Ethnologies

ethn logies

Colouring Cape Breton "Celtic"
Topographies of Culture and Identity in Cape Breton Island

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article repense la relation entre identité culturelle et paysage au moyen de l'examen postconstructiviste, « multiculturel, politique et écologique », du festival international « Couleurs celtiques » de Cap Breton. L'auteur considère le festival comme une intervention à plusieurs niveaux : en tant que partie d'un ensemble de contrastes et de contestations au moyen desquels les habitants de Cap Breton articulent leurs identités et leur patrimoine ; en tant que medium au moyen duquel la « celticité » est formée et formulée en discours culturel transnational ; en tant qu'élément d'une stratégie des entrepreneurs insulaires destinée à donner à Cap Breton une place centrale dans les flux mondiaux du tourisme ; et en tant que lien discursif, consistant à rendre attractif un paysage nordique relativement froid au moyen de l'agréable imagerie des feuilles d'automne et d'un relief évocateur des Highlands. En cours de route, celle qui fut un jour la plus industrialisée des Provinces atlantiques peut aujourd'hui se targuer d'exprimer l'harmonie entre la « nature » et la « culture ».

COLOURING CAPE BRETON "CELTIC"
Topographies of Culture and Identity in Cape Breton Island

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Several years ago, a prominent South African expressed the following sentiment about attachment to his native land:

> To my compatriots, I have no hesitation in saying that each one of us is as intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country as are the famous jacaranda trees of Pretoria and the mimosa trees of the bushveld. Each time one of us touches the soil of this land, we feel a sense of personal renewal (Moore, Pandian and Kosek 2003: 31).

While the specific environmental references mentioned here may be foreign to most readers, the sentiment of belonging and connectedness to an environment is likely to carry a resonance for many. Would it not, however, make a difference whether such an "ecology of belonging" was articulated by human rights activist-hero Nelson Mandela or by Dutch South African Hendrik Verwoerd, Native Affairs Minister and later Prime Minister, who presided over the Sharpeville Massacre and Mandela's sentencing to life imprisonment? Verwoert believed the black majority naturally "belonged" in their bantustans or homelands, while the white settlers, who also belonged in that part of the world, were naturally fit to rule it.

The words cited are in fact Mandela's. (And as an aside, it is worth noting that jacaranda trees are native to South America, not to South Africa, so nature itself is playing a kind of Derridean *différance*-like disavowal of its cultural scriptedness here.) But similar sentiments built on what could be called a metaphysics of "organic sedentarism" — a "rooting" of cultural identity in soil, land, territory, and place — have been voiced by nationalists throughout the world, and by indigenous activists in the Amazonian rainforest, bioregional environmentalists in

northern California, and German followers of Ernst Haeckel, who first coined the term "ecology" and who believed the Nordic race was the most highly developed and that the Semitic was dangerously inferior. Does it make a difference *who* expresses such sentiments and in what context? In many respects, the task of thinking through the implications of the different ways in which culture and ethnicity (or collective identity) are stitched together with land, territory, landscape, place, and ecology, has barely begun. As issues of environmental sustainability grow in importance in the West and questions and conflicts over identity, belonging, and national boundaries continue to loom large in developing nations, these issues will need to be considered much more deeply than they have been thus far.

This paper will attempt to suggest a means by which issues of ethnicity (conceived as cultural identity) and place (or nature) can be rethought through a constructivist prism, but one that does not neglect the biophysical realities of places, regions, and landscapes. I will begin by examining the lingering dualism surrounding discussions of people/ culture/society and place/nature/environment. By a detour through actor network theory, I will articulate a practice-centred model, a "multicultural political ecology," which sees ecologies and ethnicities as "always already" intertwined within an "original hybridity" of the natural and the cultural, from which the separation of "culture" and "nature" is possible only through the labour by which each is purified of its other (Ivakhiv 2002). In this view, culture is always intermingled with place and ecology, and the process of untangling the *claims* of rootedness from the *practices* by which such intermingling occurs is always complex and fraught with risks.

