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Acadians, the Creation of a National Park, and the Politics of Documentary Film during the 1970s

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Résumé de l'article

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Making *Kouchibouguac*: Acadians, the Creation of a National Park, and the Politics of Documentary Film during the 1970s

RONALD RUDIN

Sorti en 1979, le film documentaire Kouchibouguac, de l'Office national du film (ONF), a permis aux Acadiens qui avaient été forcés de quitter leurs terres afin de permettre la création du parc national du même nom de raconter leur histoire. Cet article explore la production de ce film en portant une attention particulière aux difficultés que les Acadiens ont rencontrées en essayant de trouver leur voix à l'intérieur de l'ONF, dominé par des Québécois. Il examine aussi le film sur le plan de la forme ainsi que l'impact qu'il a eu parmi une population acadienne divisée par l'opposition parfois violente à la création du parc.

The documentary film Kouchibouguac, released by the Office national du film (ONF) in 1979, allowed Acadians – who had been removed from their lands to allow the creation of the national park of the same name – to tell their stories. This article explores the making of the film, with a particular focus upon the difficulties experienced by Acadians trying to find their voice within the Québécois-dominated ONF. It also reflects on the form of the film as well as the impact that it had within an Acadian population that was divided over the sporadically violent opposition to the park.

IN EARLY MAY 1979, 275 STUDENTS FROM THE ACADIAN TOWN of Rogersville, New Brunswick, were riveted by a screening in their school of the documentary film *Kouchibouguac*, which told the story of the expropriation of more than 200 families to make way for a national park of the same name along the province's eastern shore, roughly 50 kilometres away. This was one of 30 screenings that constituted the debut tour of the film, a production of the Office national du film du Canada.[1] Over 5,000 Acadians from all corners of New Brunswick, as well as from several Acadian communities in Nova Scotia, viewed *Kouchibouguac* in school auditoriums, parish halls, and community centres. Rhéal Drisdelle, the ONF representative who accompanied the tour, reported that the Rogersville screening generated "le plus d'intérêt et d'enthousiasme. Malgré le jeune âge du public, il y eut

1 *Kouchibouguac*, DVD (Montréal: Office national du film du Canada, 1979). This article forms part of the SSHRC-funded project *Kouchibouguac in History and Memory*. Since the production of the film took place entirely within the French-language side of the film board, I have referred to the ONF (and not the NFB) throughout.

Ronald Rudin, "Making *Kouchibouguac*: Acadians, the Creation of a National Park, and the Politics of Documentary Film during the 1970s," *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2010): 3-22.

un silence complet pendant la durée du film. La période de question a durée deux heures! Ils s'intéressent surtout aux possibilités de solutions du problème Kouchibouguac et des mesures à prendre afin d'assurer qu'une telle situation ne se reproduise pas."[2]

"Le problème Kouchibouguac" that captured the attention of audiences wherever the film was shown was already a decade old at the time of the screenings. The story began in 1969 when the New Brunswick and federal governments agreed to create a park about 100 kilometres north of Moncton. According to the regulations in place at the time for the creation of national parks, Fredericton would clear out all the residents from the territory, with Ottawa then following with the funds to develop the park. While Parks Canada was looking for an opportunity to protect a unique environment, with wildlife and landscapes that might otherwise be endangered, the province saw the chance to provide employment in Kent County – the poorest county in New Brunswick and by any standard one of the poorest in Canada. Louis Robichaud, the first Acadian elected as premier of the province (1960-1970), envisioned jobs within the park, as well as other employment in the immediate vicinity, to serve the tourists who would be attracted.

If the story had ended here, there would have been little to hold the attention of the school children in Rogersville, or their counterparts – both young and old – in other Acadian communities. After all, the story of people being expropriated for some larger "public good" was one that had played itself out on many occasions in post-Second World War Canada in the establishment of national parks as well as in the construction of dams and airports and sometimes just to remove eyesores from the landscape (as those in power viewed some situations).[3] But what made the Kouchibouguac case unique – and the reason why Acadians turned out to watch a film about the park's creation – was the fact that on this occasion a significant number of the expropriated, mostly Acadians, resisted the efforts to remove them. Civil disobedience during the 1970s prevented the formal opening of the park until early 1979 – only months before the release of the film – and it continued for some time after that. Jackie Vautour, the most prominent protester who not only became the public face of the crisis but the leading figure in the film, never agreed to abandon his land and continues to live there as I write these lines 40 years after the Kouchibouguac saga began.[4]

2 Report of ONF representative accompanying the *Kouchibouguac* tour, 3 May 1979, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, Archives du Centre d'études acadiennes (CEA), Université de Moncton. Thanks to the detective work of Roland Brideau, who worked for the ONF in Moncton at the time, this representative (unnamed in the document) was identified as Rhéal Drisdelle, who figures prominently in the story. "Drisdelle Report" will be used in subsequent references to this source.

3 For some examples of such displacements, see the following: Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1954-2003* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010); Jennifer Nelson, *Razing Africville: A Geography of Racism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); James Kenny and Andrew Secord, "Engineering Modernity: Hydroelectric Development in New Brunswick, 1945-1970," *Acadiensis* XXXIX, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010): 3-26; Tina Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies*, no. 142/143 (Summer/Autumn 2004): 161-96; and Jean-Paul Raymond, *La Mémoire de Mirabel: le président des expropriés, Jean-Paul Raymond, se raconte à Gilles Boileau* (Montréal: Méridien, 1988).

4 While the ONF catalogue describes *Kouchibouguac* as having been released in 1978, archival documents set the date as 1979. Roland Brideau of the Moncton office only received a copy in

Civil disobedience against the forced removal of a population from its land would have been exceptional in any Canadian context; but it had a particular cultural resonance for Acadians, whose history had been marked by the first modern example of "ethnic cleansing" – their removal at the hands of the British in the 18th century. For over two centuries following the deportation (or grand dérangement) Acadians largely viewed themselves as embodying the spirit of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Evangeline*, who bore her suffering stoically. In 1955, on the bicentenary of the deportation, Acadian leaders were almost apologetic about causing any offence to English-speakers who might have felt that they were being blamed for the deportation, but this reluctance to speak too loudly or forcefully in public was starting to change by the time of the Kouchibouguac affair.[5] Acadian students took to the streets during the late 1960s and the decade that followed in support of the French language and control over their own education; some community leaders created the short-lived Parti acadien, whose members wanted New Brunswick divided into two provinces – one of which would have been primarily populated by Acadians – and whose 1979 convention provided the venue for one of the public screenings of *Kouchibouguac*.[6]

The Kouchibouguac affair provided yet another opportunity for some – but by no means all – Acadians to show support for those in their midst who were willing to stand up to authority, and so the cause of the expropriés became the subject for artistic creations at the time in such media as music, literature, sculpture, and – of course – film.[7] Invariably, the story of those who were removed from their lands was constructed as an Acadian one; this was in spite of the fact that roughly 15 per cent of the dispossessed had been English-speakers. However, this linguistic minority largely settled with the government at an early point in the process, thus allowing the story to take on a certain Acadian nationalist tinge.

