

ENERGY ISSUES IN QUÉBEC : CONFLICTS AND REPRESENTATIONS¹

STÉPHANE SAVARD

Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM)

MARTIN PÂQUET

Université Laval

Be it in our economy or our daily lives, energy is like the oxygen we breath : it is invisible but vital.

Bernard LANDRY²

Nimby and Nimto. These two American acronyms are often used in relation to one of the most serious aspects of energy use in the future. “Not In My Backyard” and “Not In My Term of Office” relate to citizens’ resistance to accepting solutions proposed to stop global warming.

Hubert REEVES, *Mal de terre*³

in a country wrought with cold, fire dwells below.

Jacques BRAULT, “patience”⁴

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2. Bibliothèque de l’Assemblée nationale du Québec, Bernard LANDRY, *Notes pour une allocution du premier ministre, M. Bernard Landry, devant les membres de l’Association de l’industrie électrique du Québec, Montréal, le lundi 13 mai 2002*, [N.p., n.p., 2002], 5.

3. Hubert REEVES, with Frédéric LENOIR, *Mal de Terre* (Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 2003), 103.

4. Jacques BRAULT, *Poèmes* (Montréal, Éditions du Noroît, 2000), 142.

Energy. With industrialization and the technological developments of the 19th and 20th centuries, energy issues have been front and centre in the West and elsewhere in the world. Major medical breakthroughs ; incredible developments in transportation and communications ; extensive urbanization and the emergence of mega-cities ; the rapid and sometimes turbulent growth of world economies ; the massive arrival of information technology, nanotechnology and electronics ; as well as scientific discoveries related to the Space Age : these have, for the most part, been dependent on various sources of energy which have themselves changed dramatically over the past two centuries. The 20th century saw animal traction and coal combustion being replaced by other widely-used sources of energy such as electricity, oil, natural gas, biomass and hydrogen. In fact, according to industrialists, scientific experts, engineers, political authorities and ordinary citizens, there is a great need for more energy, hence the increasing demand. In our contemporary societies based on industry, science and technology, energy is not only essential to ensuring socioeconomic development, it is also an issue related to the empowerment of ordinary citizens. Without the necessary access to energy, citizens cannot fully participate in the political community. Hence the multiple strategies put in place to promote activism, be it in the general public, in a neighbourhood or on an individual basis. Above and beyond its strict socioeconomic dimensions, energy is undoubtedly at the heart of the political debate.

The dual assessment of the socioeconomic demand for energy and its political importance is particularly striking in the case of electricity and its related sectors : hydroelectric, nuclear, wind, gas, solar, etc.⁵ Thus, over the last few decades, great efforts have been made by scientific researchers to find methods of producing electric energy that would reduce as much as possible the ecological footprint⁶ of human societies without, however, neglecting the economic imperatives favouring the mass-production of energy at the lowest possible cost. Even today, at the dawn of the second decade of the 21st century, energy issues are one of the main preoccupations of Western societies.

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5. Even the coal sector still has a certain socioeconomic potential and is still discussed in certain political arenas. This sector has not been very popular since the 1980s with the fight against acid rain and, during the 1990s and 2000s, the fight against greenhouse gases and climate change. However, current socioeconomic and political events such as the failed sale of NB Power and its coal power plants bear witness the fact that this type of energy is still very much in the news.

6. The reduction of this ecological footprint is obviously in keeping with the new ideals of sustainable development promoted by many Western actors since the end of 1980s, notably since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987 by the United Nation's World Commission on Environment and Development.

For example, think of the numerous controversies that arise today when there is a proposal for constructing a new nuclear plant or for burying radioactive waste. Or of the struggle to include the principle of sustainable development in future projects, a result of overexploitation engendered by Western (and world-wide) dependency on oil, as in the case of the development of the Alberta oil sands.

FUNDAMENTALLY POLITICAL QUESTIONS. ENERGY ISSUES IN QUÉBEC SINCE THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY

When it comes to energy, Québec is no exception among Western countries. Since the end of the 19th century, the question of energy has been front and centre in the minds of Québec's political authorities and economic decision-makers. Beyond the strict economic impacts, these questions are fundamentally political because they are reflected in the public struggles of social actors, who often have different conceptions of a common future, to promote socioeconomic development projects.