The main part of this paper will examine one site where historical and genealogical claims to place are being fashioned and contested, that being Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island. I will focus especially on the Celtic Colours International Festival, an annual event which has become a significant component of the island's tourism strategy, by which the region is economically diversifying following the widespread collapse of its traditional resource industries. The choice of case study here may seem curious: Celtic Colours is a fairly unremarkable example of cultural and economic entrepreneurialism, a festival celebrating and marketing a particular constellation of cultural and geographic resources — the musical and artistic life of an island at the tail end of its tourist season, when the island's scenic features, especially its fall "colours,"

are still available for visual consumption. Suggesting that these colours may be "Celtic," as I will show, falls into a longstanding tradition of mapping a specific ethnic or cultural identity onto the island, and onto Nova Scotia more generally. Analogous forms of such "natural-cultural coarticulation" can be found in many places, and my example is not intended to showcase their most extreme expression. Quite the contrary: I have chosen this case precisely because it is so mundane and benign, and takes place in a part of the world where ethnic strife seems almost unthinkable. Yet even this example allows us to raise some vexing questions and, so it is hoped, to draw out useful lessons contributing to the theorization of the hybrid intermingling of nature and culture.

From nature and culture to networks and practices

Any attempt to discuss the relationship between people and place invariably conjures up the dualism of culture versus nature, or society versus environment. Each of the terms in this dyad is generally perceived to operate according to its own logic, with little flow across the boundaries that separate them, even if their domains are considered to interact in some dialectical manner. The Cartesian separation of mind and matter, a subject world from an object world, continues to underpin the basic division of labour in academia, that between the natural sciences and the humanities and social sciences. This division of labour has, no doubt, been useful insofar as it has allowed natural scientists to more readily manipulate the world to give us the technologies and medical achievements we have come to rely on, and insofar as it has allowed human scientists to carve out a space for a more nuanced way of interpreting the complexities of human individuals and societies. But, as Latour points out, it has also made it difficult for us to study the way so much of the world — from health issues and environmental problems to technological systems and political struggles — consists of "imbroglios" of the social, the semiotic, the material, and the organic, "simultaneously real, like nature, narrated, like discourse, and collective, like society" (1993: 6).

The "two cultures" split between scientists and humanists continues in such recent manifestations as the so-called "science wars" (Ashman and Beringer 2001) and the debates over the social construction of nature and wilderness (Cronon 1995; Soulé and Lease 1995; Callicott and Nelson 1998; Chaloupka 2000; Braun and Castree 2001). At issue

in these debates is whether we can come to know the "real world" of nature objectively, or whether all of our attempts to do that are culturally and historically tainted, inventions and expressions of power as much as they are descriptions and "discoveries" of the nature of things. If all of our ideas of the natural world are cultural constructs, how can we decide what our relationship to that world is to be? When scientists, policy-makers, environmental activists, industrial or agricultural workers, or indigenous communities make competing claims about "nature" and "construct" it differently, whose claims and constructions are to be accorded greater leverage? Who gets to speak on behalf of "nature" or the land, and why?

One of the more promising recent approaches for critically dissembling such nature-culture dualism has been *actor network theory*, a school of thought associated most closely with the work of Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, John Law, and their colleagues (Callon and Latour 1992; Latour 1993, 1999; Law and Hassard 1999; Hetherington and Law 2000). Actor network theorists have taken as their task the attempt to analyze and redescribe real-world phenomena in terms that are not dependent on a priori ontological distinctions between the social and the natural, subjects and objects, structure and agency. Rather, they assume that "entities take their form and acquire their attributes as a result of their relations with other entitities" (Law and Hassard 1999: 3), that is, as effects and outcomes of action and practice. The task of the theorist is to determine how it is — through what relational interactions and practices, by way of what kinds of inscription devices, translations, and mobilizations — that specific actor networks arise and achieve durable forms. How, in these processes, do certain actors successfully position themselves as central, as "obligatory points of passage," and how are "actantial roles," or functions, and "competences" distributed throughout the network? For actor network theorists, there is neither a pure nature nor a pure culture; the two are intertwined from the outset. Culture, if seen as practice and process, incorporates all those ways by which identities are shaped and societies are stabilized and sustained, with the aid of languages, ideas, images, artefacts, and machines. Analogously, nature or ecology is complex, many-layered, open-ended, richly relational and always embedded in social practices. When the ontological substance of the world is understood to be practice and process, the primary activity becomes "network building," which takes place through the enrolment and mobilization of "allies" and the

successful "translation" of interests across material expanses — as, for instance, in the way human groups "enrolled" annual grasses as allies in the transformation of the landscape we now call the agricultural revolution, or the way the disembedding of agricultural products from ritual cycles and local gift economies allowed their incorporation into regional, national, and ultimately global trading systems.

