

OXFORD STUDIES IN SOCIOLINGUISTICS

Sustaining the Nation

THE MAKING AND MOVING
OF LANGUAGE AND NATION



Monica Heller
Lindsay A. Bell
Michelle Daveluy
Mireille McLaughlin
Hubert Noël

SUSTAINING THE NATION

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SUSTAINING THE NATION

[1]

INTRODUCTION

Dwelling was understood to be the local ground of collective life, travel a supplement; roots always precede routes. But what would happen . . . if travel were untethered, seen as a complex or pervasive spectrum of human experiences? Practices of displacement might emerge as constitutive of cultural meaning rather than as their simple transfer or extension. . . . Cultural centers, discrete regions and territories, do not exist prior to contacts but are sustained through them, appropriating and disciplining the restless movements of people and things (Clifford 1997:3).

1.1 MOBILITIES AND MOORINGS

In the summer of 2009, we went to a small town in northeastern New Brunswick, called Shippagan. We were there to attend a big event for a small place: the Congrès mondial acadien, or, in English, the Acadian World Congress, usually referred to as the CMA. This event, held every five years since 1994 in a different place, aims to bring together and celebrate a linguistic minority group called “Acadians,” siblings of the Louisiana Cajuns, cousins of the Québécois—all now dispersed descendants of the first

French settlers in North America. In 1755, the British deported the ancestors of Acadians from Nova Scotia to France, England, New England, and Louisiana, reducing possibilities of making a settled nation, and creating the seminal moment in the development of a diasporic national consciousness. The CMA plays off diaspora both as a founding tragic myth and as a strong claim to cosmopolitanism, or at least to a special position in global circulations of culture: its scattered networks within both French- and English-speaking spheres now make it easier to sell its music, its literature, and its seafood around the world.

Shippagan is not usually thought of as a big player on the globalization scene; it is a small fishing port, struggling to start up a tourist industry, with relatively high unemployment. Its men have long sought seasonal or supplementary employment elsewhere, sometimes leading to longer-term migration, while regional elites struggled to instill national pride and create a permanent community. For Shippagan and its region, the Péninsule acadienne, hosting the CMA held out a promise of a boost in tourism development, greater visibility on the world culture and arts scene, and, of course, also just a plain old good time—always welcome, but especially so when times are a bit difficult. Shippagan 2009 represents the authentic, traditional Acadie, with its ties to the sea and the land, far from the modern, urban world; the reality, long hidden, of well-established labor mobility and migration, with concomitant far-flung social networks; and the new globalized economy, with its varied opportunities: opportunities for new markets for whatever Acadie sells, opportunities for new places to work, opportunities for reinventing oneself and one's nation.

Since the CMA brings together all these facets of contemporary *acadianité*, it serves as a useful point of entry to one of the ethnographic puzzles of our times: what happens when identities

produced by the nation-state encounter numerous kinds of global flows, some of which reproduce those identities and some of which challenge them? What happens when older forms of mobility, long buried in the interest of constructing the fixed, if fictive, image of the rooted community, come to the surface in ways that cannot be ignored?

For the past two centuries or so, Europe has developed and exported the idea of the nation-state as the primary means of political, economic, social, and cultural organization. It has become so taken for granted, that it is often hard for people to imagine that anything else came before, or may come after. Acadians, as emissaries of the French Empire, were supposed to help bring North America into the French sphere of influence. Later, they were supposed to try to establish a sense of nationhood on their own, despite their dispersion, despite their mobility.

We are now emerging from a long period where the nation-state has been presumed to be the only normal way to organize ourselves as populations and territories. As Michael Billig (1995) put it, our imaginations are so saturated with the idea of the nation as normal that it has become “banal”; that banal nationalism shows up in proliferations of flags, national anthems sung at the beginning of sports events, and facile assumptions about national character. The notion of nation-as-natural also emerges in some recent fierce opposition to “immigration,” as evidently threatening to national languages and cultures. These debates reveal the kinds of ideologies, or powerful ideas, upon which modern nationalism is built, specifically, that groups of people are located within firm national boundaries and have clear connections to shared cultural and linguistic practices. Said plainly, people are supposed to be *rooted* to place. Yet we don’t have to look very far to see how the conditions of the contemporary world challenge those assumptions. National

sports teams are made up of players from around the world. Bicultural and bilingual education programs are extremely popular. Huge numbers of us have complicated histories of mobility in our own family trees. It is no longer so simple to hide the *routes* that brought us where we are, nor is it so obviously desirable.