In the case of media other than film, the costs involved with telling the Kouchibouguac story were relatively modest. But producing a documentary was another matter altogether, with significant expenses connected with equipment, film stock, and crew. In the end, the budget for *Kouchibouguac* ran to over $130,000, and so could only be supported by an institution such as the ONF. Here, Acadians found that their efforts to tell a story of their own butted up against the influence of the

January, following which there was an "avant-première" with a focus group later in the same month. More formal screenings came even later in 1979. See Drisdelle Report, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, CEA. In 2007, a second documentary on the same subject appeared: *Kouchibouguac: L'histoire de Jackie Vautour et des expropriés*, DVD, dir. Jean Bourbonnais (Moncton, NB: Bellefeuille Production et Productions Vic Pelletier, 2007). Produced nearly 30 years apart from one another, the two documentaries had very different takes on the affair (but this is outside the scope of this article).

5 I discuss the public memory of the deportation in my *Remembering and Forgetting in Acadie: A Historian's Journey through Public Memory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

6 For an excellent overview of changes in Acadie during the 1960s and 1970s that are pertinent to the *Kouchibouguac* story, see Joel Belliveau, "Acadian New Brunswick's Ambivalent Leap into the Canadian Liberal Order," in *Creating Postwar Canada: Community, Diversity, and Dissent 1945-75*, ed. Magda Fahrni and Robert Rutherdale (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008), 61-88.

7 Three of the many examples of cultural productions inspired by the Kouchibouguac affair at roughly the same time as the ONF documentary are Zachary Richard's song *La Ballade de Jackie Vautou*r (1978); Jacques Savoie's book *Raconte-moi Massabielle* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1979), which was made into the film *Massabielle* (Montreal: ONF, 1983); and Claude Roussel's 1975 sculpture *Kouchibouguac ou le grand déracinement* (Roussel gave it to Jackie Vautour).

Québécois at the film board's head office in Montreal, who often made it difficult for other French Canadians to communicate their own stories on film. The conflicts that emerged between Acadiens and Québécois in regard to *Kouchibouguac* provide the focus for the greater part of this article.

The final section also deals with conflicts related to *Kouchibouguac*, but here the focus turns to divisions within the Acadian community over the story that was told. The film was made available almost exclusively to an Acadian audience in New Brunswick, but within that audience there emerged the same divisions that existed within Acadian society at large over such issues as whether it made more sense to work within the system (an approach embodied by Louis Robichaud) or from outside (as embodied by Jackie Vautour and his supporters). As played out in public, the debate often pertained to whether the film had presented all the "facts." In one such case, following the highly successful screening of the film before 1,200 students at the high school in Edmundston (far from the scene of the expropriations), one student observed in the school's newspaper that he regretted that too many of the facts "n'ont pas été présentés."[8] However, no documentary can ever present all the facts, and so the debate over *Kouchibouguac* within la famille acadienne was really about the choice of which facts needed to be told and which public face Acadians wanted to present – Robichaud's or Vautour's.

In the end, this article is largely about the politics of documentary filmmaking: which stories are told, who gets to tell them, how they are told, and how they are received by an audience. Along the way, the conflicts that were at the heart of making *Kouchibouguac* provide a mirror on divisions both within Acadian society and between Acadians and their québécois cousins.

Acadians and the ONF

The tensions that shaped the making of *Kouchibouguac* were closely related to the place of Acadians within the ONF. Until 1964, there was no autonomous French-language production unit within the film board. Once created, it was supposed to have functioned as a vehicle for francophone production across Canada. However, as Pierre Véronneau has put it, the unit was "dominée par les Québécois" who failed to distinguish between their own concerns and those of Acadians, who were going through a révolution tranquille acadienne. Accordingly, while the board produced a number of films in the late 1960s and early 1970s that dealt with Acadian topics, they were driven by "un regard québécois sur la réalité acadienne."[9]

This was most evident in the much-acclaimed *L'Acadie l'Acadie?!?* (1971) by the québécois filmmakers Michel Brault and Pierre Perrault. While the film dealt with an Acadian crisis, focusing upon the student protest movement at the Université de

8 Drisdelle Report, 3 May 1979, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, CEA, 27-28 March 1979 (submitted in May, the Drisdelle report made references to screenings over a period of months); Pierre Mayrand, "*Kouchibouguac*," *Whiska* [student newspaper of La Cité des Jeunes A.M. Sormany d'Edmundston], 7 (May 1979).

9 Pierre Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF: un quart de siècle en perspective* (Moncton: Office national du film du Canada, 1999), 9. For an English text that touches on some of these issues, see Véronneau, "A Journey through Acadian Cinema," in *Rain/Drizzle/Fog: Film and Television in Atlantic Canada*, ed. Darrell Varga (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2009), 23-46.

Moncton in the late 1960s, it did so through the lens of outsiders who translated this conflict, one of the first murmurs of a specifically Acadian awakening, into part of a larger linguistic struggle with its centre in Quebec. This approach served to make the film more relevant to Quebecers, clearly the target audience given the occasional use of subtitles to make the Acadians' French understandable. The Quebec orientation was also evident as the particular students who provided the focus for the film were always being asked to explain their own concerns about *Acadie* in the context of Quebec developments of the moment. As Véronneau has explained more broadly, filmmakers such as Brault and Perrrault saw Acadian nationalist sentiment only as "un écho de leur propre [québécois] nationalisme et saisissent mal la spécificité de la situation et des revendications acadiennes."[10]

Among those Acadians who resented this québécois imperialism was the filmmaker Léonard Forest. Born in New England of Acadian parents, Forest came to Moncton as a teenager in the late 1940s and soon embarked on a career marked by a commitment to telling the stories of poor communities, particularly Acadian ones, trying to cope with their economic and social difficulties. In this context, he was a key player when the NFB/ONF created a program in the late 1960s, Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle, to give "une voix aux secteurs défavorisés de la population."[11] Forest made films about Acadians that were designed to show hope for poor people, and he had little patience with his québécois contemporaries and their brooding about the imminent destruction of their own society.[12]

Following the release of *L'Acadie l'Acadie?!?*, Forest went public with his concerns in an open letter to Pierre Perrault in which he rejected ideas imported from Quebec as "branchés sur la haine des autres." Instead, he imagined a new Acadie that was "ouverte au monde mais fermée pudiquement aux historiens de la mort." This last reference was to the negative attitudes that came from Quebec, and so Forest told Perrault: "L'Acadie n'a pas besoin de fossoyeurs."[13] As Jeanne Deslandes has put it,

10 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 9. In spite of the film's québécois orientation, 3,000 Acadians took to the streets of Moncton on the night of its première in 1972 to assert their determination to function in French. On the issue of differing Acadian and Québécois perceptions of the political situation in Moncton in the 1960s, Donald J. Savoie, a student in Moncton in at the time, observed that his fellow students from Quebec "would not hesitate to poke the bear [the English-speakers in power], and what they saw in Moncton gave them every reason to poke it and poke it hard. I recall tensions between Moncton-based students and students from away. We knew that after we completed our studies, some of us would remain in Moncton, while those from away would go home or elsewhere. In short, poking the bear would make him grumpy, and we were the ones who would have to live with the grumpy bear." See Savoie, *I'm from Bouctouche, Me: Roots Matt*er (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009), 108-9.

11 Josette Déléas, *Léonard Forest ou le regard pionnie*r (Moncton: Centre d'études acadiennes, 1998), 114.

12 Among Forest's films in this regard were *La noce est pas finie* (1969) and *Un soleil pas comme ailleurs* (1972). In the latter case the film was shown by means of 80 community screenings, with animators on hand to lead discussions, in the process providing a real link between people in isolated Acadian communities who were viewing their own story. This tour anticipated the community screenings of *Kouchibouguac* later in the 1970s.