Any given landscape or site, however, can be an arena for competing attempts at network building. To take a provocative example, Valerie Kuletz's (1998) account of the "nuclear landscapes" of the American West describes the development of two rival actor-networks, or "ethnoecologies" as she calls them: that of American nuclear and military-industrial science and that of Native American (Paiute and Shoshone) traditional knowledge and subsistence practices. One might argue, along with cultural anthropologist Pramod Parajuli (1998), that the latter constitutes an "ecological ethnicity," that is, a group or groups which "have developed a respectful use of the natural resources and consequently a commitment to creating and preserving a technology that interacts with local ecosystems in a sustainable manner" (Parajuli 2004: on line), and who "maintain the rhythm of circularity and regenerative cycles of nature's economy by cultivating appropriate cosmovisions, observing related rituals, and practicing prudence in the ways they care about nature, harvest from nature, nurture nature, and in turn are nurtured" (Parajuli 2001: 560). Identity, for such groups, is intimately tied, in fact embedded, within specific relations with the natural world. However, this view also betrays the obduracy of traditional dualisms, according to which some "cultures" live "*in* nature," while others live "outside" it. Such a distinction risks repeating the trope by which "we" modern westerners are considered to have "objective science," while "they" — premoderns, "ecosystem people" — at best have "ethnosciences," "traditional knowledges," or some mysteriously other "ways of knowing."

In contrast, Kuletz's view, which is consistent with actor network theory, is that all sciences are by definition "*ethno*sciences": all are culturally specific, even if the effects of one kind of knowledge-practice may be more powerful across a broader range of contexts than those of another. Each knowledge-practice is embodied within particular modes of perception, communication, and intersubjective relationality. Nuclear science is embodied within cybernetic systems modelling, radioecology, grid-based mapping and visualization technologies, and discourses of

federal property management, national security, energy competitiveness, and scientific objectivity; while Native knowledge practices are embodied within oral narrative, ceremonial ritual, long-term land tenure and locally-based subsistence practices, including irrigation and wild seed cultivation, semi-nomadic gathering and hunting, and water source management practices. The two "networks" run parallel to each other, intersecting at various points ranging from protest sites to employment offices to a variety of sites of inscription, including legal documents, land use treaties, cultural resource studies, and so on. Rival networks are threaded together, as it were, through attempted incorporations, "translations" and "articulations" drawing together otherwise separate threads (signs, meanings, objects, places). At those nodes where an "actor" successfully establishes itself as an "obligatory passage point," a network connection is made through which agency and power (and perhaps desire, that is, libidinal investment, though actor network theorists have not commonly explored the psychoanalytical dimension) are redistributed and begin to circulate in new ways. But enrolment is always precarious, as the links and nodes of a network "need constant maintenance work" (Law 1997).

Ethnicity and ecology, then, are stitched together in a variety of ways. The above descriptions do not offer us a means of valorising one way of network-building over another. But they do provide a method of analyzing where, how, and with what tools the networks are assembled and coordinated, and thus can shed light on how those same networks might be contested, undone, or reassembled. In any case, if the world consists of dynamic heterogeneous networks, one must begin somewhere in studying these. Applying this perspective to a particular case of cultural contestation over regional identity, I will suggest in what follows that the regional scale of such a cultural-natural "imbroglio" — and the "translation nodes" at which new networks are being assembled — may be appropriate places to begin examining such issues.

Cultural colours of Cape Breton Island

Cultural identities and natural landscapes intermesh at every possible level, from the local to the global. They do this through the medium of technologies, discourses, representations, and material practices. Where the local level would seem most clearly rooted in the embodied experience of daily life, and the global level most dependent on technological distanciation (high-speed transportation and the mass

media dissemination of images and ideas), the regional level may provide a middle ground between these two extremes. A region is always defined against other regions and larger (provincial, state, or national) territorial units, but it is also one at which particular iconic sites and specific material interactions with nature play a crucial function.

