’ lie in Bossy’s particular ideas on Canadian nationhood, this study supports previous literature affirming that Ukrainian Canadians were a crucial driving force behind the multicultural movement. And while this book focuses on Bossy’s unexplored activism and life among English- and French-speaking milieus exclusively, I finish now what is merely one side of a surely more complex story in the hope that future research will look at Bossy’s
Ukrainian writings to further illuminate this early conceptualization of the ‘third force’.

My research demonstrates that Bossy’s efforts for the integration of Christian Canadians of European descent were unprecedented in two main ways. Firstly, his proposal differed from earlier attempts to ‘keep Canada white and Christian’ through restricted immigration rules which aimed to maintain the ethnic status quo and ensure cultural and religious assimilation into one of the ‘two founding nations’. Bossy’s project was also different from the efforts of other ethnic groups who advocated the establishment of extreme forms of corporatism in Canada during the interwar period. For example, Italian Canadians who promoted the establishment of an authoritarian form of corporatism in Canada in the 1930s did so based on Mussolini’s imperial aspirations, or international fascism. Unlike them, Bossy’s goal was to ensure the loyalty of the ‘third group’ towards the Canadian government, and as a consequence he never questioned the authority of the British monarchy. In addition, he believed that Canada must remain under the tutelage of the British empire, as Canada’s diversity seemed to reflect the extent and nature of the empire, a characteristic that Bossy believed would eventually lead Canada to a position of world leadership.

It should be noted that the idea of ethnic diversity constituting precisely the essence of Canadian nationhood as well as Canada’s potential source of world power was not new. The League for Social Reconstruction (LSR), for example, talked about the need to ‘evoke a common loyalty amongst all races in Canada’. It also argued that ‘National unity comes [from] the realization that whether we be … English or French, Protestant or Catholic, we are Canadians with many common interests, despite our geographical, racial, economic and religious differences’. But Bossy’s thought was closer to that of Imperial Loyalists, as reflected in Carl Berger’s The Sense of Power (1970). According to Berger, Loyalists in eighteenth-century Canada praised diversity and used it to claim a central and even dominant role for Canada within the British Empire. That diversity, however, was narrowly defined – the Loyalists saw Canada as solely composed by ‘the northern peoples [of] Europe’ or ‘Nordic races’.

Bossy’s equally narrow view of pluralism, that is, one defined by racial and religious homogeneity, along with his authoritarian and theocratic aspirations for government, situates his thinking further to the right than mainstream conservatism in the 1930s. I understand the idea of radical right according to how it is used by the sociologist Jens Rydgren, who describes it as being a non-violent form of right-wing radicalism or far-right politics which is critical of liberalism institutions and values as well as democracy as a system of government. Often, the radical right suggests reform along the lines of reactionary politics, that is, returning to an earlier form of socio-economic organization and government – such as the medieval guild system under absolutism. Reactionary politics are often influenced by monarchism, traditionalism, and Christian supremacy, all of which
emphasize a desire for strong authority, illiberal politics, religious devotion, and Eurocentrism. This is in opposition to what we would call the mainstream right or conservative right, which is situated at the centre-right of the political spectrum and is often shaped by values related to liberal conservatism or Christian democracy. It is also in opposition to the extreme right, which is a far-right form of politics that is violent in nature and actively hostile to democracy. Because Bossy’s proposals for socio-economic and political reform were characterized by a return to the pre-Enlightenment guild system; a strict hierarchy on the basis of origin and group association (status); the defence of shared Christian principles as the basis for intergroup cooperation; Christian nationalism or the idea that divine guidance should define our laws and our political and social life; the rejection of liberal democracy; and the close cooperation of Church and State; his ideas fall under the reactionary type, and therefore their analysis constitutes a contribution to the study of radical-right thought and, more broadly, the far right.

Most studies of the radical right associate its discourse on nation-building with ethno-nationalism and its variant racial (white) nationalism; anti-immigrant nationalism; nativism; and even ultra-regionalism. Even though the sort of ‘white nationalism’ we will look at here is characterized by an explicit distancing from groups like Blacks and East Asians as a means to uplift other (white) minorities, it was not characterized by such communities ‘abandoning their European ethnic identities’ and merging into the Anglo-Protestant mould, as has been considered typical of this type of nationalism – like the idea of the American ‘melting pot’. To Bossy, European cultural specificities were a contribution rather than a burden to the identity and progress of the Canadian nation. His theory of pluralism, then, didn’t represent ‘an affirmation of the dominant group’s ability to capture and define the identity of the country’, as explained by Ashley Jardina. Rather, Bossy thought that different ethnic groups should preserve their distinct cultures as much as possible – away from the idea of biculturalism.

