Americanity and the Prospects of a Hemispheric Social Imaginary

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This paper employs the concept of americanity, as outlined in French-language writings over the past few decades, as a point of entry to outline the theoretical foundations of a transcultural hemispheric social imaginary in the Americas. The paper begins with a brief intellectual history of americanity’s usage in francophone Québécois scholarship, after which it turns to a consideration of how the term can assist an interculturally based reading of modern society in the Americas and beyond. The final section examines the socio-political implications of using the idea of americanity, which builds upon the insights of the Canadian School of political theory regarding civic life in multicultural settings. In particular, I contend that americanity enables us to conceive of an agonistic and pluralistic understanding of the public sphere, whereby the latter is open to contestation by socio-cultural groups and the recognition of their demands in a manner that thickens democratic practices.

Keywords: Americanity; Americas; Pluralism; Public Sphere; Social Imaginary

Introduction

In an age that is nurturing simultaneously global integration and local particularities, continentalism is becoming a key site of intercultural mediation. If the African Union is a diluted institutional manifestation of a pan-Africanism born out of the post-war wave of decolonisation, aesthetic and intellectual projects seeking to reflect a sub-Saharan identity remain vibrant (Enwezor; Mkandawire). The continuous expansion of the European Union, and notably questions about Turkey’s admission and
participation in the Iraq War, are sparking debates about the substance of a pan-European ‘constitutional patriotism’ grounded in liberal democracy, multiculturalism, human rights and multilateralism (Levy, Pensky and Torpey). In Asia, ASEAN and APEC, as well as a brand of ‘neo-Confucianism’, are being reframed in light of China’s emergence as the newest global superpower.

But what of the Americas? The plan to expand NAFTA into a Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) has met both civil and state resistance because of its neo-liberal roots and imperialist tinges, while the reassertion of US exceptionalism and providentialism, or manifest destiny, in the world (Altamirano; Ignatieff) – when coupled with a tradition, derived from the Monroe Doctrine, of considering the Western Hemisphere as the USA’s own backyard – have hardly provided propitious conditions for the formulation of a multipolar pan-American identity. Moreover, fuelled by controversies about undocumented migration, cultural conservatives equate the very possibility of such a pluralised identity as a Latinisation of the USA threatening the latter’s distinctive national character (Huntington). Despite these currents, it would be a mistake to believe that the prospects of a hemispheric social imaginary in the Americas are determined by neo-liberalism on the one hand and US nativism on the other.

Indeed, this would be to overlook a vast body of non-anglophone scholarship devoted to proposing a densely intercultural and transnational version of the hemisphere that is unbounded by national and linguistic borders, thereby contesting the USA’s appropriation of the position of sole referent for the American signifier. If the concept of americanidad (or americanidade in Portuguese) has thrust the questions of cultural syncretism and ‘New Worldism’ at the heart of Latin American scholarship since the turn of the twentieth century (Canclini; Marinho, de Campos and de Souza; Martí; Mignolo; Ortiz), as have those of antillanité and créolité in the French Caribbean (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant; Glissant Le Discours antillais),¹ I want to draw attention to another stream of thinking on the subject at hand. Over the last decade or so – explicitly building upon the contributions of, and in conjunction with, their Latin American counterparts – francophone Québécois human scientists have put forth a rich body of work centred around the notion of américanité. Like its equivalents in Hispanic languages, américanité is designed to identify a pan-Americanism that equally steers clear of the misleading alternatives of Americanisation (assimilation into the US hegemon) and nativist retreatism (the protection of essentialised ethno-cultural identities).²

As such, this paper employs this francophone Québécois literature on américanité as a point of entry to outline the theoretical foundations of a hemispheric social imaginary.³ After a brief intellectual history of the term in French-language circles, I consider how américanité can assist in the task of advancing a transcultural reading of modernity and the nation-state in the Americas and beyond. However, since the concept of américanité has wide-ranging socio-political implications, the paper’s final section draws on it to extend the insights of the Canadian School of political theory regarding civic life in multicultural settings, in the direction of an agonistic and
pluralistic understanding of the public sphere that is open to contestation by socio-cultural groups and the recognition of their demands in a manner that thickens democratic practices.

