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Mistaken Identities? Newfoundland and Labrador in the Atlantic Region

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INTRODUCTION

I AM DEEPLY HONOURED to be asked to deliver this year's David Alexander Lecture. It is reassuring to know that, although he is no longer with us, David still inspires research on the Atlantic region. Although David's work was firmly rooted in the theories of political economy, it was never narrowly focused, and always took account of social and cultural contingencies. Shortly before his death, he began linking economic issues to cultural attributes in an article on literacy and economic development in nineteenth-century Newfoundland. Since then, only a few scholars have had the courage to follow his lead. The topic of this year's symposium — "The Idea of Newfoundland: Nationalism, Identity and Culture from the Nineteenth Century to the Present" — signals the growing enthusiasm for exploring the larger social and cultural contexts that shape our goals and inspire our imaginations. While historian Ian McKay worries that region will get lost in the localism that typifies much that is written in the name of social and cultural history (McKay 2000), this need not be the case, as McKay's own fine study of cultural selection in twentieth-century Nova Scotia testifies. The best cultural history builds on the findings of earlier theoretical approaches. It recognizes that culture and economy are mutually constructed — that beliefs and practices shape economic development, political behaviour, and social institutions and vice versa. While we as historians would find

our jobs easier if we could summon up a few historical laws that held firm over time and place, this is, alas, not a feature of the discipline.

Historians increasingly have come to accept that slippery terms such as "nation," "identity," and "culture" change their meaning over time. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, these terms are so freighted with meaning that they risk losing their value as analytical tools. Peter Seixas, whose field of study is historical consciousness, has recently summed up the problems and potential of attempting to explore the roots of culture and identity. He argues:

> In the early twenty-first century, with different cultures butting up against one another — temporarily, geographically, and electronically — conflicting accounts of the past compete for our attention and our belief, with enormous consequences for collective identities, public policies, and individual experience.... Canadians confront this multiplicity of pasts, more or less consciously, as enriching, enabling, and fragmenting. How we reconcile these accounts will frame the way we imagine our futures. And how we convey to the next generation not only the *sense* of the past but also *ways to deal with conflicting pasts* will determine in large measure the quality of Canadian citizenship. (Seixas 2002)

The notion that there are many histories of the same past enables us to transcend what economists are fond of calling "path dependency" (Margolis and Liebowitz). In physics, this approach informs "chaos theory," and in biology the related idea is "continency." The essence of path dependency is that what we are today is a result of what happened in the past, and that initial conditions often have a major impact on outcomes. At its most absurd level, it argues that a butterfly flapping its wings in South America can cause a hurricane in Canada. Historians do not need to be told that the past is always with us, but the near-universal embrace of the view that "history matters" is problematic because it often ignores, although theoretically it is not meant to, the possibility of agency, and the never-ending disequilibrium that characterizes human affairs. If we need to hang on tightly to one concept in the twenty-first century, it is that history, as an ever-evolving discipline, helps to liberate us from its grasp, and does not make us its unwilling victims.

In this paper I want to use history to explore one aspect of the identity of Newfoundland and Labrador — its place in the geographical space now called Atlantic Canada. A relatively recent regional category, "Atlantic Canada" defies easy definition, as James Hiller and I quickly found out when we began writing the *Atlantic Canada* Volume in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Canada* series. Our subtitle, *A Region in the Making*, came to us slowly and only toward the end of our work, after an earlier idea for a subtitle — *A Region on the Margins* — received some well-deserved criticism. Atlantic Canada, we were told by our colleagues, was not always marginal. Indeed, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was at the crossroads of the North Atlantic world as, I believe, it still is today.

The thesis of my paper can be stated simply: Newfoundland and Labrador became a Maritime province after Confederation in 1949. Despite valiant efforts to avoid such a fate, and strong evidence that Canada's tenth province differs substantially from its Maritime cousins, Newfoundland and Labrador found its identity submerged in a region that had already congealed in the Canadian vocabulary by 1949. The fact that many Canadians still conflate the Maritimes (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island) and Atlantic Canada (the Maritimes plus Newfoundland and Labrador) signals this confusion of identities. In making this statement, I in no way mean to contradict Malcolm MacLeod, who has traced the complex interaction between the Maritimes and Newfoundland and Labrador before 1949 (MacLeod 1982). Clearly there were close demographic, economic, and institutional relations between the two regions before they were married politically. What interests me is how reluctant Newfoundland and Labrador has been since 1949 in accepting its "regional" destiny.