Unlike other radical-right movements characterized as representing a backlash against cultural change, Bossy’s ideas on pluralism triggered it. Even though Bossy hoped for traditional Christian values to shape a newly defined ‘strong national identity’, there was no Canadian ‘golden age’ to go back to. Moreover, he did not ‘reject multiculturalism and the integration of foreigners’ or claim protectionist policies on behalf of the dominant ethnic group, as is common in radical-right movements. This sets Bossy’s thought as one defined by a sort of multi-cultural ideal shaped by reactionary ideology. For, even if in a restrictive way, it ultimately rejected assimilation (or the idea that ethnic groups must choose to join one of the ‘two founding nations’) to suggest instead the expansion of national belonging through a process of ethnic and spiritual integration, while promoting the exclusion of those deemed unfit. Thus, in spite of the seemingly opposing use of terminology, it is safe to argue that Bossy’s ideas on diversity can be defined.
as a unique form of radical-right multiculturalism in which *whiteness* is not ‘defined as the loss of identity’ \(^{44}\), but as the multiplicity of identities.

Bossy’s ‘multiculturalism of the right’ was different from what political scientist Alberto Spektorowski has described as ‘a rhetorical trope designed to include one’s own ethnic communities and exclude Others from the body politic’. \(^{45}\) According to Spektorowski, ‘multiculturalism of the right’ supports cultural diversity as long as this is defined by a plurality of separate states. That is, by a political system characterized by restrictions on the basis of ethno-cultural and geographical boundaries – this is called ‘ethnopluralism’. While Bossy’s idea of multiculturalism would oppose this form of inter-ethnic organization, ethnopluralism originated from a philosophy that closely resembles Bossy’s own understanding of diversity: Herderian multiculturalism. An eighteenth-century and anti-Enlightenment German philosopher, Johann Gottfried Herder promoted the cultural independence of different German groups combined with their harmonious intercultural relations under the state. Whereas he rejected internal assimilation, Herder stated that ‘foreign cultures’ were a threat, ‘a cancer’, to what he considered to be the ‘spiritual’ German community. \(^{46}\) Based on Herder’s philosophy, some scholars argue that modern multiculturalism and right-wing populism share common roots: they maintain that the Herderian idea of group or cultural difference ‘gave rise to both racial and pluralist views and these remain … common bonds between racial and multicultural notions of human difference’. \(^{47}\)

Herder influenced emerging theories on group survival based on social Darwinism and biological determinism, including the ‘integral’ or ‘tribal nationalism’ proposed by French author and politician Charles Maurras. \(^{48}\) Maurras proposed the restoration of the *ancien régime* or old rule (prior to the French Revolution of 1789) by using the monarchy and the Catholic Church as unifying cultural elements, sources of social hierarchy and order, national solidarity, and centralisation. In addition, he sought to forge a national community out of the disparate linguistic and regional identities of the French state, and he defined that larger community based on what he considered to be ‘common’ criteria, namely Catholicism, agrarianism, and historical rule under the French monarchy. \(^{49}\) In Canada, Maurras’ ideas against the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution influenced a relevant number of French-Canadian nationalist intellectuals, particularly during the 1920s (or before Pius XI condemned his ideas), including Henri Bourassa, Lionel Groulx, and Esdras Minville. \(^{50}\) While there is extensive literature on these and other individuals and groups influenced by right-wing forms of corporatism, none of the existing scholarship mentions Bossy’s corporatist organization Classocracy League of Canada (CLC), which was active (albeit with minor support) between 1934 and 1938. It is precisely by studying the short-lived CLC that Bossy’s subsequent projects for ethnic integration can be interpreted as a continuation of his early reactionary thoughts on Canadian diversity rather than as a precedent to liberal multiculturalism.
Walter J. Bossy was a Christian nationalist. Different from white nationalism, Christian nationalism is related to but not exclusively defined by racialist sentiments, mainly equating cultural purity with ethnic exclusion. Ultimately, it seeks the preservation of a ‘unique Christian identity’, unable to distinguish between religious and national identities. It is essentially a ‘cultural schema advocating the synthesis of [national] life with a particularist (almost ethnic) form of Christianity’. Because Christian nationalism is about culture as much as about race, religion, and politics, it conveniently elucidates how Bossy was able to suggest multi-culturalism under a Christian framework while sustaining a white supremacist view of the nation. ‘Christian nationalists are one example of a convergent social identity arising out of the perception of a high degree of overlap between three identities’, namely the religious (Christian), the national (Canadian), and the racial (white, European). Christian nationalism will help explain the incoherence inherent in Bossy’s attempt to use Christian notions of universalism while insisting that groups of descent other than European and Jewish communities were unfit for his idea of nationhood. It will thus also explain the racist nature of his rhetoric, of which I warn the reader.