13 Léonard Forest, Letter ouverte à Monsieur Pierre Perrault, 13 April 1972, National Film Board of Canada/Office national du film du Canada Archives (NFB/ONF Archives), Montreal. This and all subsequent references to material from the NFB/ONF Archives are with permission of the film board.

Forest felt that Acadians needed their "own solutions to using film in service to the citizens – not those developed in Quebec."[14]

Driven by this commitment, Forest emerged as a champion of an autonomous Acadian production unit within the film board, but this was no easy matter as he had to confront the strong sense in Montreal that "national" (read québécois) norms needed to be defended within the hard-won French production unit. During the early 1970s, when Forest would have been fighting these battles, French-speakers in Quebec were involved in a process that saw their identity morphing from one that encompassed all French-speakers in Canada to one with a very strong territorial element that marginalized minority language groups such as the Acadians. In this context, René Lévesque referred to French-speakers outside Quebec as "dead ducks," whose future was doomed and whose plight should not influence the need to defend French Canadian interests in Quebec – the only territory where French-speakers constituted a majority.

This view of québécois distinctiveness was not shared by Ottawa. And this was particularly true after the 1968 election of the Trudeau government, which wanted to support the French-speaking minorities as a counterweight to growing support for sovereignty in Quebec. As it turned out, the NFB had already been engaged, going back to the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle initiative, in moving away from "the universalizing pan-Canadianism of earlier NFB films." As a result, the NFB opened a number of English-language regional production centres – including one in Halifax – in the early 1970s.[15] In this context, regionalization spread to the ONF with the opening in 1974 of three French-language production centres outside Montreal, one of which – established in Moncton – was quickly viewed by some Acadians as an opportunity to assert their own identity independently of the Québécois (who had often been so dismissive of Acadian concerns).

One Acadian filmmaker, for instance, saw the opening of the Moncton production centre as an opportunity to escape "les effets néfastes de l'impérialisme culturel centralisateur de la ville de Montréal."[16] For their part, the Montreal filmmakers saw an attack on their québécois identity through the channeling of money away from the professionals in Montreal to the amateurs in places such as Winnipeg and Moncton. Jacques Godbout was particularly outspoken in this regard, fearing that funds would have to be provided to establish "des classes maternelles" for filmmakers outside Quebec. He argued "la régionalisation n'encourage pas, maintenant que nous en avons fait l'expérience, la qualité. Le label ONF s'y dévalue."[17] Another Montreal filmmaker was equally blunt, arguing "il y a trop de talents au Québec qui crèvent de

14 Jeanne Deslandes, "Leonard Forest and Acadia," in *Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle: Activist Documentary at the National Film Board of Canada, 1967-1980*, ed. Thomas Waugh, Michael Brendan Aker, and Ezra Winton (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2010), 256. Many thanks to Tom Waugh for allowing me to see an advance copy of the manuscript.

15 Christopher Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002), 90. See also Ronald Dick, "Regionalization of a Federal Cultural Institution: The Experience of the National Film Board of Canada, 1965-79," in *Flashback: People and Institutions in Canadian Film History*, ed. Gene Waltz (Montreal: Mediatexte Publications, 1986), 107-33.

16 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 13.

17 Véronneau, "La régionalisation de la production à l'Office national du film du Canada," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 55 (Spring 2002): 521.

faim pour donner de l'argent aux Acadiens, aux Franco-Ontariens ou aux Franco-Manitobains."[18] To be sure, there were also tensions between the centre and the periphery on the English side of the film board. However, those who ran the NFB did not have the same sense of mission of defending a nation within a nation that was held by Godbout and his colleagues. The *Kouchibouguac* project was born into this hostile environment within the ONF.

Making *Kouchibouguac*

As part of the efforts at the ONF head office to exercise control over productions in the hinterland, the Québécois-dominated Comité du programme met regularly in Montreal to rule on the fate of all French-language projects.[19] The comité retained direct control over those projects worthy of being sufficiently financed to create a film that might be deemed "professionnel." Other regional productions might be watched over exclusively by staff in places such as Moncton, but these films would be allocated only meagre resources and were referred to patronizingly in the ONF lexicon of the 1970s as "artisanal." Not surprisingly, this ranking system – defined entirely at the Montreal headquarters – angered the filmmakers in the regions. At the very least, the Acadian production centre demanded that it have a seat on the Comité du programme. When this was rejected out of hand, the filmmakers in Moncton responded: "Ou bien, nous sommes des citoyens à part entière, ou bien nous ne le sommes pas. . . . Nous voulons être chez nous, chez nous, autant dans le cinéma qu'ailleurs."[20]

Although the ONF tried to draw sharp distinctions between regional and national productions, those lines were blurred in the case of *Kouchibouguac* and this engendered tensions from beginning to end while highlighting, according to Pierre Véronneau, "les vicissitudes d'un projet régional quand il doit emprunter cette filière [nationale]."[21] The idea for the film first surfaced in 1975 thanks to Paul-Eugène LeBlanc, the founding head of the Moncton production centre. Before that, however, LeBlanc had been involved with the Conseil régional d'aménagement du Sud-Est (C.R.A.S.E.), which provided significant support for those expropriated from Kouchibouguac by helping to secure greater compensation for their lands and fishing rights.[22] With this background, it is not surprising that LeBlanc would have proposed that the recently opened Acadian office develop a project around this story that resonated with a people whose history had been marked by the legacy of dispossession.

In spite of the film's regional beginnings, the ONF recognized a dramatic story when it saw one. It made this a project "d'envergure nationale" so that significant funds were provided along with the need for Montreal approval every step of the way. While LeBlanc's name shows up on official documents connected with the

18 Georges-André Prud'homme, *Les p'tites vues des héritiers de lord Durham* (Toronto, 1977), 2, as cited in Véronneau, "La régionalisation de la production à l'Office national du film," 521.

19 There was a parallel structure within the NFB. See Dick, "Regionalization of a Federal Cultural Institution," 117.

20 Véronneau, "La régionalisation de la production à l'Office national du film," 516, 522.

21 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 24.

22 C.R.A.S.E. hired various animateurs to help the expropriated, one of whom was Jackie Vautour.

production's early stages, the de facto producer was the Montreal-based Roger Frappier, who was then at the start of what would be a distinguished career as producer of such films as Denys Arcand's *Le déclin de l'empire américain* and *Jésus de Montréal*.[23] Frappier was no doubt drawn to the Kouchibouguac story by his involvement in the early 1970s in a number of film projects that tackled issues about class inequalities in Quebec, in particular the 1974 *On a raison de se révolter* "qui véhicule et synthétise la pensée marxiste-léniniste au Québec."[24]

To move the project forward, Frappier sought out Guy Borremans to develop the scenario and direct the film.[25] Borremans, a Belgian-born photographer and filmmaker of some note, was living at the time in Acadie where he was teaching at the Université de Moncton. He was attracted to the project when provided with the transcript of a 1973 trial in which Jackie Vautour was tried and found guilty for his role in barricading the park. As Borremans explained to me, he immediately saw a parallel between the film that he hoped to make about Kouchibouguac and Robert Bresson's 1962 film, *Le procès de Jeanne d'Arc*, in which trial transcripts provided the basis for highlighting the courageous struggle of an individual who would not sacrifice her beliefs. Of course, it was a leap to equate Vautour's struggle about a piece of land with Joan of Arc's fatal defiance. Nevertheless it is apparent that Borremans was buying into the emerging depiction of Vautour as an Acadian folk hero, a liberation figure along the lines of a Louis Riel or a Che Guevara.