These debates are not new. Before the First World War, urban centres – especially Montreal and Québec City and, to a lesser extent, moderately sized cities such as Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières – were divided between those favouring gas and others favouring electricity as a source of energy. These groups had conflicting views on the subject of street lighting, but especially on the development of public transportation and new public services⁷. Up until the Second World War, industrialists in these very same cities tried to find the best energy supply for their companies, wavering between steam from coal combustion, electricity and hydraulic power. Elsewhere, in more remote regions, political leaders and economic decision-makers bet mostly on hydroelectricity and were awarded concessions to build dams. These initiatives encouraged regional development by private enterprise, as well as the extraction – and sometimes transformation – of natural resources⁸.



7. Clarence HOGUE, André BOLDUC, and Daniel LAROUCHE, *Québec: un siècle d'électricité* (Montréal, Éditions Libre Expression, 1979), 19-62.

8. See, among others, Claude BELLAVANCE, *Shawinigan Water and Power, 1898-1963: formation et déclin d'un groupe industriel au Québec* (Montréal, Éditions du Boréal, 1994); John H. DALES, *Hydroelectricity and Industrial Development, Québec 1898-1940*, (Cambridge (Mass.), Harvard University Press, 1957); David MASSEL, *Amassing Power: J.B. Duke and the Saguenay River, 1897-1927* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Pierre LANTHIER, « Stratégie industrielle et développement régional: le cas de la Mauricie au XX^e siècle », *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, 37, 1 (juin 1983): 3-19.

In the 1930s, notably in Montreal, there was a large movement against trusts, especially those selling gas and electricity, seen as essential common goods, at exorbitant prices. After 1944, following the first round of the nationalization of hydroelectricity assets and the creation of Hydro-Québec, politicians were no longer satisfied with regulating the energy sector by legislation. Alongside the role that Hydro-Québec played in the distribution of gas, a role it abandoned in 1957⁹, the Godbout and Duplessis governments used the public utility to directly intervene in the field of energy. Henceforth, the Québec government could compete with the private sector in what was fast becoming a strategic field: that of the production, transportation, and distribution of electricity. In doing so, it openly favoured the hydroelectric sector, well proven since the technological advent of turbines at the end of the 19th century and having a great potential to generate profits. Later, at the dawn of the Quiet Revolution, Jean Lesage's government proceeded with a second phase of nationalization by establishing a public monopoly on the production and distribution of electricity for domestic purposes. In this way, the Lesage government and its successors strongly encouraged Québec's hydroelectric development and the consumption of the energy it produced. With this political orientation in the matter of energy development, Québec became one of the most "electrified" states in the world.

These same political authorities also looked at the role that should be played by other forms of energy such as oil and natural gas, while considering other options such as nuclear energy and so-called "alternative" sources like solar, wind and tidal energy. State planning, and especially the drafting of Québec's first real energy policy in 1978, recognized energy as a driving force in the province's economic development¹⁰. Since then, energy policies, regularly revised over the years¹¹, and various issues – such as the

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9. It should be remembered that, in 1958, this sale led to the famous natural gas scandal severely criticized by the *Devoir's* journalist Pierre Laporte. See Bibliothèque de l'Assemblée nationale du Québec, *Reconstitution des débats de l'Assemblée législative, Version préliminaire*, séance du 21 février 1957, 2. See also Clarence HOGUE, André BOLDUC and Daniel LAROUCHE, *Québec: un siècle d'électricité* (Montréal, Éditions Libre Expression, 1984), 255-6.

10. Roland PARENTEAU, *Hydro-Québec: les relations entre l'État et son entreprise* (Ottawa, Conseil économique du Canada, 1986), 54-55; Gouvernement du Québec: Direction générale de l'énergie, *La politique québécoise de l'énergie: assurer l'avenir* (Québec, Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1978). It is necessary to point out that in 1971, the Bourassa Government initiated a study on energy that can be considered the ancestor of the first official energy policy. See Direction générale de l'Énergie, en collaboration avec le Bureau de Planification du Ministère des Richesses naturelles du Québec, *Éléments d'une politique québécoise de l'énergie* (Québec, Ministère des Richesses naturelles, 1971).