**Anatomy of a Concept**

In the most general terms, americanity refers to the socio-historical condition of inhabiting the Americas and the corresponding transnational and intercultural social imaginary shared across societies of the hemisphere. The concept aims to underscore overlapping zones of similarity and possible cultural convergence among these societies (in order to counter arguments about national nominalism, such as US exceptionalism), while also acknowledging the many differences between them (in order to oppose the logic of Americanising homogenisation). Thus, americanity directs analysis towards an understanding of how each society stems from processes of ‘creative adaptation’ (Taylor “Two Theories of Modernity”), imposition and blending of domestic, continental and global structures, practices and worldviews; in the case of Québec and Canada, this would include components from the three ‘founding nations’ (indigenous, French and British), yet also Asian, US and Afro-Caribbean influences, which are themselves internally divergent and polyvocal. In other words, the *differentia specifica* of American societies results from how they have structured syncretic elements to form pluralised cultural configurations, not from whether or to what extent they resist such syncretism in the name of national authenticity or the preservation of traditions.

The outlines of this conception of americanity began to emerge out of a stream of francophone literary and social scientific scholarship between the 1950s and the 1970s, which like its predecessors in Latin America, attempted to reorient French-Canadian socio-cultural parameters from a European to an American hemispheric framing. Three principal reasons underpinned this shift: the need to recognise the multiple sources of Québec’s collective identity, against forms of ethnic nationalism (Bourque; Laroche; Le Moyne); the belief that French-Canadians could no longer understand themselves as an exiled people, an abandoned outpost of France in the ‘New World’, but rather as French-speaking inhabitants of the Americas and full participants in the hemisphere’s development (Languirand; Rocher); and a claim that this embrace of a hemispheric destiny did not signify capitulation to the forces of Americanisation, but rather the opportunity to invent a societal project in conjunction with other peoples of the Americas while remaining vigilant about the possibilities of cultural and linguistic assimilation.

Of more immediate relevance here is a body of writing on americanity that began in the early 1990s, seeking to foreground the ‘identitarian ambivalence’ of Québec society (Lamonde *Allégeances et dépendances*). Consequently, *Américains francophones* can be seen as concurrently cultivating a sense of hemispheric belonging with other peoples of the Americas yet, by virtue of their distinctive French-speaking status, perpetually needing to negotiate between various socio-cultural flows and
nation-building projects (Bouchard and Lacombe; Dumont). For instance, one line of inquiry has thematised the existence of a French-Canadian diasporic literary imaginary across the Americas (e.g. Jack Kerouac, David Plante), which combines a multiplicity of geographical and social markers of identity and can be situated within wider francophone and Hispanic–Lusitanic cultural formations on the continent (so as to encompass Haiti and Martinique, as well as Brazil and Mexico) (Côté; Côté and Tremblay; Fitz; Morency).

This second wave of research on americanity has been able to pinpoint the shared features of a transnationalised American condition. Among these is the founding of the Americas through originary processes of mass violence, namely, colonisation, domination over indigenous populations and slavery (Glissant Mémoires des esclavages). Moreover, from a European perspective, the ‘New World’ represented a site for the redemption of utopian social projects that could not come to fruition on the Old Continent: the establishment of theocratic societies for the New England Puritan pilgrims and the Catholic clergy of New France in the seventeenth century (Bouchard “Comment les Québécois”), or, three centuries later, the urban realisation of the principles of architectural modernism (Brasilia, Chicago, etc.). Also common to the hemisphere are nation-building exercises aimed to establish historical narratives and collective identities that are defined against those of erstwhile European colonial metropolises – exercises that have contributed to certain former colonies on the American continent eventually surpassing such colonial powers in demographic, economic and geopolitical terms (to wit, Brazil vis-à-vis Portugal and the USA vis-à-vis Britain). And, as already mentioned, integral to the idea of americanity is a recognition of the foundational character of socio-cultural syncretism across the hemisphere, something that was initially produced out of the structural dynamics of colonial encounters and slavery, and continuously reconfigured since then via transnational migration, diasporic networks and the circulation of multilingual and intercultural flows across the territory of the Americas.

