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Sarah Miles explores the influence of international examples on the development of Québécois nationalism through the lens of the radical leftist magazine *Parti pris*. She argues that this new generation of nationalists relied heavily on the example of other revolutionary or radical movements around the world as a means of creating a coherent vision for the independent nation they hoped to establish. The authors of *Parti pris*, which was published between 1963 and 1968 in Montreal, saw in Algeria an example of how to structure socialist political parties, in Cuba an example of effective agricultural policy, and in the Black Power movement an example of how to combine cultural independence with political independence. Miles argues that these examples provided the authors of *Parti pris* a means of envisioning a nation which could be socialist, independent, and internationalist.
In 1963, Georges Schoeters wrote a letter to the people of Quebec while awaiting trial in a Montreal prison. Smuggled to the editors of the radical socialist magazine *Parti pris*, whose first edition had appeared earlier that year, Schoeters scrawled in the margins of the paper that his letter should be translated and sent to “socialist Christian unions, the socialists in Belgium, the C.G.T.—the French unions; the newspapers in all the countries of the world and all the university federations of Latin America…in particular in Mexico.” He signed the letter, like so many revolutionaries of the 1960s, “Independence or death, Georges Schoeters.” A member of the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) arrested for planting a bomb in Montreal earlier that year, Schoeters was clearly aware of the international arena in which his movement operated. While advocating for national liberation, Schoeters and the other authors of the radical magazine *Parti pris*, famous for initiating the idea of the decolonization of Quebec, relied heavily on international examples and internationalist language to articulate their vision of a new, independent nation Québécoise. *Parti pris* was first published in October 1963, led by an editorial board of approximately ten men alongside a rotating cast of close to a dozen regular contributors and a number of sporadically contributing authors. From their first issue, the partipristes, as they were called, highlighted their leftist credentials through a sustained critique of Quebec’s position as a colony within British Canada, inspired by international anti-colonial struggles. The partipristes believed that establishing a new nation would resolve their colonized condition. “We will soon liberate ourselves from this alienation, as the Québécois society has entered a revolutionary period,” they wrote in their first publication. The liberation of Quebec, for them, required its decolonization. They had a clear vision of Quebec’s political, social, and economic problems and of how to solve these to liberate their people.

In conceiving Quebec as a colonized territory, the authors of *Parti pris* were inspired by the examples of anti-colonial revolutionaries around the world. They drew on these to develop a cohesive vision for their ideal independent Quebec. First, the partipristes believed that their new, decolonized nation needed to be politically independent, undertaking its own foreign affairs. For this, they drew largely from the example of revolutionary Algeria. Second, the partipristes’ imagined nation would rely on broad socialist economic programs, based largely on the reforms of Fidel Castro’s government in Cuba. These two events in particular were seen as moments of “great transformation” and as “models” for their own work. Finally, these men believed that they needed to cultivate a distinct Québécois culture that could withstand the “foreign culture” of anglophones. Here, they were chiefly inspired by the American Black Power movement’s emphasis on cultural production as a means to liberation.

The authors of *Parti pris* were inspired by other anti-colonial movements to vocalize their political positions and imagine a coherent construction of their nation, and so viewed themselves as but one part of a global anti-colonial undertaking. Understanding the influence of global anti-colonialism and
The liberation of Quebec required its decolonization

revolutionary thought on these radicals provides insight into how the nation was imagined during the Quiet Revolution and challenges an established scholarly portrayal of Quebec nationalism as an insular project. Instead, radicals embraced international movements in their nation-building project. Through the examination of writing in *Parti pris*, I detail how radicals in Quebec were not just inspired by, but borrowed directly from revolutionary struggles across the globe to construct a model for a new nation. Anti-colonialism thus appears not as a vague utopian idea, but as a coherent and pragmatic political project. The goal of this essay is to demonstrate the complex ways that the Quebec nation was dreamed, written, and constructed.

While *Parti pris* has been noted as a representation of the radicalism of the 1960s in Quebec, the vital role international examples played for these authors has not yet been discussed. Placing Quebec’s Quiet Revolution in the timeline of global anti-colonial projects in the 1960s demonstrates how currents of global liberation and nationalism flowed together in this time. This research thus contributes to a better understanding of the most radical strands of activism in Sixties Montreal, while also weighing in on the importance of leftist internationalism to radical networks acting in a variety of contexts.

The partipristes’ “internationalist nationalism” was by no means the first iteration of nationalism among French-Canadians. An older generation of intellectuals in Quebec—René Lévesque, André Laurendeau, and Raymond Barbeau—fought for progressive reform, but did not link their political aims to a wider international struggle. These earlier progressives emphasized the importance of democratic processes, appealing to a broad electoral base rather than emphasizing direct action, and worked with organized labor to increase the power of the francophone working class. With the rise of the Parti Québécois after 1968 and the disavowal of the radical left after the 1970 October Crisis, this progressive political platform would reemerge as dominant in the 1970s. However, Lévesque and other union leaders drew on many of the nationalist narratives that more radical figures like the authors of *Parti pris* had articulated over the course of the 1960s.

