

**Myth, Alienation and the Western Trinity:
Seeking New Connections and Positive Identity in the New West**

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ABSTRACT

The conceptualization of a western Canadian region and identity has historically been linked to a negatively defined relationship with the rest of Canada. Characterized by disaffection, insularity, and rejection, this identity has been commonly called *western alienation* – a normatively derived “myth” that reinforces a distinct but discontented regionalism in the West. This study argues that in spite of these norms, western alienation also encompasses ambitions for inclusion and political efficacy that make possible new understandings of Western identity based on association with a national vision. One reason that this “positive,” inclusive identity has not been realized is that Canada’s parliamentary institutions have spurred underlying power imbalances amongst its regions. By re-examining proposals for institutional reform in tandem with challenging traditional understandings of representation and party discipline in Canada, this study contends that the issue of power centralization can be rectified. The resultant *Western Trinity* of regionalism, reform and representation – which is best illustrated through the policies of the Reform Party of Canada – suggests that through both formal and cultural re-imaginings, western identity can become more positively defined in the 21st century.

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Introduction

Understanding New Norms in Canadian Federalism

The 37th federal general election on November 29, 2000 offered very few surprises to the Canadian electorate. The governing Liberals saw their majority grow to 172 seats out of 301, with 155 garnered east of Manitoba and 101 located in Ontario alone. This represented an increase of 17 seats from the 1997 election, despite an 11 percent drop in popular vote. While the Liberals received between 20 and 35 percent of the popular vote in the western provinces, they gained few seats west of the Great Lakes. Instead, the Reform-turned-Canadian Alliance Party used its concentration in the West to capture 66 seats – six more than in 1997 – and retain its Official Opposition status. The Bloc Quebecois remained strong in Quebec, although dropping from 44 to 38 seats, while the Progressive Conservative and the New Democratic Parties both barely maintained official party status, with the NDP dropping from 21 to 13 seats and the PCs from 20 to 12. And perhaps most interesting, while the 2000 election decisively established clear winners and losers, and set the stage for four more years of majority Liberal rule in Canada, the outcome was predicated on the judgment of only 61.18% of national voters – the lowest turnout in Canadian history.

According to Elizabeth Gidengil *et al.*, the 2000 election brought to light two developments. First, the Liberal victory was largely secured on a luke-warm endorsement, a mixed result of those satisfied with the Liberal record but also those simply resigned to what they perceived to be an inevitable election outcome. Second, the gains made by “regional” parties, the Bloc and Alliance, were primarily due to high

levels of voter cynicism and regional alienation, not any positive affiliation with those parties (2001: 28-29). Gidengil supports this conclusion in a related analysis, measuring a particularly strong correlation (roughly two-thirds) between those voting Alliance and those feeling that the West was unfairly treated in Canada (2000). To these political observers, the 2000 election was less about Liberal “victory” than it was demonstrative of a strong and growing regional discontent in Canada, as well as a general voter cynicism and apathy, that was fast entrenching itself within Canada’s party system.

In many ways, the 2000 election was a retelling of a story first told in 1993. R. Kenneth Carty *et al.* argue that the 1993 election represented the real commencement of “the demise of the party system” (2000: 5). The 1993 election saw one of the most dramatic electoral turnovers in Canadian history, purging support for some of the main brokerage parties (the PCs and NDP) in exchange for specific representative bodies of Quebec and “the West” through the Bloc and (the former) Reform parties. The concept of the “national party” – the pan-national organization that traditionally brokered consensus between all parts of Canada – was deliberately forsaken for regionalized parties that appealed to geographically concentrated constituencies that shared feelings of disenchantment with the traditional party system. William Cross argues that these regional parties capitalized on political fragmentation by concentrating resources on sure wins, while “substantially [ignoring] large parts of the country where they did not believe they could win a plurality of votes in individual ridings” (2002: 122). While Stephen Clarkson called this emotional and electoral calculus “a practice as old as Canada” (2001: 18), in 1993 this practice was clearly shaping regional identities already percolating in the Canadian electorate.

Carty *et al.* argue that these behaviours in 1993 were not only extremely important to the make-up of the House of Commons, but also in the ways that they reflected a significant and meaningful shift in Canadian political culture:

No party system is infinitely malleable. When the politics of the changing country outruns its governing formulas, then the party system that links the two snaps, and whole new patterns of competition and linkage needs to be built. In this rebuilding, the parties must learn new ways of operating and develop new structures that will allow them to do so successfully. The result is not only new parties, but also new norms and forms of political linkage, as the transformed party system provides for a whole new Canadian politics. (2000: 212-213)

The 2000 election could easily be understood to represent a continuation of these “new norms,” the themes and values that characterize Canada’s political psyche, such as: political, economic and social regionalization; voter cynicism and disaffection; and regional alienation and inequity. More implicitly, these themes collectively demonstrate a pervasive concern over shifts in the balance of political *power* – growing power in the hands of an increasingly complacent and centralized governing party, the frustration of a lack of political power in the Canadian regions, and growing feelings of powerlessness felt by an electorate voting more out of protest than democratic participation (if at all). While the promise of federalism was always one of political, economic and structural balance, voters are more inclined to see a fundamental *imbalance* existing today. All of these values reflect the uneasy themes and “new norms” for Canada in the 21st century.

These themes and norms are perhaps most evident today when looking at the collective experiences of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba – often known as the Canadian West. While federalism has always purported to strike a balance between the country’s diverse geographic, cultural, economic, social and philosophical communities, the historical experience of the West suggests that this goal has not been attained. Citing ongoing and increasingly perpetuated historical discrimination and

exclusion from the benefits of the nation, advocates for this region have been quick to acknowledge a growing inequity and feelings of non-inclusion in the West as political and economic power is increasingly concentrated within the institutions and the leadership of the national government. This imbalance has reinforced an overtly negative relationship between these provinces and the rest of Canada that is not only anti-national, but also anti-government, in sentiment. Western regionalism of late has become nearly synonymous with political disaffection, discontent, fragmentation, and profound voter cynicism. Observers and practitioners alike commonly refer to this negative attitude and relationship with Canada as *western alienation*.

Moreover, while these themes indeed parallel the "new norms" in Canada illustrated by Carty *et al.* after the 1993 election, in terms of the West's experience they are far from new. These negative norms of western alienation, the identity based upon insularity and antagonism stemming from it, and the rise and success of political movements in embracing these feelings, have all formed the bedrock of politics in the West over much of its history. While "the West" has often been represented as a geographically discrete region, these themes of western alienation have set the West apart as a region with a particular social and political culture – more simply, *a unique and distinct western identity*. This identity has been carefully crafted, reinforced, and bound together over time by these perceptions of political disaffection and fragmentation that have unified the West against the rest of Canada, and have encouraged ongoing conflict and resentment. Western alienation, regionalism and identity have become a Canadian historical inevitability and, as some would even say, a Canadian mythology

Yet do these negative qualities of antagonism, perceived powerlessness, fragmentation, and disaffection generally understood as western alienation really represent the totality of western identity? Must these be the same norms and themes that take the West forward into the 21st century? On both counts, this study argues that the answer is no. This particularly negative characterization of western identity does not represent the totality of the West's regional identity, but is rather primarily a product of Canada's failed democratic institutions on both a structural and a cultural level – what some have called Canada's democratic deficit. By delving into the roots of this engrained regionalism and western alienation, this study will argue that these institutions have fostered the overt centralization and imbalance of power within Canadian federalism that has denied the West meaningful inclusion within the national vision, thus reinforcing the negative and insular identity of that region. While solutions to this power issue have been found in the reform of Canada's formal parliamentary institutions of federalism, this approach can only succeed when linked to a critical understanding of the independent function of representation within these institutions. This understanding must further address the fundamental cultural pressures of Canada's party system, the tradition of party discipline. By arguing for a necessary and significant connection between these three themes of western regionalism, reform and representation, and forming what might be called the *Western Trinity*, discussion can move away from a conception of western identity as only fragmentary, disaffected, and apathetic, and instead open doors to a more "positive" identity that understands the West's regional uniqueness as one that also embraces a national vision and inclusion within the federation.

It is thus the central premise of this study that it is through the deliberate combination of institutional, ideational and cultural evolution that this democratic deficit can be overcome, and a more expansive and positively defined identity for the West can evolve from one of pure alienation and regional insularity to one based upon inclusion, positive regional vision, and national self-understanding. This study will pursue this premise in four chapters. Chapter 1 will examine the concept of "the West" as a geographic region and as a political space, and how this self-understanding creates a shared sense of regionalism and identity among those four provinces. The West will be measured against existing theories of regional construction and constitution, the politics of space and sameness, the identity challenges inherent within multiple and relational communities, and how these elements of regionalism are "proven" and politicized to create a coherent western identity. This discussion will argue that concepts of "the West" as a region of cultural sameness are primarily reinforced through a western "myth." By depending more on emotive than empirical demonstrations of sameness and unity, and by reinforcing these ideas through aggressive political action, this myth binds the West together as a coherent regional space and identity. Yet in looking at the main political action in the West – those of western protest parties both federally and provincially – it is also evident how western identity has become primarily *negatively defined* as a disaffected and insular relationship with the rest of Canada and its institutions.

Chapter 2 argues that this western regional identity and myth possesses these negative characteristics because it is sustained and reinforced primarily through the theory and practice of *western alienation*, which common usage has incorrectly equated with extreme disaffection and insularity. Yet exploring the existing definitions of

alienation through sociological theory and as a purely western concept demonstrates that western alienation not only reflects the emotions of discontent and disaffection from national ideals, but potentially also embodies a genuine desire for engagement and inclusion within the national fold. Through this duality, new opportunities for a positive identity from within this alienation begin to emerge. Examination will then shift to the manifestations and purported historical, social, cultural, economic, and political causes of western alienation in Canada, and will show the ways in which this dual vision of western alienation has been appreciated yet also denied. This chapter will argue that this denial of a positive western vision is largely based on the failure of Canadian federalism itself to stem the growing concentration of political power in the central government, leadership, and institutions. While western alienation may be able to sustain a more positive myth of western regional identity beyond discontent and towards inclusion, real solutions remain fundamentally limited by this power imbalance.

Chapter 3 develops the important link between western alienation today and centralized power in Canadian federalism by looking closely at the most significant set of institutions that create this centralized power: Parliament, through the House of Commons, Senate, Cabinet and, most importantly, the Prime Minister. While historically Parliament is intended as the main forum for negotiating consensus amongst regions and laying constraints on the centralization of power, practice has shown that the opposite has prevailed. This study will argue that the centralization is primarily grounded in the dysfunction of these institutions, and that only through *parliamentary reform* that remedies to these power imbalances may be found. Using the framework of intrastate federalism put forward by Alan Cairns, recent and previous proposals for parliamentary

reform will be reviewed, particularly in light of their impact on regional considerations. While institutional reform is indeed a key component to addressing regional power imbalances, reform *alone* is not a panacea for the problems of the West. Rather, real solutions must be found in changes beyond the reform of institutions alone.

Chapter Four offers a potential answer to this challenge by arguing that institutional reform and regional alienation have a vital connection to one final concept: the role of the elected representative as an embodiment of regional voice. Only through the free and independent representation in all branches of Parliament can institutions function and reform in the ways most responsive to regional interests so that the West can be effectively included. However, the pressures of *party discipline* seriously circumscribe the freedom of the representative to make institutions work to the benefit of the regions. Ultimately, while acknowledging the interrelationship of this *Western Trinity* of regionalism, reform and representation may be significant in theory, it is only by overcoming the pressures of party discipline – particularly the cultural pressures dealing with public perception and stability – can the Western Trinity be made workable, successful and lasting. As the newest incarnation of the western protest tradition, the former Reform Party of Canada portrays a working illustration of how the Trinity of western regionalism, institutional power reform and independent representation can be realistically connected in modern political activities. Through policy examples and the underlying theoretical bases for the responses as expressed by Preston Manning, the Reform Party provides a telling illustration of the value in connecting the elements of the Western Trinity. Yet this illustration, which concludes by plotting Reform's highly disciplined internal leadership structure against the Party's core populist and anti-party

traditions, also demonstrates that even the embrace of this Trinity in principle cannot be made workable in practice without overcoming the cultural trappings of party discipline. While this discussion helps illustrate the Trinity, it remains a question as to whether any party is capable of truly embracing practices above party discipline to move the Trinity from platform to practice, and mere theory to actual practice.

The overall goal of this thesis is not to put forward a formula to “fix” the complex problems of Canadian federalism. Nor is it to rehash or re-brand old proposals for parliamentary reform and western amelioration. Rather, it is to draw new connections between traditional arguments and to suggest that new insights and opportunities can come from the revisiting and reordering of these traditional concepts. The main conclusion drawn is that while a positive interpretation of western identity may indeed come through a re-imagination of western regionalism through alienation, institutional practices, and the representative function, it also requires a real revolution in the culture of partisanship. Until this culture is addressed, the negative western identity that has traditionally come through western alienation will continue to prevail. The 2000 election confirmed new norms at the end of the century – centralized power, regional alienation, fragmentation, institutional gridlock, disaffection and cynicism. The question remains: can western Canadians overcome these norms, and seek truly “new” norms of distinctive regional identity yet inclusive of national vision? Can a new vision and new myth of a “New” West be imagined? Perhaps through this discussion, new tools, approaches, and considerations may be provided to help answer these questions,

Chapter One

Region, Regionalism, and the “Myth” of the West

Any discussion about the challenges faced by the Canadian West must confront the question: what is meant by “the West.” The West is a term that conveniently groups the four western-most Canadian provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba – under a single identifier. Perceived patterns of development, growth and interaction are seen to reflect a commonality and sameness that makes the West a commonly understood, holistic concept worthy of the moniker “region.” Answering the question “What is the West?” is very straightforward. The far more difficult and important step is to then ask: “*Why* is the West?” Why does the invocation of the West as a region so easily gain acceptance? Why has the term become such a meaningful and legitimate constitution of identity in Canada – amongst, and at times above, other identities? Why is the idea of the West important, and moreover, why is it important to know *why*?

This chapter explores these questions. It first examines the theoretical bases underscoring the concept of “the region,” and how this understanding of space and territory becomes significant both emotionally and politically. This significance is underscored by the practice of regionalism, which creates a regional identity that is promoted and reinforced primarily through political action and construction. This connection between regional identity and its politicization is given credence through the invocation an identity *myth* – an imaginative and sometimes narrative articulation of identity that finds its “proof” more in emotional ties than in fact, and elevates claims of

regional “self” above other contending and complementary selves. These theories of political construction, identity-formation and the myth will then be applied to help us understand the importance of the West as a regional identity, and the ways it is reproduced in Canadian discourse. This discussion will show the western identity is primarily articulated by emotive instead of empirical claims to sameness or myth, which is sustained by political action through the tradition of western protest parties. While helping us understand the West as a region, a political concept, and a distinct identity, this discussion also reveals that this identity, through political activity over time, has been largely characterized by a negative articulation of sameness based on an insular and distanced relationship with the national vision. Yet through understanding the mythical foundations of this identity, new opportunities for the positive evolution of a western myth and identity can also be considered.

Regions, Regionalism, and the Construction of Space

The primacy of geography and physical space over political understanding is a relationship rarely explored yet vastly important. It forms the bedrock of all political and social identification. As Janine Brodie explains:

[T]he politics of space is so fundamental to Canadian politics that we often think about regional divisions as natural and inevitable without questioning what we mean when we evoke the terms region and regionalism or why we tend to view politics through the lens of regional gains and losses. (1994: 409)

No political system can be properly understood without first understanding the physical space in which that system exists. Space and territory form the foundations and boundaries of legitimate socio-political activity and self-understanding. As Michael Keating describes, it is fundamental to all human interaction:

Territory is in many respects a fundamental feature of political and social life. It provides the framework for politics and social interaction. It underpins systems of authority, in the state Within the state, power is usually divided and government organized on a territorial basis. Citizenship and rights are bounded by the territorial state and representation is typically organized by territory. Territory is thus fundamental to two key aspects of the modern state. It underpins the state as a principle of domination and control; and it structures the system of representation and participation within it. (1998:1)

Territory is key to the functioning of the modern state. It is the vehicle through which citizens conduct economic exchange and structure their markets, and people practice their cultures, languages and customs. And it is a cornerstone of how humans see themselves within societies, and how social science interprets their activities as significant.

Space and place are not significant in themselves. Robert Sack argues that it is only when humans comprehend that their activities exist within the context of a certain place and time that space takes on its meaning and becomes the “fundamental ordering system interlacing every facet of thought” (1980: 4). Space over time and its significance to people are inextricably connected as human activity, beliefs, and customs “come to invest such places and configurations with import” (1980: 13). To put this into a political perspective, it follows that while the authority of the state stems from its control of territory, that control is not intrinsic or natural. It is bestowed and superimposed by the people it serves, who themselves make it significant. To Keating,

[Territory’s] substantive meaning is provided by the activities which it encompasses, and by the sense of identity it engenders ... [and through] the relative contributions of past experience and present action, of social conditioning and political choice. (1998: 7-8)

While there is no question that space exists independent of human activity, it only becomes significant to humans when they *construct* it as significant.

Understanding that political space is both socially constructed and constructing offers an interesting framework to discuss regions and regionalism within the Canadian context. The first challenge is defining the elusive term *region*. Brodie describes a region

as “a territorial entity having some natural and organic unity or community of interests” (1990:6). It is a space that may contain common geography, a likeness in economic systems and practices, similar patterns of social interaction, corresponding cultural practices, or shared customs and institutions. It is a circumscribed place where a number of “samenesses” converge. While geography, continuity and contiguity are often considered common characteristics of a region, they do not in themselves necessarily construct a region. Regions can overlap. Moreover, multiple regions may be represented across multiple spaces. The Canadian Prairies are a geographic and climatic region, but also belong to an economic region encompassing Alberta, British Columbia and the Northwest United States. Arguably, the lower portion of the Prairie provinces and the northern United States share a cultural region, as do British Columbia and the American Pacific Northwest. As well, individual provincial political institutions and a shared national institution could represent their own political regions. As inspection intensifies, numerous examples of regional sameness overlie each other, each significant in its own way, each with affirmed but debatable boundaries. Rarely are regions easily or singularly identifiable, and any static determination of a definitive or dominant region is often a controversial undertaking.

What causes one regional space to become more or less significant than another? The answer to this question is *regionalism*. A region is simply space coupled with activity; regionalism is the deliberate construction of that space giving it social or cultural significance. Harry Hiller describes regionalism as “a consciousness of kind” (2002: 29), a state of mind that unites a community and articulates the economic, political and cultural interests of group in spatial terms. The act of choosing a space, circumscribing it,

and enunciating a predominant sameness within that space is what makes it meaningful.

As Keating further explains:

We can most usefully conceptualize regions as spaces, but extending the notion of space beyond the purely territorial to include functional space; political space; and social space. A region is constituted from a territory, whose significance is given by its functional and political content. It is also an institutional system, in the form of regional government, or a set of administrative institutions operating in the territory. It may contain its own institutions, practices and relationships to constitute a distinct civil society. Finally it may have constituted itself as an actor, able to articulate and pursue a common interest in the state and global systems. (1998:79)

If a region is a purposeful construction of space, then regionalism is the energy behind the construction. Regionalism is the fiat that gives the space meaning and declares which understanding of regional sameness shall prevail. It is the action that turns a geographic region into a coherent and unique understanding of *identity*.

Much of regionalism's power to constitute identity is derived from regions being relational creatures. In other words, they recognize their sameness and the identity that flows from it most profoundly when balanced by an acknowledged difference with another space. As Brodie frames it, "regions are seen as a part of an interconnected whole in which one regional configuration is largely a function or an expression of another" (1990:17). Because regions are spatially circumscribed, where one region stops another must necessarily start. Regions gain significance when they are within, next to, or apart from another space, and compelled to look inwards and fortify their values. The belief in sameness that legitimizes a region grows through relationships with other regions, reinforced by regionalism. At times, these relationships can be positive and mutually supporting. At other times, this relationship can be negative and adversarial. Philip Resnick explains both forms:

Regionalism ... can take open or closed forms. It can speak to legitimate concerns that the inhabitants of a particular geographical space have about their society or province, but it can also take on an aura of chauvinism and disdain towards other regions, or towards the larger nation-state to which a particular region belongs. (2000: 13)

The identity that is borne from this interconnectedness contains the potential to house either the positive or the negative attributes of these “open or closed” relationships. Oftentimes, an identity may even possess both attributes simultaneously. Each region is different in how it characterizes these relationships with other spaces, and these characterizations are perpetually open to debate and change.

Regional identity claims are not immune to being challenged by other claims. Identity is rarely understood as an isolated concept; true identities are often contain multiple, diverse, or overlapping attributes within a complex whole. Says Martin Hollis:

Persons have no peculiar sort of identity. As with other objects, their identity is always a matter of the continuity of properties and relations. What makes separate persons different is their different perceptions, due partly to the fact that their bodies have a different history in space and time. (1994: 178)

It is for this reason that Roger Gibbins calls Canada a “complex stew of identities and values” (1999: 200). Some parts of the stew are other circumscriptions of political space, such as neighbourhood, civic, provincial, national or even international spaces. Some are independent of space, like those of ethnicity, gender, political ideology, or sexual orientation. This diversity and coexistence of identities fosters a process of creating and re-creating “selves” that compete and colonize, as William Westfall illustrates:

One can watch the way development destroys old regional boundaries and creates new ones, the way it at once fragments societies economically and then tries to join them together ideologically. In the end one can begin to see a pattern in which one layer of regions is laid over another layer, in which new regional identities try to establish themselves on top of older ones. (1982: 9)

Regional identity is always under the threat of competition from other identity claims. The question thus becomes: how does regionalism overcome this fluidity and attempts at colonization to establish a regional identity definitive enough to overcome the challenges of competing identities?