11. Since the first official energy policy in 1978, three other energy policies have been drafted: Ministère de l'Énergie et des Ressources, *L'énergie force motrice du développement économique. Politique énergétique*

economy, the environment, technological breakthroughs, and land claims – have incited a number of public debates. Take, for example, the controversial discussions, often acrimonious in nature, that have arisen from time to time since the late 1970s: those concerning the moratorium on the construction of new nuclear plants under René Levesque’s government, the export of electricity and the planning of hydroelectric projects during the 1980s, the distribution and domestic consumption of natural gas during the same period, the Grande-Baleine project at the turn of the 1990s, the deregulation of the electricity market and the division of Hydro-Québec into three distinct entities at the end of the 20th century, and the creation of the Régie de l’énergie in 1997.

Finally, looking at the beginning of the third millennium, it rapidly becomes clear that there have already been many debates on energy issues. These debates, especially those concerning socioeconomic development projects, are the expression of a deep-seated sensitivity to energy issues in post-industrial societies like that of Québec. The debates display the multiple forms of resistance and the strong voicing of opinions that are proof of citizen empowerment. Therefore, these last ten years, there has been plentiful waffling and debating over orientations and policies related to different forms of energy, as well as the major development projects related to them. Concerning electricity, there have been, among others:

- the Suroît project, which was aborted in 2003-2004 and, during the same period, Hydro-Québec’s policy favouring natural gas to produce electricity;
- the problems with implementing wind farms and the desire since 2003 for an eventual nationalization of this type of energy;
- the positions upheld by the “Lucides” and the “Solidaires” regarding the probable increase in electricity rates to help fill Québec’s public coffers;
- the controversial 2008 project to renovate the Gentilly-2 nuclear plant;

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pour les années 1990 (Québec, Direction des communications du ministère de l’Énergie et des Ressources, 1988); Ministère des Ressources naturelles, *L’énergie au service du Québec. Une perspective de développement durable* (Québec, Direction des relations publiques, Ministère des Ressources naturelles, 1997); Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, *L’Énergie pour construire le Québec de demain. La stratégie énergétique du Québec 2006-2015* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec: Ministère des Ressources naturelles et de la Faune, 2006).

- the Plan Nord, promoted by Jean Charest's Liberal government to develop the hydroelectric resources of northern Québec while assuring the sustainability of the ecosystem ;
- the failure to acquire NB Power in 2009-2010 ;
- and the debates concerning the La Romaine project.

Hence, the energy issue has been simultaneously present on two political levels : the management of social division and the planning of a possible future. With regard to the social dimensions, it broadly refers to a macro-policy which takes into account the common good and defines social choices. On a smaller scale, it refers to a micro-policy specifically limited in its application to everyday living and basic solidarities. The NIMBY phenomenon, that is local resistance by citizens, is part of the micro-political space which does not exclude the use of macro-political strategies. There are numerous examples of this type of resistance in the case of electric energy. It has been witnessed before, as early as the end of the 1980s, in a controversy generated by Micheline Beauchemin and others over the proposed construction of a high voltage electric line over the St. Lawrence at Grondines¹². There was also the strong and recent opposition to the Hertel-Des Cantons line after the 1998 ice storm. Other initiatives, such as the construction of small power stations since the 1990s¹³, or the establishment of wind farms¹⁴, have also met with much local resistance by citizens.

Other energy sectors have also been the subject of macro- and micro-political debates, the themes of which are many. In the case of the petroleum industry, there have been the numerous fluctuations in the price at the pump as well as the environmental issues – especially those concerning greenhouse gas emissions and global warming – that have challenged economic decision-makers and political authorities to find alternative solutions : the promotion of public transportation and the reexamination of major projects in the domain, or the production of ethanol and the search for new sources of oil. Controversies involving oil also include that surrounding the Alberta oil sands. Finally, during the first decade of the 21st century, natural gas created difficulties because of its “explosive”

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12. Defined in Étienne LYRETTE, « La dynamique sociale entourant l'implantation d'une infrastructure majeure : le cas du parc éolien Le Nordais », (Master's essay (Urban Studies), Montréal, I.N.R.S.- U.C.S., 2003), 72-81.