This context gives rise to the following question: How do roots and routes (to borrow Clifford's terminology) connect? This is an important question to ask now, because much of our scholarship on nation and nationalism has informed an interest in languages, cultures, and communities as bounded entities with firm borders. In reaction to that, there has been a spate of work in recent years that focuses instead on mobility, privileging process, and hybridity (Appadurai 1996; Basch et al. 1994; Sheller and Urry 2006; Beck and Sznaider 2006). The making and experience of rootedness and boundaries have also been explored, but generally as a separate concern (Barth 1969; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Green 2013; see Cunningham and Hyman 2004 as exception). However, roots and routes are mutually constitutive. That is, they help shape one another. This requires us to ask, how are flows and fixity connected?

This book is an attempt to answer that question by examining a minority within a minority; francophone Canadians living outside of the country's only explicitly francophone province of Quebec. Many non-Canadians (and many anglophone Canadians too) are surprised to learn that there are French-speaking people across the country. Their distribution is uneven, with larger concentrations in northern Ontario and in New Brunswick where the CMA was being held. Known as "franco-minoritaires" (French minorities), these populations have typically struggled to have the same degree of institutional recognition as their Québécois counterparts (French-language schools, bilingual health services, and

so on). It has been harder for them to use the idea of the nation to struggle for rights and resources.

These populations provide particularly helpful insights into the construction of the idea of the nation. Historically, they have drawn on nationalism's notions of rootedness to make certain political claims while, at the same time, many come from, or live with, high degrees of mobility. Many franco-minority regions are some of the hardest hit by the collapse of industrial manufacturing, by the depletion of natural resources, and by the offshoring of many of the economic activities on which these populations depended to make a living, as it has become easier and easier to search farther and farther for sources of cheap labor and cheap goods. But they are also bastions of "authentic" culture, and possess strong and effective transnational networks.

Further, Canadian social policy is firmly based on the idea of two founding nations, the French and the English (despite contestation by aboriginal and immigrant groups). Franco-minorities like those at the CMA draw on this configuration of nationalism while simultaneously presenting it with a challenge. Many Acadians who travelled to Shippagan for the CMA are bilingual, some speak chiac (a vernacular which draws on resources of both French and English), and others don't know any French at all outside of a few words. While social policy aims to provide services to fixed populations, the more homogeneous the easier, franco-minoritaires are busy moving around all over the place. Even as their elites try to shape them into the right form for the state, conditions make achieving that difficult.

Now, Canada's mode of regulating diversity simply echoes the predominant mode of political regulation of diversity in states and supranational organizations around the world: diversity is best managed by reducing it to a set of homogeneous units, whose

articulation can then be regulated. Examining the relationship between such nation-state-informed modes of regulation, on the one hand, and increasing economic pressure to encourage flows, flexibilities, and mobilities, on the other, has the potential to illuminate the sources and nature of the inevitable tensions that arise.

As a result, we consciously moved away from the methodological nationalism (Glick Schiller 2012), even of the minority kind, eschewing a focus restricted to spaces constructed in the nation-state mold, whether understood as “communities” or as national institutions (in francophone Canada, these are generally schools, hospitals, cooperatives, credit unions, parishes, and cultural associations; cf. Heller 1994; Farmer 1996; Heller and Labrie 2003). Instead, we sought to place those in relation to the mobilities that contemporary economic change has brought to the fore. There are two that concern us primarily: the first is the ways in which deindustrialization shakes the economic foundations of many First World nationalisms, and particularly of the minority nationalisms which arose in the wake of decolonization in the 1960s. In francophone Canada as elsewhere, the traditional bastions of national identity are exactly the peripheral rural or working-class urban areas most affected by this aspect of globalization. In their place, we see attempts to reinvent a new economic foundation, often by commodifying the very national identity that yesterday was a basis for claiming political rights, and today enables the production and circulation of “authentic” goods and experiences. Tourism is one key area of development in this regard, entailing new circulations and mobilities in and of itself (Heller et al. 2014).