The answer has to do with the unique process that regionalism undertakes to establish itself. Henry Hiller argues that regional identity construction must undergo three stages to be complete (2002: 36). The first is the sharing of territory, the development of meaning, social forms and collective understanding in a space. The second is the development of structural constraints, such as institutional make-ups, economic frameworks, and political systems. The third, and the most important, stage is that of *politicization*, which is the interpretation, articulation and mobilization of the regional concept. This is the most important step in regional construction, as Hiller explains,

From a sociological perspective, a region is produced by people who share a territory, creating and organizing themselves into their own local society. Regionalism (as opposed to region) is the politicization of these local traits into a consciousness of kind. (2002: 33)

Regionalism resists competing constructions of a “self” by harnessing forms of political action or expression. This action provides the constructive energy to draw a particular regional articulation and identity into the foreground amidst contending claims of sameness. As Brodie concludes, regions “remain inert until historical actors, through their productive and political activities, shape and reshape the geographic environment that surrounds them” (1990: 4).

Two principles must be fulfilled for political action to stimulate regionalism. One principle is the need for an actor to carry the political action forward. But prior to that, political action needs a basis of belief – motivating ideas that underscore its claim for regional identity and inspire those actors to drive, reinforce, and ultimately legitimize this identity. Barry Cooper encapsulates this set of motivating ideas under the simple label of *myths*. Cooper argues that all Canadian identity claims (regional or otherwise) are primarily based upon “political cultures ... [that] reinforce as well as express the several political myths” (2002: 93). He equates myths to imaginative literature, as non-linear, all-

embracing narratives that articulate a particular sense of “self” within a particular conception of time and space. The myth is the sentience that spurs the political action, the construction of spatial significance, and the salience of regional identity. It is the transcendence of identity from tangible and material ends towards a higher understanding of selfhood, history, and sameness. As Cooper explains:

The ‘answer’ is found not in an awareness of a factual array or the conceptual grasp of a deployment of data, but in an imaginative and participatory knowledge, a knowledge of reminiscence and reflection, not of reductive transformation and scientific restatement. (2002: 94)

The myth sets one identity apart from the many, and lays the real roots of the pre-eminent regional self. It is predicated on the belief that true identity is itself more firmly based in emotion than fact, and that normative “proof” of sameness is superior to any empirical proof. An intrinsic belief in a cultural myth is needed for regionalism to become political action, and for that action to give the regional space and identity real significance within history and territory. It is precisely this mythology that allows the West as a space to make the leap to full politicization and unique regional identity.

As Cooper concludes, “Differences in culture and in identity ... are just what are expressed in myth. And myths are not lies; they are stories that express and give shape to the meaning of individual and of collective lives” (1992: 98). This concept of the myth provides an extremely valuable approach towards a comprehensive understanding of “the West” as a region. The next section uses the myth framework to examine the prevailing claims of sameness in that region. While empirical commonalities (which have characterized traditional assertions of sameness and identity) have become less pronounced in the West, Cooper’s myth theory gives greater credence to normative, emotive demonstrations of western sameness. While lacking the positive proof of

commonalities that many observers seek in such discussion, these myth-based emotive claims do demonstrate a belief and a value connection to western regionalism. Accepting these claims as constitutive of regional identity, discussion will move to one of the more fundamental examples of political action in the West – the western political party tradition – to help illustrate how politicization based upon this myth has come to legitimize and characterize this western regional identity. Through this analysis of emotional connection, political action, and imaginative belief, the importance of the myth in making “the West” the region and identity it is today can be understood. It will also provide new ways to better imagine how that identity could be re-imagined.

The Protest Tradition and the Myth of “The West”

Richard Allen argues that while at times “the specific boundaries of any one region might be a matter of dispute, [the] similarities in consumer patterns, political behaviour, dress and speech in an area suggest the concept of the region” (1973: 125). Many have looked to these shared qualities in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba to characterize the Canadian West as a region. Yet how much does observable similarity in itself denote a lasting regional identity? Do comparative material factors such as regional composition, habits, or proximity in themselves determine a sameness strong enough to hold one identity claim ahead of another? Is empirical, positive proof of “the West” essential or even necessary to demonstrate its regional sameness and identity, or is there something beyond “proof” that may be considered?

Many observers have sought textbook proof of the existence of the West. One approach has been to “prove” sameness through demographic and economic comparison,

using regional homogeneity to confirm western sameness. Gibbins uses this approach in his analysis of the early decades of Canadian development, when all western provinces were jointly considered the hinterland to the heartland of central Canada. Near the end of the 1800s, settlement patterns and population surged as a large proportion of Canada's new immigrants were encouraged and given incentives to settle in the West. Between 1901 and 1931, the population share of the four western provinces grew from 12.1 percent to 29.5 percent (Gibbins, 1994: 155) – a share that has remained proportionately stable into today. The resultant “multicultural cast” (1994: 170) of settlers, who were mainly British, pan-European and American stock, stood in stark contrast to the near-homogeneity of Anglophone Ontario and Francophone Quebec. This western unity-in-diversity was further brought together through a common economy based on the region's abundant natural resources – the wheat economy in the prairie provinces; forestry, mining, and fishing in British Columbia; and the oil and gas potential in Alberta. Gibbins argues the challenges associated with the boom and bust cycles of these resource economies due to competitive world prices and fluctuating foreign markets established a “shared pain” commonality between provinces. This soon translated into a “litany of economic grievances” (1994: 171) against central Canada when government decisions began to affect those industries. These shared grievances negatively yet firmly reinforced an ongoing sense of inter-provincial dependency, interaction, and sameness that unified the West as a space, a region, and an identity.

Yet this demographic and economic similarity of the past is not well reflected in today's West. In their report entitled the *State of the West*, Robert Roach and Loleen Berdahl of the Canada West Foundation examined similar demographic and economic

trends in today's West. The study looked at the measurable factors of population, immigration, migration, demographic make-up, employment, income and finances to determine "to what extent do these four provinces hang together as a common region" (2001: iii). It found a surprising disparity across the region compared to Gibbins' analysis of historical trends. In terms of population, while the western share has remained stable at around 30 percent, British Columbia and Alberta realized almost all of the growth (and the commensurate benefits) while the populations of Saskatchewan and Manitoba remained static over the last 20 years (2001: 3). Some of this growth is due to immigration to the West, of which urban British Columbia and Alberta received nearly 90 percent in 2000 (2001: 10). Within the West itself, British Columbia and Alberta saw substantial gains over the last thirty years through inter-provincial migration – up 12.7 and 9.4 percent respectively– while Saskatchewan and Manitoba saw continued declines of 15.1 and 12.8 percent (2001: 16). In terms of population make-up, Saskatchewan and Manitoba exhibited substantially higher ratios of people not working versus people working ("dependency ratios") than the national average, while British Columbia and Alberta had lower ratios (2001: 26). Saskatchewan and Manitoba were both well below the national average for urban growth, while British Columbia and Alberta exceeded average urban growth nearly three times over (2001: 35). Even Gibbins' founding "multicultural cast" of the western provinces appears disparate today, with British Columbia claiming 17.9 percent of its population a "visible minority", Alberta claiming 10.1 percent, Manitoba at 7 percent, and Saskatchewan at only 2.8 percent (2001: 30).

Beyond demographic make-up, the survey also showed huge economic disparities within the West. Employment participation rates in Alberta over the last thirty years have

been consistently higher than the national average (72.2 percent versus 65.9 percent) while all other western provinces remained below average (2001: 50). Unemployment rates over that same period averaged between 5.8 and 6.7 percent for Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, while British Columbia was far higher at 9.3 percent (2001: 51). British Columbia and Alberta have seen employment growth rates of 3.02 and 3.15 percent since 1971, while Saskatchewan and Manitoba grew at less than half that rate (2001: 52). British Columbia's and Alberta's aggregate incomes sat above the national average in 1998 (\$51,424 and \$52,388 versus \$49,626) while Saskatchewan's and Manitoba's were substantially below that average (2001: 56). Alberta and Saskatchewan have posted GDP growth rates above the rest of country – 90.3 percent and 78.8 percent – while British Columbia and Manitoba have consistently lagged behind at 44.2 and 55.2 percent (2001: 63). Even with respect to exports, while all provinces depend primarily on U.S markets above inter-provincial markets, British Columbia and Saskatchewan have developed new and growing dependencies on Asian markets.

Within this analysis are some measurable commonalities – immigration is an above-average contributor to all western populations, inter-provincial migration remains predominantly between western provinces, all have experienced above-average urban growth, and all western provinces contain above-average proportions of the Aboriginal population. Yet the empirical differences between the western provinces in this analysis far outweigh the similarities. Roach and Berdahl ultimately conclude:

There are growing disparities among the western provinces. While western Canadians may have historical ties, social linkages, common interests and emotional ties to the idea of the West as a coherent region, the gaps between Alberta and British Columbia, on the one hand, and Saskatchewan and Manitoba on the other are growing in a number of areas including economic capacity, population growth, immigration levels, employment growth, interprovincial migration, and income levels. If the West is to remain a strong regional voice in Canada, western Canadians will have to come to grips with these disparities and their public policy implications for the future of the region. (2001: 79)

Unlike Gibbins' 1994 conclusions, this analysis shows a very weak level of measurable evidence demonstrating that the West has any level of commonality on a demographic or economic level. The evidence provided is insufficient to "prove" the existence of a region or a regional identity. On an empirical level, disparity and divergence seem to be the prevailing norms, not western sameness.

Yet Roach and Berdahl's conclusion also acknowledges the existence of historical, social and emotional ties where material commonalities have failed. These ties imply that, statistics aside, there is still a strong sense of "the West" beyond demographic or economic measures. Ralph Matthews argues that this is because regionalism is really about the study of values, and "values, by definition, are not directly observable, and supposed empirical indicators of them may always be challenged as matters of speculation and interpretation" (1980: 57). True regional identity in Canada cannot be at the level of objective, positivistic analysis, but is "to be found at the level of consciousness and identity" (1980: 48). The sources of the truest sense of the West as a region, a political expression, and as an identity, are emotive and not empirical. While empirical proof is an objective measure and quantification of facts, the emotive justifications are largely subjective expressions of belief in the coherence of a region. Roger Gibbins and Sonia Arrison acknowledge this subjectivity when they describe their own "proof" of the western region:

[T]o view the West up close is like looking into a kaleidoscope in which the brightly coloured pieces overwhelm the regional pattern. And yet, despite the often competing interests and sharply etched community differences, the West maintains some degree of coherence and some reasonable measure of distinctiveness from other regional communities in Canada. Both the regional glue and distinctiveness, we would suggest, come less from the region's varied geography and more from *how western Canadians see the world*, particularly the political world. (1995: 1)

Despite what inter-provincial statistics conclude, these “western visions” (as Gibbins and Arrison call them in their book’s title), while lacking direct empirical proof of sameness, do form the justifying groundwork for the West’s strongest regional expressions. The West becomes, as Richard Allen suggests in the title of his book, “a region of the mind” (1973).

While one can speculate that an identity is based more upon feeling than factual evidence, it is difficult to demonstrate these qualitative conclusions. One possible means is through public opinion surveys. In 1991, the Angus Reid Group surveyed common attitudes in the four western provinces. When subjects were asked which identity they viewed as their primary identification, over 75 percent indicated “Canadian”, while 11 percent answered “Western Canadian,” and 12 percent gave their respective province. Yet when they were asked if “the West should be thought of as a unique region in Canada,” 64 percent responded strongly in the affirmative. While the reasons differed – 37 percent attributed that uniqueness to geography or location, 39 percent indicated “attitudes” or “lifestyle” as the unifying factor, and others cited shared economies and similar climates – the outcome was the same. Ten years later, the Canada West Foundation asked similar questions in its survey of western opinion, *Looking West*. When asked to indicate their primary identification, 28 percent of respondents named “Canada” while only 12.1 percent named “Western Canada”, with “provincial” and “local” scoring nearly as high (2001: 3). Yet when asked to respond to the statement “The West is a distinct region, different in many ways from the rest of Canada,” 83.7 percent strongly or somewhat agreed. This ranged from a low of 78.4 percent in Manitoba to a high of 86.6 in Saskatchewan (Berdahl, 2001: 3). In both cases, while the West was not the only

identity claimed (and not necessarily the identity of primary identification), it can be concluded that western respondents did hold personal, intrinsic beliefs that “the West” was a legitimate regional identity. The Foundation drew this same conclusion from this survey in a later study, *Building the New West*:

In summary, it makes sense to look at western Canada as a coherent, self-conscious and loosely integrated regional community. It also makes sense to adopt a regional approach to public policy, economic growth, and social change. An approach that is only provincial or national is inadequate for a thoughtful discussion of the West’s competitive position in the global economy, its place in Canada, and its quality of life. (2001: 5)

Western identity, although absent of hard positive proof, does instinctively elicit an emotional yet affirmative identification across the four provinces. Much like Gibbins and Arrison’s subjective “western visions,” these self-reflective, highly normative, instinctive expressions of regional identity all lend themselves to the existence of a specifically western myth. Following Cooper’s framework, just because sameness is only justified an emotional level does not make it irrelevant or untrue; imaginative, narrative understandings of selfhood through the right action can turn a space and time into an identity. Understanding the West as a coherent region need only be myth-based, not fact-based. To Westerners, the West as a community and identity simply “makes sense.”

As argued earlier, the myth itself is only the first principle in generating political action to construct regional identity. Political action also needs actors to carry these messages forward. While the myth gives regionalism and regional identity its political foundation and energy, it is the political actors – both through their actions and through their very emergence – who make the myth accessible and understandable to people. For the West, Tom Flanagan argues that the most illustrative example of this second principle of political action would be the formation, development, and “the repeated emergence of new parties in the West” (1999: 2). The western party tradition has solidified the

principles of regional awareness and western identity within Canadian culture. Western Canadians have come to see their regional identities expressed, mobilized and reinforced by tapping into Canada's most basic arena of political action, the competitive party system. These parties represent the final step in securing the emotive link between people and their understanding of western sameness and space that solidifies the myth.

While most of Canada's electoral pedigree has charted the ebb and flow of alternating Liberal and Conservative Party dominance (both provincially and nationally), the West has always supported the rise (and eventual fall) of select parties on the provincial and federal stage. As the Introduction highlighted, even recent experience reveals a close connection between political party activity and regional interests. In their study of the 1997 election, Gidengil *et al.* measured the strong support for the Reform Party in the four western provinces (60 of 88 seats) to conclude that "the most critical feature of the 1997 Canadian federal election was the regionalization of the vote" (1999: 247). Similarly, in a study of the 2000 election, Gidengil *et al.* acknowledged a strong "ideological dimension" (2001: 28) to national voting preferences that primarily translated into regional vote concentrations, with the Alliance's Opposition status coming almost exclusively from seats (64 of 88) gained in the West. By both measures, the West was conveying a consistent political preference through a western-oriented political party that could reflect a strong acknowledgement of regional identity. But while Carty *et al.* may see these as results reflecting "new norms" (2002: 212-213), these outcomes are only small pieces of a long-standing tradition of regional partisan expression in the West.

George Melynk characterizes the western party tradition as a "cyclic" phenomenon (1992: 1) that reflects historical patterns of common ideas and beliefs that

rise, fall, and evolve over time. Much like the West's underlying myth itself, the evolution of western parties is best understood as a narrative – a story of ongoing political expression for an aggrieved people. And much like the myth they support, their purpose has been very direct: to establish a lasting presence and a political identity for the West. Beginning with the first Riel Rebellion of 1869 over the cultural and political autonomy of the Métis, this story moves through the rise of the United Farmers' movements in the early 1900s, the brief success of the federal Progressive Party in the early 1920s, the germination of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and national Social Credit party in the 1930s, the success of provincial movements of the same names through the latter 20th century, and the rise and fall of the Reform Party through the 1990s. Yet this linear recounting often neglects overarching commonalities to each of these political movements, the basic principles of a western myth that have remained constant over time. Melnyk broadly interprets this common, cyclic theme as “The West *as* Protest” (1992: 1) – a characterization that this study endorses. The opposition and challenge to the status quo that rises through protest has remained constant across western party development. In every iteration of the western party tradition, the vision has been the same: the West as a significant space, as a political region, and as a real identity. This political vision of protest-as-self pushes regionalism as an identity to the forefront of the western psyche more so than demographics, economics, or surveys could ever convey. Through this political action, the myth constructs the West.

While this tradition reflects the intent of the myth – to make the West coherent – it is more than just a story of protest. Two other common themes within this protest tradition give important definition to this story. The first theme is that of *rejection* –

rejection of the traditional party system and the political power structure that it supports. Aside from the 1958 national sweep by the Diefenbaker Conservatives and some support for nation-building at the turn of the century, the governing federal party has rarely had a strong partisan presence in the West. Gibbins argues that a pre-dominant anti-Liberal sentiment affects most western voters (1980: 104), and while the Conservatives were once a vehicle for regional discontent as a brokerage party, recent elections suggest that they have fallen from favour as well. Furthermore, while Conservatives and Liberals have dominated federal politics, the western provinces have generated numerous alternative provincial political movements of their own. Manitoba had the United Farmers and provincial Progressives in the first half of the century (until 1959 when the Conservatives came to power). Alberta's Social Credit came to power in 1935 to rule for over 35 years until Lougheed's Conservatives entered in 1971. Saskatchewan experienced rule by a loose coalition of Conservatives, Progressives and Independents in 1929, the CCF under Tommy Douglas in 1944, and the newly formed NDP in 1971. Social Credit ruled British Columbia virtually uninterrupted from 1952 to 1991, with the NDP coming to power for three years in 1972 and ten years after 1991. Unlike the rest of Canada, there has been very little congruency between the provincial politics of the West and federal politics. Even in periods of congruency, provincial counterparts have defied parallels by embracing this notion of rejection wholeheartedly with their devotion to "fed-bashing."

This rejection of the traditional political parties and the values that they represent is supported by a second theme within western protest, *populism*. The emphasis on grassroots empowerment to overcome perceived individual oppression by elite political power structures – what Preston Manning describes as the power of "the common sense

of the common people” (1992: 2) – has been a consistent objective in every cycle of western protest and has provided a logical vehicle for the disassociation from traditional parties. From the period of Louis Riel, when the Metis strove for self-determination, to the platforms of T.A. Crerar’s Progressives in the 1920s, the National CCF and Social Credit Parties, and the Reform and NDP, populism has remained a mainstay of all western protest party manifestos. Gibbins argues that the populist tone of the Diefenbaker Conservatives won the 1958 election in the West (1980: 104); Melnyk describes it as the primary vehicle for Reform’s popularity in the early 1990s (1992: 301). This sentiment was also prevalent in all of the most popular western provincial parties, be they the United Farmers of Manitoba or Alberta, the Progressives, the CCF or Social Credit. In British Columbia, for example, Donald Blake *et al.* argue that the activities of grassroots “party activists” (1991: 16) almost solely defined the popular Social Credit and CCF/NDP parties. Consistently over time in the West, it is clear that “populism is deeply rooted within the [western] regional political culture” (Gibbins and Arrison, 1995: 101).

As Walter Young explains, these western protest movements have had a profound and lasting effect on the western psyche:

People do not lightly reject the institutions and norms of behaviour they have been raised and educated to respect. When people do seek to change or destroy previously accepted institutions it is usually because they have reached a position, for whatever reasons, where they can no longer live as before; they have reached a point where their frustration, anger or suffering demand relief, and relief requires change. (1969: 1)

Moreover, the themes of rejection and populism within this western party tradition are more than just key areas of policy and interest for these parties; they also represent the fundamental way in which, through these political activities, the West as a region has defined its relationship with the rest of Canada. The theme of rejection is clearly one of asserted independence, insularity, and distance by the West; the theme of populism

advocates anti-elitism and grassroots wisdom as the means to secure this distance. Building on these themes, while the demands for relief and change mentioned by Young have always fallen short of concerted attempts at separatism or class revolution, the protest tradition has resulted in the politicization of a western myth primarily characterized by a negative relationship with the traditions and practices of the rest of Canada. This relationship has in turn constructed a western regionalism and identity based primarily upon feelings of disaffection, difference and perceived injustice between the West and the rest of Canada. These characteristics form the core of what Gibbins and Arrison call “western discontent” (1995: 1), or what Resnick simply calls “resentment” (2000: 20) in the West as it has been known in the past, and as it is known today. This is the result of the western myth and the politicization of western regional identity. Yet does this mean that the West has eschewed any positive definitions of “self” that could be found in its relationship with Canada? Is there more to the protest tradition, and the western myth overall, than this discussion has revealed so far? In the next chapter, these are questions will be examined in greater detail.

Conclusion

The idea of “the West” as a region of sameness and belonging is not an idea that emerges organically. It is a deliberate decision made by a people who feel an intrinsic sameness that is bound through space and time, and who choose to imbue that space with a meaning and significance that is unifying and mobilizing. This chapter described how the idea of regional sameness emerges through the process of regionalism, which

harnesses the power of political action to construct a regional identity that recognizes the value of a particular space and time and the significance of interactions within it. This self-understanding does not come from any material or empirical sense of sameness, but rather from the emotive qualities of a narrative and imaginative “myth” that shapes this identity and spurs political action. The framework of the myth can be used to better understand the ways in which the West justifies, on an emotional level, a temporally and spatially coherent sense of sameness even when no empirical “proof” of sameness exists. Further, the political action of the western protest party tradition provides a strong illustration of how that sameness is translated into a powerful regional identity based on the rejection of traditional Canadian political parties that is reinforced by the populist drive to overcome elitism within the country’s existing power structures.

The western protest tradition has created a western legacy that has turned a concept of space into a true political identity. As David Elton and Roger Gibbins put it,

Regional distinctiveness, regional integration, and a sense of threatened regional self-interest have in turn forged a unique regional political consciousness [A] political culture in western Canada that stands apart from the broader political culture of English Canada. (1992: 262)

While this observation is enticing on its own, it does not define what this political culture actually consists of. While this discussion has used the myth to create a context around Western space, motivating political action and identity formation, this has only been a discussion of what the myth *does*, not what the myth of the West actually represents. Barry Cooper observes that, “myths are not lies: they are stories that express and give shape to the meaning of individual and of collective lives” (2002: 98). If the myth tells a story, what is that story? And if that story forms an identity, does that identity as Canadians inside and outside of the West see it today reflect that story?