13. See Michel GAUTHIER's documentary *Rivières d'argent* (Montréal, Productions du Rapide Blanc, 2002), 50 min.

14. See Étienne LYRETTE, *op.cit.*, for Le Nordais wind park in the Matane region.

potential. Specifically, the debate was about the safety measures involved in the exploitation and transportation of natural gas. Hence, above and beyond the macro-political ins and outs, here again the debate is mainly one of a micro-political nature. Take, for example, the vigorous debate over the Gaz de France, Gaz Métro, Enbridge and Gazprom consortium's Rabaska Project, involving the transportation and transformation of natural liquified gas that went on from 2004 to 2009¹⁵. Another micro- and macro-political battlefield is in the making today, with the rapid growth of citizens' opposition to the gas exploitation in the St. Lawrence Lowlands.

PROSPECTING THE HISTORIOGRAPHIC FIELD

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the preoccupation with energy has had much public coverage, and has been equally prominent in the field of scientific research. As public debate continues, numerous scholarly, governmental and other studies concerning energy and its principal economic, technological, social and environmental issues have been brought to the fore. Within this profusion of scientific research, which sometimes takes public opinion into account, many studies have addressed Québec's main form of energy, electricity and its hydroelectric sector, analyzing the history of its production, transportation and distribution, as well as its economic and industrial consequences for Québec at the end of the 19th century and during the 20th¹⁶. Others have concentrated on its nationalization, whether that of 1944 or that of 1962-1963, defining its social, political and economic impacts¹⁷. Some scholars, such as Gilles Paquet, have not only looked closely



15. On Rabaska, see Bernard DAGENAIS, Gaston CADRIN, Michel LESSARD and Pierre-Paul SÉNÉCHAL's pamphlet, *Rabaska : Autopsie d'un projet insensé* (Montréal, Fides, 2009). A less significant example would be the 2004-2009 debates over Trans-Canada and Suncor Energy's project for a liquified natural gas terminal at Gros-Cacouna.

16. John H. DALES, *op. cit.* ; Claude BELLAVANCE, *Shawinigan Water and Power, 1898-1963 : formation et déclin d'un groupe industriel au Québec* (Montréal, Les Éditions du Boréal, 1994) ; André BOLDUC, Clarence HOGUE and Daniel LAROUCHE, *op. cit.* ; Jean-Louis FLEURY, *Les Porteurs de lumières : l'histoire de la distribution de l'électricité au Québec* (Montréal, Éditions MultiMondes, 2004) ; Jean-Louis FLEURY, *Les Coureurs de lignes : l'histoire du transport de l'électricité au Québec* (Montréal, Stanké, 1999) ; David MASSEL, *op. cit.*

17. See, among others, Carol JOBIN, *Les enjeux économiques de la nationalisation de l'électricité (1962-1963)* (Montréal, Les Éditions Coopératives Albert St-Martin, 1978) ; Claude BELLAVANCE, « Un long mouvement d'appropriation de la première à la seconde nationalisation », in Yves BÉLANGER and Robert COMEAU (eds.), *Hydro-Québec : autres temps, autres défis* (Sainte-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1995), 71-8 ; Marthe GODBOUT-BUISSIÈRES, *La nationalisation de l'électricité au Québec : phénomène politico-administratif* (Master's essay (Social Sciences), Québec, Université Laval, 1970) ; Claude BOILEAU, *Les partis politiques et le problème de la nationalisation de l'électricité* (Master's essay (Political Science), Québec, Université Laval, 1966) ; Hélène LAURENDEAU, *Le processus politico-idéologique de la nationalisation de l'électricité de 1963 au Québec* (Montréal, Université de Montréal, 1981).

at the objectives of nationalization, but have also provided their interpretation of the results achieved in the short or medium term, especially with regard to the nationalization of 1962-1963¹⁸.