Societal Modernity Redux

Having sketched the contours of americanity, I want to return to the theoretical implications of its highlighting of ambivalence as an inescapable characteristic of collective identity in the American hemisphere. What this means, in the first instance, is that a sense of inhabiting several socio-cultural lifeworlds without completely belonging to or being estranged from any of them cannot be overcome in the name of progressing toward a teleologically ordained endpoint of a singular or permanently sutured national identity. Thus, societies in the Americas are characterised by their engagement with a plurality of cultural realities that groups and persons articulate to one another to create various combinations of ways of being and thinking (Canclini; Smith; Taylor Reconciling the Solitudes). Rather than standing as an indicator of national underdevelopment or of a failure of social cohesion, then,
identitarian ambivalence can be reinterpreted as a pillar of modern experiments in the Americas.

In other words, americanity (in both its Hispanic and francophone variants) compels us to analyse both societies in the hemisphere and a hemispheric social imaginary as ‘fields of tension’ (Arnason) rather than ‘incomplete projects’ (Habermas) – namely, as socio-historical ensembles structured by the intersections of global empires, internal colonialism toward First Nations peoples and numerous transnational forces. By contrast to a unidimensional theory of modernisation (supported by a developmental concept of progress), americanity directs our attention to the ‘New World’ dialectic between historical continuity and transformation (Bouchard Genèse des nations; “L’américanité”), whereby history is a living repertoire of collective memory and institutional relations perpetually reactivated in the present. Out of processes of creative adaptation, and the dynamics of conflict and collaboration between groups (a point to which we will return in the next section), the Americas are taking shape as intercultural amalgams that neither reproduce, nor are purely derivative of, other modern experiments around the world; the hemisphere exists as a series of transnationalised spaces blending distinctly American features with East and South Asian currents, West and Central African flows, and so on.

The metaphor of a field of tensions can be employed to refute the analytical reductionism affecting two commonplace scenarios about the future of non-US societies in the Americas. Whereas Americanisation foresees a pre-ordained process of homogenising assimilation or incorporation into the US empire, Europeanisation clings to the preservation of an invented ‘Old World’ heritage (whether Spanish, Portuguese, French or British) as a monocultural buffer against dependence on, and integration into, the US orbit – or yet again, against the dilution of such a heritage through transculturalism. While seemingly opposed to one another, both schemes provide unidimensional renderings of the complex socio-cultural dynamics at play in societies of the American hemisphere.

Scholars adopting the concept of americanity can counter the neo-liberal or neo-conservative formulation of an Americanised modernisation, according to which the USA shows the rest of the Americas an image of its own future and forges a path to be emulated. But just as importantly, americanity can be used to interrogate dystopian narratives of Americanisation found in anti-American forms of nativist nationalism across the hemisphere, in which the USA is depicted as a behemoth against which vulnerable societies must be inoculated. Both utopian and dystopian strands of Americanisation draw upon monolithic representations of US society, which, like all others, is composed of various, often contradictory currents resisting simplistic caricature. From the edges of the USA, as neither pure insiders nor outsiders, societies of the Americas enjoy a privileged vantage point from which to observe and grasp the hemispheric hegemon. As a result, neither the USA’s national mythology as the land of opportunity and meritocracy’s highest embodiment, nor the image of it as a military–industrial–entertainment juggernaut emblematised by the supposed conquest of the triumvirate of the Pentagon, Wall Street and Hollywood, ring entirely
true for citizens of other American societies. Cultural, economic and migration flows within the hemisphere have facilitated a nuanced perception of the USA, which is viewed as a country in which exists structural hierarchies and an acutely skewed distribution of material and symbolic resources, on the one hand, and the presence of progressive social movements (civil rights, feminist, anti-war, labour, environmental) that have transformed the Americas, on the other. To this extent, US influence is a constant factor in the hemisphere, but its relative weight will continue to shift and be subject to intense public scrutiny and debate. Even in Canada, the most culturally proximate society to the USA in the hemisphere, there is little evidence of alignment with its Southern neighbour; in fact, if anything, what have been witnessed are diverging belief-systems among the two countries’ populations over the last few decades (Adams; Lipset).