A place like Cape Breton Island is a clearly defined unit in part because it is an island, separated from the Nova Scotia mainland, at least until the mile-long Canso Causeway bridged the two in 1955. Cape Breton has for long been associated in the public mind with the European immigrant populations which settled there — Gaelic speakers from Scotland, French-speaking Acadians, Irish immigrants from Newfoundland, Loyalist refugees from the American Revolution, and others — and with their activities, primarily in fisheries and in the coal and steel industries. With the latter industries having to a large degree collapsed over the last fifty years, unemployment hovering well above twice the national average, and the island leading the nation in health problems and low life expectancy (Macdonald 2002), islanders have recently been seeking "post-industrial" alternatives to revive their flagging economy. (The term "post-industrial" may be somewhat misleading, of course, since some industry will inevitably remain, and even the tourist and service industries are "industries" and rely on industrial means of production and consumption.) Alongside information-technology and a smattering of other industrial ventures, tourism has taken a front seat in this effort.

The history of mass tourism in Cape Breton Island, a history that shows a thorough imbrication of the natural and the cultural, goes back at least to the 1930s. Historian Ian McKay (1992, 1993, 1994) has exhaustively documented how urban-based cultural producers and government tourism managers, during the second quarter of the twentieth century, produced the image of Nova Scotia as a "New World Scotland" and a "timeless" place of rugged, hearty, but simple "country folk." McKay argues that the hazy generalizations and ethnic stereotypes of Scottish "Nova Scotianness" were created for economic as well as reactionary political reasons, and that this "tartanism" triumphed due in significant part to the romantic anti-modernist sensibility of Nova Scotia's most celebrated modern statesman, premier Angus L. MacDonald, who governed the province from 1933 to 1954. With the steel and coal industries centred around Sydney Harbour and its vicinity, Cape Breton at the time housed the largest industrial complex in the

Atlantic Provinces. While some Nova Scotia writers, such as C. W. Vernon (1903), had portrayed Cape Breton accurately as a hub of cosmopolitan diversity, populated by Natives, Acadians, Loyalists, Highlanders, Newfoundlanders, English immigrants, and European industrial workers, others such as Charles Dudley Warner (1874), Gordon Brinley (1936), Dorothy Duncan (1942), and Neil MacNeil (1948) portrayed the island as populated by peculiar, isolated, rough-hewn but amicable and archetypical "country folk." Following his ascent to the premiership, Angus MacDonald vigorously pursued the vision of Nova Scotia as the "last great stronghold of the Gael in America" (MacDonald 1937) and "greatest outpost of Celtic Scotland in the whole world" (MacDonald 1948). To make Cape Breton more attractive to that "whole world," MacDonald developed the Cabot Trail highway, deeded a part of the northern cape to the federal government for the creation of Cape Breton Highlands National Park, and presided over the founding of St Ann's Gaelic College (with its nostalgic-romanticist Hall of the Clans) and the construction of the Lone Shieling, a replica of a Scottish Highland crofter's cottage designed after one mentioned nostalgically in the anonymous poem "Canadian Boat Song," a poem which had already been recited by generations of Nova Scotia school children. MacDonald went so far as to suggest to his minister of mines and resources, J. A. McKinnon, that Cape Breton Highlands National Park foresters wear Scottish kilts and replace the green forester's bonnet with the "Scottish blue" (McKay 1992: 29). Nature was thus to be firmly associated in the visitor's mind with the tartan and the kilt, the cultural trappings of an ethnicity reconstructed in response to the pressures of tourism (McKay 1992: 45). Paradoxically, while a "merry tartanism covered Nova Scotia," the official neglect of the needs of Gaelic speakers led to a near disappearance of the Gaelic language in the province (McKay 1992: 34). As McKay puts it, MacDonald wrote the "saga of the Scottish soul into the province's collective memory — on its roads and signs, its festivals and gatherings" (19). Once the roads were built and a Highland bagpiper hired to greet visitors at the province's borders (a regular fixture since the 1950s), the tourist dollars could be expected to flow in smoothly.

With the opening of the Canso Causeway in 1955 and a consequently sharp increase in visiting motorists, Cape Breton's roads became crucial components of the island's tourism strategy. Facing a crisis in the coal and steel industries due to a steep drop in world prices, the Government of Canada created a crown corporation, the Cape Breton Development

Corporation, to develop a strategy for economic revival and diversification. The corporation's Industrial Development Division, which was succeeded in 1988 by the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC), developed a concerted effort for marketing the entire island as a tourism destination (Brown 1998). By 2002, out of a total population of about 145,000, Cape Breton's tourism industry employed about 6800 people and generated $230 million in annual revenues (Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation 2003).