Hydro-Québec, as the main public utility in the field of energy, has interested researchers who study its functioning and its contribution to Québec society. The relationship between Hydro-Québec and the government has been thoroughly scrutinized, and has revealed that the public utility is an instrument capable of achieving the aims not only of Québec's economic policies, but also those of the province's energy policy¹⁹. Hydro-Québec's guiding principles and management strategies – particularly those related to planning, export, pricing, investments and its relationship with other industries in Québec – have also been the subject of scholarly research by specialists in the fields of economic and accounting²⁰. Two collective multidisciplinary studies have looked closely at the important moments in Hydro-Québec's history, and have pondered the importance, real or imagined, of the public utility in Québec society²¹. Finally, from a comparative perspective, Karl Froschauer's analysis evaluates and compares the strategies used by the political authorities of five Canadian provinces – Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia and Newfoundland – to promote provincial industrial policies that are sometimes in competition with each other, and which favour the enrichment of their respective societies by creating surplus electricity for sale to the United States²².

Aside from Hydro-Québec and hydroelectricity, virtually every type of energy has become the object of scientific research, with some studies closely linked to the preoccupations of citizens and even the ideological

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18. Gilles PAQUET, *Tableau d'avancement : petite ethnographie interprétative d'un certain Canada français* (Ottawa, Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2008), 29-43. Also see Ghislaine DE TILLY, *La nationalisation de l'électricité au Québec : objectifs et réalisations* (Master's essay (Economics), Québec, Université Laval, 1980).

19. Roland PARENTEAU, « Hydro-Québec et l'État », in Marcel COUTURE (ed.), *Hydro-Québec : des premiers défis à l'aube de l'an 2000* (Montréal, Éditions Libre Expression/Forces, 1984), 45-61 ; *Idem*, *Hydro-Québec : les relations entre l'État et son entreprise* (Ottawa, Conseil économique du Canada, 1986) ; Pierre FOURNIER, *Les sociétés d'État et les objectifs économiques du Québec : une évaluation préliminaire* (Québec, Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1979).

20. See Gaétan BRETON and Jean-François BLAIN, *Les mauvais coûts d'Hydro-Québec* (Québec, Nota bene, 1999) ; Philippe FAUCHER and Johanne BERGERON, *Hydro-Québec : la société de l'heure de pointe* (Montréal, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1986). Also see Alain CHANLAT, in coll. with André BOLDUC and Daniel LAROCHE, *Gestion et culture d'entreprise : le cheminement d'Hydro-Québec* (Montréal, Québec/Amérique, 1984) ; Taïeb HAFSI and Christiane DEMERS, *Le changement radical dans les organisations complexes : le cas d'Hydro-Québec* (Boucherville, Gaétan Morin éditeur, 1989).

21. Marcel COUTURE (ed.), *Hydro-Québec : des premiers défis à l'aube de l'an 2000* (Montréal, Éditions Libre Expression/Forces, 1984) ; Yves BÉLANGER and Robert COMEAU (eds.), *Hydro-Québec : autres temps, autres défis* (Ste-Foy, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 1995).

22. Karl FROSCHAUER, *White Gold : Hydroelectric Power in Canada* (Vancouver, UBC Press, 1999).

commitments of their authors. Since 1973, the researchers of the Groupe de recherche en économie de l'énergie, de l'environnement et des ressources naturelles (GREEN) have analyzed and expressed their opinions in an attempt to influence the main components of Québec's energy policies. The group's research discusses energy efficiency, legislation to deregulate the market, strategies to stabilize the price of energy and consumers' preferences for different forms of energy. GREEN has published many reports, including those of Antoine Ayoub on the economics of world and Canadian petroleum²³, as well as those of Jean-Thomas Bernard on the electricity market in general²⁴.