As much as it questions the validity of theses about the inevitability of Americanisation, americanity can equally be applied to cast a sceptical gaze upon Europeanising nation-building strategies in the hemisphere as a bulwark against cultural syncretism – whether in the form of a cultural traditionalism that bolsters a country’s ‘Old World’ heritage or, as previously mentioned, an ethnic nationalism for which certain archetypes of Europeanness embody the authentic spirit of a people. At the same time, an elitist strand of Europeanisation supports a self-devaluating sense of ‘cultural cringe’ and domestic inferiority within the Americas, with European civilisation touted as the personification of artistic achievement and intellectual life needing to be emulated. To work with the idea of americanity, however, leads one to acknowledge the European sources of many of the socio-political institutions and ideologies throughout the hemisphere, while also problematising the Eurocentric founding myths of the Americas by diversifying collective memory (to include the histories of indigenous peoples, among others) and challenging the equation of national authenticity with European roots.

Contrary to Americanising and Europeanising frameworks, americanity can push analysts to reconfigure societies of the Americas as porous spaces of engagement with ethno-cultural difference and globalising tendencies, thus problematising the assumed boundedness of national cultures. Hence, in the Canadian case, americanity directly rebuts the nativist survivalism expressed in the Québécois metaphor of the province being an island of French in an ocean of English (‘une île de français dans un océan d’anglais’; see Figure 1) and in English-Canadian nationalism’s desire to maintain the border in order to insulate the domestic sphere against US influence (see Figure 2) – both of which underpin a cultural isolationism according to which continental and global insertion endangers vulnerable national identities needing to be defended against hostile ‘external’ forces.

Among other considerations, such a transnational framing of American societies repositions them within a multilingual hemispheric context that, aside from officially recognised European languages, is composed of Créole, global linguistic communities (Hindi, Cantonese, Arabic, Swahili, etc.) and indigenous languages. In this manner, francophone collectivities in Canada and Québec can begin to view themselves as one
Figure 1 The Québec problematic: ‘an island of French in an ocean of English’.

Figure 2 The Canadian problematic: at the edge of empire.
of the hemisphere’s essential components rather than a cultural oddity or exception, for americanity partially realigns these groups with populations of the French Caribbean while also indicating the creation of a nascent Latin cultural axis across the continent.

Hence, the discourse of americanity compels us to interpret the Americas as an intercultural amalgam, a creolised sphere of social relations produced out of the criss-crossing and articulation of global networks and forms of movement (see Figure 3).

By using the concept to represent the hemisphere as an important node of the Somalian and Chinese diasporas, of their Lebanese and Sikh equivalents, and of the francophonie and Commonwealth, among others, we can accentuate the polyvocality of a social imaginary that troubles the distinction between the inside and outside of national and civilisational borders (Tully).

**Cultural Pluralism and Political Agonism**

As mentioned in the previous section, americanity’s recasting of modern societies as syncretic fields of tension underscores identitarian ambivalence in intercultural settings. At the same time, what should not be neglected is the fact that the public recognition of such ambivalence is politically generative of an agonistic vision of public life in culturally pluralistic settings, one in which discursive contest between different socio-cultural groups can open up spaces for democratic practices. To this extent, americanity can build upon the legacy of what has come to be known as the Canadian School of liberal political theory, a diverse group of thinkers who have put forth acclaimed interpretations of deliberative constitutionalism, politics of recognition and accommodation of differences in multicultural societies (Blattberg; Chambers; Kymlicka *Finding Our Way; Multicultural Citizenship*; Taylor *Reconciling...*)

