

Reviews



El nuevo norteamericano: integración continental, cultura e identidad nacional

(The New North American: Continental Integration, Culture and National Identity)

Lawrence Douglas Taylor

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MEXICO AND CANADA

IMPLICATIONS OF CONTINENTAL INTEGRATION
IN CULTURE AND IDENTITY

The implications and consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the region's three countries have been widely examined from different angles. Among these studies, political and economic analyses have taken up considerable space while themes linked to culture and national identity have been fairly marginal. This is particularly the case of Mexico.

Of the three countries, Canada has paid most attention to these issues. Both the Canadian government and civil society have shown persistent concern about the dangers of the process of cultural Americanization and economic continentalization for their nation.

In Mexico, this concern has received scant attention. Both public officials linked to these issues and NAFTA negotiators expressed certain skepticism about the Canadian proposal to include cultural industries among the excep-

tions to the treaty. The apparent lack of interest by Mexican officials revealed a certain ignorance about the defense of cultural industries and showed a dearth of sensitivity about an important issue—even though it was not a trade issue—as well as the existing discrepancies about the meaning of cultural industries in each of the three countries.

Mexico was the country least familiar with the idea and treatment of culture as an industry and a good, while Canada demonstrated important experience in this area, based in its historical struggle to preserve its national identity. Canada has a greater tradition in managing conflicts linked to protecting culture and language, including cases of U.S. companies, like Time Warner in 1995 that came before the World Trade Organization tribunal in 1997.

During the 1990-1992 NAFTA negotiations, the Mexican representatives had other priorities and preferred not to wear themselves out with a trilateral discussion about protection of cultural industries. The Canadians, for their part, did unilaterally introduce an exception clause about their cultural industries, preserving the clause they had inserted in the 1988 bilateral Free Trade Agreement with the United States.

Thinking of culture as an industry and as such negotiating it as part of a free trade agreement was uncommon and set a precedent, introducing an important discussion about the effects that a free trade agreement can have on issues apparently unrelated to trade and the economy. At the same time, this precedent made it possible for other social matters, like the parallel agreements on labor and environmental questions, to become part of the NAFTA agenda and that of future trade agreements, like the Free Trade Accord of the Americas (FTAA), currently being negotiated.

The book *El nuevo norteamericano: integración continental, cultura e identidad nacional* (The New North American: Continental Integration, Culture and National Identity) by Canadian Lawrence Douglas Taylor, a researcher at the Northern Border College in Tijuana, proposes precisely to analyze this theme based on a detailed examination of the history of relations between Canada and the United States, on the one hand, and Mexico and the United States, on the other.

In contrast with other work published in Canada and Mexico on this topic, Taylor's book is a valuable effort to

analyze the situation that stems from relations with the United States from a trilateral perspective. This makes it possible to discover an important number of parallels and similarities between Mexico and Canada that were little known due to the lack of comparative historical studies that seek to explain how these two countries have dealt with, negotiated with and resolved their proximity to the United States.

Taylor focuses his analysis on demonstrating what distinguishes Canadians and Americans. Thanks to a detailed account of historical events, he manages to present a very evocative vision about what he thinks are the main determinants of Canadian national identity: U.S. territorial expansionism; economic integrationism; the Americanization of Canadian society; and Quebec's separatism. He dedicates a good part of his efforts to the study of these phenomena.

One of the most interesting topics is the analysis about how through the years Canada and Mexico have build mechanisms to resist their neighbor's expansionism. This is particularly important given the fact that Mexicans have always tended to think that nineteenth-century U.S. expansionist actions vis-à-vis Mexico were unique. Taylor points out that Canada was also invaded by its neighbor from 1775 to 1783 and was subjected to a war with the clear aim of annexation from 1812 to 1814. He also explains how several times Canada's current territory was considered payment in kind that first France and later England should make to the United States as reparations for the various wars they had carried out against it.