The men of *Parti pris* were raised on news of the Algerian War and found inspiration in global anti-colonial movements; their affiliation with these revolutionaries distinguished their politics from those of their forefathers, from *Cité libre* or even from *La revue socialiste*. Malcolm Reid, an Ontario journalist who befriended many of the partipristes in Montreal, summarized their break from Quebec’s political left, writing, “The difference is that [Pierre] Maheu and his comrades pushed the analysis further, from the schoolroom to manufacturing, from the colonized...
psyche to the colonized economy, from the material context to cultural degeneration... they recited their poetry on the street, wrote it on the walls... until it became an arm for the oppressed against their oppressors.” Reid argued that this was a wedge between separatist ideology and separatist action. The partipristes, in their own view, were different because they were willing to take ideas into the street; they believed they were providing a more concrete analysis of everyday oppression in the province than progressives writing in Cité libre. Many of the authors of the magazine undertook direct action along with writing. For example, Jean-Marc Piotte, one of the founders of the magazine, took a summer sojourn in the rural territories of the lower St. Lawrence in an attempt to convince the peasantry of Quebec to revolt. Though unsuccessful, emphasis on this type of direct action distinguished Parti pris from previous separatist journals. Articles in Parti pris addressed issues that would have been familiar to earlier generations of nationalists — laicity, territorial sovereignty — but the magazine took these a step further by recognizing them in the movements they observed around the world.

The political project outlined in Parti pris was published and individuals undertook revolutionary action in Quebec, these men found inspiration in the actions of oppressed groups around the world. They articulated a new vision of independence based on the images of Algeria, Cuba, and Black Power to imagine a nation that would be politically, economically, and culturally independent.

The FLN and FLQ: Algeria and the Idea of Socialist Decolonization in Quebec

In the partipristes’ imagination of a new Quebec, securing political power was central. More than just words, they argued Quebec’s “Independence cannot be reduced to a declaration of territorial sovereignty. The revolution... will only be social if it aims to destroy the powers of oppression which alienates the majority of the nation.” Political power without an independent government appeared useless to these radicals. Instead, they saw full-scale decolonization as a primary facet of their struggle, one that would require separating themselves from the Canadian metropole and creating a socialist government, and thus mirroring the path taken by revolutionaries in Algeria.

Algeria’s success was inspirational for the French-speaking population of Canada from the late 1950s, leading them to view their own political situation in colonial terms. They used the socialist revolution taking place across the Atlantic to argue that socialist decolonization would be necessary to free Quebec. In her study of the Québécois media’s portrayal
of the Algerian War, Magali Deleuze notes that “on the eve of the Quiet Revolution, nationalists were on the hunt for examples.” Though Deleuze details Canadians’ interest in Algeria prior to the 1960s, she argues that “the internationalization of this nationalist discourse” of revolution led individuals to “the comparison between other countries or world events like the Algerian war to develop in Quebec.”

The Algerian War provided Québécois separatists with the terminology and intellectual paradigms necessary to develop an idea of independence based on socialist internationalism, political unification, and following the lead of committed intellectuals.

Witnessing the revolutionary Algerian organization the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) and the actions of the independent Algerian state, the authors of Parti pris believed that an official revolutionary organization was necessary for both the demystification of alien colonial structures and to lead the people to revolution. Intellectuals of the FLN, both before and after it gained power in Algeria, saw themselves as serving to “situate facts in their contexts,” to better underscore the reality of their struggle while also taking “part in the action and commit[ting] [themselves] body and soul to the national struggle.” The partipristes believed themselves similarly situated and prepared to combine intellectual production with political action: “the effort of analysis and demystification which we have initiated would lose all significance if it was not… combined with a revolutionary praxis.” Based on the example of Algerian intellectuals, they believed they could agitate for revolution and demystify their own colonial situation. Just as the FLN saw their role as that of a vanguard party in Algeria, so too did Parti pris believe that they and their allies in the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ) “took up arms to make evident to the people their revolutionary role… the revolutionary youth (including the team at Parti pris), is ready to agitate at the heart of a party.” The intellectual’s role in promoting the revolution in order to create a new nation was but the first of many political ideas that the partipristes borrowed from Algeria.

Drawing on the example of political action from Algeria, the partipristes were heavily influenced by writers active in the FLN’s struggle, such as Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, and Jacques Berque. Robert Major, an early member of Parti pris’ editorial staff, noted, “At the moment the journal was founded (or just after), all the participants had read Memmi, Fanon, and Berque.” Fanon in particular loomed large for Parti pris. Fanon and other anti-colonial thinkers like Memmi eschewed the division between the nation and socialism that is so prominent in traditional Marxism; in The Wretched of the Earth, Fanon describes the importance of national culture and of revolutionary intellectuals in producing such a culture. After reading his writings on the struggle of revolutionary Algerians, “All of a sudden, it was possible to be at the same time socialist and separatist without feeling torn.”