Since the 1990s, if not earlier, other scholars have formed research groups to analyze energy issues on a global basis. Thus, in the midst of the debate on the deregulation of the electricity market, the adoption of a new energy policy in 1996 and the creation, in 1997, of a Régie de l'énergie, many researchers, led by Corinne Gendron and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt, questioned Québec' energy future as well as various prospective scenarios that were put forth at that time²⁵. More recently, the researchers of the Groupe d'initiatives et de recherches appliquées au milieu (GIRAM) have been very active and have sometimes intervened in the academic arena to comment on and analyze energy issues. The best example of this type of initiative is the publication of a study on the Rabaska project to build a liquefied natural gas import terminal.²⁶



23. See, among others, Antoine AYOUB (ed.), *Le pétrole entre les pays producteurs et les pays consommateurs. Actes du premier colloque international d'économie pétrolière* (Québec, Université Laval/GREEN, Département d'économie, 1974). By the same author, *Le point sur la situation énergétique : internationale, canadienne, québécoise* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, Conseil de planification et de développement du Québec, 1982); *Éléments d'une politique québécoise de l'énergie et application aux secteurs du pétrole et du gaz naturel* (Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, Conseil de planification et de développement du Québec, 1983); *Les problèmes de l'énergie et de dialogue Nord-Sud* (Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 1983); *Le pétrole : économie et politique* (Paris, Economica, 1996).

24. See, among others, Danny BÉLANGER and Jean-Thomas BERNARD, *Les exportations d'électricité d'Hydro-Québec : rappel historique et perspectives futures* (Québec, Université Laval/GREEN, 1990), 90-17; Jean-Thomas BERNARD and Joseph A. DOUCET, « L'ouverture du marché d'exportation d'électricité québécois : réalité ou mirage à l'horizon », *Canadian Public Policy*, 25, 2 (1999) : 247-258; Jean-Thomas BERNARD and Michel ROLAND, « Rent Dissipation through Electricity Prices of Publicity-Owned Utilities », *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 30, 4b (1997) : 1204-19.

25. Corinne GENDRON and Jean-Guy VAILLANCOURT (eds.), *L'Énergie au Québec : quels sont nos choix ?* (Montréal, Les Éditions Écosociété, 1998). See among others forward-looking papers such as Corinne GENDRON and Nicolas TREMBLAY's, « Faire les meilleurs choix pour l'avenir » : 67-83; Maryse LABRIET's, « Choix énergétiques et enjeux sociaux : le cas des transports » : 109-125; Raymond CHENEL and Jean-Guy VAILLANCOURT's, « Les choix de la population : le développement durable et l'efficacité énergétique » : 153-169; and Pierre DANSEREAU and Jean-Pierre DRAPEAU's « La seule option : une politique énergétique axée sur le développement durable » : 171-182.

26. Gaston CADRIN, Bernard DAGENAIS, Michel LESSARD and Pierre-Paul SÉNÉCHAL, *op. cit.*

INVESTIGATING AN UNDER-DEVELOPED AREA. ANALYZING CONFLICTS AND REPRESENTATIONS

As discussed above, most scholars who have studied energy issues identify and describe the energy policies and approaches adopted by the Québec government. Their interest has also been directed toward certain projects promoted by public utilities or private companies in the energy sector, such as Hydro-Québec. Sometimes they are motivated by more than mere scientific curiosity. Based on the information and ideas acquired through their research, experts in economics, in science and technology, in sociology and in regional development can use their knowledge to criticize and influence government policies. Some also try to promote their own vision of the types of energy that Québec should favour and call for a fair price for oil, electricity and natural gas.

Aside from such research and position statements, there is another way of seeing Québec's energy issues in the 20th and 21st centuries. Since access to energy affects each and every citizen's access to food, shelter and transportation, it is central to economic development, scientific discoveries and massive private and public investments. Because it is more or less linked to the economy, the environment, technology and land development, the drafting of energy policies and the resulting choices give rise to numerous debates, be they on the macro- or micro-political level. Encouraged by public opposition, these controversies inevitably wind up in the chamber or one of the committees of Québec's National Assembly, or surface during public hearings held by public agencies such as the Régie de l'énergie or the Bureau d'audiences publiques sur l'environnement (BAPE). Thus, these ongoing energy issues reveal the various ways that Quebeckers see themselves, symbolically or otherwise. However, these conflicts and representations have seldom been the object of scholarly research, and syntheses on these questions are still forthcoming. Nevertheless, as shown by certain studies in American history²⁷, which focus on political authorities and other