Throughout the text, Taylor reiterates that the United States has been the factor that has most contributed to the consolidation of Canadian identity. Although its influence in the lives of Canadians is undeniable, I think that the author underestimates certain factors that in fact contradict the idea that Canada is a nation whose unification is due practically to the U.S. threat: "The resistance of Canadians to the United States—a historic struggle that continues even today—is what truly defines them culturally as a people." (p. 228)

In contrast with Taylor, who thinks that the central issue that prompted the foundation of Canada in 1867 with the British North America Act was U.S. expansionism, I think it was not the only factor for political unification. Events such as the cancellation of the 1854 Reciprocity Accord, the Manifesto of the Annexation of Montreal to the United States (1849) and Louis Riel's rebellion in Manitoba (1869-

1870) alerted the populace of the British North American colonies about the danger in continuing to function as autonomous governments and economies in the New World, even if they all belonged politically to the British Empire. The decision to organize as a dominion, without breaking with the English homeland, was made by Canada's founding fathers, figures like George Brown, Alexander Galt and John Macdonald. The authors of the British North America Act and the Canadian confederation naturally took into consideration the threats of U.S. expansionism, but they were also profoundly motivated by economic necessities. The fact that several of the colonies—notably Quebec—considered relations with the United States more lucrative than those with the rest of the colonies, leading them to favorably consider a possible annexation of territory, undoubtedly pushed the founding fathers to speed up discussions about unification. On the other hand, the U.S. Civil War (1861-1865), together with the 1854 commercial accord, had created a certain economic boom in the British colonies, who lost considerable economic advantages with the cancellation of the accord and the end of the civil war and the loss of that market.

In my opinion, while the 1867 unification was an act of self-protection from annexation, it also clearly aimed at catching U.S. interest and negotiating a free trade agreement. That agreement was not signed until 1911, although it was never put into practice because it was challenged by the Canadian Parliament, and Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier's government was brought down, accused of negotiations the Canadian people violently disapproved of, a rejection that has gone down in Americans' historic memory as an insult.

Taylor's book, although it does not openly admit it, aims implicitly to explain to a non-Canadian reader the reasons and motivations Canadian society and different governments have historically expressed about the reaffirmation of Canada's identity. The author dedicates both the introduction and the first two chapters to this question. So, for 111 pages, the reader discovers an innumerable list of facts, dates and details that allow him/her to understand more fully the roots of Canada's—and also Mexico's—fears with regard to its relations with the U.S.

The analysis of Canada is more profound than that of Mexico, which is limited to repeating the better known episodes of U.S. expansionism, particularly the annexation of Texas and the 1846-1847 war. I also think that the book's second chapter would have been clearer if the author had

included maps explaining the way the northern and southern U.S. borders were drawn and how that affected Mexico and Canada.

Although Taylor amply explains the origins of Canada's identity struggle with regard to Americanization, he does not go deeply into the contradiction that it has manifested historically with regard to its relationship with the United States. While the defense of its identity has had a prominent place in national concerns, it is also the case that the government and a sizeable number of entrepreneurs, investors and businessmen have always tended to favor economic and trade relations with the United States.

This has been repeated since 1867. However, there have been exceptions, moments in which resistance movements to Canada's continentalization have surfaced. Among them is the period in the 1960s and 1970s known as "Canadianization," which resulted in a process of the creation of greater awareness in Canadian society about the degree of foreign alienation of its economy and natural resources. However, until today, as the book shows, an enormous dichotomy persists between public policies that support cultural and linguistic nationalism and a clear strategy of the political and economic elites aimed at giving the head to pro-continentalist positions.

One of this book's achievements is undoubtedly the analysis of Mexico's and Canada's borders with the United States, particularly in the light of the important changes since September 11, 2001. The issue of border relations is even more important given the fact that for the first time there is a discussion about instrumenting a common border policy within the so-called U.S. security perimeter.

This book dedicates a large number of its pages to analyzing Canada's federal and provincial policies for protecting national culture and identity. Nevertheless, despite the wealth of information in those chapters, it is surprising that the author makes no mention of one of the Ministry of External Affairs and International Trade's International Cultural Relations Bureau's most important projects: the promotion of Canadian studies in the world as an instrument to reaffirm Canadian identity from abroad.

In this writer's opinion, this deserves an important place in the book, because the author did interview two of the bureau's officials, Alan Dudoit and Jean Labrie (p. 175), but makes no reference to its work, involving one of the most important public projects aimed at contributing to Canada's identity by forming a critical mass of foreign intellectuals

who could contribute to it. Professor Taylor does not mention the work of several Canadian foundations, either, like the Brofman Foundation, which for decades has been funding academic projects inside Canada that contribute to consolidating Canadian identity, such as the Center for Canadian Studies at McGill University in Montreal. In short, the preservation of Canadian cultural industries and identity is an issue whose importance means it touches on different sectors of government and civil society.

Lastly, although the book is a significant Spanish-language contribution to the study of Canadian culture and identity and opens up important research sources that will undoubtedly contribute to writing other works, at no time does the author define what the "new North American" of the title is.

Teresa Gutiérrez-Haces

UNAM Institute for Economic Research