"Region" is another one of those slippery concepts, whose meaning changes over time. Over two decades ago, geographer Cole Harris commented that Canadian regions have only "fuzzy locational meanings" but have become part of a "vocabulary of spacial ambition and resentment" (Harris 1981). Nowhere is this generalization more applicable than in the Atlantic region. Largely because of the way that Ottawa viewed its eastern flank, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador was tied from the beginning to Maritime economic status as a benchmark of achievement and, like the Maritimes, has often been treated with dismissal and disdain when its political leaders tried to argue for a national policy that would better serve its interests. In other words, ambition and resentment were the sub-text of the Terms of Union for Newfoundland and Labrador in 1949.

All regions of Canada argue that national policy does not serve them well, but few areas of the country have such deep scars to prove their case. Since the Second World War, francophones in Quebec have substantially improved their economic well-being (their per capita income in the province is now first, up from close to last in the early 1960s) and the West has come into its own. Even the Territorial North, a region no better endowed with resources than Atlantic Canada, yields a statistical standard of living higher than the Atlantic provinces. As we wait for our day in the sun, we are increasingly being told that we will never see that day because of some flaw in our collective culture. Can culture really be the culprit that explains our fate?

MISTAKEN IDENTITIES

Atlantic Canada is not a region in any academic sense of the term. Even at very basic levels, which political scientist Janine Brodie (1990) defines as formal, functional, and imaginative, the region of Atlantic Canada does not exist, except

perhaps in the recesses of the Ottawa bureaucratic mind. At the formal, or geographic, level, the Atlantic provinces exclude much that is Atlantic — Anticosti, the Gaspé, the Magdalen Islands, Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, for example. The areas of the North American continent called Atlantic Canada may be held together by the Gulf of St. Lawrence, but this body of water has not cradled a cohesive social order and is not home even to one provincial capital (unless you count Charlottetown, which faces resolutely toward Nova Scotia across the Northumberland Strait). At the functional, or institutional, level, we share similar demographic, economic, political, and social structures and have a common history of belonging to the French, British, and Canadian empires. However, these commonalities have never inspired the kind of sustained political action of the type for which Ontario, Quebec, and the West are noted. At the imaginative level, there are strong and deeply entrenched provincial identities, and sites of powerful identities at sub-regional levels — Cape Breton and Labrador, being the most obvious. There are also cultural identities with names such as Mi'kma'ki, Acadie, Africadia, and Atlantica that exist within, across, and beyond provincial boundaries. But I can find no quintessential Atlantic Canadian.

The Atlantic region, defined by its north Atlantic location, was becoming a functional reality in the mid-nineteenth century when newspapers, school texts, and constitutions began to powerfully influence public sentiment (Friesen 2000). Thereafter the provinces had the upper hand in shaping identity. Because our provincial boundaries have had pride of place in establishing our sense of citizenship and identity, region has little power to tap our deepest emotions. Does it matter to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, for example, that the casualties of the collapse of the fisheries move to Halifax, Toronto, or Fort McMurray? I suspect that "the mainland" is just the mainland even if it encompasses Prince Edward Island and Cape Breton, which are technically not mainland at all, but excludes Labrador, which is by my reckoning part of the mainland. Regions of the mind, it seems, are even fuzzier than their formal and functional counterparts.

While the narcissism of small differences plays well in the Atlantic region, it rings hollow in the rest of Canada where a simplified and stereotypical view of Atlantic Canadians has become firmly entrenched (Forbes 1989). Backward, conservative, and juiced up on handouts, we are widely perceived as a region blighted by location, culture, and identity. I first rubbed up against the attitude when I moved to Toronto in 1967 to do graduate work. At that time, CHUM radio was airing angry blasts against Atlantic Canadians (usually called "Maritimers" or "Easterners") living in Scarborough who failed to mow their lawns. One individual, who later became a valued friend, initially announced that she did not want to meet me because of my regional origins. In Toronto, I quickly learned to pass as a Central Canadian, my regional roots only given away when I said the words "aunt," "tourism," or "Chicago."