This synthesis of nationalism and internationalism would be central to the ideology of Parti pris. In 1966, Jan Depocas wrote in the magazine: “A little bit of internationalism removes one
from the nation, a lot of it brings one back.” Determining how much of each—nationalism and internationalism—was appropriate for this context was a role the men of *Parti pris* understood for themselves, as a self-fashioned Fanonian group of revolutionary intellectuals advocating for their nation. The connection Fanon provided between socialism, independence, and nationalism was invaluable. In addition to his connection between nationalism and socialism, Fanon argued for oppressed people’s right to advocate for political independence with violent resistance due to the inherently violent nature of colonial oppression. Jean-Marc Piotte argued that Fanon was important for many “because he saw the liberatory effect of violence,” meaning that his writings allowed for the sort of direct action with which the authors of *Parti pris* were so enamored. Taking Fanon’s writing as instructional, the authors were determined to apply it to their own contexts: “Quebec,” Paul Chamberland admitted, “is not like Algeria.... but we are transforming ourselves, applying [these examples] to our situation.”

As historian Sean Mills notes, Fanon’s ability to form a general theory of colonialism out of the particularities of the Algerian example made his work particularly appealing to other liberation movements. Instead of simply reading Fanon as an account of decolonization, the magazine’s authors wanted to “fanonize’ and decolonize” themselves, actively applying international ideas to the political situation in Quebec. Through Fanon, then, the partipristes could argue that socialist internationalism could be based on political independence rather than being contradicted by the creation of independent nation-states. An early emblem of Third World intellectual writing about Algeria, Fanon and other radical theorists served the partipristes as they articulated their own political ideology and, perhaps more cynically, drew “lines between themselves and

**The Algerian War provided Québécois separatists with paradigms to develop an idea of independence**

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The authors of *Parti pris* were also concerned with how political parties could provide a base for the establishment of an independent socialist state yet remain revolutionary. For this, Algeria again seemed to provide a solution. “President Ben Bella… has shown how the unity of the FLN was maintained at all costs, this unification of forces… having facilitated the struggle at the national level and accelerated the movement for liberation.” Debates raged in the journal about the differences between the Rassemblement pour l’Indépendence Nationale (RIN), the Parti Socialiste du Québec (PSQ), or various other political parties. They
argued that the province’s inability to support a fairly unified ideological doctrine was part of why their position remained marginal. Piotte wrote of the Québécois political scene: “the impatience and the tendency towards improvisation of the FLQ reflects... the incoherence of existing political parties.” Piotte and other authors, frustrated by a lack of political success, looked to Algerian revolutionaries’ ability to come together behind a single party as an example for their own case. “Algeria,” the editorial board wrote in 1965, “has become in our eyes a revolutionary model by those who knew how to adapt doctrine to their own reality by modifying necessary elements to enable the application of a malleable, yet firm socialism.” Highlighting the importance of unifying behind a revolutionary party, the partipristes took to heart the FLN’s example of revolutionary political struggle, as they would the example of Algeria’s actions as an independent state after the War.

During the Algerian War, revolutionaries appealed to the international community to bring international pressure to bear on France. Afterwards, the Algerian state aimed to support the liberation of oppressed peoples around the world through the power of national sovereignty. In a 1965 edition of the journal, the authors rejoiced in the fact that Algeria affirmed “its solidarity with those countries which are fighting against all forms of foreign domination.” The authors of Parti pris dreamed that they might be able to do the same. “It is important for us to participate, according to our being, to the ‘planetization’ of the Earth,” which they saw as an important part of the “global revolutionary present which is constituted by the triumph of the laboring classes over capitalist society and the emancipation of oppressed peoples.” The partipristes believed that their political independence would provide the opportunity to support anti-colonial movements around the world. The independent Algerian state’s commitment to global liberation provided the partipristes with an ideal of how they might operate their own nation. Algerians’ emphasis on international diplomacy, Fanon and the FLN’s emphasis on nationalism and socialism, and Algeria’s government policies as an independent nation provided the authors of Parti pris with a framework for their own political goals. From the Algerian example, the authors drew a distinct language of international solidarity and imagined how a national government might actually facilitate and expand a socialist, internationalist
ideological program.

The case of revolutionary Algeria illuminated a coherent political ideology for the partipristes, providing an example of radical political organization and demonstrating the role nationalist revolutionary intellectuals could play in promoting both nationalism and internationalism in an independence movement. Intellectual and radical action during the Algerian War, and the ideas that emerged from independent Algeria in the 1960s, established language Québécois radicals could use to describe their own political desires.