The western protest party themes of rejection and populism, and the negative association and identity that flows to and from these actions, have often been encapsulated under another well-worn label: *western alienation*. The next chapter argues that, at its heart, the real “story” of the myth of the West is in fact this story of western alienation. By looking at both its common social and historical understandings, as well as theories of its causes, western alienation becomes a narrative of a people who have experienced feelings of deep disaffection as a region within Canada that have caused discontent and disengagement. Yet this discussion will also show that within this narrative another set of feelings is also contained – those of a deep want of engagement and inclusion within that same country – that have yet to be brought forward. While alienation may indeed be the stimulating concept behind the myth and the negative identity that flows from it, these hidden qualities of desired belonging and inclusion could contain the potential for a more positively defined identity, turning the story of the West from one of negative association with the country to potentially one of positive belonging of a region within – not against – the nation.

Chapter Two

Western Alienation: Discontent, Inclusion and Power in Federalism

In one of his earliest works, Preston Manning aptly describes the deep connection between elements of the protest party tradition and the concept of “western alienation”:

Whenever populism has become a force to be reckoned with in western Canadian politics, it has been energized by “western alienation” – a conviction shared by generations of western Canadians that their region and interests have not achieved equality with the constitutional and economic interests of Quebec and Ontario, and that systemic change is necessary to achieve such equality. (1992: 118)

As discussed in the last chapter, this protest tradition represented the political action that sustained the forces of regionalism, which in turn constructed a coherent Western identity from what had previously been only loosely associated space. Underscoring all of this activity was one inspiring concept, a western myth. Through the actions of western protest parties, this myth came to form a distinct identity for the West. The chapter concluded by speculating that this myth, and all traditions that spring from it, may be more fundamentally grounded in the “story” of western alienation as Manning describes.

But what does this “western alienation” underscoring the myth really represent? The last chapter’s discussion of the themes of rejection and populism within the protest tradition concluded that these themes reflected a strong disaffection and discontent that had come to characterize both the party tradition, and western identity more broadly. These feelings have often been what observers come to characterize as western alienation. But what if there is more to this myth than just disaffection? For example, while populism reflects a subversion of elite structures and traditional practices, on deeper enquiry could it also reflect a deeper and near-contradictory desire for political involvement and inclusion? In much the same way, could there be another face to

western alienation beyond that which inspires a negative identity of discontent? This chapter will attempt to address these questions by arguing that contrary to common interpretations of western alienation as reflecting generalized disaffection in the West, the phenomenon itself more accurately expresses the attempt to unify this negative emotion with a deep desire for political inclusion. It is, through the combination of these ideas that the potential for a stronger and more positive western identity can be imagined that can maintain a regional orientation and distinction while benefiting from a larger concept of national belonging.

To develop this argument, western alienation will first be examined in terms of its popular and theoretical definitions to demonstrate how these contradictory drives of disaffection and want of inclusion can be mutually understood, potentially reconciled, and understood in the context of a more diverse, complex and balanced western identity. This discussion will further argue that the predominantly negative characterization of western alienation and identity to date is primarily the product of a fundamental failure in the institutions that distribute power in the Canadian federation – what could be considered a failure in federalism. This failure ultimately frustrates the achievement of balance – or what Manning calls “equality” above – needed to resolve these negative attributes of disaffection and inclusion. It is not by eliminating western alienation, but by better understanding its multiple meanings and causes, that the potential to advance a western myth and identity can be realized. This identity is not based purely on insularity and political fragmentation, but also on a positive, inclusive and integrated sense of the West within a national vision of Canada.

The Western Myth and Western Alienation

The last chapter argued that the justifications for any myth were to be found largely within emotional responses. As the supposed foundation of the western myth, finding a basis and definition for western alienation is no different. In its most common usage, the term “western alienation” is often invoked to represent a negative identity of conflict, antagonism, and disaffection against the rest of Canada. First coined by Gibbins in his earliest book (1982: 181), he later described it as a strong “cultural tension” possessed by all western Canadians whereby past injustices experienced against the western provinces are melded into a single “alienated” ideology (1995: 34). John J. Barr more simply defines western alienation as “a growing consciousness that we [westerners] are powerless” (1992: 246). Under both explanations, the western region asserts its sameness through an association with or (more appropriately) against the nation as a whole. Canada – or more specifically, Ottawa, Ontario and Quebec, and the political parties that represent them – is seen as the oppressor and the enemy. The relationship between the West and what it sees as the dominant power structure reflects what Barr considers “a colonial relationship” (1992: 247) vis-à-vis a hegemonic centre – an us-versus-them, hinterland-versus-heartland, periphery-versus-centre relationship within the larger federation. From these quick descriptions, western alienation could be loosely defined as a state of disconnection and disengagement from the political mainstream – what Resnick calls “a sense of estrangement from central Canada that can be channeled into a politics of resentment” (2000: 20). The result of this resentment – or what Gibbins and Arrison already called “western discontent” (1995: 1) – is that the West turns inwards upon itself for cultural actualization, reinforcing and at times insulating its own cultural

boundaries against what it sees as an external threat or oppressor. These elements form the common definition of western alienation and the “negative” western identity of today.

Political disaffection is a phenomenon that has been growing across the country, not just in the West. The voting turnout for the last election, which at 61.18 percent was the lowest in Canadian history, illustrates a growing disconnect between government and Canadians in general that analyses over the last decade have confirmed. For example, to support the Royal Commission on Electoral Reform in 1991, Andre Blais and Elisabeth Gidengil surveyed the level of “political cynicism in Canada” (1991: 35). They found that 70 percent of Canadians believed government did not care what “people like me” think, 79 percent believed people elected to Parliament “lose touch with the people,” and 82 percent believed parliamentarians made promises they had no intention of fulfilling. A similar survey conducted by Paul Howe and David Northrup in 2000 showed 69 percent of Canadians felt politicians “lose touch with the people,” and 63 percent felt “people like me do not have any say over what the government does” (2000: 9). In 2002, the Centre for Research and Information on Canada found that 77 percent felt political leaders had low honesty and ethical standards, 73 percent felt most leaders didn’t tell the truth, and 55 percent felt they had little or no confidence in political leaders (2002: 18). Finally, 37 percent of those surveyed said that government had a negative impact on most people’s lives, while 34 percent felt that neither level of government could be trusted to protect “the programs that you care about” (2002: 15). A mere 28 percent felt that the impact of government on their lives was positive (2002: 19). These surveys tell us that governments across Canada are facing significant voter disaffection or alienation in need of remedy.

While all of these surveys included western respondents, in very few cases was measured disaffection significantly more pronounced in this region over others. For example, the Canada West Foundation's *Looking West* survey created an "alienation index" that measured the feelings in each western province about provincial respect, provincial influence, and provincial share of federal transfers (how much they received, and if they received enough). Not surprisingly, the West scored 60.2 percent on this index but individual provinces ranging between 46.1 percent and 68.6 percent (Berdahl, 2001: 6). The author predictably concluded that the West was highly alienated. However, there were no baseline numbers from other provinces to determine if these results were comparatively meaningful, nor did these numbers alone even show a strong consistency within the West. Similarly, the Centre of Research and Information (CRIC) asked if a respondent's province was given "the respect it deserves in Canada," 69 percent in British Columbia, 56 percent in Alberta and 76 percent in Saskatchewan responded in the negative. Yet these conclusions appear less conclusive when compared to 84 percent in Newfoundland (2002: 15). In fact, most of the recent attitudinal surveys conducted cannot demonstrate a disaffection in the western provinces (individually or regionally) that is statistically more significant than that found in non-western provinces.

So is there an alienation that is unique to the West? Shawn Henry, in his recent study on political disaffection across Canada, argues that there is not. While he agrees with the presence of alienation in the West, he rejects that it is more significant or fundamentally different than disaffection found in Canada's other regions (what he calls, generally, "political alienation"). He only supports recasting western alienation as "a regionally based form of peripheral region alienation" (2002: 88) – a general political-

psychological impact that comes from being a segregated region. He disregards anything distinctly “western” about western alienation. In contrast, Elton and Gibbins support a definition that is unique and particular to the West – a purely “western” alienation:

[I]t is inappropriate to conceptualize western alienation as a particular form of a more universal phenomenon, political alienation. Rather, western alienation is a regional political ideology of discontent. By this we mean that western alienation embodies a socially shared set of political beliefs – a set with some degree of cultural expression and intellectual articulation, with a recognized history and constituency, and with recognized proponents and representatives. Western alienation is thus a central part of the political culture of the Canadian West. (1992:263-4)

By their argument, western alienation possesses a prevailing cultural significance, a shared belief system, and historical specificity far more complex than Henry’s generalized political alienation. While on one hand it is an ideology of discontent, this description conveys that it is also an ideology with a deeper meaning and significance for the West. The notion that western alienation could be a condition above and beyond generalized disaffection or “resentment,” but rather possesses a unique and culturally particular type of disaffection, is a notion that this study endorses. It recognizes that western alienation, as the founding story of the western myth, is exceptional in constructing western regionalism as an identity and a political culture. But what is it that makes this version of alienation exceptional over others? In the West’s case, this exceptional nature can best be explicated through a closer look at the subject of “alienation” through a broader, sociological lens.

Many sources use terms like disaffection, disconnection, disengagement and alienation interchangeably. As Ada Finifter observes, the term’s meaning has become wrongly saturated with these primarily negative connotations:

So many meanings have been attributed to this concept, many of them vague and mystical, that it verges on losing much of its scientific utility. Even in empirical research alone, the term ‘alienation’ has been used to refer to powerlessness, estrangement, self-estrangement, anomie, discontent, hostility, isolation, meaninglessness, frustration, and a host of other cognate and occasionally peripheral concepts. (1972: 3)

These descriptions all speak towards a rootlessness or lack of social or ethical standards. Yet the term itself also encapsulates a much richer set of meanings not reflected in these definitions. Karl Marx invoked the phrase “alienation” in his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 to describe the relationship between workers and their work. When the means of production in an industrial society comes to represent profit instead of personal actualization for workers, they become *alienated* from their labour. This separation is not only a dislocation from a worker’s industry, but also from his or her “human intellect and creative capacity” (Billon, 1981: 719). This creative capacity is an analogy for social identity, which Gary Thom translates into a more encompassing definition of alienation:

[T]he key question for Marx concerns the nature of the connection with society It involves the active appropriation or reappropriation of man’s objectifications and externalizations, the entire social world. It is a matter of exercising and expressing a wide range of productive and creative potentials – species powers – whose self-realization exists as an inner necessity, a need. (1983: 29)

While to be alienated is to feel separate and distanced, Thom’s definition sees the alienated self as also acknowledging a larger whole that the self is distanced from. True alienation must have an object or a focus. To be alienated is to be alienated *from* something that is regarded as self-fulfilling and socially validating. From this perspective, alienation is in fact the converse of anomie, existentialism or extreme disaffection; by simply acknowledging a lack of completion, an individual is validating that the potential for completion exists. To be alienated is not to feel that there is no place of belonging; rather, it is to know where belonging is, and yet to be always painfully apart from that place. The alienated person thus imagines himself or herself as connected to a larger society – not necessarily as it is, but as it *could* be. Alienation is the story of a conflicted identity, disaffected because it is incomplete, yet silently seeking completion.

Political alienation, like that found in the West, is a composite of these sociological definitions. It envisions a person or group isolated and identified from the larger political system that also seeks the ability to reintegrate with that system. David Elkins effectively blends this sociological construction into the political context:

One can only speak of alienation from something that one has reason to be attached to anyway. Alienation is similar to a heresy. Something can be heretical only if it lies within a system of belief. Buddhism is not a Christian heresy; it is a complete religious system in its own right. Alienation, by analogy, can be understood as involving a dual relationship of acceptance and rejection: rejection of one part of a political system by another part; feeling left out of something into which one is in fact integrated to a significant degree; feeling 'alien' in a place where one has every right to feel at home. (1982: 1)

Political alienation embodies the same oppositions of emotional duality, of pushing and pulling, of rejecting yet striving to accept the system from which one is alienated. Alienation, through its dualistic drive to disintegrate from and re-integrate within the dominant system, acknowledges a potential value and a desire to exercise influence in that existing system. It goes beyond the simple emotions of disaffection or disengagement; more accurately, it is the frustrated pursuit of *inclusion* and *integration* into the political mainstream and broader society.

From the above discussion, it is reasonable to consider a more complex portrayal of western alienation and the western myth than that of only general discontent, disaffection or resentment. It allows for an interpretation of western alienation in which westerners not only embody a deep frustration with their political world, but by the same motions where they also want to ameliorate those feelings through inclusion and understand themselves with the political mainstream. Elton and Gibbins observe that,

[W]estern Canadians have persistently sought greater inclusion in the national political, social and economic fabric Although western Canadians maintain a political subculture that is oriented primarily towards strengthening of regional political processes, they also maintain a commitment to their national government. (1992: 274)

Gibbins and Arrison more simply conclude that, “discontented westerners have wanted in, not out” (1995: 41). This description explains why western alienation has never coalesced into significant support for western independence or separatism. Moreover, this description transforms western alienation from a myth based solely in a negative relationship with Canada to one capable of a positive, inclusive vision of regional identity within the nation – what Resnick earlier called an “open” form of regionalism (2000: 13). When looking at specific examples of these interlacing visions, it becomes clear that it is this denied inclusive vision that feeds discontent above all other things.

Finding specific demonstrations of western disaffection and frustrated inclusion only requires a brief look at some illustrative examples of the relationship between the western provinces – sometimes jointly, sometimes severally – and the larger federation (mainly, the federal government). Saskatchewan and Manitoba have long cited economic exclusion and marginalization through federal tariff and railway freight rates that have favoured central manufacturing interests at the expense of prairie resource production (Gibbins and Arrison, 1995: 21). British Columbia has similarly cited long-term frustrations regarding its “fair share” of federal spending, procurement, and grants in areas ranging from resource to infrastructure to social policy development compared to those given to central and eastern provinces (Resnick, 2000: 27). Yet the most compelling examples of western alienation would be those centring on the province of Alberta. Along with historically being the focus of much of the West’s political activism against the federal government, Alberta has also experienced a commensurate growth in wealth that has not only given it the tools to translate this activism into actions, but has significantly increased its expectations around political inclusiveness. These expectations

have rarely been met, and disaffection has grown quite strong over time. Most illustrative of this point is the 1947 discovery of oil and gas in Leduc, Alberta. This discovery represented a significant source of wealth for the province compared to the rest of Canada, and with that wealth Alberta expected commensurate growth in its political clout. It was hoped that with this clout would come greater influence on national decision-making and greater inclusion for the whole West. Yet none of this influence materialized. Rather, the economic growth only led to a tightening of central Canada's grasp on the province's levers of economic and political power. A chief example was the 1980 National Energy Program (NEP) under Trudeau, which limited the price of domestic oil, nationalized energy revenues, and redistributed nearly \$50 billion in natural resource tax revenues that Alberta claimed as its own (Gibbins and Arrison, 1995: 22). This move not only curbed Alberta's accumulation of wealth, but also quashed any initiatives to enhance its political influence nationally. What should have led to greater inclusion within the national economy and politics only resulted in strife, and gave further reason for Alberta and the western provinces to continue to distance themselves from the federal whole.

The political cost of this and other examples of unresolved conflict is still being realized today as the West's economic stature nationally and internationally continues to grow. With that has come a growth in its political activism that is still clearly discontented, but also still clearly seeking national involvement. Alberta once again became the prime example of this upsurge when six prominent figures (led by Stephen Harper) wrote an open letter to Premier Ralph Klein proposing an "Alberta Agenda". This Agenda proposed changes in six key areas of federal-provincial policy (including health care and tax collection) to "build firewalls around Alberta, to limit the extent to

which an aggressive and hostile federal government can encroach upon legitimate provincial jurisdiction” (2001: A14). Although the word “separation” was not used, this letter was intended to encourage Klein to put Ottawa “on notice” that Alberta had the jurisdiction and the economic and political capacity to distance itself even further from central Canada if key frustrations were not addressed. Supporters viewed this proposal as the natural next step in federal-provincial relations for western provinces; detractors portrayed it as a clear opening move towards full separation. At minimum, political observers agreed that if it spread this movement could represent a new high-water mark in western alienation

Yet Premier Klein refused to endorse this proposal. While publicly he often “talked tough” about Alberta and the West’s relationship with the federal government, his actual interactions with Ottawa showed a reticence to exacerbate the distance that already existed. In the Speech from the Throne delivered on February 12, 2001 (shortly after the open letter), Klein’s government made its position quite clear:

Like Albertans, the government is fully committed to a strong Alberta within a strong Canada. It rejects the destructive vision of separation, and embraces the concept of a united, diverse nation in which each province has an important role.

The speech highlighted that it still wanted areas of provincial constitutional jurisdiction respected, and implored Ottawa “to deal with the concerns of Albertans to make sure their voices are heard, and their priorities addressed fairly” (2001). Two years later, when policy conflicts again arose between Klein and the federal government around the Kyoto accord, Klein reiterated a similar message in a letter to the Prime Minister, stating that “the Alberta government believes in a united Canada,” and that it is “the government’s intention to work hard to strengthen national unity and especially Alberta’s role in Confederation.” Yet this letter also contained a caveat similar to that stressed in 2001 by

noting, “Alberta’s ability to be a partner in Canada is compromised by the current federal government, which often does not listen to the people of this province” (2003). In both cases, Klein moved the dialogue away from themes of disaffection and separation to more cooperative themes of political “voice” and “listening” within an inclusive Canada. Political posturing aside, this is not the language of pure disaffection, disengagement or aggression, but of engagement. It is the language of inclusion and re-integration above all else in the face of a legacy of disappointment and disaffection.

These brief examples and the discussion leading up to them illustrate what western alienation is defined as and looks like in Canada today. While the term itself and the actions taken in its name indeed demonstrate the dual yearnings of political discontent and political inclusions, the myth as known today still embraces an antagonistic and insular interpretation of these qualities within the western identity. But as the discussion suggests, these qualities may represent an incomplete western identity. Why has the West not been able to bridge its myth from these negative identifications against Canada towards the positive identifications that the pursuit of inclusion and national understanding might inspire? Furthermore, even in accepting that these conditions exist, they do not in themselves explain why these conditions exist. The Reform Party of Canada harnessed these frustrations of western alienation with the phrase “The West Wants In” – but *in* to what, and to what end? The next section will attempt to answer these questions by looking into the core causes of and limitations within western alienation. Exploring these root causes will motivate a better understanding of the roots of western alienation and a western myth, as well as the barriers to positive identity that continue to put resentment before inclusion in the West.

Causes of Western Alienation, Failures of Federalism

When recently asked to identify the main causes of western alienation, a *Calgary Herald* editorial reflected what many political observers have often concluded: “It’s the policies, stupid” (2002). The column persuasively argued that all discontent between the West and the federal government is based on specific policy decisions the West disagrees with. An analysis of recent media confirms numerous examples of federal policies and issues finding poor support or strong opposition in the West. Federal spending is a perennial issue, be it a lack of spending in key areas such as transportation infrastructure, health care, or industry subsidies (such as farming in Saskatchewan or cattle ranching in Alberta), or too much spending in areas considered wasteful such as a selective business subsidies, regional development schemes or simply politically unpopular programs (for example, the national gun registry). Decisions impacting provincial resources and revenues – like oil and gas in Alberta, forestry in British Columbia, and the federal ratification of the Kyoto protocol generally – remain highly controversial and symbolic among western provinces. Equalization between “have” and “have-not” provinces often leads to conflicts, as do any changes in economic policy that affect the West (including interest rates, trade policy, or merely federal surplus allocation). Even small issues such as federal rules around public service activities, patronage appointments, or official bilingualism have raised western ire. In February 2000, a Task Force struck by Prime Minister Chretien and chaired by Manitoban Liberal MP John Harvard to explore issues of concern for the West released a report outlining no less than 75 individual policy recommendations ranging from agricultural policy to homelessness to sport – all under the auspices of acknowledging “a preoccupation with fairness and equitable treatment”

(2000: 3). All of these recommendations represented policy responses to the substantial disconnect between the West and the federal government that have all, to some extent, contributed to larger feelings of malaise and neglect across those four provinces.

Yet as Stephane Dion framed it to a University of Regina audience, “Simply put, the heart of the problem is not policy or money, but the lack of respect” (2001). While many polities experience policy conflicts, not all experience such strong regional alienation as a result. According to Elton and Gibbins, this is because these issues represent more than just immediate policy to the West:

Although western alienation has its roots in agrarian society that has by and large disappeared, the economic, political and partisan unrest of the past is sustained by contemporary grievances, some of which reach back into the past and some of which are more recent in origin. (1992: 263)

The issues of today act as reminders of a long legacy of unrest for the West – symptoms of deeper, more historically significant causes. Gibbins and Arrison break these deeper causes of western alienation down into three dovetailing “discontents” (1995: 34). The first is *economic discontent*, which argues that the national economy has been historically oriented primarily to central Canada’s advantage, while providing very little return to West. While other studies have covered this pattern more exhaustively, Gibbins and Arrison draw particular attention to Macdonald’s National Policy, discriminatory freight rates, the National Energy Program, historical federal spending and investment patterns, and national debt and deficit management as examples of national policies that have favoured central Canada while relegating the West to the “periphery” of the national economy. At this periphery, the West sees its resources and potential plundered for the national benefit (1995: 25). Whether or not this perceived imbalance in economic clout is

legitimate is ultimately immaterial; in the opinion of these authors, “the reality of this complaint ... is etched indelibly on the regional political culture” (1995: 25).