It was not until recently that I have come to understand how political economy, migration patterns, scholarship, and the mass media converged in the 1960s to construct an unflattering image of Atlantic Canadians. As the region's wage-earners shifted their focus from New England to the St. Lawrence heartland in the post-Second World War period, deeply-rooted cultural practices — seasonal migration, family-based economic strategies, enjoyment of the Nashville sound — were replicated in their new homeland. Not mowing their lawns was one of only a litany of concerns expressed about Atlantic Canadian workers in Toronto. Employers often refused to hire "Easterners" because they were reluctant to bow to industrial discipline, and landladies complained that they drank too much, were poor housekeepers, and often left without paying their rent (McCormack 1968: 13). These negative traits were captured on celluloid when the National Film Board chose a Nova Scotian family in Montreal to explore poverty, in a film entitled *The Things I Cannot Change*, produced in 1966. Directed by Tanya Ballantyne, it became the forerunner of the NFB's Challenge for Change Program. Don Shebib's 1969 film, *Goin' Down the Road*, clinched the image of irresponsible, uneducated ne'er-do-wells in the big city. Television added further evidence of "down home" culture in *Don Messer's Jubilee*.

Although the decade of the 1960s was a high point of negative stereotyping, the practice has not stopped and has re-emerged with a vengeance in recent years. A feature of the neo-liberal agenda is to blame the victim. As a result, the Atlantic provinces have become the objects of smear tactics that would be unacceptable if all people in the region had a different skin colour, or shared a common physical handicap. A few recent examples will suffice to make the point.

In a paper published in 2002, Alberta-based political scientist Barry Cooper noted "even if one traces the social patterns of twentieth-century Maritime experience to an otherwise admirable eighteenth-century conservatism, the fact remains that stagnation and decadence remains [sic] the most prominent feature [sic] of communal life to have survived into the present" (97). By Cooper's reckoning, Maritimers (by which I think he means Atlantic Canadians) are conservatives but not his type of conservative (which would more properly be defined as neo-liberal).

In October 2002, Margaret Wente, Jeffrey Simpson, and John Ibbitson went on a feeding frenzy, tarring all Atlantic Canadians with the patronage brush when the policies of Solicitor-General Lawrence MacAulay came under scrutiny (*Globe and Mail* 10, 19 and 22 October 2002). Atlantic Canadians, they implied, pursued an outmoded and discredited approach to political patronage. As most undergraduate students in political science know, patronage is the glue that binds political units together when public policy fails to do so.

In an otherwise flattering review of the movie version of David Adams Richards's *The Bay of Love and Sorrows*, *Globe and Mail* columnist Ray Conlogue noted (1 February 2003) that the Miramichi is "a corner of Canada that most Canadians think of as little as they can." Not content with one swipe, he concluded that

the film is "a true chronicle of a benighted corner of Canada" — as if despair, depravity, and drug dealing are unique to the Miramichi. Conlogue might try walking down Yonge Street some Saturday night where Ontario versions of career criminal Everette Hatch and his Mirimichi victims abound. It is precisely because the characters in the film speak so eloquently to realities of our time *everywhere* that David Adams Richards's work is so well received, and presumably why Conlogue awarded the movie a rare 3½ stars.

Disparaging remarks about Atlantic Canada are not a simple reflection of ignorance on the part of people in other parts of Canada. Rather, like racial slurs, they serve as a major force for consolidating second-class citizenship. Such comments suggest that we are unworthy in some way, and ensure that we take second place in corporate investment and federal policy. How did we ever get to this state of affairs, and how do we find ways of moving beyond the region bashing that has become so deeply entrenched in the Canadian vocabulary?

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR IN CONFEDERATION

The Maritime provinces must take some of the blame for creating the template that now frames the identity of Newfoundland and Labrador in Confederation. Even as the ink was drying on the British North America Act in 1867, Nova Scotians were expressing their disapproval of the new constitution with their votes and their petitions. Although Nova Scotia's Repeal Movement was unsuccessful, anti-Confederation feelings continued to surface. In 1886, W.S. Fielding's Liberal government sponsored a secession motion that passed in the Nova Scotia legislature, but it failed to spark a practical response. The three Maritime provinces came together in the Maritime Rights Movement of the 1920s which yielded some successes, but these were outweighed in the balance by the publicity associated with the movement that identified the Maritimes as a poverty-stricken region populated by whiners (as if other regions of Canada did not also have a rhetoric of grievance).