Borremans's vision for the film, which shaped the debate over its production within the ONF, was first put down on paper and presented to the Comité du programme in May 1975. He authored this proposal in collaboration with Gérald Leblanc, who had been working on the project since early in the year and would retain a connection throughout the production. Leblanc would go on to a career as one of Acadie's most important poets and as the lyricist for the Acadian band 1755, whose song *Kouchibouguac* is featured in the film.[26] In writing a memoir years later, Leblanc reflected on how "these Acadians' ancestors had already lived through the Deportation of 1755 and were now going through something else not unlike that experience. I sorted through the documents and testimonies. I met with some of the people who had been expropriated, in order to familiarize myself with the facts of the crime."[27]

But if Gérald Leblanc was concerned about the "facts," Borremans' intent was to produce what he described from the start as a work of "fiction" in which there would be re-enactments of "situations historiques," such as Vautour's trial, that used both

23 Guy Borremans, interview by author, 14 August 2009, Trois-Rivières, notes in possession of author. Even though Frappier's name does not show up on ONF documents as the producer until much later in the process, Pierre Véronneau also viewed him as having been in charge from the start. See *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 24. Efforts to have Frappier confirm the nature of his role in the project were unsuccessful.

24 Réal La Rochelle, "Cinéma rouge au Québec," *Bulletin d'histoire politiqu*e 13 (2004): 107.

25 Guy Borremans interview.

26 These lyrics also appeared as Leblanc's 1978 poem, *Complainte du parc Kouchibouguac*, in his *L'extrême frontière. Poèmes : 1972-1988* (Moncton: Éditions d'Acadie, 1988), 57-8.

27 Gérald Leblanc, *Moncton Mantra*, trans. Jo-Anne Elder (Toronto: Guernica Editions, 2001), 86. Leblanc billed this work as an autobiographical novel.

"les gens du Parc et des comédiens."[28] The director even considered having Vautour, who Borremans described as "l'héro du film," play himself, which would have further linked *Kouchibouguac* with Bresson's *Le procès* as both would have used amateur actors in order to make the film seem more realistic.[29]

Vautour was supposed to represent all of the expropriated, who were themselves representative of the larger Acadian population. There was no mistaking the Acadian nationalist tone in this initial scenario, which viewed the creation of the park "comme une aggression contre tout un peuple. . . . Reste à savoir quel rôle le Parc va jouer dans l'histoire acadienne. Destruction progressive d'un peuple, devenu tribu historique." However, if this were an advocacy film for Acadian rights it also had a class dimension, as the scenario highlighted the fact "l'élite acadienne ne s'est jamais montrée solidaire dans la lutte des citoyens du Parc. . . . Son silence demeure pour le moins inquiétant, si nous considérons les démarches que l'élite a réalisées pour valoriser le bilinguisme à l'Hôtel de Ville de Moncton, par exemple."[30] While the Acadian elite was working within the system in support of bilingualism, it was not prepared to countenance the efforts of Vautour and his supporters who were working from outside.

When the Comité du programme first reviewed the project in May 1975, it raised questions about both the substance of the film and the qualifications of the Acadians who were behind it. In spite of Borremans's explicit reference to the project as one of "fiction," the comité believed that it was dealing with a "documentaire" and expressed concerns about "la démarche cinématographique que ses auteurs envisagent et plus particulièrement sur le rôle qui sera accordé à la fiction dans le produit final." The comité also had reservations about the ability of the Acadian team to carry out the project, with some members wishing that responsibility had been given for "la réalisation d'une production régionale à une cinéaste de Montréal." Here lay the fundamental tension in the production of *Kouchibouguac*, a regional project that needed approval from Montreal. For the moment, however, the concerns of the comité were put aside and pre-production was allowed to continue with "les gens du milieu" playing a leading role; the hope was "les Acadiens tireront un grand bénéfice de la réalisation du projet dans leur région, car il leur fournira une excellente occasion d'acquérir une formation professionnelle."[31]

A dialogue of the deaf continued for nearly two years. On the one hand, there was Borremans, who in various versions of the scenario submitted during 1976 still wanted to "mêler style documentaire et fiction. Certaines des séquences seront de véritables interviews, d'autres seront simplement reconstituées" in order to tell the

28 "*Kouchibouguac*: Projet de recherche présenté au Comité du programme production française," 22 May 1975, 92-101: 626, vol. 2, NFB/ONF Archives. The various scenarios cited in the essay were created with the involvement of the late Gérald Leblanc and are used here with the permission of Paul J. Bourque.

29 Notes by Guy Borremans, 19 July 1975, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives.

30 "*Kouchibouguac*: Projet de recherche présenté au Comité du programme production française," 22 May 1975, 92-101: 626, vol. 2, NFB/ONF Archives.

31 Comité du programme, Minutes, 29 May 1975, NFB/ONF Archives (access to information request). The minutes of the meetings of the Comité du programme were obtained by a request (2009-10-03) through the federal Access to Information Program.

story "de l'impuissance d'un peuple deux fois déporté."[32] On the other hand, there was the Comité du programme, most of whose members felt that there were "encore trop d'imprécisions majeures quant au contenu réel du film." The unhappy members wondered how it would be possible to recreate the trial "avec les amateurs et l'argent dont on dispose."[33]

In a sense, this futile conversation reflected the larger one taking place within the ONF between the producers outside Quebec and their masters in Montreal. In June 1976, at the same time that Borremans and the Comité du programme were talking past each other about yet another scenario, there were a series of meetings between the regional producers and the same committee. While Paul-Eugène LeBlanc argued for regional production in order to help avoid assimilation "par les Anglais, les Québécois ou Radio-Canada," the head of the comité, Clément Perron, referred to "la Régionalisation hors Québec" as something that had been "née presque malgré nous" and which could result in little of value from individuals who acted like "l'adolescent frustré qui arrive mal à dissimuler, sous ses gestes brusques et ses verres teintés, le désarroi de son âge."[34]

By the start of 1977, patience for the project in Montreal had entirely evaporated. Roger Frappier asserted his authority and wrote to Borremans that he had "pris ce projet au point mort . . . pour essayer de trouver des solutions valables à sa production. Je n'ai pas réussi." And so Frappier told the director: "Je ne peux pas mettre *Kouchibouguac* en production. Les raisons qui motivent cette décision sont multiples. . . . Mentionnons seulement la non-disponibilité de fonds, le vieillissement de la situation actuelle par rapport au scénario, la tension entre les diverses personnes au niveau du travail sur ce film en région, la piètre qualité du matériel de Jackie Vautour, déjà tourné."[35]

The project might well have ended there had it not been for a dramatic change in the Kouchibouguac saga that trumped Frappier's view that the story had become stale, focused as it was on Vautour's role in barricading the park in 1973. In the years that had followed, while the other residents made their way to their new homes, Vautour had held fast until his own home was bulldozed in November 1976. He was subsequently shuffled off to a motel, where he was still living in March 1977 when the police, acting on a complaint from the motel owner who had not been paid, decided to evict him. Vautour resisted this police action and was not removed before there had been significant destruction of property. By the time the dust settled, he and two of his sons had been arrested. Inspired by these events, Borremans wrote a new scenario – Kouchibouguac II – only two days after Vautour's expulsion. As the director explained: "Devant ce pénible bilan, nous proposons l'abandon de l'approche dite de fiction-reconstitution afin de donner la parole aux faits immédiats. Dans les jours, les semaines qui vont suivre, il sera crucial d'enregistrer les témoignages de tous les acteurs d'un drame frisant le génocide."[36]

32 Guy Borremans, "Jackie Vautour vs La Reine," 14 February 1976, 92-101: 626, vol. 2, NFB/ONF Archives. The same expression can be found in "*Kouchibouguac* scénario," 17 June 1976, 92-101: 626, vol. 2, NFB/ONF Archives.