![Figure 3](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 3** A hemispheric reframing: the Americas as a multipolar and syncretic space.

the Solitudes; “The Politics of Recognition”; Tully). While by no means uniform in their conclusions, theorists regrouped as part of the Canadian School share an understanding of the Canadian public sphere as having developed sophisticated procedures and mechanisms for public debate and deliberation with regards to issues of ethno-cultural diversity; these have supplied an intellectual environment through which they have formulated the institutional conditions facilitating the recognition of multiple collective identities without compromising group demands for equal legal treatment or overriding them via culturally assimilationist national designs. Correspondingly, the Canadian School’s guiding principle is that of dialogical pluralism, according to which divergent positions can be accommodated and claims can be negotiated through an ongoing national conversation—or, to put it in another idiom, through the exercise of public discourse between citizens.

The first implication of taking seriously americanity’s insistence on identitarian ambivalence is to approach the latter as an inescapable quality of a transculturally conceived hemisphere. Accordingly, ambivalence cannot be transcended through politically formalist means, since officially sanctioned institutional arrangements from above (such as constitutional negotiations, the attainment of national sovereignty or legal rulings) have little ‘trickle down’ effect upon the lifeworlds of the peoples of the Americas, which are defined by manifold attachments and belongings. Moreover, americanity exposes the fallacy of perceiving an ambivalence forged out of intercultural realities as a problematic state of affairs that should be resolved through formal political measures, which amount to a flight from the intricacies and contingency of cultural pluralism while revealing a longing for finality and sameness. The conviction that all traces of identitarian multiplicity can be rooted out of nation-states and put behind them once and for all embodies the fantasy of a society identical to itself, which ‘overcomes’ cultural alterity under the guise of unity. In turn, this conviction sustains a closure of public arenas to long-standing and emerging claims for the recognition of historically stigmatised identities and injustices perpetrated against certain ethno-cultural communities (Kernerman; Tully). Read through the lens of americanity, ambivalence becomes an irresolvable aporia and limit-condition of social life in our globalised epoch, intimately related to the multilayered and polysemic character of collective identities in the Americas today. Thus, both national and transnational institutional configurations in the hemisphere are themselves variable, and subject to being revised and renegotiated over time.

In a related fashion, researchers can employ americanity to elaborate an agonistic vision of transcultural politics, whereby participants seek to widen as well as intensify sites and modes of interrogation of already constituted and seemingly discrete national communities. Concretely, what this signifies in the Canadian case is a revisiting of the historical narrative of a compact between three founding peoples because of several factors. Among these are the ambiguous level of ascent and outright opposition by substantial fractions of two of three original collectivities (indigenous peoples and French-Canadians) to participate in the nation-building
project, and such groups’ still unresolved grievances about their unequal status within the Canadian federation (which can be traced back to European colonisation and the British Conquest of 1789, respectively). Other factors include perpetual uncertainty on the part of these communities about their institutional positions within Canada in light of their demands for self-determination (Kymlicka Finding Our Way; Létourneau; Maclure 81–82), and claims of marginalisation or wholesale exclusion from this dominant national narrative on the part of other ethno-cultural groups (notably African- and Asian-Canadians).

More generally, with the notion of americanity, we can envisage national and hemispheric spaces as sites that cultivate discourses and acts of transcultural invention, trespassing and dissent by symbolically dominated or politically disenfranchised actors, who are contesting the very terms of the framing of their collective rights and experiential lifeworlds. This brings us to consider how social movements in the Americas representing diasporic communities of colour, indigenous peoples and immigrants with various official statuses are engaging in struggles to challenge and restructure national political arrangements – which they portray as contingent and imperfect socio-historical constructs liable to be transformed as a result of public debate and deliberation.