**Fighting the Yankees: Economic Independence and the Cuban Example**

For the partipristes, political independence would be useless without simultaneous economic independence from anglophone imperialism. Only a few years before *Parti pris* began publishing, Fidel Castro and the 26th of July Movement took power in Cuba. Though little in the way of formal economic policy came out of the immediate aftermath of their 1959 victory, Castro embarked on a tour of North America, coming as far as Montreal to speak about the possibilities inherent in a socialist uprising. The global revolutionary left, at least in these early years, celebrated Castro and Ernesto “Che” Guevara, and saw in them a vital example of national resistance to American capitalism. By their relative physical proximity to the Caribbean island and intellectual affiliation with its geopolitical situation, it is unsurprising that the authors of *Parti pris* looked to Cuba for guidance in the nationalist economic policy they desired for Quebec, to say little of the revolution’s inherent resistance to foreign national economic domination.

Castro’s success and Cuba’s eventual economic endeavors loomed large for the partipristes, who went so far as to title their December-January 1968 edition, “Québec Si, Yankee No!” mirroring the common call heard during the Cuban Revolution. The partipristes’ dream of a new nation was predicated on significant economic reforms and they relied heavily on the Cuban example, which appeared more similar to their own situation than the experience of more formally colonized territories. Cuba’s nationalization of industry, the establishment of autogestion — a form of workers’ self-management — and agrarian reform appeared to *Parti pris* as essential policies for resisting neo-imperialist control once they secured their own political sovereignty.

The Cuban people’s ability, in the eyes of the authors of *Parti pris*, to throw off the yoke of American corporate and neo-imperialist influence was particularly inspiring. Indeed, the Cuban critiques of American policy in Latin America, though they often sounded political, were generally economic in nature, centering on critiques of capitalism and the tactics American politicians used to suppress economic self-development in the global south. In the fall of 1967, the partipristes reproduced the full text of Guevara’s “One, Two, Many Vietnams” speech. This was placed after a full page photo of the bearded revolutionary and a few choice citations, including Guevara’s claim that “one must remember that imperialism is a global system, the final stage of capitalism, and that it must be
beaten through a great global struggle.”

Just as Fanon provided intellectual inspiration for radicals in Montreal, so too did the Cuban revolutionaries who fought for economic liberation from the United States and Europe. The partipristes’ reliance on the example of the Cuban Revolution would grow as they developed a more coherent idea of how to organize an independent political state — based on the idea of Algeria — and moved on to the need to develop an independent, socialist economy.

From some of their earliest writings, the authors of Parti pris took Cuba as a prime example of how to minimize the influence of American corporations. The revolutionary state was recognized for crafting economic policies that defended “against an external danger, the deathly menace of counterrevolution from European and American imperialism.” Parti pris discussed the importance of Cuban student organizing and unionizing to support the Revolution, and compared their activities with student actions at the Université de Montréal, pointing to the problems inherent in the “global situation of student syndicalism.”

Their critique of syndicated students at the Université perhaps neglected to acknowledge that a group of about a dozen of its students in fact traveled to the island in 1959 to examine recent revolutionary activity. Ironically, the partipristes invoked examples of Cuban student movements and student unions in order to critique students who were, at least partially, sympathetic to the island as well. Regardless, Cuban students’ example appeared valuable for the partipristes who saw solutions to the dilemmas they were facing in Quebec.

In addition to students’ participation in economic and political reform, Parti pris was interested in the agrarian reforms undertaken by the Castro regime. The magazine dedicated significant space to the means and successes of Cuban agrarian movements, which they felt were instructive for Quebec given the province’s similar economic base in small-scale rural production. The role of agricultural laborers in Quebec was a significant concern to these radicals. In a 1965 edition dedicated to the question of unions in the province, Michael Draper spent almost a dozen pages discussing the problems and solutions of agricultural unionization and critiquing prior leftists in Quebec for ignoring the issues of this portion of the population. Cuban leaders had promoted massive increases in the state’s agricultural production by nationalizing large land holdings immediately after the revolution. They were themselves sympathetic to Quebec’s own rural struggle. In 1959, the aforementioned dozen students from the Université de Montréal had been specifically invited to visit Cuba by the newly established National Institute for Agrarian Reform. George Schoeters — the FLQ member whose letter was transcribed in Parti pris in 1963 — was among those students.

In reference to these Cuban agrarian reforms, the revolutionaries in Quebec believed they could find a model for their own agricultural laborers. “By the light of the Cuban example,” Lise Rochon wrote in her discussion of Cuban agrarian reform, “the Québécois government’s disinterest in resolving the problems posed by agriculture is
evident. What an under-developed country managed to achieve for its agriculturalists, Quebec, a much more prosperous nation, has not achieved.”46

When they looked at Cuba, the partipristes saw a variety of similarities in their reliance on agriculture — though the Québécois were perhaps slightly luckier in their possession of natural resources. These radicals turned to Cuba’s innovations in autogestion and agricultural reforms for ideas about how to bolster a revolutionary economy against neo-imperial forces.