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27. On this subject, the historian David E. Nye is certainly a pioneer with his works on the link between the relationship with technology and a certain type of American nation-building. Referring to Thomas P. Hughes's thoughts on electricity and "networks of power" or "power systems" as cultural artefacts, D. Nye studied the narratives and stories of members of the elites, including the cultural and political elites, which describe the American nation according to their own life experience with different forms of energy and related technologies. They also analyze the citizen's reasons for choosing one type of energy or technology over another and the consequences of these choices on American culture and society at large. See David E. NYE, *Electrifying America: Social Meanings of a New Technology, 1880-1940* (Cambridge (Mass.), The MIT Press, 1990); *Idem, American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 1994); *Idem, Narratives and Spaces: Technology and the Construction of American Culture* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1997), 61-91; *Idem, Consuming Power: a Social History of American Energies* (Cambridge,

socio-political actors, behind the positions taken on energy choices lie symbolism and self-representations which are also expressions of contemporary political culture.

In Québec, the few scholars who have looked into these questions work in the humanities and social sciences. Cultural geographers are well represented in this group because of their interest in northern regions. Frédéric Lasserre, Éric Canobbio, Caroline Desbiens, Guy Mercier and Gilles Ritchot have analyzed the various ways southern Quebecers and members of First Nations communities perceive the territories, resources, and landscapes of northern Québec, especially the James Bay and the Nord-du-Québec regions²⁸. Sociologists have also been active in this type of research. In particular, two of their original studies are worth noting. As early as 1984, Ronald Babin, a pioneer in the field, explored the fierce controversy concerning the construction of nuclear power plants²⁹. More recently, researchers working with Thibault Martin and Steven M. Hoffman have analyzed hydroelectric projects in the North, taking into account values and perceptions concerning nature, as well as the changing relations between First Nations and the Québec or Manitoba governments³⁰. This subject has also



The MIT Press, 1998); *Idem*, *America as Second Creation: Technology and Narratives of New Beginnings* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2003); *Idem*, *When The Lights Went Out: A History of Blackouts in America* (Cambridge, The MIT Press, 2010); Thomas P. HUGHES, *Networks of Power: Electrification in Western Society, 1880-1930* (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). Note the contribution of William C. Harvard Jr. who, in his history of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), emphasizes the analysis of perceptions with regard to nature and nation-building. He argues that, in the United States, there are two different perceptions concerning the TVA in general, and its water control policies and the building of hydroelectric dams in particular. The first one sees the TVA as the result of the progress of science and technology which allows them to control nature's most hostile elements and free people from floods, poverty, sickness, etc. The second one is very critical of the TVA's projects that have destroyed the natural environment of the Tennessee Valley and forced its inhabitants to modify their traditional way of life. See William C. HARVARD, Jr., « Images of TVA: The Clash over Values », in Erwin C. HARGROVE and Paul K. CONKIN (eds.), *TVA: Fifty years of Grass-roots Bureaucracy* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 1983), 297-315.

28. See Eric CANOBBIO, *Géopolitique d'une ambition inuite: le Québec face à son destin nordique* (Québec, Septentrion, 2009); Caroline DESBIENS, « Un nouveau chemin vers les rapides. Chisasibi/La Grande et les relations nord-sud au Québec », *Globe: revue internationale d'études québécoises*, 9, 1 (2006): 177-210; Caroline DESBIENS, « Producing North and South: a Political Geography of Hydro Development in Québec », *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 48, 2 (2004): 101-118; Frédéric LASSERRE, *Le Canada d'une mythe à l'autre: territoire et images du territoire* (Montréal, Éditions Hurtubise HMH, 1998); *Idem*, « L'eau, la forêt, les barrages du Nord du Québec: un territoire instrumentalisé? », in Frédéric LASSERRE et Aline LECHAUME (eds.), *Le territoire pensé: géographie des représentations territoriales* (Québec, Presses de l'Université du Québec, 2003), 13-29; Guy MERCIER and Gilles RITCHOT, « La Baie James. Les dessous d'une rencontre que la bureaucratie n'avait pas prévue », *Cahiers de géographie du Québec*, 41, 113 (1997):137-169.

29. Ronald BABIN, *L'option nucléaire: développement et contestation de l'énergie nucléaire au Canada et au Québec* (Montréal, Boréal Express, 1984).