To be clear, this agonistic rendering of intercultural politics in the Americas does not value antagonism or conflict for its own sake, nor is it intrinsically wary of consensus as a mechanism of domination. Rather, I take agonism in the Arendtian sense of a rhetorical contest between parties holding differing visions of the good life and of the appropriate political arrangements most suited to realising such visions – that is to say, agonism as an essential principle of a thick version of democracy in culturally pluralistic settings. Following Arendt, then, we can reformulate the concerns of the previous section in denoting the dubiousness of the objective of civic unanimity or uniformity, which would create an impoverished public realm where citizens experience little need for substantive debate and discussion (Arendt 93–94). Hence, the concept of americanity points towards an understanding of public arenas and civil societies as locales generated through discursive engagement between groups establishing collaborative and conflictual relations, with the outcomes of such engagement being no more significant than the prospects of wide-ranging popular participation in the formulation of, and deliberation about, hemispheric and national institution-building projects. In agonistic terms, democratic robustness does not originate from parties reaching agreement as such, but from continuous discursive contest among them. This is not to say that the existence of such moments and sites of contestation necessarily translates into a substantial public recognition or addressing of demands on the part of stigmatised ethno-cultural groups, nor even in levelling ‘the playing field’ on which civic actors can advance their claims. Nevertheless, because of its insistence on the need to consider transnational and multicultural identities as defining hemispheric realities, americanity fosters a political context in which these claims can be advanced, considered and deliberated upon.
Instead of being seen as divisive or compromising of communal unity, transcultural reinscriptions of national narratives based on hemispheric and global forces can contribute to unleashing dense moments and sites of public discourse, where actors are compelled to debate and negotiate with others concerning the kinds of socio-political arrangements under which they will be governed. From this vantage point, dissensus and political antagonism originate from attempts to impose monocultural renderings of collective identity through assimilationist governmental policies, or from ethnically essentialised discourses of national belonging operating through a series of moral dichotomies (us/them, friend/enemy, etc.). Conversely, the creation of public spaces in which cultural pluralism and syncretism can thrive is itself generative of bonds of mutual respect between agonistic protagonists, for out of socio-political engagement and dialogical reciprocity among them can emerge relations of affinity and divergence on particular issues (Maclure 140–44). It is through contestation and deliberation between parties that these kinds of political relations can exist, by putting into question territorially discrete identities and asserting rights to the recognition of cultural difference; indeed, pluralism is endangered not because of a surfeit of agonistic dynamics, but on the contrary, from a paucity of them – clearing the way for flagging civic participation in democratic practices and a weak exercise of popular sovereignty.

Conclusion

Pioneered in Latin American thought and reformulated in francophone Québécois scholarship over the last few decades, the notion of americanity provides a rich intellectual terrain through which to reinterpret the Americas as intercultural and transnational space, composed of syncretic fields of tension whose hemispheric social imaginary is defined by a sense of pluralism and identitarian ambivalence. Instead of falling back upon the well-worn tropes of Americanisation and Europeanisation, social scientists can employ americanity to concentrate on how American societies produce their cultural specificities through – and not against – engagement with and articulation of multiple hemispheric and global forces. Such reinterpretations are essential if we are to grasp how identitarian ambivalence represents the social undergirding of discursive agonism in the public spheres of these societies, as well as the extent to which public dialogue and cultural pluralism are themselves the sources of robust democratic practices (as per the Canadian School of political theory).

Recognition of the multiethnic and creolised roots of the American hemisphere has the potential to pave the way for the kind of thick interculturalism that transforms public spaces into realms of encounter with alterity and critical self-interrogation. In this manner, notions of tolerance and reasonable accommodation of ‘visible minorities’ can be replaced by a collective duty of hospitality toward others (Derrida; Kant), not to mention a willingness to put into question customary and acquired ways of being and acting in the world in order to remain open to the provocation of difference (Kurasawa). Because it effects a hemispheric turn, then, americanity
provides some of the conceptual tools through which to recast socio-cultural and political processes in different terms – methodological nationalism giving way to an analytical cosmopolitanism (Beck) whose radical potential has only begun to be explored.