33 Comité du programme, Minutes, 29 April 1976, NFB/ONF Archives.

34 Cited in Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 20.

35 Frappier to Borremans, 28 January 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives.

36 *Kouchibouguac* II, 23 March 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 2, NFB/ONF Archives.

That Borremans had raised the rhetorical heat, now somehow equating the removal of the residents (or at least Vautour) with an act of genocide, did not seem to bother the members of the Comité du programme when they met shortly after the tabling of Kouchibouguac II. While there was still sufficient discussion to force the meeting to stretch over two days, in the end there was a palpable sense of relief that Borremans had abandoned the fictional aspects of the project and the green light was finally given for it to go into production – but only under circumstances designed to tighten Montreal's control over the regions.[37] By means of a process that Pierre Véronneau described as "un passe-passe comptable," funds that had been set aside for regional production were transferred – for the first time – for use by the head office. Frappier and his colleagues saw this as a positive step "vers le cinéma professionnel." As for the regions, they saw "un détournement des fonds."[38]

In the months that followed, Borremans moved the project into production – shooting interviews with the expropriés during April and May 1977 – while never entirely abandoning the idea of including staged elements. In this regard, the ONF entered into a contract with Antonine Maillet to have scenes from her play, *Les Crasseux*, filmed for inclusion in *Kouchibouguac*.[39] Written in 1966, the play could not have been based upon the Kouchibouguac saga that had not yet begun; but it may as well have been since it focused on neighbouring Acadian towns – one well-to-do and the other poor – that were at odds with one another. The wealthier Acadians found their less-privileged cousins beneath contempt, and so thought of them as *les crasseux* (literally "covered in filth"). The elite ultimately discovered a pretext for having the government confiscate the lands of the weak, so that they would have to start again from scratch elsewhere. Maillet was playing on class divisions within Acadian society, in the process putting Acadian leaders in a position to expropriate and deport their own. Of course, in the Kouchibouguac affair, the individual who had actually signed the expropriation orders was the Acadian premier of New Brunswick; and the *Kouchibouguac* film project, from its earliest scenario, had included reference to the frequent disdain of well-to-do Acadians for the impoverished who were being removed.

Frappier apparently went along with Borremans in regard to *Les Crasseux*, but he was far less supportive when the director sought to create footage that would dramatize the destruction that had taken place in removing the residents. In one case, Borremans wanted to bulldoze an abandoned house and in another he wanted to recreate the burning of a bridge.[40] In a sense this was Borremans returning to ideas about re-enactment that had found so little support from Montreal earlier in the process, and so it should come as little surprise that Frappier rejected such ideas out of hand.

37 Comité du programme, Minutes, 31 March and 5 April 1977, NFB/ONF Archives.

38 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 25. On the subject of the transfer of funds from the regional to the Montreal budget, there is an unsigned note in the NFB archives that is attached to what appears to be minutes of a meeting (possibly of the Comité du programme) on 11 April 1978. The note points out that "les transferts des fonds" would lead to "abolir la régionalisation." This was an effort "de nous boucher, comme tous les autres qui sont soit inexistants ou voués à la mort." See Dossier: Historique de la régionalisation, Acadie, 11 April 1978, NFB/ONF Archives.

39 Contract with Antonine Maillet, 29 April 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives; Antonine Maillet, *Les Crasseux* (Montréal: Holt, Rinehart et Winston, 1968).

40 Guy Borremans interview.

Borremans viewed the producer's behaviour as constituting "la grande censure," but Frappier saw a project that was coming off the rails and called all of the members of the production team to a meeting in early June 1977.[41] The producer described "une situation de rupture, j'aimerais avant d'en arriver à l'irréparable, qu'on prenne au moins le temps de s'asseoir et de visionner l'ensemble des rushes tournés à ce jour."[42] Borremans – along with other members of the production team – refused to meet Frappier unless someone "extérieur du projet" was also on hand.[43] There was clearly little love lost between the director and his producer, and only a few days later Borremans quit, feeling that he had been manipulated and refusing "dorénavant toute forme collaboration avec cet organisme et ses représentants." Over 30 years later, Borremans still saw his treatment as having constituted part of "le livre noir de l'ONF."[44]

It is easy enough to attribute this situation, as Pierre Véronneau has, to "la personnalité du réalisateur," but there was also a larger context. On the same day that Borremans's resignation was announced, the Comité du programme held a discussion about the very "pertinence de la Régionalisation."[45] In this atmosphere of suspicion of regional projects, the Comité du programme indicated that its patience with *Kouchibouguac* had just about run out. Frappier proposed that the documentary could be salvaged by taking what had already been filmed, adding to it both existing newsreel footage as well as new footage that would be shot under the supervision of Gérald Leblanc, who had been involved with the project from the start, and Rhéal Drisdelle, a member of the team who had been an active supporter of the expropriés.[46] After viewing the rushes, the comité was "étonné [par] l'enthousiasme de Frappier, à propos de ce matériel dénudé de toute cinématographie ou presque," and insisted that "un réalisateur de métier soit choisi pour terminer la réalisation du film *Kouchibouguac*."[47]

Despite the scepticism of the members of the Comité du programme, Frappier's solution prevailed and provided the outlines for the path that took the film to completion. While the various tasks were parceled out among the existing crew members, no one was given complete directorial control, and Frappier was ordered to be "sur le lieux de tournage."[48] If anyone had control over the final product it was Frappier, but this would not have been evident from the credits; they gave equal billing to 26 individuals listed alphabetically, including Borremans as well as others who had left the project before its completion.[49] The credits also did not indicate the

41 Guy Borremans interview.
42 Telex from Frappier to Borremans et al., 3 June 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives.
43 Telex from Borremans et al. to Frappier, 7 June 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives.
44 Telex from Borremans to Frappier, 14 June 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives; Guy Borremans interview.
45 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 25; Véronneau, "La régionalisation de la production à l'Office national du film," 521.
46 As in the case of Paul-Eugène LeBlanc, Drisdelle had been associated with C.R.A.S.E..
47 Comité du programme, Minutes, 16 June 1977, NFB/ONF Archives.
48 François Macerola to Jim Domville, 29 June 1977, 92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives.
49 In addition to Borremans, the cameraman Pierre Letarte and Serge Beauchemin, who was responsible for the sound, also left the project before it was finished because "le film programmé n'était pas celui que nous envisagions." See Pierre Letarte and Serge Beauchemin to Clément Perron, 22 August 1977,

specific tasks of the crew members, but this appearance of collective responsibility was no act of solidarity within the crew that somehow mirrored the film's own spirit of solidarity with those who had been expropriated. Frappier himself was under orders from Montreal to keep an eye on the crew, a number of whom were Acadians. As Pierre Véronneau has observed, for Acadians having to deal with the ONF, the *Kouchibouguac* project epitomized "l'arrogance de Montréal quand il traite avec eux."[50]

An Acadian film?