More broadly, the partipristes celebrated Cuba’s socialist reforms — though how effective they were on the ground the partipristes may not have known. Regardless, the journal regularly pointed out the economic achievements of the Cuban government and people:

To abolish private property from the means of production, the accumulation of capital, of profit, etc. all the things that characterize capitalist exploitation of man by man, the people must come together; only their cooperation, in absolute equality, will permit them to build a new society, a society which is not simply a capitalist planned economy...! A society finally founded on man and not on capital.47

Socialist doctrine, as has been previously discussed, was extremely important for the partipristes’ imagination of political and economic independence from the Canadian federal government and anglophone economic domination. Allying themselves strongly with the new Castro regime, Québécois radicals argued that the fight against American economic neo-imperialism undertaken by the Cubans was inseparable from their own fight against American capitalism. Pierre Vallières, a periodic contributor to Parti pris and a member of the FLQ, concluded in his article on the Cuban Revolution that the struggle in which both the Québécois and the Cubans fought was fundamentally anti-capitalist as well as anti-imperialist. “All revolutionaries, particularly in the Americas, must stand at the ready to defend Cuba” both politically and economically, he wrote.48 Not only was association with Cuba useful as an example of anti-American socialist behavior, but standing with Cuba was seen as an important way for the Quebec radicals to legitimate their politics on the world stage.

The partipristes saw Cuba as a partner and ally in the struggle against anglophone domination but also as an example of how to achieve economic independence from American neo-
imperialism. They were inspired by the student and youth mobilization, through effective syndicalism, and by the radical agricultural reforms of the revolutionary Cuban government. This, the partipristes believed, was an ideal model for economic reform in their own territory. The perceived similarities between Cuba and Quebec — the size of their territory relative to their oppressors, the specter of informal empire, and the reliance on agricultural production — allowed the authors of *Parti pris* to draw convincing lessons from this small, Caribbean island.

**Joual, Nègres blancs, and Black Power: Cultural Independence and the African-American Example**

_Perhaps most famous among the associations between African-Americans in the Black Power movement in the United States and revolutionaries in Quebec is Pierre Vallières’ 1968 work* Les Nègres blancs d’Amérique, republished in English in 1971 as* The White Niggers of America._

In this work, originally published by *Parti pris’* edition house, Vallières argued that the economic, cultural, and political circumstances in which the French of Quebec found themselves could be equated to the situation in which the African-American population of the United States was placed for most of their history. While it grossly over-exaggerates the similarity of these two struggles, Vallières’ work was rooted in a real association between these two groups. Various partipristes would travel to the United States and communicate with Black Panthers by the late 1960s. Indeed, Vallières spoke periodically with Stokely Carmichael and claimed that his book was supported by the Black Panthers and other Black Power organizations. After Vallières’ publication of *Nègres blancs*, Michèle Lalonde penned her famous poem, “Speak White,” which articulated how for the francophone population of Quebec, “the French language was their blackness.”

Lalonde wrote:

_Speak white_  
_Tell us again about Freedom and Democracy_  
_Nous savons que liberté est un mot noir_  
_comme la misère est nègre_  
_et comme le sang se mêle à la poussière des_  
_rues d’Alger_  
_ou de Little Rock._

Comparisons, then, between African-American civil rights movements, the idea of blackness, and the struggle of Quebec were important to radicals in the late 1960s and 1970s. Yet Vallières did not draw his famed comparison lightly; the authors of _Parti pris_ were deeply inspired by African-American radicals and the Black Power movement long before the publication of _Nègres blancs_. The Black Power movement helped the partipristes articulate their vision of the cultural oppression of the francophone population of Quebec, based on a comparison of linguistic differences and cultural production as a means of liberation.

Unlike other nationalists in Quebec who had lamented the supposedly poor state of the French language spoken in their province, the authors of _Parti pris_ chose to celebrate this quasi-creole by publishing Québécois poetry and literature in the magazine and production house of _Parti pris_.
Emphasizing the “polluted culture” of Quebec in language similar to that used by African-American poets who wished to retrace their roots to “our Black family,” the partipristes published poetry and fiction in an effort to provide such a purified version of French-Canadian culture to their readers. Language was thus a central tenant of the liberation of the people in the eyes of these authors. Gaston Miron, the famed Québécois poet, wrote in 1965: “language is fundamentally the same as the existence of the people, because it reflects the totality of its culture in signs, signified, and signifiers.” Drawing language from French linguistic theory, Miron demonstrates the importance of understanding and using one’s language to articulate the culture of a people. The attention these authors placed on language and on cultural expression through language was thus both unique to their historical experience as a linguistic minority in Quebec, but reflected in many ways the sentiment expressed by many Black Power activists that African-Americans possessed a distinct culture and means of expression which deserved to be celebrated and spread.