Prior to the Second World War, Newfoundland and Labrador were, by and large, spared the disparaging rhetoric that had been building around the Maritime provinces since 1867. The east coast dominion was off the radar screen for the average Canadian, even in the Maritimes. Nonetheless, a region called "Atlantic Canada" emerged as a full-blown entity with Newfoundland and Labrador's entry into Confederation. Ottawa claimed it could not offer over-generous terms of union to Newfoundland and Labrador for fear of raising the ire of the Maritime provinces, whose claims against Confederation were still on the agenda. When Milton Gregg, the New Brunswick-based Minister of Fisheries, was eventually added to the federal government's Interdepartmental Committee on Newfoundland, it was not for the obvious reason that fisheries were important to the new province, but rather to ensure that the final agreement did not include terms that might create problems in

the Maritimes (Blake 28). Under Term 29, the cash-strapped, highly-taxed Maritime provinces were made the benchmark against which to measure Newfoundland's needs eight years after Confederation. The fix was in.

If anything could spur the Maritime provinces to embrace their new provincial cousin, it was the extent to which Newfoundland and Labrador could lend support for a national policy that took account of regional differences and needs. As early as June 1949, New Brunswick's C.C. Avard, editor of the *Maritime Advocate*, made the case for a regional politics when he encouraged voters in the federal campaign to "vote for the men who will stand valiantly and persistently for the Atlantic provinces rather than for those who are mere voting machines for their political parties." By so doing, he argued, the Maritimes could join with Newfoundland to create a "united Atlantic front" that would "demand Maritime rights from Ottawa" (June 1949:4). In 1957 the *Maritime Advocate* was re-christened the *Atlantic Advocate*, only one of a number of developments that would lay the foundations for an imagined Atlantic region. Robert Chambers, the cartoonist for the Halifax *Chronicle Herald* and *Mail Star*, was hired to visually represent the new Atlantic Canada in the *Atlantic Advocate*. Invariably, his images portrayed the region as getting the short end of the stick when it came to dealings with Ottawa.

As the foregoing suggests, the decade after the entry of Newfoundland and Labrador into Confederation was a special moment in the history of regional cooperation. I have dubbed the efforts to create a common political agenda in this period the "Atlantic Revolution" (borrowing the phrase used by historian W.S. MacNutt), because it anticipated Quebec's Quiet Revolution in its bureaucratic structures and modernization goals (Conrad 1988). In the early 1950s business interests in the region came together under the leadership of the Maritime Provinces Board of Trade to push for the creation of the Atlantic Provinces Economic Council. Established in 1954, APEC was designed to bring interest groups together to investigate the region's problems, and develop policies to solve them. For reasons of political advantage, Newfoundland played a junior role, sending only four delegates compared to the seven from each of the Maritime provinces. Premier Joseph Smallwood agreed to attend the first meeting of Atlantic premiers in 1956, but Newfoundland remained outside of the Council of Maritime Premiers when these meetings were formalized in 1971.

Smallwood's successors were equally cautious of any regional approach that would tie their hands. With a 200-mile limit promising escape from the province's have-not status, Brian Peckford, for instance, had little interest in collaboration with his Maritime cousins. The Atlantic provinces thus went their separate ways on constitutional issues, the fisheries, and off-shore oil and natural gas resources in the 1980s and 1990s. Although the poorer provinces managed to entrench, in section 36 of the Constitution, the principle of equalization, it has yet to be fully tested. The Atlantic provinces, individually or collectively, had little impact on the Macdonald Commission that resulted in the Free Trade Agreement with the United States in

1989, and when the Atlantic Accord on offshore oil and gas resources management and revenue sharing was signed in 1985, it was a bilateral agreement between the federal government and Newfoundland and Labrador. It was not until 2000, after two decades of federal and global restructuring, that a Council of Atlantic Premiers finally appeared on the scene (MacMillan 2001).

Ottawa was much quicker to lock down an Atlantic Canada template. In response to a well-orchestrated campaign to address the special needs of the eastern provinces, the Diefenbaker government introduced the Atlantic Provinces Adjustment Grants in 1958. Regional issues were further acknowledged in the Atlantic Development Board created in 1962. Smallwood, for good reason, was suspicious of these developments, which scuttled the special privileges that he had hoped to sustain through Term 29. The Liberals under Trudeau were less enthusiastic about an exclusively Atlantic regional focus for development programmes, but the Mulroney government returned to a regional approach with the creation of the Atlantic Provinces Opportunities Agency (ACOA) in 1987.