All of the scenarios prepared for *Kouchibouguac* suggested that this was a film that would emphasize the specific difficulties experienced by expropriés who were Acadian, a people with a particular experience of dispossession. Nevertheless, the film that was released early in 1979 never employed the words "Acadian" or "deportation," which is perhaps not that surprising given the neglect of Acadian concerns at the ONF. The 75-minute film consists almost entirely of the former residents telling their personal stories without reflecting on the larger "national" implications. By and large there is no narrator, so that the individuals are allowed to speak for themselves without the intrusion of another voice. These were the interviews that had largely been collected before Frappier took over, supplemented with new material such as a subsequent interview with Premier Richard Hatfield.

Kouchibouguac was, as one reviewer put it, "un film militant," and so can be seen in the context of the film board's Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program a decade earlier, which was driven by "the new theory of participant action research and community empowerment."[51] At the same time, however, the film was not representative of the English-language films about Atlantic Canada produced by the NFB before 1990, which have been described as "exalt[ing] innocent lives of 'honest toil' threatened by the relentless yet necessary forces of modernism."[52] There was nothing romantic about the depiction presented in *Kouchibouguac*, which instead shared some of Léonard Forest's dramatization of the challenges for the survival of Acadian communities. However, while Forest and his peers had given control over some of the production process to the subjects of their films, *Kouchibouguac* – as we

92-101: 626, vol. 1, NFB/ONF Archives. Letarte explained to me 30 years after the fact that he had left the project due to unhappiness both with conflicts within the crew and with "l'impuissance du film" in the face of "une situation bouleversante et traumatisante." See Pierre Letarte, interview by Ronald Rudin, 9 December 2009, Montreal, notes in possession of author. For his part, Borremans indicated to me in an interview that he was not at all pleased with having his name associated with a film he had quit.

50 Véronneau, *La production acadienne de l'ONF*, 25. In the same source, Véronneau also noted that the credits indicated that the film had been made "en collaboration avec le Programme français/Acadie" (25). However, there is no such reference in the DVD version. This only reinforces Véronneau's argument that Acadian involvement in *Kouchibouguac* had been regularly devalued.

51 David Lonergan, "La mémoire nécessaire," *Acadie nouvelle*, 29 September 2007; Zoë Druick, *Projecting Canada: Government Policy and Documentary Film at the National Film Board of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), 147. The broader vision of the Challenge for Change/Société nouvelle program is also discussed in Waugh, Aker, and Winton, *Challenge for Change*.

52 Colin Howell and Peter Twohig, "A Region on Film: Metropolitanism, Place and Meaning in NFB Films," in Varga, *Rain/Drizzle/Fog*, 10.

have seen – was scripted by outsiders to the communities under siege. Nevertheless, there was no mistaking that this was an advocacy film for the rights of the dispossessed, even if not one explicitly addressing Acadian issues, and so it shared many of the characteristics of the documentaries of the time that were broadly linked to the cinéma vérité movement whose practitioners viewed the "film maker as catalyst."[53]

Recognizing that *Kouchibouguac* was politically loaded, New Brunswick government officials who were contacted near the end of production refused to provide archival photographs of buildings that had been destroyed. Fredericton had been responsible for removing the people from the territory that would become a park and, in the process, had compiled files for each property that included photos. Sensitive about anything having to do with the Kouchibouguac story, the province refused to release the photos, even though it had a legal opinion that it could have done so. T.E. Sifton, a bureaucrat in the Department of Natural Resources who played a key role in the expropriation process, expressed concern about the feelings of the former residents who might be embarrassed if "the memory of what they used to live in will be held up for all to see. . . . I suspect the motives of the producers of this film and I believe that the residents do not want to be reminded of the past and the problems it brought with them."[54]

More likely, however, Fredericton was concerned about aiding the production of a film that would present the provincial government in a negative light. Indeed, the claim that the expropriés wanted to forget about the past was refuted by the last scene of *Kouchibouguac*, which showed storm clouds over the horizon as the following words appeared on the screen: "En mai 1978 577 expropriés de 213 familles signent une pétition réclamant des gouvernements de reprendre leurs terres et leurs droits." By this time, the Kouchibouguac saga had taken yet another new twist as Jackie Vautour, mindful that the formal transfer of the land from the province to the federal government was imminent, began to encourage former residents to return to the park to block this process. He returned to his own land in July 1978, and remains a squatter there over 30 years later.

Oddly, however, Vautour's own role in *Kouchibouguac* is rather muted, and while he does occupy a significant amount of time in the film he was not portrayed as the larger-than-life hero that Borremans had imagined. As David Lonergan has put it, "Il y occupe une place importante, mais il n'est pas le pivot du documentaire."[55] More specifically, Vautour's growing status as an Acadian freedom fighter was played down, most notably in newsreel footage of his appearance at a Moncton courthouse to face charges connected with his expulsion from the motel. Protesters on hand to

53 Eric Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 256. The terms "cinéma vérité" and "cinéma direct" are rather casually thrown about, with some filmmakers who are inserted into one category or the other contesting their inclusion. Nevertheless, there was a genre of activist documentary film at the time, and *Kouchibouguac* was part of that movement.

54 Sifton to R.E. Hanusiak, 21 February 1978, RG 639 A N1, Provincial Archives of New Brunswick (PANB), Fredericton, NB. The expropriation files in RS 639 provide a wealth of material, including photos, maps, and correspondence about each property.

55 Lonergan, "La mémoire nécessaire."

support Vautour were given a considerable amount of attention, but their placards referring to the Kouchibouguac cause are obscured while they can be clearly heard incongruously chanting "Français, Français, Français" in the background. Vautour's cause had nothing to do with language, and so the only explanation for the crowd's chanting was in connection with the earlier battles over bilingualism in Moncton. While this context would have only been understood by Acadians, the effect of the scene – for whomever would have been watching it – was to make the protesters appear less explicitly Acadian and more broadly French Canadian (much like the students in *L'Acadie l'Acadie?!?*).