This feeds directly into the second discontent, *political discontent* – the feeling of being left out of the larger frameworks of political decision-making and the mechanisms of political accountability. By the nature of the party system, the electoral system, and population distribution, coupled with the practices of responsible government, western Canadians are assured that most representatives come from central Canada and that the interests of the resulting government will undoubtedly reflect the interests of that majority. Gibbins and Arrison draw attention to the presence of party discipline in the House of Commons, which makes it difficult for western MPs to defend regional interests, and to the practices of cabinet secrecy and solidarity, which bury regional advocacy behind the cabinet walls (issues this study will develop in greater detail later). By having the voices of the West virtually subsumed, the national political system has a diminishing relevance as a positive force for western Canadians. As Gibbins notes, these institutional flaws have a direct impact on economic policy decisions that ultimately “drive Canadians apart as much as it pulls them together” (1982: 192).

From these economic and political discontents, the *cultural discontent* within western alienation and a western myth is born. As Gibbins and Arrison conclude:

Once the economic and political grievances surrounding western discontent have been cleared away, there is a residual sense of alienation that can best be described as cultural. In some important way, Western Canadians see themselves as different from those who live outside the region. (1995: 34)

These cultural tensions reinforce the tangible discontents of economics and politics, transforming perceived injustices into a logical rationale for feelings of difference and distance from the rest of Canada. Western alienation amplifies general discontents with

frustrated regional interests and aspirations to drive a wedge between western Canadians and those in the rest of Canada. Yet, as already speculated, this wedge also represents a profound cultural desire to reintegrate into the Canadian political mainstream. For example, despite finding numerous disenchantments with Canadian politics, Howe and Northrup's survey also found that 71 percent of respondents were very or fairly satisfied "with the way that democracy works in Canada" (2002: 6). They therefore concluded that the true political disaffection was really with "government responsiveness," not with a more generalized democratic alienation (2002: 44). Folding this conclusion into Gibbins and Arrison's "discontents", the negative characteristics of western alienation found within the western myth – while definitely expressed through issues, economics and politics – may have more fundamental foundations in a perceived lack of accountability and effectiveness in the federal government. Put another way, the common cause of this myth may be a profound lack of *efficacy* on the part of western Canadians, an inability to control their own political, economic and historical development, and to understand themselves and their regional identity within the nation. Policy decisions, exclusionary decision-making and historical grievance may not be the core causes of the alienated and incomplete western identity, but merely the symptoms of a reoccurring syndrome.

What does a lack of efficacy look like in the western Canadian context? The development of protest parties in the West, through its themes of rejection and populism, can once again provide a strong illustration. The rejection theme was earlier referred to as the rebuff of traditional parties and their practices. Yet it is also about the denunciation of traditional power structures in favour of new channels of influence. As Young explains, historically it was this feeling of rejection coupled with "the insensitivity of the political

system [that] brought about the welding together of a fragmentary dissent to form a concerted demand for reform that was heard and could not be ignored” (1969: 111). The theme of populism, through its appeals to the grassroots population (“the people”) to overcome elite domination and take control of the formal structures of authority, provides the means by which to replace these power structures. As Harry Boyte describes,

Populism is a language of inheritance. It grows from a sense of sense of aggrieved “peoplehood,” as distinct from personhood. It emerges from the conviction that an elite has dishonoured an historically, culturally, or geographically constituted people, its memories, origins, common territory, ways of life. Thus there is a certain class feeling in populism – the belief that common people are mistreated by the powerful. (1986: 8)

For Boyte, populism is a conceptualization of a power struggle between “the common people” and the elite figures of society. It provides the channels of influence and efficacy, or at least the means to establish those channels, upon which the rejection theme is based. Populism is a mild form of revolution, as it aims at reversing the power structure to favour society’s largely disadvantaged groups. David Layock integrates this approach to populism with his study of the Canadian prairie politics to conclude that, “popular democratic thought and its practical expression, populist political action, are patterns of recognition and critique of existing social distributions of power” (1990: 294-295).

Through these demonstrations, efficacy within the West is perhaps most clearly understood as an issue of power relations. Just as populism and rejection are both at source concerned with the distribution of power within a society, so too is the western myth that these themes politicize and the alienation that sustains this myth is really a story of imbalances of power and authority within the Canadian federation. It is from this want of power that alienation’s want of involvement and inclusion is derived, and when these wants are frustrated disaffection ultimately arises. Alienated westerners want to see greater power and efficacy in their hands to control their political development and

national evolution, and pursue the inclusion that can outweigh its prevailing discontent. When the “West Wants In,” what it wants “in” to is the political power structure. Acts of rejection and populism are committed to jointly confront these frustrations and provide this power. The story of western alienation is really the story of denied empowerment.

Power relations and efficacy in this context are both more simply described as a want of balance. What the West is really disaffected by is not a net deficit of political power for the West, but a relative deficit or an *imbalance* of power between itself and the rest of Canada. This imbalance is primarily exacerbated by an extreme centralization of power in the Canadian political system whereby, all decision-making influence over national policies and development are made solely within the insulated “centre” of the federal government. Donald Savoie refers to this phenomenon as “court government” (1999: 635), arguing that mechanisms that once incorporated regional interests into Canada’s national power structure (for example, Parliament itself) have been deliberately reshaped to only direct this power towards the upper echelons of the federal government (primarily, the Prime Minister). Savoie concludes, “the prime minister’s court dominates the policy agenda and permeates government decision making to such an extent that it is only willing to trust itself to overseeing the management of important issues” (1999: 663). This centralization has significantly compromised the ability of the West to find balance, efficacy or inclusion within national power structure to ensure that decisions reflect the best interests of that region. Regional discontent and frustration consequently emerge. Herein lie the most basic causes of western alienation (in today’s negative and isolationist forms), and the basis for the myth that emerges from it.

While Savoie's analysis is primarily institutional, his theory is also grounded in an acknowledgment that there has been a fundamental failure within federalism itself. This conclusion is best explained by looking at what federalism represents not only as an operational or organizing principle within Canada, but as an ideology for reconciling disparate and multiple identities. Richard Simeon and Katherine Swinton argue that, "federalism is at once a set of institutions ... and a set of ideas which underpin such institutions" (1995: 3). In principle, federalism ensures a balance between the desire for unity within a nation and the desire for diversity through the empowerment of that nation's multiple groups, including regions, and by bridging competing but potentially complementary understandings of spatial identity. The federal system is about finding equilibrium within the power structure, providing what Simeon and Swinton call, "some antidote to the pathologies of centralization and to the risks faced by small, perhaps vulnerable, individual nations" (1995: 6). A truly balanced federal state is not a fixed entity; there must be a fluid and dynamic process in place to continually renegotiate this equilibrium, and shift the balance appropriately as the cycles rise and fall, and as the demands of various identities fluctuate. As Donald Smiley notes, it is the ability to constantly adjust this balance that is essential to strike a lasting "consensus between differentiated communities" (1977: 368) upon which a federal system is predicated.

These observations are particularly relevant when discussing the West in Canada. Federalism in this country has become what Gibbins calls "a moral framework for Canadian life" (1999: 200), whereby economic, cultural, and social balances are key to true political consistency for Canadians. At the heart of the Canadian federal structure is this ability to find a fair balance between segmental and regional interests against the

national interest. When this ability is undermined, federalism is not working effectively. When power is centralized in the federal government and regions become alienated and excluded from defining this role, federalism is not working. A lack of balance in the federal system is a dysfunction of that system, and the frustration of inclusion, the multiple discontents, the lack of efficacy, and the imbalance and centralization of political power are all sourced and institutionalized from and within this dysfunction. It is from these causes that western alienation is borne, and the western myth is given its story of limited inclusion and frustrated potential. Conversely, it may be through the remedy of this dysfunction that a path towards a more positive, inclusive and expansive western identity can be found. However, the means by which to bring more balance to the dual tendencies of western alienation as the new narrative of the western myth, will require deeper enquiry.

Conclusion

Western alienation informs the narrative myth that constructs the western identity as it is understood today. It is the story and the energy that binds the western region together. Yet because of western alienation's inherently dual nature – which it offsets deep feelings of rejection with those of desired inclusion – it is also possible to envision the potential for a stronger, more positive sense of western identity within the scope of that myth. Rooted in frustrated power relations, the negative characteristics of western alienation are at root a product of the failure of federalism in Canada to adequately balance the needs of regional identity against and within the national interest. Embodying the seemingly paradoxical characteristics of extreme political disaffection and discontent

on one side, and strong desires for national inclusiveness on the other, this western myth finds its causes in a legacy of frustrated ambitions and systemic exclusion that drives it to retreat into a regional identity that is increasingly insular and antagonistic. Because of this alienation, the western “self” remains unnecessarily distant and insulated from the potentials and opportunities concordant with a positive and integrative relationship as a strong region within, disengaged from, the rest of Canada.

As a January 31, 2001 *Montreal Gazette* editorial put it, “a federation is more than a cheque-book and western alienation would diminish if Westerners felt they had a real voice in determining national policies” (2001). The pursuit of *voice* strikes at the core of the themes of failed federalism and central power domination in Canada. It encapsulates the desire for meaningful participation in government processes, efficacy and accountability to rebalance influence within the federation. As Elkins observes,

We must constantly remind ourselves that alienation and allegiance can be found in the same person, and that allegiance and discontent may reflect a reasoned posture and a balanced assessment of political objects. (1982: 37)

Acts of antagonism, isolationism, or deep-seated disaffection that spring from the alienated western identity also share the common pursuit of stronger inclusion within the federation. And for that reason, there is also new opportunity and potential for the West.

But how is this voice of inclusion attained within a power system that is imbalanced and centralized? Donald Savoie, in his analysis of the broad power relations between the powerful “centre” the federal government and the rest of Canada’s political actors, speculates that this shift in power raises questions about “the fundamental machinery of government” (1999b: 46). He sees strong connections between power imbalances and the way that the processes and tools of Canada’s political system operate within and between governments. In Savoie’s estimation, these institutions represent the

fundamental machinery of efficacy in Canada that, when broken down, feeds the negative aspects of western alienation and regional identity. They thus become the instruments of exclusion. Yet when working correctly, these institutions should and can maintain the appropriate balance of power in the federation, reversing this trend of centralization and becoming the instruments of inclusion. In other words, from within the jaws of our problem of the West, so too might a solution be found. The next chapter will examine more closely this 'machinery' in light of conclusions regarding frustration, inefficacy and failed federalism within the larger story of western myth and identity. This will help in not only establishing a better understanding how this machinery represents, reflects and reproduces the complex power relations that characterize Canada and the West, but also the conditions under which this machinery could actually remedy this power imbalance.

Chapter Three

Executive Power, Regional Voice, and Limitations to Institutional Reform

In *The West in Canada: An Action Plan to Address Western Discontent*, Roger Gibbins and Robert Roach aptly summarize the issues of western identity, alienation and myth explored over the last two chapters:

[T]here is a deep-seated belief among western Canadians that when it comes to their interests and aspirations, the Government of Canada doesn't listen, doesn't understand, and doesn't care. As a consequence, the relationship is marked by suspicion and acrimony, and by national policies that often fail to account for the unique character of western Canada. It is a relationship that needs to be fixed. (2003: 1)

As the last chapter concluded, the primary cause of western alienation and acrimony was the centralization of power within the Canadian political system. By denying the West meaningful inclusion within national decision-making, this centralization constitutes a fundamental failure in the workings of federalism by failing to support a fair balance of political power. Gibbins and Roach also conclude that, “the essence of the solution [to western alienation] must be found in strengthening the West’s voice in national political life” (2003: 4). This voice is essential to the expression of inclusiveness in the federal balance of interests and the active embodiment of the political power. It is what is so strongly lacking in the West today, and what has mythologized the western identity as one of acrimony, insularity and disaffection from the rest of Canada.

This chapter will look at how this voice is suppressed, and more importantly, how it can be regained by the region, mainly through changes to what Savoie calls the “fundamental machinery of government” (1999b: 46). This chapter will argue that the growing over-centralization of political power in Canada is directly related to the failure of federalism’s parliamentary institutions that were originally intended to limit

centralization and permit regional voice within national government by looking at the relationship both as a challenge for the West, but also as a source of potential solutions. This study will first look at the growth in power of the political executive in Canada (in particular, the power of the Prime Minister) and how that growth has compromised the ability of Canada's central institutions, mainly those of Parliament, to adequately represent regional voice to and within national government. This study will then look at oft-cited proposals to reform these institutions as a means of returning efficacy to the West. While there is clearly a relationship between the failure of institutions and the failure of inclusion for the West, reform of these institutions alone represents an important yet incomplete solution to the attainment of an uninhibited voice and positive national inclusion for the western myth and its identity beyond alienation.

Institutions, Centralization, and the Failure of Parliament

Simeon and Swinton argued that Canadian federalism represented both a set of ideas and institutions. While acknowledging that institutions rise to reflect social, political and cultural norms, some argue that institutions also shape those norms. James March and Johan Olsen argue that institutions are "more than simple mirrors of social forces" (1983: 739). They also mold cultural values and dictate how those values manifest in human activity within space. This theory of *new institutionalism* further argues that institutions are formative actors in themselves. As March and Olsen explain further:

Political democracy depends not only on economic and social conditions but also on the design of political institutions. The bureaucratic agency, the legislative committee, and the appellate court are arenas for contending social forces, but they are also collections of standard operating procedures and structures and define and defend interests. They are political actors in their own right. (1983: 738)

By this theory, while culture may begin as an intrinsic and myth-like concept, it soon becomes a product of the institutional “machinery” that society structures itself around. As Winston Churchill once prophetically noted, “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us” (Franks, 1987: 145). In the Canadian context, Simeon concludes that “we institutionalize the regional dimension” (1977: 292) through our basic structures and processes of political interaction and behaviour. Savoie similarly acknowledges, “the role of political institutions in accommodating or integrating the forces of regionalism” (2000: 204), but further sources this regional fragmentation and insularity in national institutions that “have not been very effective in checking the concentration of political power at the centre or to voice regional concerns” (2000: 209). Institutions are therefore seen as causes of this regional culture, not just responses to it. They have exacerbated, not remedied, regional fragmentation and power concentration. Gibbins concludes that, “the major incentives and opportunities for territorial politics, as well as the major disincentives and obstacles, are to be found within the political system itself” (1982: 5).

The relationship between centralizing institutions and the problems of regional alienation has not been lost on observers in the West. Gibbins and Arrison note, “Western Canadians have come to the conclusion that the problem is deeply embedded within the political regime and the nature of Canadian parliamentary government” (1995: 85). This “nature” refers to the institutional operations of the federation that are seen to bolster the interests of central Canada. Cairns likewise concludes that,

[A] combination of political practice and institutional pressures at the central government level has produced a federal government out of touch with the prevailing regionalism of Canada, and is consequently politically and administratively insensitive to the territorial diversities its policies encounter. (1979: 9)

Institutions that should form the operational framework of federalism itself have instead only stimulated the imbalances that negatively reinforce western alienation. While these conclusions all link institutions to centralization, opinions vary about which institutions are most responsible for creating this failure, and which may be most appropriate for a remedy to these developments.

The preamble to the British North America (BNA) Act of 1867 (since renamed the Constitution Act) bestows upon Canada “a Constitution similar in Principle to that of the United Kingdom” that will be “federally united into One Dominion,” yet will also “conduce to the Welfare of the Provinces.” The Westminster parliamentary model and the institutions borne from it were intended to be not only the primary unifying forces, but also conduits to negotiate competing segmental interests as the most basic interactions of federalism. These mixed objectives have resulted in two main “tracks” of institutional development and usage in Canada. The first track is predicated on the explicit division of constitutional powers between the national government and provincial governments (laid out in sections 91 and 92 of the Act). K.C. Wheare states that a formally functioning federal arrangement depends upon “the general and the regional governments being co-ordinate and independent in their respective spheres” (1963:5). Yet in practice, these bodies require a level of *interdependence* and coordination alongside this autonomy, which Simeon deems necessary given that “demands from citizens do not necessarily respect constitutional lines of authority” (1972: 5). Federal and provincial governments have therefore created practices of *intergovernmental relations* (IGR) to assist this interaction. The most well-known practice is the federal-provincial conference, which provides “a forum where the principals meet with the principals [of

each government] to influence, bargain with, and persuade each other” (Simeon, 1972: 132). The First Ministers’ Conference between Premiers and the Prime Minister is the most significant conference, as it tries to accommodate the independent and interdependent elements of the federal relationship towards the collaborative creation of national policy. When interests are appropriately grouped, these and other practices of IGR can be useful in enhancing western voice.

The second institutional track approaches federalism as an internal rather than external power brokerage, as a power negotiation *within* the national government itself. This track emphasizes one institution in particular: the Parliament of Canada. Michael Atkinson and David Docherty argue that Parliament (primarily through the House of Commons, but also through the executive branch of Cabinet, and the Senate) is the most significant set of institutions within the federal government and the fundamental machinery of power inclusion for Canada’s voices within the central government:

Parliament is the centre of government in Canada It is in the legislative arena that policy is defended, successes celebrated, and failures dramatized. It is here that governments are tested, and here, in Parliament, where the pathologies of public policy are diagnosed. (2000: 5).

What makes the role of Parliament so fundamental? C.E.S. Franks explains the traditional purposes of Parliament as four essential functions – to form legitimate government, to give government authority, to act as a watchdog, and to enable alternative governments to be formed (1987: 4-5). All of these functions contribute to Parliament’s most essential purpose – to act as “the main forum for mobilizing consent” amongst legislators and citizens (1987: 217) – creating a “process of contest and confrontation [within parliamentary debate that] should ensure that the government, to overcome and forestall criticism, produce policies that have the widest possible acceptance” (1987: 15). Savoie

further argues that beyond mobilizing consent in government, Parliament is also a body capable of laying “constraints” on government (1999b: 87), be it through the ability to command the government’s time and resources in debates, committees or Question Period, or simply by raising the awareness of the government’s action in to public and the media. Through the practices of *consensus* or *constraint*, Parliament can provide the best internal means to ensure that regional issues are treated fairly and inclusively.

The successful operation of Parliament and these mechanisms of consensus and constraint primarily depend upon the abilities of its core actors – the elected representatives in the House of Commons (the Members of Parliament, or MPs), the members of Cabinet, and the appointed Senators. It is through these actors’ capacity to debate, deliberate, and discern government policies that a diversity of positions can be expressed at the national level. MPs as a group can create regional blocs and positions to move regional interests forward. Senators and Cabinet ministers appointed from specific regions of the country can also exercise these regional expressions. Through these actors, constraints are placed upon government and consent can be mobilized. A balance of power can be negotiated, making Parliament one of the best mechanisms to promote fair federalism in Canada and *responsiveness* to regional demands.

Yet experience shows that theory and practice can be dramatically different. Savoie notes that currently, “The power, influence and even the relevance of Parliament are under threat ... [and] Parliament is increasingly failing to hold the government to account” (1999b: 339). While the theory of Parliament is indeed one of constraint, consensus, and regional voice, the natural gravitation of this institution has been towards power centralization and regional marginalization. Franks says this is because, despite

regional actors providing both consensus and constraint to government action, “the structure of power in Canada is executive-centred” (1987: 21). He further notes that,

Executive-centredness leads to difficulties in building consent. Policy-making is in private, below the level of public visibility, and often policies, when they emerge, are sprung full-blown on a surprised, unsuspecting, and sometimes non-too-pleased public Executive-centred policy-making does not lead to the mobilization of consent while policies are being developed. Parliament is unimportant. It ratifies and authorizes decisions worked out elsewhere. (1987: 215)

Peter Hogg argues that this executive-centredness is not an institutional anomaly, but a by-product of one of Canadian federalism’s basic conventions—*responsible government*:

In a system of “responsible government” (or cabinet or parliamentary government, as it may also be called) the formal head of state whether King (or Queen), Governor General or Lieutenant Governor, must always act under the “advice” (meaning direction) of ministers who are members of the legislative branch and who enjoy the confidence of the majority in the elected house of the legislative branch. (1996: 223)

Ronald Cheffins and Patricia Johnson conclude that, as a result of this convention, real political power, influence and efficacy has “shifted inexorably in the direction of first the cabinet and, increasingly in recent years, the first minister” (1997: 77).

As the executive branch and de facto “centre” of parliamentary government, traditionally the Cabinet system was intended to advance efficient decision-making and strong leadership. As Franks notes:

Parliamentary cabinet government is a system of concentrated power and authority in which prime minister and cabinet control the executive and lead parliament. The parliamentary-cabinet system, according to Bagehot, ‘is framed on the principle of choosing a single sovereign authority, and making it good; the American [system is based] upon the principle of having many sovereign authorities, and hoping that their multitude may atone for their inferiority.’ Ours is not a system of checks and balances, but of fused, concentrated, centralized power. (1987: 265)

Cabinet and its ministers are responsible for planning and making policies, preparing and steering legislation, passing and enforcing regulations, raising and allocating revenues, designing budgets, overseeing administration, directing the public services, making appointments to significant agencies, boards or commissions, overseeing public contracts, and many other important institutional operations. The House of Commons and the

Senate have a role in approving some of these actions, but without question the Cabinet holds very significant levers of government power and concentrated political influence.

Yet this concentration of power in Cabinet over and above Parliament does not in itself necessarily lead to adverse impacts on regional voice. An important corollary to responsible government is that Ministers are almost always drawn from the legislative branch, theoretically mitigating any actions that Cabinet may take at that branch's expense. Further, Ministers must maintain the *confidence* of that branch in their decision-making; if that confidence is lost, the Governor General may dissolve government. Traditionally, to ensure that confidence was maintained on a regional level, Cabinets would be comprised of MPs and Senators from specific regions, representing their regional interests to the government executive just as they did within Parliament at large. As Michael Whittington observes, this system, "forces the executive to seek compromise and accommodation among competing views and allows the government to minimize the number of "losers" when policy decision are taken" (2000: 53). In principle, regional ministers would make the executive branch effectively embrace the same disciplines of constraint and consensus as Parliament itself. This brokerage could provide strong voice to regions and an effective balance of power while maintaining decisive sovereign authority. Whittington calls this "the genius of cabinet government" (2000: 53).