One imagines that few people would be happier than the Ottawa mandarins, should the four Atlantic provinces become one political unit. This is not likely to happen any time soon. When the Deutsch Commission was struck in 1968 to explore the possibility of Maritime union, it dutifully went through the motions, but it was clear from the outset that there was little benefit for New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island in taking such a step. Cooperation in the form of the Council of Maritime Premiers and the Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission followed, but the results fell far short of full regional bonding. Would any other Canadian province willingly give up its independent political status? I do not think so and, to my knowledge, the Maritimes are the only Canadian provinces ever urged to consider such a possibility.

The reality, of course, is that the three Maritime provinces also display distinctive cultures (Beck 1977). While Ottawa may be served by lumping them together, it is hard to imagine that any of them, with possible exception of Nova Scotia, would benefit from such a merger. Indeed, Nova Scotia, or more correctly Halifax, is the prime beneficiary of Ottawa's de facto policy of treating the region as one province. Federal offices are increasingly consolidated there, and corporate headquarters are following suit.

We must conclude, then, that Newfoundlanders and Labradorians suffer from mistaken identity, at least when it comes to the way that the province is perceived by other Canadians, including people from the three Maritime provinces, who expect the citizens of Canada's youngest province to help them in their battles with Ottawa. The analogy, of course, is with the four Western provinces, where one would scarcely consider British Columbia and the Prairie provinces to be part of one region — or are they?

Gerald Friesen has recently argued quite persuasively that the Prairies have ceased to be a dominant citizenship image, replaced by "three component prov-

inces and at least five major cities, and that these units are far more important than any single prairie entity in contemporary Canadian life." Friesen goes on to make the case for a single Western region that includes British Columbia. The new "political West," Friesen argues, is much more important than the community labelled "prairies" and now operates, if not on a formal or imagined level, at least on a functional one as represented, for example, in the Canadian Alliance party (Friesen 2001: 22).

Is it the case, then, that if there is not an "Atlantic Canada" now, we should invent one? Are we, like the new West, becoming a region with four component provinces, seven geo-cultural identities, and three major cities? This may well be the case. Certainly Halifax, Moncton, and St. John's have emerged as city-states, much envied for their ability to draw people, capital, and energy from their underdeveloped hinterlands. Meanwhile, Acadians, Cape Bretoners, and Labradorians identify with their "place" even more strongly than the province of which they are a part. Do these identities make regional cohesion a pipe dream or, as in the West, is there something to be gained by constructing a coalition to produce a "political East"?

WHAT'S IN A REGION?

We in Atlantic Canada are not alone in our efforts to define new identities for ourselves, but our context may allow us to be more complacent and therefore less imaginative. Consider, for example, the leap of faith it takes for nations to throw in their lot with the European Union, or the difficult experience of most developing countries attempting to bring purpose and prosperity out of the ashes of the colonial experience. Time is long overdue for Atlantic Canadians to reconsider what we want for ourselves, and to create the institutions that will support our goals. While new information technologies have the capacity to collapse time and space in the twenty-first century, they have yet to annihilate the past and place (history and province), and our emotional attachments to them. We must not let the past, or selective perceptions of it, get in our way.

Shortly before his death, David Alexander wrote an important article entitled "New Notions of Happiness: Nationalism, Regionalism, and Atlantic Canada." In it he noted that provincial identity may be "felt and expressed more strongly in Newfoundland than in any other province of English-speaking Canada" (82). He made this point in the context of a stinging critique of the emerging neo-liberal agenda, and Ottawa's refusal to take responsibility for regional underdevelopment. For David, the best way to address the economic and social challenges facing all Canadians was a national strategy, *not* a provincial one. His arguments fell on deaf ears. If he were alive today would he take a fall-back position, suggesting that by pursuing a regional strategy a "new notion of happiness" might be achieved?