Tourism in Nova Scotia has been vigorously promoted, and the annual *Doers' and Dreamers' Guide* (Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture 2003), a 400-plus page visitors' directory available at every tourist information centre, carefully delineates what each part of the province has to offer. The *Guide* is organized into a series of seven "trails" or "scenic travelways," to be traversed by roads spanning the province. One of these, by far the longest section in the book, is dedicated to Cape Breton Island, which is introduced as a "seat of ancient culture and hub of the Celtic music revival" (Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture 2003: 165). Curiously, which "ancient culture" is being referred to is left unclear. "For centuries," the text continues, "the Scottish and French settlers of tree-covered mountains and magnificent valleys nurtured their heritage in relative isolation"; and, a few paragraphs later, mention is made of the historically reconstructed French fortress of Louisbourg and of "centuries-old Acadian villages." But no mention is made of the Mi'kmaq, whose history on the island goes back many centuries further than those mentioned. This section of the *Guide* is further subdivided into four scenic travelways: the Ceilidh Trail, the Cabot Trail, the Bras d'Or Lakes Scenic Drive, and the Fleur-de-lis, Marconi Trails and Metro Cape Breton region. Culture here is readily mapped onto nature: as can be guessed from their names, the island's Gaelic heritage is emphasized on the western coastal Ceilidh Trail, which takes one through such fiddler-spawning villages as Creignish, Mabou, Judique, and Inverness, while the Fleur-de-lis Trail takes one through the reconstructed French fortress of Louisbourg and the Acadian fishing villages of the island's south-east coast. The most travelled route by tourists is the 300-km long Cabot Trail (named after the Italian explorer and British subject who may or may not have reached the shores of Cape Breton), which loops around the island's scenic northern peninsula and encloses Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

With the renewed emphasis on tourism in recent years, issues of cultural identity and ethnicity have necessarily sprung to the fore once again. Undoubtedly the most celebrated cultural product originating in Cape Breton recently has been the wave of "Cape Breton music" represented by such fiddlers and singers as Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, the Barra MacNeils, the Rankins, Rita MacNeil, and Mary Jane Lamond. Fiddling has been a local tradition in parts of Cape Breton since the first Gaelic settlers arrived in the late eighteenth century. When the 1971 CBC television documentary *The Vanishing Cape Breton Fiddler* suggested the tradition was on the verge of disappearing, local musicians formed the Cape Breton Fiddlers Association and launched the Glendale Festival as a way of reviving the fiddle and step dancing traditions. The popularity in the 1980s of bands like Ireland's The Pogues gave some impetus for aspiring Cape Breton musicians to electrify their music. With the more recent emergence of the phenomenally successful marketing category of "world music" and its subset "Celtic music," Cape Breton's artistic talent has finally been catapulted into international prominence, with a travel magazine recently calling the island "the Mississippi Delta" of Celtic music (*Travel and Leisure* 2003).

The Celtic Colours International Festival

In this context, it was only a matter of time before someone would come up with the idea of an international festival centred on the "Celtic music" of Cape Breton. Folk festivals have played an important role in reviving and reinventing both cultural traditions and local economies for a number of decades (Rosenberg 1993; Whisnant 1990: 181-252). The "great boom" of folk music revivals in the late 1950s and early 1960s (Rosenberg 1993: 2), which resulted in such high-profile and long-running festivals as the Newport Folk Festival (begun in 1959), the Philadelphia Folk Festival (1960), the Mariposa Festival (1961), and others, did not leave Cape Breton untouched. Local festivals had been organized in Broad Cove, Big Pond, Highland Village, Christmas Island, and elsewhere since as early as the late 1950s (MacInnes 1997: 21ff.), and the number of cultural festivals on the island has continued to grow through the last three decades, totalling over a hundred by the early 2000s.[1] When Max MacDonald and Joella Foulds of Sydney-

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1. The Centre Bras d'Or in Baddeck even attempted to establish a "Banff East" concept festival at one point. This information, along with other helpful suggestions in this section, came to me from an anonymous reviewer of this article.

based Rave Entertainment visited the Celtic Connections Festival in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1996, they were impressed enough to propose the idea of a similar festival in North America's "Celtic heartland" (MacEachen 1997a). Some wheeling and dealing and a government grant later, the Celtic Colours International Festival was born.