The linguistic – as opposed to the Acadian – focus of the Kouchibouguac affair was further reinforced by the only two moments in the film when English was spoken. In one case, Roary Stewart, talking about his own expropriation and generally speaking in French, switches into English when describing his dealings with the government agent, who comes across as a swindler as he tells Stewart that he should not appeal the paltry offer presented for his land: "You might get as much as [the original offer], but you might get less." Summarizing this experience, Stewart angrily remarks: "C'est là qu' j'aurai dû lui donner mon poing droit dans la gueule . . . . Un homme qui dit une affaire de-même là, c'est un vrai crook hein?"[56]

English-speakers also came off as untrustworthy in the interview with Richard Hatfield, the only person to appear on camera who had not been expropriated. Hatfield, of course, was not responsible for the Kouchibouguac affair, which he inherited from Louis Robichaud. Nevertheless, he was in power as programs were put in place to improve the settlements for the former residents, and he looks particularly uncomfortable in trying to justify his policies. On one such occasion, he is asked if "the expropriates really benefitted from the creation of the park." Shifting around in his chair and sweating visibly, Hatfield responded: "Well, I'm not, I don't know that you can say that they have really benefitted. I've heard that many have claimed that they've had difficulty in socially adjusting. I've heard that a . . . a variety of claims but the . . . I would say that a number of them in fact. I think most of the jobs that were available in the park went to the former residents of the park." Hatfield comes across as shifty, which was probably not entirely fair given the considerable attention he paid to the individual cases of former residents with whom he had personal communications.[57]

In the midst of battles within the ONF about the value of regional French production, the *Kouchibouguac* project ended up under close supervision from Montreal with a story line that drew attention to linguistic conflict. As a result, the film seemed to speak to French Canadian oppression and not to anything that was specifically Acadian. Nevertheless, the film played in community halls and on local television stations almost exclusively to Acadian audiences, who would have recognized as their own both the story being told and the accents of those telling it. In the end, the film was never translated into English in spite of some discussion about

56 *Kouchibouguac*.

57 This is exactly what he said. Many of the same files in RS 639 at the PANB, which contain photos of the properties of those expropriated, also include correspondence between the former residents and the premier.

making accessible a story about expropriation, which would have also reverberated in various parts of English Canada.[58] This was a missed opportunity not only to bridge the linguistic divide, but also to bring French Canadians closer together. The film was never shown on television outside Acadie, this in spite of efforts to cast it in a manner that would have broadened its appeal, especially to a québécois audience. By and large, only Acadians saw Kouchibouguac; but within that audience there were some radically different reactions.

A mirror on Acadian society

Divisions among Acadians, as much as oppression at the hands of others, had been a part of the Kouchibouguac story from the start, and so it is hardly surprising that the film elicited widely differing responses from within the only audience to have seen it. By the time that *Kouchibouguac* was released, Acadians had been debating for some time whether to work within the system, following the lead of Louis Robichaud, or to stand in opposition to it, the position associated with Jackie Vautour. The film sympathized unambiguously with the latter view, and so on the day after its première the Acadian daily *L'Évangéline* provoked a public debate when it complained that the documentary amounted to little more than "la nostalgie" for a world (and a world of poverty at that) that was now gone. The reporter of the piece, Nelson Landry, complained that the film focused entirely on the negative and paid no serious attention to "le mode de vie actuel" of the expropriated, some of whom were now living in better housing than had previously been the case.[59]

The response to Landry's critique was immediate and largely negative, reflecting the perspective of those who defended Vautour and who had been generally dissatisfied with *L'Évangéline*'s coverage since the start of the affair. While the newspaper did from time to time offer expressions of support for the expropriés, these were neither sufficiently frequent nor sufficiently strong for those, such as the editors of the student newspaper at the Université de Moncton, who accused *L'Évangéline* of keeping "'les Acadiens dans leur ignorance'" in regard to Kouchibouguac. For these students, the newspaper was part of the "establishment" and so was reluctant to support the former residents, a perspective no doubt encouraged by the fact that *L'Évangéline* was receiving, at the time that the film was released, significant financial aid from the federal government – the very institution responsible for creating the park.[60]

58 Discussions within the film board about an English version abruptly came to an end in 1981. See Arlette Dion to Guy Maguire, 21 September 1981, 67-065, NFB/ONF Archives. The efforts to broadcast the film beyond Acadie ended similarly. The film was shown on the Radio-Canada affiliate station CHAU (in Carleton, Quebec, which broadcast across the Baie des Chaleurs to New Brunswick) in June 1979, and on Radio-Canada's network across Atlantic Canada in April 1980. However, it was never shown in French outside the region except for a small corner of the Gaspé region of Quebec. Raymond David, the head of French broadcasting at SRC, thought "*Kouchibouguac* se prêterait mal à une présentation par tout le réseau français, compte tenu de la facture de ce documentaire. Sans doute serait-il plus réaliste d'envisager une diffusion à l'échelle régionale." See Raymond David to Yvon Babineau, 4 January 1980, Fonds C.R.A.S.E., 46.14-14, CEA.

59 *L'Évangéline*, 26 March 1979.

60 *Le Front*, 21 March 1977, as cited in Marc Johnson, "*L'Évangéline* contestée, 1966-1982," in *L'Évangéline, 1987-1992. Entre l'élite et le peuple*, ed. Gérard Beaulieu (Moncton : Les Éditions d'Acadie et Chaire d'études acadiennes, 1997), 360-1.

Individuals who wrote responses to Landry's commentary seized on the fact that it had been run by *L'Évangéline* as if it were a news story when it was in fact an editorial of sorts, a critique of those who had come to see Vautour and his supporters as Acadian freedom fighters. One letter to the editor complained about "un reportage subjectif," while another found the film "émouvant" for its depiction of the expropriés standing up for their rights: "Je n'ai encore jamais vu un Acadien défendre aussi héroïquement que Jackie Vautour, en dépit de l'incompréhension du plus grand nombre, la cause du droit à la propriété, et surtout, du droit à la justice pour ceux qui croient encore pouvoir se défendre sans autre preuve que celle du gros bon sens."[61] Faced with significant public disapproval, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper offered to publish a retraction of Landry's piece but it never appeared.[62]

Radically different perspectives on the film continued to be on display in the months that followed. On the one hand, there was the overwhelmingly positive response of the ordinary Acadians who came out to schools and community halls to watch *Kouchibouguac* as part of the same tour described at the start of this article. Fairly typical was the situation when it was screened in Saint John, a city with a relatively small French-speaking population, where 30 people – including some who hailed from the vicinity of the park – enthusiastically watched the documentary. Rhéal Drisdelle, the ONF representative who accompanied the tour, reported that those in attendance showed "beaucoup de sympathie pour les expropriés, ayant été eux-mêmes forcés de s'exiler à St-Jean pour des raisons économiques."[63]

The film also generated considerable enthusiasm at special screenings for such explicitly partisan events as the 1979 annual meeting of the "separatist" Parti acadien. On this occasion, Drisdelle observed "ce public politisé connaissait déjà les grandes lignes de ce drame." A screening of the film was also one of the major activities during a "Journée de solidarité pour les expropriés du Parc Kouchibouguac," which was held (illegally) on Jackie Vautour's land within the park in September 1979. This event was organized by C.R.A.S.E., which, as was noted earlier, was an organization that had been defending the interests of the expropriés for roughly a decade and had included such principals in the film project as Paul-Eugène LeBlanc and Rhéal Drisdelle. Given this connection with both the cause of the expropriated and the film project, it was only natural that a long day of activities should have ended with an outdoor projection of "*Kouchibouguac* . . . sur un grand écran."[64]

In opposition to those who wanted to use the film to promote a cause, there were individuals in positions of authority who viewed the documentary as pure propaganda that concealed the benefits of the park to score political points. This perspective was communicated in the 1981 report of the Special Inquiry on Kouchibouguac National Park, which had been established in the late 1970s by the Canadian and New Brunswick governments to try to resolve some of the issues that had allowed the crisis to simmer for so long. Chaired by Gérard La Forest, a distinguished New Brunswick

61 *L'Évangéline*: 29 March 1979, 9 April 1979.