Lest you see me only as an agent of Maritime imperialism, let me remind you that going it alone is neither desirable nor even possible. In our globalized society we are all in it together, but the way we position ourselves in the new world order is indeed up for negotiation. The critical question before us now, as it has been in the past, is this: How do we balance the often conflicting and ever-evolving contexts and identities — individual, local, provincial, regional, national, continental, global — that inform our condition?

Region, I contend, is a tool that we should not abandon lightly in our quest for renewal. It may well have legs, though perhaps they are not as steady as those that prop up nation and province. If, as some scholars claim, identity can exist entirely in the realm of the imagined world (Anderson 1991), then we have the capacity to draw upon our common regional experiences, as tenuous as they are, to inform our actions in the present and our dreams for the future. History and cultural production will play an important role in our dreaming, but we have a lot of work to do if we wish to get the most out of our regional identities. Despite the fact that all Atlantic Canadians get tainted with the same brush by many of our fellow Canadians, we have done little research on our commonalities and how they might serve us in our efforts to bring our communities successfully into the new global order (Hiller 2000). Newfoundlanders and Labradorians, especially, seem to be like Quebecers, turned inward. Perhaps it is time to look outward.

Of what do our shared regional experiences consist, and how might we use them? First, as many commentators remind us, we are a deeply-rooted people. Unlike much of the rest of Canada, functional boundaries in the region (with the exception of the inland border between Labrador and Quebec) were already in place at the time of Confederation in 1867. By that time too, the well-travelled routes of trade and work, especially in the fishery and forest industries, brought Maritimers and Newfoundlanders together. This was as true for two of the region's beleaguered minorities — the Mi'kmaq and the Acadians — as it was for the Anglo-Celtic majority. These ties continued to be reinforced into the early twentieth century, most notably by the coal and steel industries in industrial Cape Breton, and by our shared surveillance, social service, and educational institutions, most of them located in the Maritimes. When the 1917 explosion in Halifax harbour threw the city into chaos, Newfoundlanders were among the most generous in their aid, not only because (our polls tell us) they are a generous people by and large, but also because so many of their sons and daughters attended schools and worked in the city (MacLeod 1994).

Our experiences in Confederation since 1949 have reinforced our interregional bonds and, short of collective amnesia, we will continue to imagine our futures as "have-not provinces" within Confederation. This may be both our greatest cause for unity and our greatest stumbling block to meaningful change. Who wants to be associated with losers? Yet, I was forced to rethink my own position on provincial autonomy by a discussion in one of my classes about the role that Nova Sco-

tia might play in the Atlantic region, should off-shore oil and natural gas make it a "have" rather than a "have-not" province. A student from Moncton suggested that Nova Scotia's wealth should first go to other Atlantic provinces, which share Nova Scotia's "have-not status," before it is poured into the national fiscal pot. Such a view has also recently been put forward by former New Brunswick premier Frank McKenna (2001). Is this position reflective of new "imagined communities" that are taking shape in a rapidly transforming global context?

I cannot answer this question, but I sense a strong desire on the part of many Atlantic Canadians, one shared passionately by David Alexander, to be a part of a movement that would make us models in the world, not a backward people constantly playing catch-up. Have we the capacity to completely transcend our negative stereotype once and for all? I think we have. And in the spirit of path dependency and chaos theory, I contend that even small gestures can make a difference.

Two years ago, I wrote an opinion piece for the *Globe and Mail* in which I strongly criticized the overwhelming tendency of the rest of Canada to marginalize and stereotype Atlantic Canada. I specifically took aim at Ralph Klein's mindless criticism of transfer payments and the CBC's pitiful representation of the region in its much touted series *Canada: A People's History*. Although I did not choose these examples specifically to juxtapose economics and culture, I see now that slights in both areas bothered me equally.

I received a lot of mail as a result of that short article as well as the Canada Research Chair I currently hold. While the Chair will forever be a reminder of the validity of chaos theory, one of the letters my opinion piece inspired stands out particularly in my mind. It was from a journalist in St. John's who wrote: "I really enjoyed your article in today's *Globe and Mail*. It was eye-opening to learn some people in Nova Scotia were also opposed to Confederation." Although my article did not argue against Confederation — in fact I expressed my regret that my students were embracing separatism — it was interpreted as such by most of my readers.

