L. Turgeon, “Interpreting Quebec’s Historical Trajectories: between *la société globale* and the regional space,” in A. Gagnon, *Quebec: State and Society, 3rd ed.* (Peterborough, 2004)

**Overview**

Turgeon, in this chapter, explores how the historical evolution of Quebec has been interpreted and conceptualized by past and contemporary analysts of Quebec society. He argues that new comparative approaches advanced in the past few years move beyond an opposition between Quebec as a regional space and Quebec as *une société globale.* Recent comparative work has brought new interpretative categories such as Quebec as a new collectivity, and Quebec as a small nation and region-state, that allow for the simultaneous understanding of the unique and shared characteristics of Quebec’s historical trajectories.

**Background**

* By the end of the 1970s, new generation of social scientists began to question the idea of Quebec as a society that lived in isolation from the socioeconomic and ideological trends that had shaped the rest of North America
* Revisionist perspective proposes a new interpretation of the Quebecois subject and his/her spatial-temporal positioning. Instead of placing emphasis on the unique character of the Quebec experience, they argue that on the whole, Quebec’s historical trajectory is very similar to that of other North American societies.
  + Gilles Paquet argues that “we did not live, before 1960, in a world of oppression, of paralyzing conservatism and illiberalism, but rather in a world that closely resembled what was to be found elsewhere in Canada.”
  + In this analysis, a pre-Quiet Revolution Quebec is already modern, and the Revolution does not mark the entry of Quebec into a liberating modernity, but rather is associated with the rise of the welfare state, with the establishment of large scale social programs, as was simultaneously occurring the majority of occidental societies
* This revisionist perspective has been subject to numerous critiques in recent years
* According to R. Rudin, “revisionists have ignored most of the behaviours which cannot be explained by universal social and economic forces” – though he similarly does not buy into the historiography of Quebec as backwater prior to the 1960s
* Turgeon argues for adopting an explicitly comparative approach to discover what is and what is not unique about Quebec
* Quebec as a new collectivity –
  + According to Bouchard, new collectivities have evolved following either a model of continuity, or a model of rupture, with the motherland
  + Quebec, like Puerto Rico, is one of the few collectivities of the new world not to have achieved political sovereignty
  + Additionally, Quebec is unique in that it draws influence from several outside powers (France, the Vatican, the US, Canada, Great Britain)
  + Is most distinguished, hwr, by the persistence of an ideology of continuity, and an idealization of the pre-revolutionary French motherland. It was not until post-1960 that Quebec experienced a real cultural break with France. Indeed, this break is still not complete since the cultural elites have been hesitant to adhere to the American Dream embraced by the middle class
* Quebec as a small nation and a region-state –
  + Nationalist mobilization was not simply elite driven, but engaged all of civil society, allowing a plurality of voices and opinions into the project and reinforcing its civic character
  + Quebecois nationalism distinguishes itself from Catalan and Scottish nationalisms in several respects:
    - First, political independence as an option has received much more support in Quebec than in Catalonia or Scotland
    - Second, Quebec has had the most trouble in developing a truly civic conception of the nation – and Anglophones and Aboriginals have been historically excluded from representations of the nation
    - Paradoxically, while Quebec is the small nation possessing the most control over its destiny, it has not succeeded in finding recognition for its distinct character
    - A.G. Gagnon affirms that these small nations have had, and will continue to have, and increasing tendency to construct themselves as region-states.
    - In sum, these small nations are evolving in the context of international dynamics over which they have very little direct control.

**Conclusions**

The Quebecois have undoubtedly benefited from their historical trajectory being put in perspective with that of other collectivities – bringing about a more accurate comprehension of Quebec’s history.