62 Drisdelle Report, 25 March 1979, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, CEA.

63 Drisdelle Report, 7 May 1979, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, CEA.

64 Invitation à la Journée de solidarité pour les expropriés du Parc Kouchibouguac, Fonds Josette-Déléas, 221.72, CEA.

lawyer who would later serve on the Supreme Court of Canada, the inquiry recommended – among other matters – that Jackie Vautour be allowed to remain in the park, an action that made it possible for the story to recede slowly from public view.[65]

In spite of this effort to calm the waters, there was also bitter criticism in the report of those who resisted the expropriation and those who supported the resisters, and in this regard the ONF film was singled out for special attention. Echoing the view of *L'Évangéline*, the inquiry report depicted the film as one-sided for not showing the improved conditions of some who had been moved: "It is difficult to say that any particular event in the film is false, but the total impression is extremely misleading. The plight of the Park residents following the expropriation is rightly underlined. But life did not stop there. Much is made of the small amounts the expropriates received in compensation for their homes . . . . But nothing is said of the relocation program under which the expropriates were able to get far better houses than most of them had before. . . . We hear nothing of those – and they are numerous – who are now satisfied with their lot."[66]

Instead, La Forest complained that the public heard too much in the film about Vautour, and what it heard tended to be uncritically positive. For instance, there is a sequence that shows Vautour being greeted like a conquering hero when charges against him were dropped for having resisted eviction from a motel after his house had been destroyed. The report of the inquiry questioned the objectivity of the filmmakers in this regard, complaining that "the release of Vautour . . . looks like vindication by the court, rather than a release on a technicality based on a mishandling of the case by the police."[67]

As for why Vautour and the aggrieved expropriés more generally were treated so well in *Kouchibouguac*, La Forest speculated that it may have had something to do with the fact that "two former members of C.R.A.S.E., Paul-Eugène LeBlanc and Rhéal Drisdelle, were both employees of the National Film Board in Moncton when the film was produced." Hedging his bets, the commissioner observed: "It may well have been that these individuals had little to do with the film. We have no knowledge to the contrary." Having stepped back from his accusation, La Forest then concluded by suggesting the charge once again: "But certainly the story in the film faithfully mirrors the views of C.R.A.S.E. and Mr. Vautour throughout the piece."[68]

As we have seen, LeBlanc and Drisdelle were connected with the film, but the report of the Special Inquiry – apparently trying to calm the waters – was not prepared in a manner that forcefully accused them in its final published form. It was better to make it appear as if others were subjective. However, off the record, in notes made in conjunction with interviews conducted in preparation of the report, one of the lead

65 Canada and New Brunswick, *Report of the Special Inquiry on Kouchibouguac National Park* (Chairman Gérard La Forest and Commissioner Muriel Kent-Roy) (Ottawa: Government of Canada and Government of New Brunswick, October 1981). In addition to the recommendation that Vautour be allowed to stay on his land, the inquiry also called for improved compensation for those who had been expropriated and an end to Parks Canada's practice of removing the resident population to create new parks. All of the inquiry's recommendations were accepted.

66 Canada and New Brunswick, *Report of the Special Inquiry on Kouchibouguac National Park*, 83.

67 Canada and New Brunswick, *Report of the Special Inquiry on Kouchibouguac National Park*, 84.

68 Canada and New Brunswick, *Report of the Special Inquiry on Kouchibouguac National Park*, 84.

figures for the inquiry made his views much clearer. Particularly telling were his notes from having viewed *Kouchibouguac* with Drisdelle on two occasions. On the first of these, he observed: "The film is very much like Drisdelle himself. . . . The concern for the expropriates is genuine but he does not mind twisting reality a bit to convince people." As for how the film distorted reality, this same individual provided a long list of *Kouchibouguac*'s failings following his second viewing of the film with Drisdelle: "The total impression [of the film] is very misleading. Not only does it neglect matters where the government properly responded, [but] it lets the expropriates do the talking. What they say is not false in terms of what they think or feel happened, but . . . this honest belief is not always consistent with the facts."[69]

Even more caustic were remarks recorded during an interview with one of the leading figures in Acadian society that was prepared for the inquiry in 1980. While the internal notes prepared for the inquiry refuted many of Drisdelle's comments, there was no such refutation of the wild accusations made by this Acadian leader. While none of these claims made their way into the final report, they do shed some light on the divisions within Acadian society. Particularly striking was the claim that "L'ONF a donné beaucoup d'aide [aux militants]. Ils ont payé pour des manifestations; ils ont engagé des autos. . . . On s'est servi des fonds de l'ONF pour essayer d'élire [Père Armand] Plourde du Parti acadien."[70]

The anger generated by *Kouchibouguac* among some Acadian leaders was genuine, and reflected the fact that ordinary Acadians did watch the film and could often be mobilized by its depiction of the expropriations. At a time when many Acadians were questioning their own institutions, the film was no doubt viewed as threatening to those in authority – a perception confirmed by a high-ranking federal bureaucrat close to the Kouchibouguac dossier, who wrote to Premier Hatfield at the time that La Forest was working on his report: "Most of [Vautour's] active supporters seem to come from more distant communities such as Shediac and Shippagan, where interests less informed on the particulars, have rallied to the cause. These interests have been strongly influenced by a film, highly sympathetic to Vautour, prepared for the NFB."[71] It was convenient for this civil servant to conclude that only those "less informed" had been moved by the film, but the record indicates that a wide array of Acadians – regardless of where they lived – generally responded to it positively while those with some authority most often responded negatively. Few, however, were left indifferent.

From the Acadians who conceived the idea for the film, to the Québécois at the ONF who were sometimes troubled by it, to the Acadian audiences that saw it either in community halls or on television, *Kouchibouguac* generated strong reactions while along the way reflecting a number of larger realities. On one level, the film provides

69 "Rhéal Drisdel [*sic*] and Film," n.d., Fonds Muriel Kent-Roy, 188.114, CEA; "Movie *Kouchibouguac* (second viewing)," 24 October 1980, Fonds Muriel Kent-Roy, 188.114, CEA.

70 Interview with Special Inquiry, 10 August 1980, Fonds Muriel Kent-Roy, 188.114, CEA. Plourde came close to winning his riding in the 1978 provincial election, the only Parti acadien candidate to finish second. More generally, in that election the success of the Parti acadien most likely resulted in the narrow defeat of the Liberal Party, headed – ironically – by an Acadian. Plourde's role in that election forms the focus of another ONF production, *Armand Plourde, une idée qui fait son chemin* (1980).

71 A.T. Davidson to Richard Hatfield, 6 June 1980, RS 417, file 18074, PANB.

a window into the complicated relationship between the various components of French Canada in the aftermath of the Quiet Revolution. Having achieved a sense of what was possible in Quebec, the Québécois in positions of power at the ONF showed little concern with telling someone else's story, in much the same way that Quebec's political masters at the time were unconcerned with the impact of their quest for greater autonomy upon the French-speaking minorities in the rest of Canada.

Kouchibouguac was a film that had, at least in terms of the words that were said and some of the scenes that were shown, been shorn of the Acadian edge that had been part of its raison d'être. Nevertheless, it was ordinary Acadians who saw the film, who heard their own accents telling the story, and who were brought together for the experience. Contrast this with the negative reactions of some Acadian leaders to *Kouchibouguac*, and we can see how the film also provides a window into the deep divisions within Acadie as it lived through its own révolution tranquille. Within the ONF this film was a small enterprise, but one which spoke to some much larger French Canadian issues.