Historically, this "federalized" (Savoie, 1999b: 48) approach to Cabinet design endeavored to live up to the ideal of regional brokerage. Herman Bakvis refers to John A. Macdonald's inaugural cabinet as "a chamber of political compensation where the provincial spokesmen traded their support for national policies in return for concession to their region" (1991: 16-17). Yet Cairns argues that this brokerage has receded over time:

Early Cabinets were collections of regional notables with independent bases of their own who powerfully asserted the needs of their provinces at the highest political level in the land Now, however, regional spokesmen of such power and authenticity are only memories. Although the regional basis of appointment continues, the regional power brokers are gone. (1979: 6)

While the regional voices should be present in principle, in tradition, and by convention, today the ability of regions to influence the decision-making ability of “the centre” has been constrained within Cabinet just as it has been within the rest of Parliament. As Franks concludes, “Cabinet has now joined Parliament as an institution being bypassed” (1987: 362). Today, the focus of power in the parliamentary system rests solely with the Prime Minister. Savoie describes this ultra-centralized power:

[M]uch of the centre of government belongs to the prime minister and not to ministers, either collectively or as individuals The strengthening of the centre of government has not, as was initially envisaged, strengthened the collective decision-making capacity of Cabinet by acting as a counterweight to the line ministers and powerful mandarins in line departments. Rather, it has weakened both Cabinet and line ministers and their departments. On the other hand, the power and influence of the prime minister and his advisers – both partisan and permanent officials in central agencies – has in turn been considerably strengthened. (1999b: 338)

Prime Ministers have gained this advantaged position over the rest of the executive system due to the complete freedom to “add, delete, and adjust the machinery of government at any time and as they see fit” (1999b: 43). For example (and this is far from an exhaustive list), the Prime Minister: controls all senior political and bureaucratic positions; is the functional representative of the Queen for most constitutional authority; fully dominates the government agenda and policy development, including the Throne Speech and Budget; exercises all tools of patronage; represents Canada abroad; determines the scope and influence of all ministers and departments; and, perhaps most importantly, controls all the little perks and punishments that parliamentary players are potentially heir to. Through the Prime Minister’s Office and the Privy Council Office (both controlled by the Prime Minister), all the political and public service decision-

making machinery becomes focused on “the partisan and personal interests of the political leadership which happens to be in office” (1999b: 336). As Savoie concludes:

Prime ministers have become much more than spokespersons for their Cabinets. They are the focal point of the government and the administration and they clearly dominate inside government. They provide the leadership, the style, and the coherence of the government and the ebb and flow of the fortunes of the government are directly linked to their performance. (1999b: 71)

For these reasons, few would dispute that institutions make the Prime Minister the real “centre” of power in Canada. Says Jeffrey Simpson, “the prime minister is the Sun King around whom all revolves and to whom all must pay varying forms of tribute” (2001: 4).

The effect of this power shift on regional influence has been profoundly negative. Although Whittington correctly notes that “executive decisions are [still] formulated and tempered within the crucible of the Cabinet chamber” (2000: 33), and thus with some accountability to both Cabinet and the rest of Parliament, Franks more realistically observes, “the minister’s ultimate accountability is not to Parliament but to the prime minister who appoints and dismisses him” (1987: 232). Cabinet and Parliament no longer represent the influential machinery of government; their beholden relationship to the Prime Minister overrules any advocacy for regional voice or inclusion that could transpire. As Simpson concludes, “prime-ministerial power is now more centralized than ever, and the centralization is increasingly out-of-step with the operating practices of other major institutions, the needs of modern government, and the expectations of citizens” (2001: 62). These dashed expectations coupled with unmet regional ambitions make the connection between this narrow power centralization and the negative identity of western alienation patently clear.

Given the limitations on Cabinet to represent regional voice in the face of overt domination of the Prime Minister, the capacity of Parliament to mobilize the consent or

constraint of its representatives and to provide an effective check on executive power becomes even more important, yet more problematic. As Roman March explains, in reference to the House of Commons,

[W]e wish to think that in electing our Member of Parliament we have given him responsible power over our lives. But it may be that this power is a myth and our simple, human desire to be well ruled by those to whom we have entrusted power is not being carried out. (1974: 2)

Cabinet, no longer compelled to ensure a role for regional voice within the House of Commons, often changes practices within the House to dissuade constructive parliamentary activity. The use of closure on debates is but an example. While debate is considered one of the fundamental precepts of consensus-seeking within Parliament, the Liberal government in Ottawa, between its assumption of office in 1993 and December 2001, prematurely cut off debate on over 70 bills in the House of Commons (Coyne, 2001: A22). While a case can be made for closure for a number of reasons by any government, this frequency has never been justified nor does it have historical precedent. The action is clearly a purposeful circumscription of Parliament's basic purview that denies the MP opportunities to participate in national policy-development, making Parliament virtually irrelevant as a mechanism for representing regional interests.

Parliament offers one other option for consensus and constraint that has not yet been addressed, the Senate. As Hogg explains, "The Senate was intended to serve as a protector of regional interests, which is a traditional function of the upper house in federal systems" (1996: 235). It gives decisions of the House of Commons and Cabinet a sober second look, purportedly with a focus on regional interests. Gil Remillard and Andrew Turner describe the Senate's function as "counterbalancing the dominance of the more populous regions in the House of Commons by giving the regions an equal voice in

the Senate” (2003:106). However, because the Prime Minister appoints senators, and because they fall outside the practices of responsible government, senators have effectively become direct delegates of the leader rather than the regional interest. As Franks notes, “Whatever lack of legitimacy the Senate has because its members are appointed is compounded by the partisan and often unimpressive motivation in appointment” (1982: 187). Accordingly, Ronald Watts concludes that,

[T]he Canadian Senate, despite its formally strong constitutional powers and relative effectiveness in legislative review and the performance of other functions, is in comparative terms among federal second chambers the weakest in representing regional interests. (2003: 101)

Simpson’s assessment of these shortcomings is much more direct, calling today’s Senate, “an affront to federalism and democracy” (2001: 223). The Senate has become institutional proof of centralized power rather than a bulwark against it. Proposals to reform the Senate (such as the “Triple E” model proposed under the Charlottetown Accord whereby senators are “equal, elected, and effective”) continue to be mired in either constitutional deadlock or diminishing political interest. Remillard sees change only occurring “by means of a constitutional amendment and a full revision of the operation not only of the Senate, but of the government as a whole” (2003: 121). Like the House of Commons or Cabinet, the Senate today remains inadequate to fulfill its intended role as an equalizer for regions, instead only reinforcing the Prime Minister’s central power. R. MacGregor Dawson’s analysis concludes that the Senate “is never mentioned without the question of abolition or reform being at once raised, for virtually no one has any desire to maintain it in its present unsatisfactory condition” (1970: 300).

The limited ability of all of these elements of Parliament to advance regional interests – the Senate, the House of Commons, and the Cabinet – all indicate a strong

connection between Canada's centralizing trends and institutions, and the growth in disaffection and negative western identity. According to Savoie, the result of this leader-centred system "is that national policy-making has made Ontario and Quebec interests its principal focus" (2000: 209) at the expense of the West and other regions. The already-cited example of this is the National Energy Program of 1980 that was driven through Parliament despite fierce opposition from Alberta and other western representatives. Another example is the 1986 federal decision to award a CF-18 maintenance contract to Canadair in Montreal despite an internal review confirming that a superior bid had been received from Manitoba's Bristol group. More recently, the advancement of the Kyoto protocol, the national gun registry, and policies impacting resource development have all been cited as examples of decisions made through Parliament despite concerted regional objections within Parliament. Through examples such as these, Parliament has clearly become a central focus of the West's most negative feelings towards Canada's "centre".

This inability to influence national decisions has created a sense of irrelevance and cynicism on the part of all citizens and regions towards Parliament. Simpson characterizes Parliament today as "an institution of national ridicule" (2001: xii). Michael Bliss similarly observes that "the national institutions of Canada are corroding and Canadians know it" (2001: A14). Yet Atkinson and Docherty argue that despite deep cynicism around Parliament's performance, "the system was created to work" (2000: 6). In other words, the impacts seen today are only a result of the system *not* working. This idea that an unimpeded or reshaped Parliament could reverse these power trends has spurred various efforts towards *parliamentary reform*. To Franks, parliamentary reform contemplates changes that "deal exclusively with creating more, and competing, channels

for influencing key issues at the national level” (1999: 32). By reforming institutions to improve channels of influence and responsiveness for the elected Members of Parliament, Cabinet Ministers, and even Senators instead of the Prime Minister-centred executive, Parliament can once again become the focus of significant decision-making and regional voice can once again have an inclusive role. As Franks explains, institutional changes create a springboard for new ways of conceptualizing and shaping Canadian government:

[R]eform of parliament is not simply a technical matter of making parliament more effective and efficient, although it is often presented in those terms. Reform is also a question of the purposes for which political power is to be used in Canada and how various interests and viewpoints succeed or fail to influence political choices and outcomes (1987: 6)

For the “purposes” of empowering the West, parliamentary reform may fit the bill. Gibbins and Arrison argue that moving beyond western alienation must involve “a search for an institutional framework more in tune with regional values and aspirations” (1995: 86) that allows for inclusion, voice, and an end to the discontented identity that the myth constructs. To put it simply: fix the parliamentary institutions, and in turn, fix federalism. Gibbins argues that “Canadians must come to believe that only institutional reform offers a solution to regional discontent – that a solution is not to be found in a new leader, a new party, or a new government” (1994: 198). But is reform in and of itself enough to meet the challenges of the West? The next section will examine what reform really means, what it might look like for the West, and seek clues as to why it remains such a challenging solution for a regional identity in search of its own national vision.

Intrastate Parliamentary Reform: New Rules, Old Game

Franks observes that “the rhetoric of reform argues for a parliament-centred structure of power; the reality of Canadian politics is an executive-centred system” (1987: 6). Moving reality closer to that rhetoric requires more than just structural changes to

Parliament and its particular institutions. As March and Olsen argued earlier, institutional change must stimulate a significant cultural renewal in Parliament and central government that not only targets the structure, but also the actors and behaviours within. In this regard, Cairns offers one potential framework that can help frame institutional parliamentary reform and culture change. Drawing upon the theories of Karl Lowenstein, Cairns begins with two approaches to federalism to which reform could be applied: *interstate* and *intrastate federalism*. These models parallel the two institutional “tracks” of federalism discussed earlier – the former paralleling intergovernmental relations, the latter reflecting the internal workings of Parliament and central institutions. Because it is predicated on the constitutionally entrenched division of federal-provincial powers and difficult to alter (as demonstrated by the failed Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords), Cairns argues that there are substantial limits to the reform of the interstate approach. Therefore, it is not an approach that he favours to transform Ottawa “into a more effective outlet for territorial particularisms” (1979: 11). Instead, he advocates that this goal can be best achieved through his second framework – intrastate federalism.

Through the intrastate model, “territorial particularisms are given an outlet not only by the control of a government at the state or provincial level, but also in the key policy-making institutions of the central government” (1979: 4). Primarily, these “outlets” would refer to the direct operations of Parliament itself, including the conduct of legislative business, the management of time and schedules within Parliament, or the ways in which Parliament is convened and conducted. Specific examples may include calls for “free votes” in the House, greater and more independent committee discretion and review of government initiatives, changes to Question Period and debate protocol,

more options for non-government legislation, and more predictable House scheduling like fixed days and times for sittings. Intrastate reform also extends to the Senate (such as the “Triple E” reform proposal), the Cabinet (through proposals like the “election” of Ministers by party caucuses), and the composition of the federal public service. Intrastate reforms even touch upon mechanisms feeding into central government – the behaviour of advocacy streams, political party operations, or the electoral system. Cairns concludes that with some or all of these intrastate reforms, “territorial particularisms,” lost due to the prime-ministerial dominance of Parliament, can be regained, and healthy tensions of constraint and consensus can be restored to Parliament’s branches:

[G]overnment will not be viewed as a government for the resolution of problems for which regional inputs are irrelevant, nor as an instrument for expressing and fulfilling a set of national aspirations clearly differentiated from the more localized goals of the lesser communities and their government. Instead, it will tend to be viewed as an arena for the open clash of regional interests and their attempted harmonization within central institutions. (1979: 4)

By reforming central institutions, a more balanced version of intrastate federalism can evolve, increasing the power base of regions within the political system and curbing the “decline in the legitimacy and effectiveness of the central government” (1979: 2).

Calls and proposals for parliamentary reform to remedy these regional and institutional failings have exhaustively emerged from various sources – political parties, different levels of government, academics and interested observers. Recently, the Canada West Foundation’s *Action Plan to Address Western Discontent* includes a number of intrastate reform recommendations to benefit the West, including: the introduction of free votes in the House of Commons; reform of the Senate (both operation and appointment); seat redistribution within the House; analysis of the regional composition of central federal agencies and program expenditures, and new organizations to enhance regional input into economic decision-making (Gibbins and Roach, 2003: 2). As another example,

Robert Fife from the *National Post*, after interviewing numerous political scientists, put forward a short but comprehensive consensus of proposals for reform, including the empowerment of parliamentary committees, enhanced private member review of draft legislation, Senate reform, free votes, and greater permissions around private members' bills in the House (2001: A10). These are not new ideas; both proposals build from reform proposals that have been advocated and borrowed in the past.

There is also strong support among the public for intrastate reforms, particularly in the West. An April 2001 survey by the Centre of Research and Information on Canada asked western Canadians about changes they most wanted to see in government. Among other changes, 60 percent of Westerners surveyed cited Senate reform, and 55 percent cited changing House of Commons rules to allow more "free votes" from MPs, as desired changes to the parliamentary system (2001: 8). The Canada West Foundation's *Looking West* survey similarly found that 83.9 percent of Westerners supported Senate reform, 71.6 percent supported electoral reform through proportional representation, and 69 percent supported citizen initiated binding referendums (Berdahl, 2001: 8-9). Even parliamentary representatives agree on a need for institutional reform. Former MP David Docherty's 1996 survey of past and present MPs found 85 percent favoured more free votes (1997: 161). Peter Dobell found like support for committee reforms among MPs, including 90 percent who favoured greater stability in membership and chairmanship (2000: 9) and 76 percent who supported opposition chairpersonship (2000: 27) of committees – both to ensure a more comprehensive review of government initiatives.

Despite overwhelming support for some method of reform, consensus on how to approach reform, and which reforms to specifically pursue, is much more difficult to

ascertain. Franks observes that while everyone agrees on the need for reform, a “general paralysis over reform prevents change” (1999: 5). Some reform experiments have failed due to larger complications – for example, Charlottetown Accord proposals around Senate reform failed in part because they fell into the realm of complex constitutional reconstruction. But in many other cases, and much to the frustration of advocates, the reasons for failure or lack of progress on institutional reform remain unexplained. Many equate this lack of progress with a lack of a sound “plan” for reform. Yet proposals on this subject are extensive, including those specifically tailored to advance western interests in Parliament (the studies by Gibbins and Arrison, Franks, and Gibbins and Roach are but a few examples). Most proposals borrow from the intrastate methods laid out in Cairns’ framework, and in this sense there are arguably few new ideas to discover. Rather than duplicate the work of others by venturing specific reforms that arguably repackage old ideas, this study would argue that the more provoking enquiry is not into what *could be* done to reform, but into what *has been* done, and more importantly, have these changes even *mattered at all*? In an environment where proposals to enhance western power have proliferated, understanding why these ideas succeed or fail is significant.

There are countless illustrations that could be drawn upon to show the relative success and failure of parliamentary reform proposals in Canada. In the interest of narrowing this scope, one particular example based on the reform of the House of Commons itself is the development of internal intrastate reform initiatives driven by the Members of Parliament. In a placating move following a divisive election campaign for the Speaker of the House of Commons that saw parliamentary traditionalist Peter Miliken

win over strong parliamentary reformers, House Leader Don Boudria announced the formation of an all-party committee to explore options for parliamentary reform in March 2001. In part a response to public interest of parliamentary reform following the 2000 election, and in part due to heavy criticism of recent procedural limitations placed upon amendments made by opposition parties deemed frivolous by the Speaker, this committee was headed by Deputy Speaker Bob Kilger and asked to report back to the House by June 1, 2001. When that date was met, the “Kilger Committee” recommended an array of amendments to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons (57 amendments in the initial report, to be exact) ranging from changes to debate procedure, to the organization and function of committees, to improvement of private members’ legislative abilities, and even to the utilization of new technologies in voting and House scrutiny. The Committee gave the House a year to review the content, and since then has provided four follow-up reports elaborating on issues like private members’ business and technology utilization. Hundred of pages of recommendations have been produced through this process, and continue to be produced. To date, very few of these recommendations have been implemented in the House of Commons. The last report in June 2003 seemed to embrace this incremental pace, prefacing in its introduction that, “Procedural reform in a parliamentary democracy is an on-going process, and is characterized by evolutionary development, rather than radical change” (Canada, 2003: 1). This was before recommending even further study and reporting to precede any substantive changes.

More importantly, none of the Kilger recommendations that *have* been implemented to date are reported to have had any substantive impacts on the functioning of Parliament. Unfortunately for reformers, this is highly typical of the results Canada has

seen from reform attempts over the last 40 years. Prior to the early 1960s, the strong growth of cabinet government during wartime and the 1958 election of the Diefenbaker government (which represented the largest cross-regional majority government in Canadian history) had made the pursuit of reform unnecessary to most involved. But as the 1960s began to produce a series of minority (and less regionally responsive) governments, and spending began to increase significantly, government and non-government advocates began to contemplate intrastate reforms. Early on, reformers made a number of important gains including the substantial empowerment of standing committees to review estimates and most bills, the establishment of Question Period, and multi-party discretion over a larger portion of the debate agenda. More importantly, they established the principle of ongoing internal review of parliamentary rules. However, this was the last time that gains of such magnitude would ever be made through this process. The 1970s passed without major reforms, and the early 1980s brought only minor changes through the Special Committee on Standing Orders and Procedures under Thomas Lefebvre (the 1982 “Lefebvre Committee”), such as the establishment of a parliamentary calendars and private member statements prior to Question Period. Many proposals for serious reform were made over those decades, but very few meaningful remedies were acted upon. In other words, even with minor successes there has still been a failure to create real changes and new opportunities within the House of Commons.

Perhaps the most notable attempt at reform made in the last few decades (and the closest to an exception to the above pattern) was the June 1985 report from the Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons (dubbed the “McGrath Report” after the chair, MP James McGrath). This report engaged in what it called “the most ambitious

attempt to pursue major and comprehensive reform in the more than one hundred-year history of the Canadian House of Commons” (1985: xi). It included substantial reform to the scope, structure, composition, funding and discretion of standing committees. It also advocated expanding the House’s role to include scrutiny of Order-in-Council appointments and delegated legislation, greater emphasis on private members’ business and House operations, and the televising of more activities such as committee meetings. Yet what made this report unique was its primary recommendation – a substantial qualification of the “confidence convention” as it related to parliamentary voting. The report advocated explicitly identifying which types of votes in the House would be considered “confidence” votes under responsible government – votes that, when lost, obliged the Governor General to dissolve Parliament and potentially call an election or ask another party or coalition to form government. The report concluded that if government could overcome the “constitutional myth that every vote was a test of confidence” (1985: 6), real dissent against government could be expressed, truly “free votes” in the House of Commons could be conducted, and real constraints and consensus could be laid on executive and prime ministerial power.

This was the first report that recognized that reform of any real practical value required “change in attitudes rather than changes in the rules and procedures of the House” (1985: 5). Real problems existed within the basic values underscoring parliamentary activity, not in any of the specific Standing Orders or any other formal rules across Parliament. The McGrath report advocated a true *cultural* change. Interestingly enough, this was one of the few recommendations from that report that the government did not address. Almost immediately following the tabling of the report, the

government implemented open nominations and the secret ballot for electing the speaker, an expansion of standing committees to include some OIC appointment and delegated legislation reviews, as well as better direct policy review (through stronger budget and staffing frameworks), and higher precedence to private members' business in daily procedures. But the issues of confidence and culture remain untouched and unchanged.

Since the McGrath report, subsequent tweaks to the House of Commons operations have only minutely built upon these reforms. The Conservative government's proposal entitled *Shaping Canada's Future Together: Proposals* in 1991 supported "free" votes in the House and greater opportunity for Private Members' bills (among other things). The proposal was reviewed by a parliamentary committee – the Beaudoin-Dobbie Committee – but never enacted. The Liberal Opposition at the time (through MP David Dingwall) put forward a list of proposals called *Reviving Parliamentary Democracy*, which outlined reforms to committees, question period and House procedure. However, the Liberal "Red Book" campaign platform in 1993 only promised more OIC appointments for review and larger legislative roles for committees – a platform for reform that aimed well below the bar set by their predecessors and themselves while in Opposition. The remainder of the 1990s only saw the Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and the occasional Special Committee continue to refine the parameters envisioned by the McGrath report (Kilger was the latest incarnation of this process). It should also be noted that a significant element of the constitutional reform package under the failed Charlottetown Accord of 1992 was change to the representative nature of the Senate – mainly, a move towards elected members with equal representation of six senators per province. This proposal failed with the failure of the Accord.

Yet over that same period reformers in the House of Commons have celebrated some small victories. For example, in 1998 the Reform Party took advantage of a small government presence in the House to accept a motion that private members' bills left on the Order Paper at a session's prorogation be automatically carried over as new bills for the following session. This passage of Standing Order 86.1 forced government to address these bills directly in the House, because they could no longer be left to expire at session's end. A more recent victory in November 2002 took advantage of divisions within the Liberal caucus when 56 Liberal MPs went against the Prime Minister's wishes on a Canadian Alliance motion allowing chairs of committees to be elected by secret ballot instead of a show of hands, thus keeping individual votes secret from the party whip (Curry, 2002). Some saw this move as a stride towards truly independent parliamentary review of government activity through committee leadership.