The second is the remaining investment in primary resource extraction and industrial transformation. While these are moving out of the traditional bastions of national identity, they are not

actually disappearing; and in any case, as we will see in Chapter 2, they have never been solely located in those bastions in any case. Nonetheless, there are contemporary features to the chronic inability of those regions to provide full employment, notable among them the necessity to move farther and farther afield. Today, it tends to be northern, including circumpolar, regions that are at the heart of primary resource extraction. This has consequences for the range of mobilities, and the possibilities for moorings in environments which are characterized by a host of complexities: the imaginary of the west and the north as frontiers, and, in the case of Canada, defining elements of national character; newly politicized relations with indigenous populations whose presence has tended to be alternately ignored and romanticized; security concerns held over from the Cold War and renewed in the post-socialist era in the wake of the economic affordances of climate-change-induced opening of Arctic seaways; lack of settlement infrastructure; and, a challenging climate.

These two new mobility elements (the new economy one, triggered by regional economic redevelopment in traditional bastions, the other the movement farther and farther afield of national group members trying to stay engaged in today's version of the old economy) required a methodology which held in one frame both mobility and mooring. The ethnography we report on here moved back and forth between these two processes, requiring our own movements across the country and around the key regions and events we chose as points of entry: the new loci of the resource extraction economy in northern Alberta and the Northwest Territories, and one of the traditional bastions of francophone Canada involved the longest and to the greatest extent in labor mobility, northern New Brunswick, specifically the areas known as the Restigouche and the Péninsule acadienne (see figure 1.1).



Figure 1.1 Field sites in Canada, east and west.

As we explain further below, in each region we sought multiple modes of engagement with the evolving modernist spaces of institutionalized francophone nationalism, notably the political lobbying and cultural associations; with the new zones of economic development and their workers; and the social networks of all the francophones we encountered in these ways. But in order to illustrate how this worked, let us go back to the CMA, in the sunny summer of 2009.

1.2 THE CMA, NEW BRUNSWICK 2009

The CMA is methodologically and conceptually useful because it is an important node for making connections between mobilities and moorings in 21st-century francophone Canada. It is many contradictory things at once. Held every five years since 1994, it is a major nation-building event, a space for the discursive construction of “acadianness” or “*acadianité*” in the nation-state sense of a homogeneous population defined by shared language, culture, and history, with a shared origin story in the idea of Acadie as located in the French settlement of the Annapolis Valley (in what is now the Canadian province of Nova Scotia) in the early 17th century. *Acadianité* in particular, and Canadian Frenchness more generally, serve as rich sites for exploring the development and discursive struggle around ideas of the nation historically and today, precisely because, in the face of a failure to fit many of the canonical frames of nationhood, so much effort has been invested in making and reproducing the idea of the nation anyway. The CMA is one important example of those efforts, among many.

One of the ways in which *acadianité* fails to fit canonical models of the nation is in its struggle with rootedness. While claiming

roots in the Annapolis Valley, those roots are actually a node in a history of routes, a temporary mooring in a long history of mobilities. The farmers and fisherfolk of the Annapolis Valley were settlers from France, one small group among the many Europeans who settled—for shorter or longer periods of time—the many regions of imperial conquest around the world during Europe's age of empire, and who remained in contact with, and in movement among, France and its colonies.

They were sent in part to claim a piece of North America that was among the zones of contention among competing European powers, in this case, in particular France and England. "Acadie" was ceded to Britain in 1713 treaty negotiations after one of the continuous wars of that period. It was not until a few decades later, however, that changes in colonial conditions rendered the presence of the French settlers on British territory problematic; in 1755, Britain demanded allegiance to the crown, and failing to get much, deported about 7000 of the 9000 "Acadians" to its American colonies, to Louisiana, to France, and to Britain itself. Some took shelter in other parts of what was still New France, although that part of France's North American holdings was also lost to Britain by 1763.

The story Acadie began to tell itself was of roots lost, and needing to be refound. The CMA serves as a space to do just that, aiming to gather Acadians from around the world, however briefly (the Congrès usually lasts two weeks), to reknit broken genealogies, and to tell the story of Acadie over and over again. By choosing sites like Shippagan (see figure 1.2) understood as bastions of settlement (and certainly not as temporary moorings), the CMA also helps erase the constant waves of economic migration typical of Acadian history to this day.