A note on methodology

The focus of this book is not a person as much as an idea: the ‘third force’. Thus, this study will address the conceptual origins rather than simply the origins of the ‘third force’. As a consequence, I use a methodological approach characteristic of the study of the history of ideas or conceptual history, which deals with the evolution of ideas and value systems over time.

Firstly, this study builds upon Mark Bevir’s understanding of hermeneutic meaning. On the one hand, I disagree with Bevir’s interpretation of ideas as existing only once due to (he argues) an idea being utterly dependent on a specific subject situated within a specific context. As I see it, this approach leaves the historian without the possibility of comparing two ideas expressed at two different points in time or by different individuals, which denies any two thoughts having anything in common – and therefore any form of communication. On the other hand, Bevir’s stress on subjectivity and context is important. His insistence upon the fact that ‘historians should concern themselves with … meaning as it exists for particular individuals’ in particular reveals that signification is a process that results from both perception and intention. Accordingly, in this study, I do not try to find the truth about the ‘third force’ or an objective and stable definition of it. Rather, I seek to reveal how a very particular individual understood it in order to comprehend the subjective intentionality behind the first trichotomic interpretation of the Canadian nation.

Bevir maintains that historians ‘should generally presume that [the subject’s] beliefs are sincere, conscious and rational’. However, because Bossy’s life was characterized by a firm desire to either attain or highly influence
power, I believe that Bossy’s discourse was often shaped by the wish to manipulate meaning. A clear example of this is when he began using the term ‘New Canadians’ (which had been historically understood as generally defining any Canadian of descent other than British or French) and linked it to individuals of European descent (except for Jewish communities) and Christian faith only. This is why this study will combine Bevir’s approach to language with semiotics. Above all, semiotics distinguishes between signifier and signified, that is signs (words on a page, facial expressions, an image…) and the concept they communicate in order to find meaning. 57 I am especially interested in the poststructuralist interpretation of semiotics, which rejects the idea that words relate directly to anything specific, true, unchangeable, or objective. This leads to the conclusion that, while text (signifier) might remain through time, the ideas these texts express (signified) are subject to change.

This also happens the other way around. Considering a poststructuralist interpretation of semiotics allows us to identify the persistence of an idea through time despite alterations in the vocabulary used to express it. For example, I see ‘third force’ as a sign or a signifier, which means that the two words together are only the means by which the idea or signified of a trichotomic Canada is transmitted. This is why, throughout this book, I will show how different words like ‘New Canadians’, ‘foreign group’, or ‘third element’, were used to express the same idea. Using such words or signifiers to trace the persistence of a concept through time as expressed by a specific subject has been my main interest. It is important to highlight that I reject the poststructuralist idea that, ultimately, meaning does not exist. While poststructuralism helps demonstrate that there is no ‘one-to-one correspondence between language and an external reality’, 58 as well as locate historical shifts in meaning, it can also impede historical research altogether if used to fuel a nihilist perception of the world. Indeed, I believe truth is subjective. Yet that doesn’t mean that truth does not exist, it simply means that truth may result from perception rather than fact.

It is through poststructuralism that I am able to find the ideological biases that, in turn, determine the vocabulary I use when framing the beliefs of the historical actors I study. That vocabulary is mine alone and it is subject to my own context and perception of reality, as is the narrative that I created from fragments of the past left by people whose experiences were also dependent upon their own context and perception of reality. It is part of the historian’s craft to try our best to make sense of those fragments through an objective lens. Unfortunately, this is complicated, to say the least. This is why my goal throughout this study hasn’t been to be as objective as possible, but rather to be reflective as often as possible. That is, at times I didn’t simply let the sources talk but incorporated my own understanding of the events as they unfolded. I did this exclusively when I thought it necessary to justify my approach, as it is this which determines the order of events and encounters, the inclusion and exclusion of historical actors, the analysis of