While Dobell notes "the House of Commons has lagged behind" (2000: 8) in terms of parliamentary reform, and the rest of Parliament has followed suit, this is not to claim that intrastate reform has not been met with some success. While the pace has been glacial, reform has happened, is happening, and will likely continue to happen. The real question actually becomes: if changes have been made, why don't any of them seem to have made a difference? Advocates both internal and external to government put forward reforms both large and small, from the very ambitious to the excruciatingly technical. Many reforms have been proposed, and the few that have been implemented have made little meaningful difference. There has been little true advancement of western voice or diminution of centralized power. The myth of western alienation as insular and disaffected continues to grow, as does overarching political cynicism amongst the

electorate. While reforms have been proposed and at times realized, it seems that the right reforms have not. The rules have changed a little, but the game remains much the same.

Why do institutional remedies that could create new, positive understandings of western alienation and identity still elude us after so much time, energy, and public support? The near-continuous stream of parliamentary reform proposals for public debate suggest that many still believe that it is merely a case of the right reforms not yet being discovered. Perhaps the more reasonable answer is that substantive reforms haven't happened yet because they *cannot happen* in the existing environment. Franks suggests that, "parliament is more in need of understanding than of change" (1987: 261); Neil Reimer similarly hypothesizes that institutional reforms only reflect "technical fixes to what is in fact a cultural problem" (1995). Perhaps institutional change because it only provides half-measure solutions to a problem that is as much about a cultural "understanding" as it is about procedure and process. Reform alone is not enough – there are challenges and understandings beyond it, at the very core of Canada's political culture, that must be overcome if the regional voice of the West is to truly get beyond the centralization of power in Canada. If this is indeed the case, then this study must look beyond changing the rules of the game, and start looking at the nature of the game itself.

Conclusion

As Gibbins and Arrison note, "Western Canadians are not opposed to a reasonably strong national government; they are opposed only if that government fails to provide institutional expression for western interests and aspirations" (1995: 104). Federalism is both a set of institutions and a set of ideas meant to meet these objectives.

Yet on neither front is federalism meeting its purpose by creating the necessary balance and inclusion found in the true federal principle. While there was once a time where Parliament and Cabinet could accommodate this balance and still support regional voice, those days are now over. As *National Post* writer Paul Wells points out, “The criticisms of Parliament are perennial, precisely because they never get fixed” (2000: A1). The western identity today represents the consequences of this failure through its growing insularity and alienation from national involvement.

Gibbins says “the political system drives Canada apart as much as it pulls them together, if not more” (1982: 191). This chapter explored this principle by looking at the broad role of institutions in developing Canada’s regional culture, and the particular role of Parliament as a mechanism of consensus and constraint in balancing the role of national vision and western regional voice in Canada. The discussion concluded that Parliament was actually supporting an imbalance and centralization of power away from regions like the West and towards the “centre” of government – mainly, the Prime Minister. Attempts to overcome this systemic centralization through proposals of parliamentary reform have further demonstrated that every piece of machinery within Parliament has the potential to channel power to the centre and away from the West. The few minor reform proposals that have succeeded convey more than the many that have failed but showing that there is more is needed to achieve meaningful institutional reform than simply structural change. As Savoie observes, “Canadian national political and administrative institutions are on the defensive, as never before in our history; no informed person today claims that Parliament is functioning well” (2000: 211). There is a *cultural element* to parliamentary activity that must be further addressed.

McGrath's report ventures that the cultural element to parliamentary reform has more to do with the actors within Parliament's branches than it does specific changes:

The purpose of reform of the House of Commons in 1985 is to restore to private members an effective legislative function, to give them a meaningful role in the formation of public policy and, in so doing, to restore the House of Commons to its rightful place in the Canadian political process. (1985: 1)

It further suggests that this challenge is intimately linked to the historical speculation about "whether [parliamentary] representatives' first loyalties should be to constituency, to party, to country or to their own conscience" (1985: 1). The next and final chapter explores the concept of *representation* in light of the current limitations demonstrated with institutional reform. Emphasis will be placed on the ways in which allegiance to party and leadership hierarchy has created a culture that places unnatural pressures on representatives to conform to and reinforce Canada's centralized practices. It is through the intrinsic connection between the trinity of regionalism, reform and representation that the limitations of traditional institutional practices and reform can be overcome, the positive elements of western alienation can be drawn forward, and new patterns of narrative understanding within the western myth and identity can be realized.

Chapter Four

The Western Trinity: Regionalism, Reform, and Representation Realized

Over the past three chapters, this study has looked at the idea of “the West” as a region and how that characterization is sustained by a western myth. This myth is the result of western alienation, which is characterized primarily by feelings of discontent and disaffection within Canada, but also contains the potential for more positive understandings of western identity through a hidden but growing want of political power and inclusion into the political mainstream. The inability to reconcile these negative and positive aspects of identity is primarily caused by failures within federalism to prevent the imbalance and overt centralization of power and efficacy. This centralization is institutionally engrained and supported, yet changes to these institutions through parliamentary reform have been unsuccessful in addressing the continued imbalance.

As Franks concludes, “the reality of how parliament functions is so different from the ideal proposed in reform that the two are difficult to reconcile” (1987: 257). Experience has shown us that institutional reform alone is simply not enough to combat the centralizing trends of today’s federalism and its impacts on western identity. There is still one element lacking – a cultural element. This next and final chapter is dedicated to understanding this cultural element, and finding the final piece to the puzzle that can successfully bridge the gap between western regionalism and institutional reform. This missing piece is *representation*, and the ability for individual representatives to act freely and by conscience in order to fully represent regional interests within parliamentary institutions. By acknowledging and working from the significant connection between

regionalism, reform and representation – forming what will be called the *Western Trinity* – this study envisions the final step within western alienation from disengagement to inclusion, towards more positive visions of the western myth and western identity.

The first section of this chapter will use the 1985 Special Committee on Reform of the House of Commons (the McGrath Report) to discuss the concept of representation, first from a theoretical perspective in terms of the values of *effectiveness* and *responsiveness*, and then from its interaction with parliamentary institutions in advancing regional interests and voice. This discussion will show that representation within parliamentary institutions for the benefit of western voice is only practicable when representatives are given flexibility in their role to independently advocate for regional interests within those institutions (thus completing the Western Trinity). Discussion will then examine how free and unfettered representation has become distorted primarily through the practice of *party discipline*, stimulated in part by formal conventions of federalism but more significantly through the informal cultural practices of political parties themselves. The study will conclude that while there is clearly a significant connection within the trinity of regionalism, reform and representation, party discipline has limited representation and made this connection unworkable. Breaking this Trinity has only encouraged the negative qualities of western identity and alienation to flourish. Without a more expansive and independent vision of representation within parliamentary institutions, the western myth will only continue along this negatively derived narrative.

To illustrate this conclusion, the second section will look at the Reform Party of Canada as an example of the Western Trinity in principle and in action. Through its historical and ideological evolution, the Reform Party reflected many characteristics of

the myth of western protest and negatively defined alienation caused by federal power imbalances (as established in earlier chapters). This party further reflected a deliberate attempt to draw a workable connection between its western regional challenges, the pursuit of institutional reform, and new freedoms for the individual representative outside traditional party culture – all the elements of the Western Trinity. Yet while the Reform Party expressed a commitment to targeting the power frameworks and structural bases of party discipline through its positioning as both an “anti-party” and populist party (Carty, 2000: 49), closer scrutiny of that party’s internal practices raises questions about a genuine commitment to addressing the deep cultural challenges of party discipline. These questions remain largely unanswered, and the concluding chapter raises further questions about the foundations and character of western identity in 2004.

Representation and Party Discipline: Conscience and Confidence Collide

Donald Smiley and Ronald Watts contend that the true failure of reform is the “failure of the institutions of the central government to be representative of and responsive to regional interests and values” (1985: 25). The last chapter noted that the success of any branch of Parliament was primarily dependent upon the actions and engagement of the actors within that branch. The McGrath report similarly argued that the main goal of parliamentary reform was not any particular institutional correction, but “to restore to private members an *effective* legislative function, [and] to give them a meaningful role in the formation of public policy” (1985: 1). It argued that private members should act upon “the positive effects of dissent” (1985: 10) whereby issues of centralization, executive domination, and regional parity would be communicated and

addressed. Without question, the report acknowledged an important connection between the actions of the individual representative and the ability of parliamentary reform to inspire meaningful change. This is an opinion shared by others, including Franks:

[T]he road towards reducing the tensions and problems of national unity is the same one that must be followed to strengthen parliament itself: to ensure that the individual elected members of the House of Commons become stronger, more independent, and more influential spokesmen and spokeswomen for the people they represent. (1999: 3)

From a western perspective, Gibbins and Roach suggest, “the primary conduit for a western Canadian political voice should flow through Members of Parliament“ (2003: 5). These perspectives (while focused on the House of Commons) recognize not only a connection between reform and representative effectiveness, but also between these ideas and the pursuit of regional inclusiveness. This relationship between regionalism, reform and representation could be said to form an interconnected and reinforcing Western Trinity with the sole purpose of advancing western identity.

Why is there such a strong connection between these three concepts within the Western Trinity? Both the “reason for” and “source of” this valuable connection are bound to McGrath’s notion of representative *effectiveness*. As John Courtney explains, effectiveness in representation can mean many things:

Representation ... can denote the presence of elected or appointed agents who have been authorized to act on behalf of others with the expectation that at some time in the future they will be held accountable for their actions. It can be used descriptively as a way of comparing the racial, linguistic, sexual or occupational composition of an elected assembly with that of the general population. Or it may in some symbolic fashion embrace myths or images, such as flags and anthems that have developed as part of a political culture. In each of these three respects, “representation” applies to an *end*: actions followed by accountability, the extent to which the sociodemographic attributes of the elected correspond to those of society, and symbolic threads interwoven into a cultural tapestry. (2002: 115-116)

The “end” of political representation as a subset of this definition fits loosely into two categories: quantitative and qualitative. The former is normally equated with the distribution of House of Commons seats across Canada, Senatorial positions across

regions, or Cabinet posts. While distribution is a provoking topic of debate, more relevant to our considerations here are the *qualitative* aspects of representation – what it is that representatives actually represent, and how that role meets regional objectives. Qualitatively, Hanna Pitkin defines political representation as “acting in the interests of the represented, in a manner responsive to them” (1967: 209). Yet she provides no singular explanation of what or who is being represented, and what this *responsiveness* entails because responsiveness is always dependent upon the environment and values being represented. With respect to the West, because Parliament derives its regional sensitivities from the actions of individual representatives negotiating regional interests within national institutions, responsiveness could best be defined as the representation of, and sensitivity to, regional interests. Gibbins observes that, “if effective means of intrastate representation are not built into national institutions, regional conflict can be intensified” (1994: 195). If representation achieves the balance within these institutions to advance the regional interest alongside the national, then responsiveness has been met.

Yet in practice, a single interest like region is not the only interest to which parliamentary representatives must be responsive. Paul Thomas argues that representatives must face “a kaleidoscopic definition of their representational roles” (1991: 237) – multiple expectations and roles that they must negotiate between. This multiplicity complicates definitions of responsiveness, as oftentimes these different roles can be at odds and must be balanced to weigh competing obligations and pressures. Anthony Birch tries to address this challenge by qualifying the term “representative” into three main usages: denoting an agent or spokesperson who acts on behalf of a principal or group, an individual that shares certain characteristics with a class of persons, or an

individual who symbolizes the identity or qualities of a class of persons (1971: 15). In terms of political representation, the first of these definitions can be further refined into the two most important functions: the *trustee* and the *delegate*.

The trustee representative is entrusted by electors to make decisions based upon his or her best judgment. The delegate representative simply reflects the consensus wishes of his or her constituents. For the trustee, responsiveness comes through exercising individual preference and conscience; for the delegate, it comes through acting as a conduit for the preferences of his or her electors. Edmund Burke, an eighteenth century English MP and theorist on representation, best illustrated these dual roles. In his 1774 Speech to the Electors of Bristol, he described the trustee role as: “Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion” (cf Birch, 1971: 39). In a later speech, he similarly and more personally illustrated the delegate function: “I was not only your representative as a body; I was the agent, the solicitor of individuals ... and in acting for you I often appeared as a shipbroker, than as a member of parliament” (cf Franks, 1987: 58). To Burke, these dual roles were part of the same obligation. The true challenge was to judiciously balance these roles to meet his particular determination of responsiveness.

These dual roles both have the potential to be responsive to regional interests. Through the delegate role, the term “constituents” can be interpreted in its broadest sense – not only those of “local” origin through formal constituencies, but also those comprising larger regional constituencies. Through the trustee role, a representative has personal discretion to represent regional views if they deem fit as an individual. Under both Birch’s and Burke’s assessment there is ample discretion for regional voice to be

advanced. There will be cases where region is not the primary consideration in a decision, where regional consensus cannot be reached, or where personal judgment is at conflict. But on balance, reformers assert that the regional interest will have a greater likelihood of emerging if the representative can remain responsive, independent, and unimpeded – in short, free – in these multiple roles. This is the representative role that regions seek, and this is why the reform Parliament has been the target of regional advocacy.

Yet this is not a complete picture in practice. There is a very significant third role of the representative that neither Burke nor Birch emphasize, that of political party representative. As Patrick Boyer explains, representatives must acknowledge “the threefold nature of their responsibility: to constituents, conscience, and caucus” (1993: 83). The presence of the party within our political system cannot be ignored. Franks argues they are essential to our political system because they “organize members into cohesive units which provide the satisfaction of collective action” (1987: 35). Through their widespread organizations, Cairns argues parties can provide responsiveness to regional interests by acting as “a unifying or nationalizing agency ... which minimize differences, restrain fissiparous tendencies, and thus over time help knit together the diverse interests of a polity weak in integration” (1977: 234). Of Canadians surveyed by Blais and Gidengil, even 74 percent acknowledge, “without political parties, there can’t be true democracy” (1991: 42). Parties are fundamental to how Canadian politics “work,” and thus fundamental amongst representative roles. If representatives were operating in a neutral environment, these party pressures would be no more challenging to balance than those of constituency and conscience, and on balance the regional interest would be represented. But this trio of representational roles is far from equal. Because they are

significant ordering and organizational agents, parties are complicit in the centralization of power and marginalization of regional interests. The advancement of the party “centre” has thus taken precedence over the delegate and trustee roles.

This precedence arises partially from the historical practices of party organizations in general; as Simpson explains, Canadian parties (particularly those that govern) “are like military formations: sharply hierarchical, with a top-down command structure led by the prime minister with all rewards demanding loyalty and all penalties taxing dissent” (2001: 46). They channel power to leadership. This conflicts directly with the ideal of representational freedom. Parliament becomes subordinate and responsive to partisanship instead of electors. March sees this as a regressive shift:

The independent notable who could and did vote on issues on his terms has virtually disappeared from Parliament. Instead, he has been replaced by men whose fundamental loyalty is to a party machine, and it is its necessities which have to be met first. Not the conscience or private wishes of the MP or his constituents. (1974: 2)

Extreme partisanship is tantamount to the loss of representational independence, encouraging the disregard of all other representative obligations (including region). With the party calling the shots, the once-expansive role and discretion of the representative is irrevocably narrowed. Loyalty to region and constituents diminishes in priority. Linking this conclusion to those from the last chapter, it becomes more apparent that it is not parliamentary reform itself that has failed the region. It is the representation within the reform paradigm that has failed. Regional responsiveness in Parliament has given way to partisan considerations and central influence that intrastate reform cannot repair.

The power of parties to exert pressure upon and dictate the actions of its representative members is often called *party discipline*. Franks argues that it is this power

that has virtually taken over the Canada's institutional practices to advance the centralization of power and dominance of leadership:

The [party] power structure gives members a subordinate role and disciplines them to party lines, puts the focus for discussion as well as decision in the executive rather than in parliament, and assigns government the role of benevolent paternalism. (1987: 31)

Party discipline ensures that the will of "the centre" is strongly enforced. Yet much like parties, party discipline also serves an important ordering function in Canada. Government often faces delays and pressures that impede decisive leadership and national objectives. Disciplined parties can overcome these challenges. Dobell therefore argues that party discipline is at times "necessary and helpful rather than an external pressure that members resent" (1985: 50) and often "integral to the operation of the Canadian House of Commons" (1985: 42). Franks also supports this position:

The adversarial system forces a discipline on the government. It must be able to defend what it has done in terms of a general public interest. This serves to counter the extreme particularisms in Canadian politics. (1987: 226)

Yet he cautions that, "the system breaks down ... when the basis of consent erodes, or parliament fails to perform its crucial task of mobilizing consent" (1987: 226). This is particularly true for the West in a disciplined system. Gibbins and Arrison argue that "party discipline in the House of Commons ... makes it difficult for western MP's to defend regional interests," because "regional interests and the local interests of constituents are sacrificed to the larger interests of party" (1995: 28). The logic for this is simple: the distribution of representative seats across the country by population creates a clear numerical domination by Ontario and Quebec, making it axiomatic that "the interests of party become the interests of Central Canada" (1995: 30). Despite its positive ordering elements, from the West's perspective party discipline has only enhanced the power of "the centre" and diminished that of the regions on all parliamentary fronts.

While issues of party discipline are the most relevant to the House of Commons, the effects are also felt in Cabinet and the Senate as well. Gibbins argues that party discipline has diminished the regional influence of Cabinet through *cabinet solidarity*, whereby closed-door disagreements are mandated to give way to united public positions. Regional voices that do not make it into the final Cabinet position are further muted because of *cabinet secrecy* conventions, which conceal dissenting opinions from public view. Joined by the ministerial tradition of *collective responsibility* for all decisions, regional interests are buried deep within party and leadership pressures. Gibbins concludes that the “norms of secrecy, solidarity and collective responsibility [in Cabinet], long an irritant to radical reformers in western Canada, seriously compromise territorial representation” (1982: 66). These partisan pressures also extend to senators, although their appointed status and lifetime tenure lessens the effect. Lowell Murray argues, “Senators are members of caucus and in a few cases of Cabinet ... [and] the tradition of party solidarity and the need for it in order to ensure stable government in the Westminster system usually take precedence over other considerations” (2003:143). In both cases, party interests move to the forefront of all representative considerations.

Because party discipline is a core cause of the centralized federal power and western alienation, there have been numerous calls for its relaxation. David Kilgour and John Kirsner argue that this relaxation could create tangible benefits for all regional voices across Canada, and even unite previously opposed parties:

If party discipline in Canada is relaxed, it would be easier for, say, Atlantic Canada to defy their three party establishments, if need be, in support of regionally significant issues. Coalitions composed of members from all parties could exist for the purpose of working together on matters of common regional or other concern. The adverse attitudes and structures now entrenched in Parliament ... might well change in the direction of all parties working together in the national interest. (1991: 203-204)

Gibbins and Roach concur that such loosening of discipline “speaks directly to the western Canadian concern about the lack of an effective political voice in the national Parliament” (2003: 2). Yet relaxing party discipline to free the representative from party pressures is dependent on a true understanding of its causes, both formal and informal.

The *formal* causes of party discipline can be narrowed down to the constitutional convention of responsible government. Under responsible government the parliamentary executive (Cabinet) remains in power as long as it maintains the “confidence” of the majority in the House of Commons. Savoie says that this means that, “Members of Parliament in our system are not elected to govern ... [but rather] to hold those who govern accountable for their policies” (1999b: 50). This accountability bestows a great deal of significance on the actions of the representative in the House of Commons. When confidence is taken to its extreme, each decision or vote is potentially a judgment on the ability of the government to remain in power. MPs’ actions are not seen as independent actions based on independent issues. Party solidarity becomes integral to parliamentary stability, and party leadership on all sides uses every tool to prevent representatives from making judgments contrary to the united party front. As Gibbins explains,

A cabinet unable to command the loyalty of its supporters in the House would run the risk of losing confidence of the House and being forced to resign; MPs unwilling to support their cabinet colleagues “come hell or high water” would run the risk of having power fall into the hands of their partisan opponents. Hence the reality of responsible government; if the governing party controls a majority of seats in the House, it will not be defeated on a vote of confidence. (1994: 47)

A representative’s vote ceases to be a decision of independent principle; it is cast under the fear of party reprisal, with “the whip” (the party member responsible for enforcing party solidarity) vetting out punishment or denying reward for those deviating from the “party line.” As March concludes, it is in part due to the whip’s control of all tools of

reward and punishment – what some call “sticks and carrots” – that “party loyalty has become the prime political virtue of an MP” (1974: 55).

The oft-cited remedy to the pressures of responsible government has been to encourage more “free votes” in the House of Commons – votes that are “free” from party discipline. Howe and Northrup found that 82 percent of Canadians believed better laws would come if voting was free from party interests (2000: 23). Blais and Gidengil found 77 percent supported MPs who voted “freely” instead of along party lines (1991: 42). Gibbins and Roach cite free votes as one of their cornerstone reforms in their *Action Plan* (2003: 5), and even the 1993 federal Liberal *Red Book* promised, “more free votes would be allowed in the House of Commons” (1993: 92). To achieve this reform, the McGrath report theorizes that discipline must be reduced by “indicating in advance those measures and policies to which the confidence convention would apply” (1985: 8-9). It recommends that any measures publicly cited as non-confidence, those involving the elimination of reduction of a supply estimate, or any concerning issues beyond core party policy should be automatically exempt from discipline. Only the defeat of an explicitly indicated “confidence” vote would thus lead to the defeat of government and necessitate pressure from the whip. By making these changes, the report predicts that parties in the House of Commons would experience an “attitudinal change” (1985: 9), easing the obligations of responsible government and the pressures of party discipline on otherwise independent-minded representatives. This change would ripple across all intrastate practices that capitalize on the assent or dissent of representatives government, such as: creating more independence in committees, more opportunities in Question Period and legislation, and potentially even impacting the nature of Cabinet or Senate discussions. If

successful, formalized reforms like free votes could represent the truest methods towards representational freedom and institutional reform.