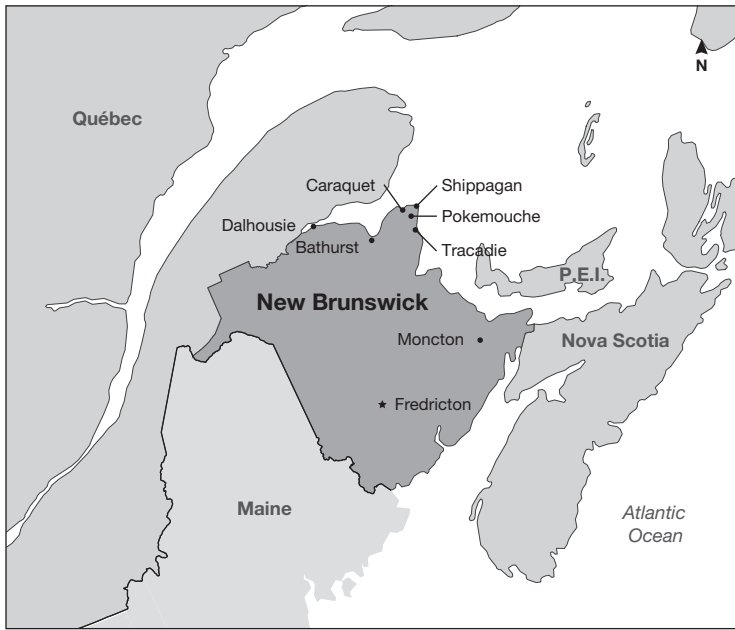


Figure 1.2 Map of New Brunswick.

The people who come from Quebec, Alberta, France, Louisiana or Massachusetts to gather in Shippagan (or in 2004 in Lafayette, Louisiana, and 2014 on the border between Quebec, New Brunswick, and Maine) are meant to be the descendants of the first Acadians, who ended up in the forests of Maine, the textile mills of Massachusetts, or the bayous and prairies of Louisiana, and who never left afterwards. Most of them continue to have their own complex histories of mobilities, in their own lives and that of their families. Indeed, it applies to most of the people we encountered—including some we had first met thousands of miles away, working in the northern Alberta oil sands or building bridges in the Northwest Territories. For some members of the Acadian

elite, these mobilities are problematic; they are sometimes even referred to as an “*exode*” (an exodus), imagining multiple and continuous mobilities instead as a singular and unidirectional move from the community to the outside world. As we will see in Chapter 5 in greater detail, the CMA is also a space of attempts to appropriate these mobilities and reinvent them as “circulations.” The CMA thus helps us understand how moorings and mobilities encounter each other, and what people do to try to highlight one or the other—and why.

As we will argue in Chapter 2, in the case of Acadie, of francophone Canada, and of linguistic minority nationalisms more generally, modernist nationalism has served an important role in contesting internal colonialisms (Hechter 1975)—the use of cultural difference to legitimate the exploitation of peripheral regions and their populations, and of class relations. The making of ethno-classes (see Chapter 2) makes available the concept of the nation to contest disadvantage, though not by contesting the political economic structures that produce that linkage of cultural and linguistic difference and social inequality. Instead, elites mobilize populations whose unhappy position in the social hierarchy is justified on the basis of their supposed cultural difference to contest not their difference but their inequality, that is, to work at national autonomy; that national autonomy is understood as the condition necessary for emancipation and social mobility (though not geographic mobility, since one key element of national legitimacy is a privileged tie to a bounded territory).

In this frame, mobility has long been understood to be a problem to be overcome, although it is inherent in the place of peripheralized workers in industrial and postindustrial capitalism—both of which Canada is currently experiencing at the same time. Canada’s position as a colony has long focused its economy on



Figure 1.3 The Abitibi Bowater paper mill, 2009.

primary resource extraction and the industrial transformation of those resources (see figures 1.3 and 1.4). That economic mode continues (though the resources have largely shifted from fur, lumber, and fish to minerals, oil, and gas) at the same time that some forms of it suffer the same collapse due to resource exhaustion and farther-flung competition as elsewhere in the First World. (One theory about this is that the ever-increasing global reach of capital is outstripping the ability of polities invented for regulating smaller [nation-state] markets and their international exchanges; cf. Hobsbawm 1990; Castells 2000; Harvey 1989).