*Parti pris* affirmed and advanced the movement to celebrate *joual*, an effort to reclaim domestic cultural expression. *Joual* was previously understood to be a pejorative name for the manner in which the urban poor of Montreal spoke, but the partipristes reappropriated the term, lauding their compatriots’ language. As a means of justifying this celebration, the authors compared *joual* to the distinct linguistic expression of blacks in the United States. African-Americans “also have a ‘joual,'” Gérald Godin, a novelist, poet, and regular contributor to *Parti pris*, wrote. “More politicized than us, it has become a reflex among [blacks in America] to try and confuse the white man… by using ‘jive-talk.’ Our use of ‘joual’ is but the repetition of a mechanism that has worked for them for a long time.” The authors of *Parti pris* compared their efforts to the African-Americans’ cultural revolt against white America long before Vallières published his seminal work, though the two are certainly linked. The unique linguistic expression of African-Americans and the Black Power movement helped the partipristes to articulate their own rejection of anglophone culture.

Many partipristes were fixated on cultural production’s role in securing liberation. Laurent Girouard, for example, critiqued the so-called colonial literature which had long been produced in Quebec, saying that they must “think to create the conditions of emancipated literature,” by “talking with bombs.” Instead of reflecting their oppressed state, the partipristes believed that literature and art were “expressions of being,” and thus were necessary for human liberation. Just as the Black Power movement regularly critiqued the forms of art created as a form of oppression, and instead supported the Black Arts Movement (BLAM), so too did the authors of *Parti pris* use their platform to promote domestic, liberated art and literature. In particular, the partipristes saw jazz music as a form of uniquely liberated cultural production. Reflecting the idea that art should express a form of free human existence, based in some ways on the Cuban idea of the new socialist man, Patrick Straram wrote in 1964 that jazz “is a re-creation...
Québécois radicals borrowed from the Black Power movement to articulate how francophones...

of the world, and the most elementary of examination permits one to understand the similarity between this recreation and the efforts of Marxists, the re-creation of a world which is this time made by men for men.”

The partipristes were fascinated by the example of black artistic production in America as a means of liberation distinctly linked to political projects — like the art of Emory Douglas which adorned the cover of most editions of the Black Panther Newspaper.

Despite the more commonly cited influence of the Algerian or Cuban examples for Parti pris, these writers had much more consistent contact with black radicals in the United States. In 1968, Straram, a partipriste, writer, and renowned oddball, found himself in “forced exile in California,” writing an article for Parti pris from Sausalito. Straram traveled to California several times through the decades, spending time in San Franciscisco and Berkeley in particular, both hotbeds of Sixties radicalism and home to the Black Panthers in California. Straram compared the role of himself and his fellow radicals in Quebec with that of blacks in the United States, saying, “Socialism? Without an independent Quebec, impossible. And has socialism ever been possible in the United States without first the revolts of blacks, Black Power, the Black Panther Party?”

Not only did Straram consider the Black Panthers a vanguard party in the United States, similar to the FLQ and Parti pris in Quebec, but he fostered similar conceptions of the role of art in revolutionary movements. Straram argued:

Art is no longer considered a simple aesthetic activity external to praxis, but on the contrary ethical material, a means of investigation and elucidation of a re-discovered reality and...permits all people of a group to feel solidarity with one another in service of the need to affirm and live out an identity. (Think about rock’n’roll and jazz, without which Carmichael, Newton, Brown, Cleaver, Seale would not be so immediately understood by black Americans…) How would we live, otherwise?

...could liberate their minds and bodies through reflection on and celebration of their distinct culture
Emory Douglas, the Black Panthers’ Minister of Culture and an activist in San Francisco, expressed similar ideas about the value of art in revolutionary activity. “The art is a language, communicating with the community.”⁶⁵ The art he produced, Douglas argued, “was a collective interpretation and expression from our community.”⁶⁶ For Douglas, Straram, and the partipristes, art in all of its forms was a means of revealing the reality of their situation and expressing it both to other members of the community and around the world.

Québécois radicals continued to see California as a place where they could speak out their rebellion. Note, for example, the oft-forgotten Vaillancourt Fountain, designed and created by radical Québécois separatist Armand Vaillancourt, which stands to this day in downtown San Francisco. When the sculpture was first opened in 1971, Vaillancourt stenciled the words, “Québec Libre” in blazing orange along its concrete twists and turns—and re-painted them when city officials erased his writing.⁶⁷ That a legendary Québécois artist nestled this 40-foot tall sculpture in amongst the hippies and Black Panthers of San Francisco is no coincidence. Rather, it represents a continuation of the associations and alliances made between black American radicals and partipristes a decade before. This association was important for black radicals as well, though the relationship was occasionally fraught. Gilles Bourque, a contributor to Parti pris from 1965 to 1968 told of an interview held with a Black Panther during Montreal’s Expo ’67. While the Panther’s representative eventually came to sympathize with the Quebec radicals, he was at first startled by the cheers from the crowd, yelling, “Nègres blancs, nègres blancs!” (in reference to Vallières’ work) at the presenter before him. “He had to be told that this was a compliment,” Bourque said. “He thought it was some sort of racial epithet.”⁶⁸ However, the fact that the 1968 Congress of Black Writers — featuring the likes of C.L.R. James, Stokely Carmichael, and Walter Rodney — was held in Montreal is a testament to the lasting associations between these two groups.⁶⁹