From its inception, Celtic Colours was strategized as an effort to extend the island's tourist season into mid-October. The "colours" of the title are a play on the implied interpenetration of the island's cultural and natural heritage, both of which will greet visitors to the island in full bloom at this autumnal harvest of artistic events, *ceilidhs* [gatherings], square dances, and celebrations. Celtic Colours has since grown into a nine-day long music and arts festival taking place in various communities around the island, and bringing in hundreds of performers from around the world. It has become one of the largest Celtic festivals anywhere, topped only by Glasgow's Celtic Connections and the Festival Interceltique de Lorient in Brittany, France. Nearly 18,000 tickets have been sold annually over each of the last three years, including about 1500 for the "World's Biggest Square Dance," as over 300 artists perform at some forty venues around the island. Workshops and visual art and craft exhibitions round out the festival's offerings for ticket buyers, about half of whom come from off the island. Each of the last three festivals has been estimated to have generated close to six million dollars for the local economy.[2] In 2005, the festival was named Event of the Year at the East Coast Music Association industry awards.

Currently in its ninth year, the festival would seem to have become a success, and it has played a pivotal role in extending the island's tourist season into mid-October. Festivals, whether traditional or commercial ones, however, are prime sites of contestation between competing forces: business interests clashing with local efforts to carve out cultural identities, preservers of tradition vying with its creative reinterpreters, "insiders" versus "outsiders," the large-scale commercial display of folklore or "fakelore" counterposed against the more "intimate" artistic encounters treasured by seekers or purveyors of "authenticity" (Dorson 1976), articulations or experiences of shared heritage and "communitas" set against expressions of intergroup differences and dissonances, and so on (Falassi 1987; Stoeltje 1983; Bendix 1989;

2.   Much of the information on the festival here is taken from news articles archived on the News page of the Celtic Colours web site (http://www.celtic-colours.com), as well as from the *Cape Breton Herald* and other local media.

Magliocco 2001; Rouse 2001). Folk festivals have been especially potent arenas for the interplay of tensions raised in the process of commodifying local culture (Bausinger 1990). Generally speaking, the larger the festival, the more crucial the role of cultural programmers in defining what will constitute folk culture (Bauman, Sawin and Carpenter 1992). In folk festivals, as Cooley observes, "the staged presentation […] of music and dance once (presumably) found in the fields, in the villages, in the log homes" — and, we might add, in the kitchens of Cape Breton — "has resulted in new rules, new performance conventions, new arenas of musical meaning" (2001: 245).

In examining the Celtic Colours International Festival, it is appropriate to ask, first of all, what its name might mean. What makes the festival, or its colours, "Celtic"? The latter term is, most basically, a linguistic category designating a subset of the Indo-European language family. Moving from a linguistic designation to an ethnic or "racial" one, however, is tricky. Some historians have argued that "Celticity" is little more than an "exoticizing" cultural strategy developed over the last three centuries, most notably during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary and intellectual movement known as the Celtic Revival, to distinguish between metropolitan Anglo-Saxon elites and their peripheral, internally colonized "others" (Chapman 1992; Brown 1996; James 1999). With the reawakening of a popular interest in ethnic identity in the 1970s (in the wake of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* and the television series based on it) and following more recent entertainments such as *Braveheart* and *Riverdance*, "Celticity" has become a source of cultural identification among North Americans of European descent seeking exotic alternatives to the Anglo-Saxon "norm" (Bowman 1994; Hale and Payton 2000). In some areas in North America and Europe, Celtic identity has begun to provide a source of white, working-class resistance to reigning discourses of liberalism and multiculturalism (Dietler 1994; McCarthy and Hague 2004). For all their centrality to European history, the "Celts," however defined, have maintained "an aura of mystery and inaccessibility" (Chapman 1994: 33) which has made them a sought-after identity resource. In light of these developments, one must wonder how recent an invention "Celtic music" may be. Does its "Celticity" lie in its instrumentation, its tonal qualities and sonorities, its vocal delivery, its lilting, dance-like rhythms and repetitive variational forms, or by the ethnic affiliations, languages spoken or sung, or "temperaments" of its performers? If instrumentation,

is it the bagpipes, tin whistles, and fiddles, or the strumming guitars, electric pianos, and synthesizer washes that increasingly fill in its textures? The recognition of "Celtic music" appears to vary depending on its context: in the United States it is more often associated with Irish music, in Canada with Scottish, and so on (Porter 1998; Thornton 1998, 2000; Sparling 2003; Chapman 1994; Hale and Thornton 2000). In the context of the music of Britain, Malcolm Chapman writes, the "Celts" "simply form the largest regiment in the phantom army of 'folk' who are the notional makers of 'folk-music'" (1994: 42).