So be it. Since the 1960s the gap between outmoded myths and regional reality have widened to the point where something is soon bound to snap. Notwithstanding the fine academic research on the region dispelling the myth of conservatism and backwardness — can you match anywhere else in Canada the social engineering reflected in Smallwood's outport consolidation program, or Louis J. Robichaud's sweeping municipal reform and commitment to bilingualism? — the salvos just keep coming. Political economist Donald Savoie, who in many respects is David Alexander's successor as the most penetrating commentator on regional issues, argues that current conditions require that "Canadian regions ... integrate themselves differently in the new economic order" (Savoie 2000: 214). I may not agree entirely with his prescription, which focuses primarily on ties with the United States, but I am convinced that the time has come to assess the place of all four Atlantic prov-

inces in Confederation and in the world. Newfoundland and Labrador have taken the lead in this process by establishing a Royal Commission to investigate the province's relationship to the rest of Canada. As far as I know, no attempt was made to make this inquiry regional in scope but its impact will almost certainly have regional repercussions (Royal Commission 2003).

In any efforts to reinvent ourselves provincially or regionally, it is important to take into consideration the new identities that have emerged with what Michael Ignatieff calls the "rights revolution" of the second half of the twentieth century. How we approach issues of class, culture, gender, place, and race will almost certainly determine the success of our creative exercises, just as issues of railroads, tariffs, and trade shaped negotiations around the BNA Act in 1867, and the policies of the welfare state served as a backdrop for the entry of Newfoundland and Labrador into Confederation. I was both surprised and intrigued by the recent decision of the aforementioned royal commissioners to hold separate sessions with women and Aboriginal peoples, whose voices were largely absent from the general meetings held to discuss the place of Newfoundland and Labrador in Confederation. Both the Maritime Rights Movement of the 1920s and the Atlantic Revolution of the 1950s suffered from the exclusivity of its leadership. It is important to make this effort a broadly based one.

The regional identities within the loosely joined geographic area known as Atlantic Canada are potentially as divisive as they are within Canada. Would Labrador, with a population of less than 30,000 people, not be better served by territorial status? Cape Bretoners are currently raising serious questions about their relationship with mainland Nova Scotia. Would they not be better off as a separate province in the manner of Prince Edward Island? Should Acadie, that area of New Brunswick dominated by the province's nearly 250,000 francophones, not have greater autonomy and so, too, the region's more than 30,000 Aboriginal peoples?

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is necessary to acknowledge these cultural identities if the goal of closer regional cooperation, boldly announced in 2000 by the new Council of Atlantic Premiers in a document entitled *Working Together for Atlantic Canada*, is to be achieved. If we do not do so, we will be like old generals going into battle fighting the last war. Cultural identities are as real in 2003 as economic and social ones. Indeed, overall diversity and social equality have been correlated with high-technology success in American cities (Florida and Gates 2001). If we closed the gap in women's salaries, for example, we would go a long way to bringing the regional standard of living up to national standards. Culture does matter.

In making these comments I have no interest in advancing the cause of Atlantic Canadian political union, or dissolving our deeply entrenched regional institutions in a sea of cultural identities — although these are two possible options. There are other models for small states dangling off the edge of large continents. The Scandinavian countries continue to remain separate jurisdictions while cooperating in the

Council of Nordic Nations, and introducing reforms that make them world leaders in standards of wealth, equality, and social justice. After having fought for centuries to impose unity on diverse cultures, Great Britain has recently oped for devolution to take into account cultural differences. We could, of course, develop our own model for proceeding, not swallowing whole what works for others. Theoretically, in this age of internet communications, some areas of Atlantic Canada may find that they have more in common with nations elsewhere. Cape Breton, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island, for example, might decide to throw in their lot with the island nations of the world which currently make up nearly a quarter of the United Nations' membership, and are exerting their muscle in the General Assembly through the Association of Small Island States. We must not let path dependency hobble our imaginations, for it is our imagined region, more than the formal or functional ones, that will ultimately shape our success or failure in the future.

CONCLUSION

We must accept that, for better or for ill, the four Atlantic provinces, and the various peoples within them, have been drawn, over the last half-century, ever closer together in the struggle to adjust to rapidly changing conditions nationally and globally. Region-building has been shaped more often by the peculiarities of the Canadian political system than by forces within the region itself, but it is none the less real for that. In facing an uncertain future, we must acknowledge that we have crawled into bed together. The question now is, "What, if anything, are we going to do about it?"

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