The revolution of black Americans against the internal imperialism of the United States was both symbolic and inspirational for leftists in Quebec. While the Black Panthers were only established in 1966, the Black Power movement in combination with this organization remained a significant inspiration for the partipristes. Black Power helped these radicals in Quebec to articulate their desire for distinct cultural life as a facet of political and economic independence. The work of American radicals was symbolically important, and the alliances built with these groups helped to strengthen the Québécois movement. “Our struggle for... decolonization is integrated into the internal struggle undertaken by the peoples of North America.... we must link our combat with that brought by black Americans... supporting Black Power... is a must for all Québécois,” the editorial board wrote in 1968. Though the Black Power movement was gaining strength as Parti pris’ influence was waning, its role was vital in developing radical conceptions of cultural production in Quebec.
PARTI PRIS CLOSED ITS DOORS IN 1968, its members divided over whether or not to support the Parti Québécois and its dramatic rise in popularity. The final edition of the magazine was released in the summer of 1968 and detailed some of the student movements that exploded across the world in the summer of that year. Yet the ideology they promoted lived on into the early 1970s. Montreal remained an astonishingly internationalist city, garnering increasing attention after the famous Expo '67 and the Congress of Black Writers in 1968. Even the networks built by the partipristes are visible in the movements of the early 1970s. When the FLQ kidnapped Pierre Laporte and James Cross, murdering the former and bringing martial law to the province, they relied heavily on the new ideology put forth by radicals from Parti pris to describe to the world why they had undertaken such a radical act. Though Parti pris and the FLQ were, for the most part, not overlapping organizations, many of the ex-authors of Parti pris were arrested under the War Measures Act of October 1970 under suspicion of collaborating with the FLQ. Most of these men were released, and in December 1970, four members of the FLQ negotiated their release to Cuba, securing a plane and flying into Havana to the welcome of the Cuban government.

None of the examples discussed here negate the domestic context that led to the establishment of Parti pris and their distinct revolutionary ideology. The men behind this journal believed that they were liberating their people through revolutionary struggle; they were committed to the idea of a Québécois nation and to the domestic revolution they felt was approaching. However, this relatively small number of radicals in urban Quebec used the examples of other revolutionaries to articulate their vision of a nation and to tie themselves to successful movements being undertaken around the world. Without a clear precedent for revolutionary action in their context, the partipristes looked to other anti-colonial movements for inspiration and the symbolic power of association. The Algerian example helped the authors to develop rhetoric portraying Quebec as colonized—and thus the belief that the province could be decolonized through an independent socialist government. They looked to Cuba to understand how they could destabilize American neo-imperialism and re-create new, socialist economic structures in the country they wanted to build. And, looking to what they saw as a similar case of internal colonization, Québécois radicals borrowed from the Black Power movement in the United States to articulate how francophones could liberate their minds along with their bodies through reflection on and celebration of their distinct culture. More than a passive symbol, international anti-colonialism was a tool that Parti pris used to create a pragmatic political agenda for the future and to explain their own experiences. Domestic political and social contexts were central to the imagination of Parti pris, certainly, but international movements helped the authors find the language necessary to dream, write, and work towards a new independent nation.
Endnotes

1 Schoeters was Belgian but became a founding member of the Front de la Libération du Québec; he was arrested for a bombing in the spring of 1963. See Georges Schoeters, “Lettre de Georges Schoeters,” reprinted in Parti pris (November 1963): 8. Schoeters had, in fact, met Fidel Castro when the Cuban leader came to Montreal in 1959 and drew self-consciously from Third World Marxism. See Sean Mills, The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 44.

2 Ibid., 6.

3 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

4 Some of the more important contributors to Parti pris include: André Brochu, Paul Chamberland, André Major, Jean-Marc Piotte, Pierre Maheu, Jacques Ferron, Patrick Straram, Laurent Girouard, Gerald Godin, and Luc Racine. Brochu was a 21-year old poet from a suburb of Montreal; Chamberland, also from Montreal, was 24 in 1963; Major was 21 years old and also worked for La Presse and Le Devoir; Piotte was 23 and would go on to teach at UQAM. Straram was a French citizen involved in the Situationist International. He came to Quebec in 1958.

5 Quebec as a colony was an idea first proposed by a mentor to the partipristes, Raoul Roy, who edited La Revue socialiste. Whether he provided the idea for the partipristes or they for him is unclear, but it furthered his idea and fully articulated a theory of Quebec’s colonization (Mills, The Empire Within, 39–43).