Yet this change or any like it has not been made. Discipline has not been overcome, and the representative freedom needed to advance reform and regional voice has not been attained. In his analysis of free voting proposals, Franks notes that there is actually “nothing in the conventions of confidence [that] prevents governments from losing votes on many items of business before Parliament without the defeat being considered a loss of confidence” (1997: 35). Confidence voting is not the threat to parliamentary stability that many parties and reform advocates make it out to be. This is because the real causes of party discipline are not constitutional or institutional, but the for stronger *informal* causes of internal party culture itself. As Lisa Young explains,

[P]arty discipline in Canada has evolved into something far greater than a mechanism for ensuring stability within the context of responsible government. Rather, it has become an integral part of the culture of party politics as they are played out on the national stage. (1999: 126)

The pressures of party culture are a result of both pragmatism and need. To begin, representatives need the security of parties because of the growing level of “amateurism” amongst elected figures. Docherty notes that between 1993 and 1997, 68.1 percent of sitting members were serving their first term while just over 13 percent were on their third term or more (1997: 43). MPs are also naturally loathe to give up the resources and experience of the party organization that help them win nominations, conduct elections, and distribute rewards locally. Follow that by the “carrots” provided by the whip and party leadership – trips, funding, and appointments to committees, Cabinet, or Senate – and representatives become clearly beholden to parties. As Gibbins summarizes, “MPs to a large extent impose party discipline on themselves” (1994: 48).

The culture of pragmatism and need also extends the parties themselves. While traditionally national parties have played unifying brokerage roles, Brian Tanguay argues that the emergence of strong regional parties has diminished this role:

[S]ince the national parties are unable to reconcile within themselves the various regional interests from across the country, they are ineffective as organizations for formulating and debating important issues of public policy that have regional implications. (2002: 304)

Today's national parties are challenged to remain relevant to their electorate in light of regional parties and burgeoning provincial governments, and have become not much more than election-day organizations to fight and fund campaigns. Because of these shortcomings, Tanguay concludes that the national party system "uses party discipline like a club to bludgeon internal and external opposition" (2002: 310). Where the public may see national parties becoming less relevant, the use of discipline can help sustain the appearance of unity, control and legitimacy that the public seemingly demands. In politics, perception is reality, and public image can take precedence over substance. This pressure creates what could be called a "cultural confidence convention," whereby dissent of any fashion (even dissent supporting regional goals) is perceived as a failure of or affront to unified leadership. Franks argues that acts of dissent that publicly convey instability face harsher discipline than threats to the formal confidence convention:

[F]ree votes are not likely to be an important part of the solution to the problems of the private member. On the other hand, greater tolerance of dissent could be. The obstacles to this lie in public and media perceptions and in the laws and rules governing representation and parliamentary behaviour. (1997: 36)

In a time when elections are won and lost on the popularity of parties and their leaders, a party culture that punishes all dissent has flourished as the harshest acts of party discipline are often justified as a necessary evil.

This informal, cultural need for public party solidarity, coupled with the formal conventions of responsible government, has led to a system of uncompromising solidarity within Canadian parties. The harsh discipline that representatives face today significantly limits their ability to freely represent regional identity within parliamentary institutions and the national interest. Whereas party discipline forces a representative role that is largely singular, freedom comes from that role becoming deliberately multiple and responsive to numerous interests. This was the McGrath report's vision of effectiveness:

Members of the House of Commons unquestionably have a role with respect to their constituents. Members also belong to political parties. As party members, they are often obliged to submerge their personal beliefs in those of the party and vote accordingly in the House of Commons. The member that disagrees consistently with the party is often dismissed as a maverick. We believe the country would be better served if members had more freedom to play an active role in the debate of public policy, even if it meant disagreeing with their parties from time to time.... Private members must once again become the instruments through which citizens can contribute to shaping the laws under which they live. (1982: 2)

Partisanship creates real obstacles to this effectiveness, institutionalizes unfairness, and creates a disruption in the power equilibrium of federalism that is core to western discontent. Gibbins and Arrison attest that this commitment to partisan constraints and disciplined solidarity "is *the* problem in the mythology of western Canadian political discontent" (1995: 28). True regional voice through institutional reform can only come when connected to a vision of representation that is free to pursue regional voice and consciously unburdened of the constraints of party discipline. That is why there is a fundamental relationship between western regionalism, parliamentary reform, and the function of representation in the political system. This important connection completes the Western Trinity, the elements of which hold the potential to represent a unified approach in creating more positive understandings of the western myth and identity.

Acknowledging this connection of the Western Trinity as meaningful or useful in contemplating new visions of western identity is an important step in itself. Yet discussion has also shown that party discipline must be overcome if this Trinity is to be truly unified and *workable* for the West. While March contends that “the [party] machine warps the will of the public for its own purposes – electoral victory, and the spoils of and the thirst for power” (1974: 136), he admits it is also “very much a part of the modern political process, and its presence must be incorporated into the official mythology” (1974: 136). The challenge thus arises: in practice, can this barrier of party discipline be overcome so that the important connection of the Western Trinity can be made? The next section will explore this challenge by briefly looking at the Reform Party of Canada – its beginnings, its purposes, and its evolution as the most recent manifestation of the western protest party tradition. This party not only acknowledged and embraced the significant interrelationship of the Western Trinity, but it also advocated a number of core principles that demonstrated a true intent to overcome party discipline in order to make the Trinity workable. However, questions remain about the Reform’s real intent to overcome the cultural elements of party discipline, and if a functional Trinity could ever have been realized under this party, or any other party – past, present or future – for that matter.

The Reform Party of Canada – The Western Trinity from Theory to Practice

As previous chapters have highlighted, the 1993 federal election introduced a number of regionally focused third parties that sprang up “to articulate, and even exacerbate, ethnolinguistic and regional tensions ... [as well as to] challenge fundamental precepts of the party system and seek to reshape it radically” (Carty *et al.*, 2000: 35).

Among these new parties was the Reform Party of Canada. Launched in 1987 in Winnipeg under the leadership of Preston Manning, this party entered the partisan fray advocating such policies as a Triple-E Senate, rejection of the Meech Lake Accord, free trade and privatization, democratic reform, tougher stances on criminal justice, and revamped bilingualism and multiculturalism policies (Manning, 1992: 169). Reform quickly evolved from a loose association of 300 members to electing its first Member of Parliament in 1989, to attaining 52 seats in 1993, to becoming the Official Opposition in 1997 with 60 seats. By the late 1990s, this regionally based party had entrenched itself in the party system as “the principal vehicle of a distinctive and potentially reconfiguring approach to democratic politics in Canada” (Laycock, 2002: 23).

But the Reform Party of Canada achieved more than that. It also laid some of the essential groundwork needed to use the connections of the Western Trinity in order to move beyond the negative qualities of western alienation and power centralization towards real inclusion, respect and a positive sense of western identity within the national vision. This theory will be explored by looking at how Reform’s development and practices paralleled the three elements of the Trinity – a vision of western regionalism and identity, a drive towards institutional reform, and an ideology of representational freedom. While this discussion will show that the Reform Party acknowledged the value and principles of the Trinity, outstanding questions about the Reform Party’s approach to one important issue beyond the Trinity – party discipline – remain unanswered.

The first step in illustrating Reform’s relationship to the Trinity is to establish the ways in which the party constructed and politicized western regionalism and identity. William Cross argues that the Reform Party found its “roots in the articulation of regional

interests ... [and] as a party of Western Canada” (2002: 117). This is primarily illustrated through its 1987 platform title, “The West Wants In, and from electoral outcomes in the West since that time. Gidengil *et al.* argue that the 1997 and 2000 elections revealed a correlation between voter preferences for Reform and a western ideological orientation (1999: 247; 2001: 28), which Laycock concludes translated into “a dominant position within the Western component of the [party] system ... [that] allowed Reform to set the agenda for policy debate in the West” (2002: 153). Yet voting patterns alone do not make the case that the Reform Party was either a strictly western party, or alone formative of western identity. As theorized in the first chapter, Reform’s western orientation is better understood through the theory of the western myth, whereby the construction of identity is primarily a proven through emotional sameness that required political action to engrain it as a true identity. It further embodies the cyclic tradition of western protest parties, the political actions that ultimately reinforce the myth of western regionalism and identity.

The Reform Party’s role within the western protest party tradition is best understood when held up against the two themes discussed earlier: *rejection* of the traditional party system, and the embrace of the anti-elitist, grassroots tradition of *populism*. On the first theme, Manning’s words at the Western Assembly on Canada’s Economic and Political Future in May of 1987 show that the legacy of western rejection was well-entrenched within the party’s founding principles:

Let me make clear from the outset that when we refer to the possibility of creating a new political party to represent the West, we are not talking about another splinter party or single-issue party, or yet another party of the strange and extreme. The West has produced too many of these in the past years, and there is no need for another.

Rather, if we think at all about the creation of a new federal political party to carry our concerns and contributions in the national political arena, we should be thinking about the creation of a new vehicle to represent the great political “reform tradition” which runs like a broad and undulating stream throughout the length and breadth of Canadian politics

but which currently finds no suitable means of expression in any of the traditional federal parties. (Manning, 1991: 166)

This appeal to the “reform tradition” of rejection was soon echoed in the founding Constitution of the Party (1991), referring in its preamble to “the reform tradition in Canadian politics whereby farsighted and courageous men and women have sought to correct injustices and inequities” (1991: 1). Paying homage to a number of western Reformers (Riel, Haultain, leaders of the Progressives, CCF and Social Credit) and the leaders of western protest groups, parties and interest groups (Confederation of Regions Party, Western Canada Concept, Canada West Foundation), the preamble concluded that there was “a need for a contemporary expression of the reform tradition in Canadian deferral politics in the form of a new, broadly-based federal political party” (1991: 1). This rejection principle was reiterated in the Party’s appended Statement of Principles (which remained unchanged throughout Reform’s existence), and later in Manning’s writings when he concluded that his partisan beliefs were grounded not in left- or right-wing ideology, but primarily in “an older and broader reform tradition that had expressed itself in various ways and at various times through Canada” (2002: 23).

In addition to this theme of rejection, the Reform Party also exemplified the populist tradition of western protest parties, a tradition that Gibbins and Arrison acknowledge as “deeply rooted within the [western] regional political culture and enjoys substantial public support” (1995: 101). Manning freely admitted to this orientation for himself and his party, and its intimacy to his “reform tradition” of rejection:

My personal political convictions are rooted in the populist political tradition of western Canada It is a tradition characterized by the politics of regional alienation and concerted efforts to secure fundamental changes in the economic and political system by operating outside the traditional party structure and appealing to the common sense of the common people. (1992: 2)

If a party can recognize, facilitate, and tap into the power of populism – the grassroots swell of political will and the “the common people” – there is “no more potent political force on the face of the earth” (1992: 25). Manning later wrote that this grassroots swell “is what democracy ought to be about – a bottom-up revolution that involved the direct participation of the people whose futures are at stake” (2002: 78). Populism is not just a campaign promise or a specific set of policies; it is a fundamental vision of society and the world. According to Flanagan, Manning’s populism was “not an ideology but a methodology, not a doctrine or a set of positions but a process for discovering the ‘will of the people’ and thereby overcoming superficial divisions among the people” (1995: 3). It is from this belief that Manning wholly endorsed the text of Thomas Jefferson’s letter to William Jarvis in 1820, which reads, “I know of no safe depository of the ultimate powers of society but the people themselves” (1992: 327; 2002: 49).

These manifestations of rejection and populism within Reform’s value structure created what Flanagan calls the “glue of regionalism” (1995: 58) that bound that party’s policies to a larger belief in western sameness, myth and self. Like the protest parties before it, Reform’s embrace of the western myth most directly came through the embrace of its founding narrative, *western alienation*. Manning argued that, “whenever populism has become a force to be reckoned with in western Canadian politics, it has been energized by ‘western alienation’” (1992: 118), and for the Reform Party, this alienation pushed the vision of the protest-reform tradition forward and turned western regionalism into a true political identity. Reform’s invocation of western alienation was characterized primarily by what Gibbins and Arrison describe as “an intuitive appeal to people who see

themselves victimized by distant economic and political elites” (1995: 67), and embraced a negative western identity based on national discontent. As Manning explained it:

[W]estern alienation stems from frustrated ambitions, unfulfilled expectations, and the tragedy of unrealized potentials – the crop that might have been if the hail had not come, the fortune that might have been made if the well had been drilled three miles farther north. Such sentiments deeply affect how many westerners think about themselves and the country as a whole. (1992: 122)

The Reform Party did not have to look far to find justifications for this discontent: the 1986 tendering of CF-18 jet fighter maintenance to a Quebec firm despite a lower bid from a more qualified Manitoba contractor, the National Energy Program that resulted in billions of dollars in losses to the Alberta government, and the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords that were seen to pander to Quebec while watering down concepts like Senate reform, all fit the pattern of western victimization and disaffection.

Yet the Reform Party also acknowledged the other side of western alienation, that representing a more positive definition of identity – the struggle for inclusion. Reform’s founding slogan, “The West Wants In,” expressed an inherent willingness to overcome this discontent and embrace a western identity seeking a new relationship and mutual benefit within the national whole. As Manning explained to the 1987 Western Assembly,

The West wants IN, and when the West gets “in” in a true and meaningful sense, we will be in a position not simply to advance our own interests but to provide support and stimulus to all the resource-producing regions of the country, and the nation as a whole. (1991: 172)

This sentiment was reiterated when he wrote of his expectations for the “New Canada”:

Whether “left out,” “driven out,” or “wanting out,” Canadians are alienated from the life, politics, economy and decision-making of their own country On the other hand, if there is a common aspiration with a potential for linking Canadians together in a new way, it is this: Canadians who are still committed to Canada “want in” – into the life, economy, culture, politics and decision-making of our own country. (1992: vi)

Manning and Reform recognized the potential duality within western alienation, and the potential within western identity itself to balance negative associations against those

more positively defined. He colloquially referred to this duality as the difference between “Little Westerners” and “Big Westerners,” the former remaining content to advocate for distance and division in the West, and the latter acknowledging a more inclusive view of the region within Canada (1992: 356). Manning later concluded that saw a Big Westerner within himself and what he was trying to achieve with his Party: “It’s in my nature, as a Westerner with roots in the newer part of Canada, to express my passion for my country by building something new and better for our future” (2002: 121).

To achieve this new positive western myth and identity, Manning argued that the West had to “shake the last vestiges of its underdog psychology and to seize the future” (2002: 423). To do this, Reform first recognized that western alienation was primarily caused by: the failure of federalism to prevent the imbalance and centralization of political power. For Flanagan, this valuation of balance was reflected most strongly in Manning’s deeper religious-philosophical belief of *monism* – the philosophy of oneness (1995: 34) – which holds that there is a deliberative space at the core of every polity where divergent interests can be reconciled by the mutual strengths of “the people.” The ‘Old Canada’ characterized by the uneven distribution of power between regions and centralized oppression would give way to the ‘New Canada’ of balance and equality. To Manning, the true goal of the reform tradition was this universal oneness of political power. What the West wanted “in” to was the political power structure.

The appreciation and pursuit of balance is more concretely expressed through Reform’s political message. Over time, while Reform portrayed the West as a region aggrieved and excluded by an oppressive central government with central interests, it also sought changes to give westerners greater control over the national political agenda by

“transforming the prevailing distribution of power” (Laycock, 2002: 159). The inaugural 1991 “Blue Book” of policies and principles gave voice to these causes and solutions:

Reformers believe that New Canada must be a *balanced federation*, not an unbalanced federation where one province has special status or a special deal; or where all the provinces have special status and Canada has no status; or where one generation centralizes all the power in Ottawa, and the next generation centralizes it all in the provincial capitals in the name of decentralization. (1991: vi)

While reiterated in policy documents throughout the early 1990s, these power issues became more prominent as the Quebec unity crisis of the mid-1990s grew in significance.

The 1995 Blue Book made it clear that, “Confederation should be maintained, but that it can only be maintained by a clear commitment to Canada as one nation” (1995: 38). This

commitment was further articulated in 1996’s *20/20 Discussion Paper* on national unity:

Reform’s vision of a New Confederation sees an expanding Canada, a more vigorous and creative country, as rich, plentiful, and varied as our land. It rejects the *over-centralization* of power in the hands of a few, and instead, sees many advantages to distributing power more evenly throughout the country. It is a vision that sees a Canada growing, expanding, diversifying, and prospering in the vitality of its many people, provinces, and regions. (1996: 3)

Yet it was not until the 1997 Blue Book that the Reform Party fully recognized the relationship between formal federal institutions and power concentration by advocating for significant, structural reforms whereby the “arsenal of centralizing powers at the hands of the Federal Government and the over-concentration of power in the hands of the executive and Cabinet are placed under reasonable restraints” (1997: 19). The federal institutions held most culpable regarding the power imbalance in Canada were those of Parliament – the House of Commons, Senate, and Cabinet. But Reform also recognized that it was within Parliament that opportunities to address this imbalance could be found. For Manning, this potential for positive change was most evident in the House of Commons:

For me, the House of Commons is “the temple of democracy,” where the spirit of democracy ought to reside and be expressed in its purest and most potent form. But most

of the time, the actual operations of the House are in direct contradiction to this ideal. Voting is neither free nor representative; freedom of speech is circumscribed, not encouraged; the will of the prime minister, the will of the parties, the interest of the media – not the will of the people – are the driving forces. (2002: 95)

For these reasons, democratic *intrastate institutional reform* became a cornerstone of Reform's western platform. The 1991 Blue Book proposed reforms like a Triple-E Senate, increased use of parliamentary committees, binding referenda, voters' initiatives and MP recall mechanisms. These proposals were reiterated in the 1993 and 1997 election platforms, and in various revisions of the Blue Book throughout the 1990s. They all reflected Manning's longstanding belief that Parliament was both "the root cause of [democracy's] decline and the best measure to secure its revitalization" (2002: 426-427).

Returning to the 1991 Blue Book, perhaps the most explicit example of Reform's commitment to parliamentary reform was the specific message in the Leaders' Forward:

Reformers believe that New Canada must be a *democratic federation* where the people take ownership of their own Constitution through Constitutional Conventions, and where the rules of a reformed Parliament make the members more *responsive* to the real interests of their constituents. (1991: vi)

The central policy commitment behind this principle was for "more free votes in the House of Commons" (1991: 10). This declaration was followed by three equally significant policies: (1) that all Reform MPs "shall vote with the Reform Party majority in the House *unless* a Member is instructed to abstain or vote otherwise by his/her constituents"; (2) that the Canada Election Act be amended to "eliminate clauses which place Members of Parliament in a position beholden to their national Party Executive or Leader rather than their constituents"; and (3) to amend the oath of office making MPs swear or affirm "fundamental allegiance to their constituents" (1991: 10). These four policies all shared the same intent – greater flexibility for representatives to independently act within reformed parliamentary practices. These proposals recognized

the importance of the local or regional “constituent” in decision-making, and the value of representatives in being responsive to those views for the benefit of the West. Reform clearly connected the concepts of democratic reform and representational expansiveness.

Policies supporting these connected concepts remained core components of the Reform Party platform (both Blue Books and election platforms) throughout the 1990s. Some policies, such as direct democracy reforms like the recall of MPs, remained virtually unchanged over time. Other policies experienced slow but deliberate evolution, including those proposals for representational flexibility (particularly in the House of Commons) which were reinvented and re-branded in the 1997 Blue Book:

When a Reform M.P. votes in the Parliament of Canada, her or she represents:

1. the principles, policies and platform of the Reform Party of Canada on which the M.P. was elected;
2. the views and interests of constituents in the M.P.’s riding, in particular the consensus among constituents, if such a consensus can be determined; and
3. the M.P.’s own knowledge, judgment and conscience regarding the issues at hand.

For Reform M.P.s, where (1), (2), and (3) are in conflict, it is (2) – the consensus of the will of the majority of the constituents – which takes precedence. (1997: 38)

While the “constituent” interest (both local and regional) was once again designated the express consideration, this version of the policy also recognized the need for flexibility to balance individual conscience with party considerations in representation. Paralleling Boyer’s “threefold nature” of representation (1993: 83), this policy also reflected what Manning once called the “unified field” theory of representation:

Effective representation in a modern democracy ... is not a matter of representing “constituents interests only” or “party principles and platform only” or “member’s judgment only,” but a judicious and practical combination of the three in accordance with well-understood principles and practices. (1992: 322)

Manning’s theory contemplates a flexibility and multiplicity in representational roles, as well as a need to balance these conflicting roles. This flexibility is what gives representatives the opportunity to bring the “local” interests of their regions forward

amongst others, to restore balance in the political decision-making structure. Through this final leap, Reform put the final piece of the Western Trinity in place.

Notably, the vast majority of the parliamentary and representational innovations reflected in the Reform Party's evolving policies emphasized the institutional and partisan pressures brought on by the traditions of responsible government –the “formal” elements of *party discipline*. In the 1991 Blue Book, the policy of free votes was clearly linked to the principle that there should be a new formalization of what constituted confidence votes in the House, and “that the defeat of a government measure in the House of Commons should not automatically mean the defeat of the government” (1991: 10). The principle behind this policy stems from Manning's proposal to the 1987 Western Assembly that called for MPs to “remove themselves from the stifling party discipline which impairs their ability to represent their people with honesty and integrity” (1991: 169). Manning saw overcoming discipline as essential to all other challenges in the West:

Under present arrangements, there is less freedom of speech and freedom of political action in the Canadian House of Commons than there is in any other political forum in the country Members are censured for representing their constituents' views when those differ from the government or party line, and rewarded for voting against constituents' interests in favour of the party line. (1992: 323)

For Manning and the Reform Party, reforming the confidence convention to overcome the formalized barriers to constituency representation was the only way that representational freedom could be achieved and parliamentary reform made effective.