30. Thibault MARTIN and Steven M. HOFFMAN (eds.), *Power Struggles: Hydro Development and First Nations in Manitoba and Quebec* (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2008).

interested historians such as Robert Gagnon and Yves Gingras, whose research discusses how, in the context of the La Grande River hydroelectric project, perceptions of the James Bay region changed from a territory to be developed to a laboratory in the making³¹. More recently, David Massel focused on different motivations and representations of landscape among American planners, Canadian and Québec political authorities, and other Québec citizens including residents of First Nations communities on the Peribonka River concessions during the Second World War³². Another historian, Stéphane Savard, has researched the numerous changes in Hydro-Québec's representations of symbolism and identity as promoted by Québec's political authorities from 1944 to 2005³³. Finally, professor of literature Dominique Perron's analysis of Hydro-Québec's narratives shows how they have influenced the way Quebeckers see themselves³⁴.

If reality is more than just values and representations, these two notions are most certainly a reflection of this reality. Such is the case with energy issues which, as discussed above, are riddled with numerous conflicts between the aims that are put forth and the representations that are promoted. In keeping with a political perspective, these issues have become favoured research subjects for scholars hoping to understand the multiple aspects of Québec society: its relation to nature and the environment; to technological and economic "modernity"; to its significant other, namely the First Nations; etc.



31. Robert GAGNON and Yves GINGRAS, « La baie James : de territoire à laboratoire », *Bulletin d'histoire politique*, 7, 3 (spring 1999) : 67-78. Also Robert GAGNON, *La mobilisation des compétences : la protection de l'environnement à la Baie James* (Master's essay (History and Sociopolitics of sciences), Montréal, Université de Montréal, 1984).

32. David MASSELL, *Quebec Hydropolitics. The Peribonka Concessions of the Second World War* (Montreal and Kingston, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011).

33. See, among others, Stéphane SAVARD, *Retour sur un « projet du siècle » : Hydro-Québec comme vecteur des représentations symboliques et identitaires du Québec, 1944 à 2005* (Ph.D. thesis (History), Québec, Université Laval, 2010). Also, by the same author, « L'instrumentalisation d'Hydro-Québec par l'Union nationale (1944-1960) : quels rôles pour le développement hydroélectrique ? », in Xavier GÉLINAS and Lucia FERRETTI (eds.), *Duplessis : son milieu, son époque* (Québec, Septentrion, 2010), 175-195 ; « Quand l'histoire donne sens aux représentations symboliques : l'Hydro-Québec, Manic-5 et la société québécoise », *Recherches sociographiques*, 50, (2009) : 67-97 ; « Lieu-de-mémoriser Hydro-Québec comme symbole des représentations de la nature et de la technologie : esquisses de réponse et pistes de réflexion », in Émilie GUILBEAULT-CAYER and Stéphane SAVARD (eds.), *Conserveries mémorielles*, 2e année, 4 (2007) : 46-64.

34. Dominique PERRON, *Le nouveau roman de l'énergie nationale. Analyse des discours promotionnels d'Hydro-Québec de 1964 à 1997* (Calgary, University of Calgary Press, 2006). See also, by the same author, « "On est Hydro-Québécois" : consommateur, producteur ou citoyen ? Analyse de la nationalisation symbolique d'Hydro-Québec », *Globe : revue internationale d'études québécoises*, 6, 2 (2003) : 73-97.

These studies cover the political choices made to favour or discredit different sources of energy and their main sectors – hydroelectric, nuclear, natural gas, oil, wind, solar, etc. – while comparing the different values underlying each of these choices. They also take the objectives behind energy choices and relate them to the debates on symbolism and self-representation driven by the political authorities and other socio-political actors : environmentalists, First Nations, editors, citizens’ groups, economic decision-makers, etc. When intervening in the public arena, especially in the political domain and the media, actors use different strategies when discussing energy issues which reveal their degree of empowerment. Thus, the study of conflicts and representations in energy issues highlights some new perspectives on Québec’s political culture, revealing a country “wrought with cold” where “fire lives below”.

(translation : Jeanne Valois)