7 Jean-Marc Piotte, interview with the author, July 29, 2017, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.


9 Sean Mills discusses, to some extent, the international scene in Montreal in this period but does not focus on radical publishing in The Empire Within. David Austin, in his work on black radicalism in Montreal, notes that Parti pris published the work of Haitian and Martiniquan writers but does not explore the partipristes’ radicalism more. See Austin, Fear of a Black Nation: Race, Sex, and Security in Sixties Montreal (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2013). A few studies specifically of the magazine exist but are primarily written by ex-partipristes. See, for example, Robert Major, Parti pris : idéologies et littérature (Quebec: Hurtuboise HMH, 1979) or Paul Chamberland, Parti pris anthropologique (Montreal: Parti pris, 1983).


11 Nineteenth-century nationalism in Quebec focused on achieving political power at the federal level and emphasized what was seen as the natural traits of French-Canadians: their Catholicism, culture, institutions, and laws. Parti pris was part of a more radical, leftist nationalism that developed during the Quiet Revolution and emphasized secularism, socialism, and separatism. Arthur Buies’ anticlerical nationalism was one of the few exceptions to this trend. For more on these changes, see Gilles Gougeon, A History of Quebec Nationalism, trans. Louisa Blair, Robert Chodos, and Jane Ubertino (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1994) or Ramsay Cook, Canada, Quebec, and the Uses of Nationalism, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Inc., 1995).
The partipristes were aware of and frustrated by this lack of radicalism by their elders. In the opening piece of the October 1963 edition of the journal, they wrote, “the intellectuals of the generation which precedes us, by taking the path of ‘objectivity’, play the role of the impartial spectator; they situate themselves… outside of… reality, and thus condemn themselves… to never change, substituting…the concrete struggle between men with the abstract futility of dialogue and discussion.” See “Présentation,” Parti pris 1 (October 1963): 2.


This quote is taken from La Révolution Africaine, the state-sponsored organ of the independent Algerian government. It is demonstrative of the attitude taken by the FLN long before this editorial was published. See “Éditorial : Espérances et réalisation,” La Révolution Africaine, 153 (January 1–7, 1966): 3; and Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Richard Philcox (New York City: Grove Press, 2004), 167.


The major figures of Parti pris generally fell behind the RIN, but there were analyses and debates about the nature of the RIN’s political programs and the benefits and drawbacks of other political parties in the journal.

Jean-Marc Piotte, interview with author, July 29, 2017. Piotte himself suggests that he was not as strong of a believer in the ideas of Fanon, though many in the journal were. Piotte instead was particularly interested in the writings of Memmi and Jacques Berque.


Mills, The Empire Within, 33–34.


Mills, The Empire Within, 34.


The major figures of Parti pris generally fell behind the RIN, but there were analyses and debates about the nature of the RIN’s political programs and the benefits and drawbacks of other political parties in the journal.


For an analysis of the importance of international affairs in the Algerian War, see Matthew Connelly, A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria’s Fight for Independence and the Origins of the Post–Cold War Era (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
36 Mills, The Empire Within, 66–68.
37 Parti pris 5, no. 4 (December–January 1968). This was also the title of a song by Colombian revolutionary Alejandro Gomez Roa, “Cuba Si, Yanquis No!” Though the superimposition of the song over images was done later, see this video for a recording of Roa’s song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=odWx8sQQACU.
41 Michael McAndrew, “Le syndicalisme étudiant Quebecois,” Parti pris 2, no. 6 (February 1965): 27.
48 Ibid., 24.
50 In one striking example of this, Patrick Straram, one of the more radical partipristes, wrote an article for the final edition of Parti pris from Sausalito, California. Straram, “A la santé de Rudi Dutschke et quelques autres folk-rock mirabellenwasser,” Parti pris 5, no. 8–9 (Summer 1968): 66–72.
51 Austin, Fear of a Black Nation, 65; Mills, The Empire Within, 80. Both Austin and Mills have done significant work in examining the associations and discussions amongst black Americans and French-Canadian radicals.
52 Mills, The Empire Within, 82.
53 Quoted in Mills, The Empire Within, 82. I find it important not to translate Lalonde’s poem as the original text combines both French and English intentionally. The text in French reads as follows: “We know that liberty is a black word / just like misery is black / and as blood mixes with dust in the streets of Algiers / and Little Rock.”
55 Miron, “Le non-poème et le poème,” 90.

62 The Freedom Archives have digitized most covers of “The Black Panther Black Community News Service,” the periodical the organization produced from 1969 to 1982. They can be consulted online: https://search.freedomarchives.org/search.php?view_collection=90&page=1.
64 Ibid., 69.
68 Gilles Bourque, interview with the author, July 5, 2017.
69 For more on this association, see Austin, Fear of a Black Nation.
70 There is debate about why the magazine closed. Jean-Marc Piotte, who was in Europe undertaking doctoral work by 1968, said that the magazine closed for lack of funds, but Gilles Bourque, who was still writing for the magazine to the final edition, argued that they could have maintained production if the will had existed to do so. Instead, he argues that political divisions led to the abandonment of the project. I tend to believe Bourque’s interpretation. Jean-Marc Piotte and Gilles Bourque, interviews with the authors, summer 2017.
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