Laycock concludes that “the Reform party put the problem of democratic representation closer to the centre of public debate than it had been for years,” and that over a very short period this small party successfully stimulated “a critical re-examination of the foundations – representational, attitudinal, and institutional – of contemporary Canadian society” (2002: 26). One re-examination was through the connection between

parliamentary reform and representational considerations, and their relationship to the pursuit of regional equality and power balance inherent in establishing a positive identity for the West. This brief sampling of Reform's past policies illustrates that the theory of the Western Trinity can be exercised in the partisan context. The illustration of the Trinity is further advanced by the recognition that the formal elements of party discipline – the confidence convention – must be addressed before meaningful change can occur.

Yet if the Reform Party had indeed achieved this connection, then why did it fail to resolve the problems of western alienation and negative identity during its tenure? This study would argue that this shortcoming indicates a gap between the *theory* of the Western Trinity and its practical *workability*. The last section argued that a party seeking to overcome alienation and foster institutional and representational change must also be a party seeking to overcome not just the formal confidence convention behind party discipline, but also the informal, “cultural confidence convention” that enforces party solidarity to meet public expectations. While Reform's policies reveal the intent to overcome the formal attributes of party discipline, some observers question Reform's real commitment to overcoming these more informal, cultural elements. They argue that, historically, overbearing executive control at the internal party level, with Manning as the primary instigator, significantly compromised the Reform's ambitions of reform and regional empowerment. Trevor Harrison describes the early operations of Reform as “a highly centralized, professional, and tightly controlled organization” (1995: 196), and that as early as 1992 “Reform had become a tightly controlled organization manipulating its members into pursuing the aims of Manning and his Calgary clique” (1995: 216). Efforts towards grassroots control were embraced “not as a value in itself but rather as a

means of legitimating the actions taken by a leadership and therefore pre-empting dissent” (1995: 219). Flanagan attributes the same heavy-handed qualities to Manning personally, noting he “speaks in the names of ‘the common sense of the common people’ but he is the only one who is authorized to express it” (1995: 32), and that Manning’s leadership was consistently predicated on his executive control whereby “expulsion and suppression” (1995: 19) was the only way to resolve conflicts.

Although these conclusions are largely anecdotal, there are some elements within the Reform Party’s most basic policies that support these observations. For example, despite statements appealing to grassroots support, reform traditions, and representative accountability, the 1991 Constitution that Reform kept in place during its tenure clearly centralizes the party’s organizational authority directly in the hands of the Leader and Executive. For example, the Leader and Executive had sweeping powers over candidate recruitment, nomination and development. Section 4(c) says that candidates are,

subject always to the right of the Executive Council, in its absolute discretion where it feels the overall best interest of the party is involved, to intervene with respect to any nomination and to nullify the nomination of any candidate (1991: 5)

In contrast, sections 5 and 6 of the Constitution only demand review of Executive Council members every four years and mandate no regular reviews of leadership (review could only be commenced through membership vote). Furthermore, while section 1(d) allows for the Leader and Executive to unilaterally pass “interim policies and objectives of the Party,” section 7(g) requires a double majority – a majority of votes, in a majority of provinces – for policy changes from the grassroots. From this perspective, Reform’s internal practices do not reflect those of a party genuinely committed to moving beyond cultural discipline or executive control in its entirety. Questions remain about whether Reform’s version of the Western Trinity was truly meant to work, or merely rhetorical.

While Reform's anecdotal and constitutional behaviours betrayed a weak intent to overcome the cultural confidence convention, this conclusion must be balanced with two interlacing perspectives on the Party's more intrinsic principles that, in principle, reflect a strong intent towards practical workability that internal practices had not yet embraced. Gibbins and Arrison argue that one of the key principles in the Reform vision has been the "rejection of partisanship" (1995: 97) – an assertive *anti-partyism* by which not only traditional parties, but traditional party behaviour, is rejected. As Clarke *et al.* explain, the Reform party provided "a vehicle for expressing displeasure with the old-line parties and the political establishment more generally" (2000: 213). Gidengil *et al.* note that more anti-party voting went to Reform than abstention in 1997, concluding, "to the extent that it is mobilized on the basis of anti-party sentiment, the Reform party can be classified as an 'anti-party' party" (2002: 80). While general cynicism with partisanship is by no means unique to the Reform Party's base, Laycock argues that it does become more meaningful when held up against the Reform Party's particular variant of populism. The policy objectives of the citizen's referenda, initiative and recall reflect a populism that engages the grassroots directly in place of representative figures to independently come to a consensus position. What some call direct democracy, Laycock formally refers to as *plebiscitarianism* (2002: 94). As he explains, these tools are as much tools to circumvent the disciplining role of parties as they are tools of direct citizen engagement:

[Plebiscitarianism] is a construction kit for detours around policy intersections that have been clogged and polluted by parties and organized interests. In an era of deep and broad cynicism about politics and public life, there is a visceral appeal to the mechanisms promoted as capable of minimizing the impact of parties, politicians, governments, and groups whose activities are assisted by government intervention. (2002:95)

These anti-politics, anti-politician and anti-party approaches all imply one simple principle: parties and their processes only distort the true will of the people. From this

perspective, despite overly centralized internal decision-making on the practical party level, arguably there remained a strong core belief in overcoming the trappings of centralized power and party discipline's cultural compulsions. Perhaps the practices of the Reform Party had only failed to keep pace with its deeper principles, and that time would have resolved this inherent conflict. The unanswerable question remains: given time and greater experience, which approach to discipline would have prevailed? In the absence of both for the Reform Party, true workability of the Trinity for that party, or any party for that matter, must remain a subject of speculation.

Conclusion

Parliamentary reform in itself is rarely successful in addressing the key problems of regional alienation. This is largely because it ignores the fundamental role of free and flexible political representation within those institutions. This chapter has concluded that with an expansive understanding of the role, functions, and responsibilities of those representatives integrated into discussions of institutional reform, real changes to western discontent and power imbalance in the West can be achieved. The key to this successful three-way fusion of regionalism, reform and representation, a connectedness that this study has called the Western Trinity, is the ability to recognize and overcome both the formal and informal pressures of party discipline that accompany traditional party practices and distort the ability of these representatives to advance regional interests.

To demonstrate a working example of the potential connectedness the Western Trinity, the latter section of this chapter looked at some examples of policy and ideology from the 13-year tenure of the Reform Party of Canada. Through Preston Manning's

leadership, Reform represented both the West as a region and identity, and the West as an alienated body in Canada seeking to create a more positive definition of its identity within the national vision. This party also recognized the connection between alienation and institutional power issues in creating this alienation, and thus put forward coherent plans for the reform of both parliamentary and representational practices that acknowledged the interconnection between western regionalism, reform and representation. Part of this acknowledgement included policies to address the formal elements of party discipline, the confidence convention under responsible government. However, when observations that Reform historically supported the centralization of power internally and directly within Party operations and practices are weighed against discussions of Reform's "higher" ideals of anti-partyism and populism, it remains difficult to conclude that Reform was genuinely willing to throw off party discipline's informal, cultural attributes, and make the connection of the Western Trinity workable.

Reform's true intent in this regard will never be known. Gibbins and Arrison conclude that despite the arguments of western Canadians, "three decades of parliamentary reform have made virtually no impact on the pervasiveness and centrality of party discipline." (1995: 98). Looking at the evolution of the Reform Party since the late 1990s – Manning's advocacy of the United Alternative, the March 2000 decision to re-brand the party nationally as the Canadian Alliance, the election of Stockwell Day as leader that summer, the lackluster national performance in the November election, and the eventual replacement of Day with Stephen Harper in March 2002 – questions around its true commitment to overcoming the cultural pitfalls of party discipline have grown even murkier. Manning himself opined that, by the 2000 election, the Canadian Alliance

under Day had drifted far from those most basic policy principles spending very little time or energy “building the Alliance ... as an alliance of ideological, regional, and organizational interests united by a commitment to a principle platform” (2002: 344). Faron Ellis concluded after the same election that the Alliance’s goal was to “shed its image as a western vehicle ... [and] a shift away from the regional and policy articulation characteristics of Reform” (2001: 59). By 2002, Laycock had similarly concluded that the Alliance had become “de-Westernized” and had “soft-pedaled traditional Reform positions on the Triple-E Senate and Ottawa’s poor treatment of the West” (2002: 163). All indications today show the Western Trinity remaining largely unarticulated, much like any progressive articulations against party discipline. The western myth has not evolved towards new positive understandings of identity. It could be argued that the West has lost its voice.

Yet throughout these developments, Manning’s message remains unchanged. In a recent University of Calgary lecture, he continues to distinguish between “Big Westerners” and “Little Westerners,” and remind people in today’s West to “think big... to act more and more as one big unit – and then use the strength of that united West to influence and shape the country as a whole” (2002). But moving forward on the beginnings of a federal government under new leadership, and new possibilities for Opposition to that government, questions remain. Does the prospect of a “united West” with a positive identity still make sense today? Does the myth itself still make sense? What does “the West” mean in 2004? These questions all warrant final consideration.

Conclusion

Seeking New Connections and Positive Identity in the New West

Preston Manning refers to the West of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a region that “couldn’t even defend its own interests, let alone impress its ideas on the federal government or the rest of Canada” (2002: 422). For him, this persona is on the cusp of change as one considers the potential of the “New West” in Canada:

The New West of the twenty-first century will produce more than one-third of Canada’s goods and services. It will become home to more than one-third of Canada’s population, with B.C. becoming the nation’s second largest province by population, and it will control more than one-third of the seats in Canada’s Parliament. In the twenty-first century it will be impossible to implement any truly national policy without the West’s concurrence, or to form any truly national government without Western participation. (2002: 422-423)

The key to meeting this potential is to avoid “thinking small” – to move away from specific frustrations to focus on the West’s rightful place within a pan-national vision. This is an inward-looking yet outward-inspired regionalism that brings the new strengths and clout of the region as whole to bear on national issues. It is a new vision for the West as a powerful region working within and contributing to the nation. With that vision comes the potential for a new and renewed identity, and a new way of looking at Canada.

This study has been precisely centred on the vision of a New West in light of its strengths and opportunities, understanding itself and its problems, and meeting its true potential and rightful position of power within Canada. The central premise has been that the negative character of western identity and alienation experienced in the Canada of the past and present is an inherent result of Canada’s failed democratic institutions on both a structural and cultural level. Yet with an appreciation of the formative relationship between current notions of this particular western identity, meaningful reform of those

institutions, and new approaches to representation, a new and more positive identity can be found from within this alienation, based upon real changes in the culture of partisanship. Chapter One examined how the concepts of sameness, significance and emotional connection within and between physical spaces created a sense of regionalism and identity in the West. It then examined how the historic themes of rejection and populism in the western protest tradition translate this sense into what could be called the western “myth,” which was primarily characterized by the negative emotions of discontent and frustration against the rest of Canada. Chapter Two looked at how the negative identifications sustaining this myth were captured within the concept of western alienation, yet how that very same concept also contemplated powerful emotions of connectedness and inclusion within the West. By identifying the causes of this negative identity within alienation – the failures of Canadian federalism that create a concentration of influence and an imbalance of political power in Canada – the discussion contemplated how these inclusive elements could be realized within a positive western identity. Chapter Three examined how that power imbalance manifested itself in the institutional workings of Parliament, through the House of Commons, the Senate, the Cabinet, and the role of the Prime Minister. It looked at frustrated proposals to reform those institutions, and concluded that for reform to genuinely resolve regional alienation, existing practices around parliamentary representation must be re-imagined, and the formal and cultural trappings of party discipline must be overcome. Chapter Four further discussed this renewed approach to representational roles, and argued that the expansion of these roles could be best attained through the completion of the *Western Trinity* linking regionalism to reform and representation in theory and in practice. The chapter closed with a limited

discussion of how the Reform Party of Canada reflected its own version of the Trinity, and how in practice the cultural challenges of party discipline created challenges (even for this committed party) in moving the Trinity from theory to practical workability. Through this discussion, questions remained about whether the Western Trinity could ever stop the swell of western alienation in practice, and create new opportunities for positive identity in the West. Those questions will likely remain unanswered.

Carty *et al.* earlier observed that 1993 brought forward “new norms” in Canadian federalism through new regional parties that held true through the 2000 election. This regionalization of the vote, coupled with growing disengagement and cynicism by the electorate, had ordained the Reform Party (and the Canadian Alliance by default) as the vessel for western alienation and the western myth at the end of the 20th century. And in its time, the Reform Party and its founder, Preston Manning, endeavoured to create a positive sense of self in the West that would exceed these norms. As Manning wrote, “if there is a common aspiration with a potential for linking Canadians together in a new way, it is this: Canadians who are still committed to Canada “want in” – into the life, economy, culture, politics and decision-making of our own country” (1992: vi). Yet experience has proven that these norms have not been exceeded, and the potential of Manning’s “New West” remains largely untapped. Looking forward in the early years of the 21st century, the environment is once again undergoing change, as is the vehicle for western identity and ideals. Two recent developments are particularly relevant.

First, there is the decision of the Canadian Alliance and Progressive Conservative parties to merge. With the approval of nearly 96 percent of Canadian Alliance members and 90 percent of PCs in December of 2003 (Martin, 2003: np), the parties officially

merged to form the Conservative Party of Canada, and former Canadian Alliance leader Stephen Harper was named the new party's leader in March 2004. Advocates see this as the best way to overcome regional vote splitting to defeat the governing Liberals; detractors fear that some fundamental policies and practices may be lost. Given the last chapter's conclusions about the Alliance's maintenance of traditional Reform policies past 2000, those policies concerning regional interests, institutional reform, and representational freedom seem particularly threatened under this new coalition. Stephen Harper, in a recent address, emphasized that the new party will "combine grassroots democracy and energy of the Canadian Alliance with history and governing experience of the PC Party," and that the new party will "take up the cause of democratic reform" (2003). But this is only speculation given that the party has only recently elected a leader and has yet to establish upon a set of national policies. The 19 "principles" of the merger Agreement-in-Principle only insubstantially refer to ideals such as regional diversity, responsiveness to members, and "a belief in ... the institutions of Parliament and the democratic process" (2003: 2). Columnist John Ibbitson predicts that the new party is in grave danger of "ditching the most populist planks of the Alliance platform in favour of wishy-washy [Progressive Conservative] principles" (2003: A13). The ill-fated cycle experienced by western protest parties – where a protest party's rise is soon followed by its fall – once again seems to be coming to pass with this merger. Once held by the Reform Party, the mantle of the ambitious western identity trying to surmount the insularity and disaffection of western alienation may now be up for grabs.

This opens the door for the second development, the ascension of Prime Minister Paul Martin. While the Canadian Alliance moved away from western issues since 2000,

Martin appears willing to take up that mantle. He has made ending the negative effects of regional alienation in Canada one of his major pre-election platforms, vowing in his response to his first Throne speech, “I have said that alienation in the West and British Columbia is not a myth. It is a reality. We must address that reality – it’s a question of earning people’s trust” (2004). In his document *Making History: The Politics of Achievement*, released just prior to the fall 2003 Liberal Party leadership convention, Martin is even more direct: “In Western Canada, new voices are bearing the clear message: the west wants in” (2003: 3). The Prime Minister has deliberately and purposefully picked up the language of regional empowerment within alienation left behind by the Reform Party. He combines this message with a commitment to “reforming parliament ... to bring regional concerns and issues right to the heart of the national government” (2003: 11), referencing intrastate reforms such as free votes, strengthened parliamentary committees, and more legislative influence for MPs – a promise confirmed in the 2004 Throne Speech. Martin links these goals explicitly to the goals of ending executive centralization and expanding representation:

The current system isn’t good enough. In Ottawa, government MPs are torn between their desire to serve constituents and the interests of their communities on the one hand, and on the other, the insistence on strict loyalty and discipline that emanates from “the Centre,” the Prime Minister and Cabinet In effect, the command-and-control systems of centralized authority in Ottawa have pushed the views of citizens and communities off to the side. Too many Canadians have thus come to see MPs as the representatives of Ottawa in their ridings, instead of representatives of their ridings in Ottawa. We have to change that. (2003: 11)

Just as Reform has in the past, Martin acknowledges a clear connection between the western regional condition and the dysfunctional parliamentary and representational institutions forming what he called in an early speech “the democratic deficit” (2002: 10) within Canada. In essence, he is acknowledging the three elements of the Western Trinity

singularly, although it is unclear if the value of the significant connection between the three is being acknowledged.

It is also difficult to tell if Martin recognizes what must be done to move beyond the message to practice and workability. On February 4, 2004, the Martin government released *An Action Plan for Democratic Reform*. In the preface, the Prime Minister states that the plan was designed to “reconnect Parliament to Canadians and renew the capacity of Parliamentarians – from all parties – to shape policy and legislation” (2004: ii). It is a fusion of parliamentary and representational reform, with an eye to the longstanding grievances of the West. Among the proposed reforms were: more resources, authority and independence for parliamentary committees (particularly on legislative issues); greater roles for parliamentary secretaries; agreement to review proposals for committee review of appointments (such as Crown corporation heads), and continued review of House Procedure. Most relevant to this study’s discussion is the plan to introduce a “three-line whip” procedure whereby votes would be explicitly ranked in importance and expectation, with only those designated as “three-line” being confidence votes (2004: 4). If achieved, this method could make significant gains in overcoming the formal aspects of party discipline.

Yet as this study has illustrated, there are many good proposals on the books that have never been put into practice. Moreover, these changes may do little to curb the informal, cultural aspects of party discipline, which evidence and actions to date suggest is still a culture embraced by the Martin Liberals. For example, despite the three-line whip proposal, the Martin government has already declared that one of the West’s largest policy issues – the national gun registry – would be a full confidence vote because it is a

“spending issue” (Curry, 2004: A09). Because almost every government initiative involves spending, this peculiar justification draws into question whether conditions would ever be appropriate for a truly free vote. Observers have also noted the continued absence of proposals to reform the Senate, federal board and commission appointments, judicial appointments, and the electoral system – all important western reform initiatives. On a structural level, Martin’s new Prime Minister’s Office composition includes the Prime Minister as chair of nearly half of all Cabinet committees and the creation of a number of policy secretariats directly reporting to the Prime Minister. This draws into question whether or not power has truly been de-centralized in Ottawa (Fife and Dawson, 2003: C02). While Martin’s commitment to carrying forward the western myth and addressing the democratic deficit may be genuine, actions have yet to demonstrate a willingness to move from concept and connection to political will and workability.

It is also difficult to predict whether or not dusting off the old mantras and ideas of the traditional western myth is yet another attempt to galvanize both positive and negative western sentiments is to genuinely achieve true regional alleviation, or simply an empty gesture to secure electoral gains in the West. Whatever the intent, the Western Trinity and the New West envisioned by Manning is clearly being colonized as the domain of the governing traditional party. It may be the covert co-optation of the western myth out from under the nose of Westerners. The regional party may no longer be the sole, or even preferred, vehicle for regional expression. By the next election, the party system may look very different than it did ten years before. Or it may not. What is known is that Canada in 2004 remains a country challenged by regional, electoral and individual disengagement, just as it was ten, twenty or even fifty years ago.

And what of the West's pursuit of what Manning called the "common aspiration" (1992: vi) of the West through inclusive, positive, national visions for itself in Canada? As this study has conveyed, even when solutions are charted and the right connections are made, the renewed identities of the New West can still remain out of reach. Gibbins and Arrison speculate that this may be because the legacy of unresolved western discontent reflects a more fundamental and immutable incongruity between core western and national "cultural" beliefs that frustrates all best laid plans:

The search has been for an institutional framework within which regional values could find more effective expression and regional interests could be more adequately protected. However, the search has been largely unsuccessful, and thus the structural foundations of western alienation remain in place. While the intensity of that alienation will fluctuate across time and space in response to short-term policy and partisan facts, the sentiment itself will not disappear... [This is] because the national visions articulated by Western Canadians rest uneasily with in the broader Canadian political culture (1995: 143)

While the West may be secretly willing to blend its distinct regional identity with that of the national, perhaps those who steward the national identity prefer to keep this distance and difference. While western reformers often introduce new ideas into the national political lexicon that become part of national political debate (for example, the Reform Party proposal for Senate reform still under discussion today), these ideas have only provided an incremental approach to the New West. The gap between western and national cultures still remains vast despite the most concerted attempts.

Perhaps these cultures are destined to always be incongruent; to never find themselves in each other, but only in themselves as apart. Historically, the western myth has always been predicated on the alienated self, the disaffected self, and the self forever distanced from the national whole. The West has only ever really known itself as "the West" when it has been alienated and distant. Perhaps there is no western myth *without* these forces. If this alienation were to be addressed, the mere existence of "the West" as a

coherent entity could come into question. It is entirely credible to say that there is no such thing as “the West,” only “the alienated West”, and that all efforts to evolve that alienation are destined to fail. Perhaps the West cannot be the West any other way. Despite what countless theory and speculation has provided, exclusion over inclusion and imbalance over balance may be Canada’s real equilibrium.

Hence, what may be in question is two incongruent cultures that remain incongruent by nature and by design. The myth of the West today, and the vision of the New West with a renewed identity, may find its only fulfillment through the pursuit, not the attainment, of national inclusion. Consequently, any pursuit of a workable solution to western alienation always meets resistance. While the West seeks inclusion and resolutions, it may forever maintain a subconscious difference and distance from the national whole that ensures its carefully crafted and historically reinforced regional identity remains intact and untouched. The myth exists because the West *tries* to overcome its negative self; it does not exist because the West *succeeds*. In this sense, the failure of past protest traditions to reverse power structures and to achieve true regional voice is in actuality a success, a source of strength, and a source of self for the western identity. It is this value that, while bringing frustration to the West, also keeps the region a strong and ever-diligent part of Canada. Despite a legacy of failure and incongruence for the West, perhaps success for the region has been attained. There may be no need to find new norms in the political system, or a New West in Canada. Perhaps what has been seen before and is being seen today *is* the New West – a region and identity caught up in a process of *becoming*, forever distanced, yet forever yearning to connect. Always western, yet always Canadian at heart.

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