Emerging in the wake of these shifts is the service and information economy, including the commodification in industries like tourism of the very forms of national identity that the old economy produced and relied on. Thus, the CMA helps us understand the difficulties encountered in sustaining the idea of nationhood



Figure 1.4 The Dalhousie oil power plant, formerly owned by NBPower, closed in 2012. NBPower felt the upkeep of the plant would be too costly, especially after two local industrial mills (paper and chemical) closed down in 2007. The plant still stands, but locals and politicians are currently debating whether it should be sunk in the bay or reopened so as to foster economic development.

under the conditions of late capitalism: difficulties due to greater extensions of trajectories of labor mobility; greater emphasis on “flexible” workers, undermining the possibility of stable employment and stable communities; new economic opportunities which commodify and “skillify” identities and the practices which compose their performance (Urciuoli 2008). And so, under a sea of red, white, blue, and yellow flags, t-shirts, and merchandise, Acadians are invited to come celebrate *their* identity with their *cousins* “from the world over,” or on a visit back home from out West—to produce and consume themselves, as it were.

However rich and complex, the 2009 CMA is, however, merely a point of entry to the broader story we tell here. We will juxtapose the various mobilities and moorings of an ethnoclass and its elite in order to explain why it is becoming more difficult for the idea of the rooted nation to sustain itself. We will look at how the necessary mobility of resource and infrastructure workers in the resource extraction ("old") economy poses a problem for the reproduction of the rural bastions understood to guarantee the authenticity of the nation, whether "at home" or "out west" or "up north." The continued urbanization of new elites is equally problematic; both are constructed as forms of "exodus" and "assimilation," even though in fact people experience not only their mobility, but also, and strongly, their mooring at home (and often they put their money where that mooring is, even if their bodies cannot always come along). One of our major points, then, is that the discourse of national elites about threats to the reproduction of the nation represents a response to shifting conditions that make more evident the realities of mobility that used to be possible to erase or ignore. We argue that many forms of contemporary mobilities are not as new as they are made out to be, they are just harder to contain. Having said that, however, we also argue that the emergence of the tertiary sector, especially in ways which commodify national identities and profit from ever-wider networks of circulation of goods, people, and information or ideas (let us call them material, human, and symbolic resources), creates new conditions for the production of national identities. Those conditions have two consequences: one is to attribute greater value to the mobilities and mixities which until now have been constructed as threatening to the fixity and purity of the nation, while the other is to commodify exactly those pure, fixed forms. Much of what we have to recount concerns how those processes produce a variety of tensions, which

have to be managed in a variety of ways. Ultimately, they allow for new ways of sustaining the nation, even as the nation itself is reimagined as a source of semiotic value in globalized networks of exchange.

The CMA in the summer of 2009 will lead us to move around quite a lot over the course of this book, to different parts of francophone Canada, with reference to other parts of the francophone world, from Mali to France to Louisiana. We will follow the trajectories and networks of some key participants in our project, in particular around New Brunswick and between New Brunswick, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories (with excursions to Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia, as well as Mexico). We will look at their mobilities in relation to their moorings, the tensions that relationship raises, and how they are managed, from a gendered division of labor to the mobilization of French, English, and other languages. We will work backwards in time, to grasp the historical foundations of current conditions and practices, and forward, to try to see where ideas of the nation might be headed. For now, let us begin with a bright summer's day in Pokemouche, a small town about a half-hour's drive from our base in Shippagan.

1.2.1 West Meets East at the CMA

One day, Monica and Hubert went to Pokemouche to visit l'Espace neuf (the New Space) (see figures 1.5 and 1.6). While the CMA was advertised as being based largely in Caraquet, the cultural capital of the Péninsule, and some argue, of Acadie, its sites were spread out around the region, in order to spread the resources that came with it. (We chose Shippagan as a base because Hubert's family, who lives there, was able to offer us excellent conditions, and because it was fairly centrally located.) Around town we could



Figure 1.5 Espace neuf at the CMA, Pokemouche, 2009.



Figure 1.6 Espace neuf, setting.



Figure 1.7 Identification tags received for the Noël family reunion.

see posters for the family reunions that are such a central part of the Congrès, acting as a key way of building transnational Acadian networks and a shared sense of identity: the posters and banners are all in the colors of the Acadian flag, with recognized Acadian family names down the white stripe in the middle (Chiasson, Landry, LeBlanc, Boudreau, Arseneau, see figures 1.7 and 1.8). The Noël family reunion was to be held in a few days in Lamèque, across a small strait from Shippagan. This was to be the first year that McLaughlins were recognized as an Acadian family, to Mireille's wonderment—in previous years she had had to register with her great-grandmother's name (Comeau), despite 240 years of McLaughlin presence in the region (the problem was that the British Loyalist McLaughlins came from the United States after the American War of Independence, and became assimilated