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Notes

[1] I want to thank Natalie Melas for drawing my attention to Glissant’s Le Discours antillais and its similarities to the argument advanced here. While it goes beyond the scope of this paper, a comparison between antillanité, créolité and américanité would be extremely fruitful, in a manner already laid out by certain thinkers: “La Créolité englobe et parachève donc l’Américanité puisqu’elle implique le double processus: d’adaptation des Européens, des Africains et des Asiatiques au Nouveau Monde; de confrontation culturelle entre ces peuples au sein d’un même espace, aboutissant à la création d’une culture syncrétique dite créole” (Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant 31).

[2] Although an analysis of the Latin American contributions to this hemispheric imaginary is well beyond the scope and intent of this paper, it should be mentioned that the notion of americanity finds its roots in pioneering essays such as José Martí’s “Nuestra América” (“Our America”, first published in 1892) and José Vasconcelos’ La raza cósmica (The Cosmic Race, first published in 1925). For more recent Latin American writings on the concept, see, inter alia: Marinho, de Campos and de Souza; Mignolo; Ortiz; as well as the journal Nuevo Mundo <http://nuevomundo.revues.org >. Despite these, as well as the works of other authors writing in English (Csipak and Héroux; Cuccioletta, Côté and Lesemann; Dupont; Quijano and Wallerstein), the notion of americanity remains relatively obscure in the English-speaking world.

[3] The concept of the social imaginary originates in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, referring to a symbolically mediated system of significations that is collectively instituted and shared. For Castoriadis, the social imaginary is the source of society self-creation in the socio-historical field or, put differently, of what he terms the instituting society (Castoriadis The Imaginary Institution of Society 146; World in Fragments 8, 13). More recently, the social imaginary has been given wider currency by Charles Taylor, who understands it to mean the common ways that ordinary persons imagine the social world, including intersubjective, narrative and normative dimensions of existence (Taylor Modern Social Imaginaries 23–25).

[4] Many of the leading francophone Québécois historians, sociologists, political scientists and literary scholars have participated in this debate (Bouchard Genèse des nations et cultures du nouveau monde; Fournier; Lamonde Allégeances et dépendances; Létourneau; Rocher; Thériault), as have some of the province’s key French-language journals (Possibles, Argument, Recherches sociographiques, Sociologies et sociétés, Politique et société, etc.). The Groupe
interdisciplinaire de recherche sur les Amériques (GIRA) is an active research network on the topic. See <http://www.gira.info > (accessed 15 February 2008).

[5] For instance, Lamonde playfully advances the following ‘formula’ to represent the various historical components of Québec identity: $Q = -(F) + (GB) + (USA)2 - (R) + (C)$, where F is France, GB is Great Britain, R is Rome (or the Roman Catholic Church) and C is Canada. For an elaboration, see Lamonde Allégeances et dépendances; Histoire sociale des idées au Québec.

[6] Americanity’s rejection of an exclusively European-based national collective memory does not entail the latter’s erasure or the death knell of the distinctiveness of the francophone project on the continent (Thériault). Rather, it recognises that collective memory is contested and multiple, with one of the key questions being whose history is preserved and whose is forgotten. Thus, the task consists of combining the mnemonic imaginaries of, say, indigenous peoples and black Canadians to that of French-Canadians in Québec.

[7] The identification of a Canadian School of political theory stems from many sources (Beiner and Norman; Kernerman). While bound together by an overarching progressive liberalism, this School contains a variety of approaches that range from Taylor’s Hegelian emphasis on recognition to Chambers’s Habermasian interpretation of deliberation, and from Tully’s Wittgensteinian notion of the ‘aspectival’ character of cultural diversity to Kymlicka’s theory of accommodation of minority group rights.

[8] To this extent, my perspective differs from those of many other theorists of agonistic politics, such as Connolly’s neo-Nietzscheanism and Mouffe’s neo-Schmittian approach (Connolly; Mouffe). Like them, however, I want to maintain the crucial distinction between agonistic adversaries (based on the analogy of a contest between protagonists bound by ties of mutual respect) and antagonistic enemies (based on the analogy of warfare and destruction of protagonists).

Works Cited