Celtic Colours has featured an inclusive mix of performers including Cape Bretoners of Scots Gaelic ancestry and musicians from Scotland, Ireland, Brittany, and Wales. But it has also featured Acadians and other non-Gaelic Cape Bretoners, as well as musicians with no clear "Celtic" link from Louisiana, England, Germany, Denmark, and elsewhere. The festival's emphasis on "connections" and the cross-fertilization of traditions explains this inclusiveness, and nightly jam sessions at the Gaelic College provide an opportunity for the actual development of musical hybrids. The question of "Celticity" is given an interesting twist when, for instance, Spain's Galician bagpiper Carlos Nunez relays stories between songs about his band's discovery of "Celtic" bagpipers, descendants of Galician Spaniards, while on tour in Cuba. On this point, Galicians' and neighbouring Asturians' claims to "Celticity" have themselves been contested by those who demand a strict linguistic criterion for their "Celticity"; such a linguistic tradition died out several centuries ago in those Spanish provinces, and today's Galician (Galego) is a Romance language closely related to Portuguese. Yet, local activists have lobbied for their recognition as "Lands of Celtic Heritage" on the basis that the ancient Celtic tribe of Gallaeci or Callaeci, referred to by Herodotus, resided here and that Galicians today feel themselves to be as Celtic as anyone else (Robb 2003: 238; Porter 1998: n.9; A Mamoa de Dumbria 1999).

The festival has thus become a place where Celticity and pan-Celtic identities are displayed, performatively enacted, and transformed. "Celticity" here is redefined both more tightly or centrifugally — with pride of place given to Cape Breton traditions, with their unique and localized fiddle-playing styles, pianistic accompaniment, and step dance traditions that have disappeared even in the Scotland in which they ostensibly originated — and, at the same time, more expansively, extending outward into the Latin Transatlantic (via Nunez), the

American South (through the Acadian Diaspora, whose musical culture shows mutual influences with and on "Gaelic" musical traditions), the multiethnic world of "Aboriginal music" (through such artists as Mi'kmaq Cape Bretoner Lee Cremo), and into the byroads of "world music" through the various collaborations of such "Celtic music" giants and crossover artists as The Chieftains and Afro Celt Sound System (see Bohlman 2002: 43-44). Cape Breton Island is thereby repositioned from being a "rural backwater" or, at best, a peripheral outpost of cultural conservatism to what is now a lively and progressive cultural crossroads — a place that seems on its way to becoming what Latour calls an "obligatory passage point" within the transnational networks of Celticist cultural marketing. What were once local, family- and community-based performance traditions have been extended or mutated into global networks of musicianship, fandom, style, and commerce. Renamed "Celtic," the music of Cape Breton performers, from the vocal stylings of Rita MacNeil to the rocked-up performance antics of Ashley MacIsaac, comes to signify the "timeless" tradition, expressive energy, and natural and cultural "colours" of the island itself.[3] Its Celticity provides a means by which middle-class Euro-Americans can hyphenate their identities by grafting on "roots" from a part of the Old World that has become fashionably exotic. To North American "cardiac Celts" (Bowman 1994, 1996), Cape Breton can thus serve as a midway point between their mythicized North Atlantic origins and the communities of the Western Diaspora. Cape Breton becomes a place where ethnicity *almost* becomes "aboriginality," or at least where the line between the two can become provocatively blurred. The festival, in this sense, taps into and extends a transnational political project linking nationalist movements in Scotland, Wales, Cornwall, and Brittany, with their far-flung support bases abroad (see Hale and Payton 2000; Harvey, Jones, McInroy, and Milligan 2002).

Celtic Colours differs in another important respect from Celtic Connections and the Festival Interceltique. Where the others are located in a single urban area, Celtic Colours is spread out across the entire region of Cape Breton Island. This has the effect of encouraging movement, sightseeing, and consumption around the island, with

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3.   It is worth noting that the wildly controversial MacIsaac was "discovered" and his off-island career launched by the New York-based composer Philip Glass and his ex-wife JoAnne Akalaitis, who have summer homes in Inverness County (Feintuch 2004: 90; Mead 1999).

visiting concertgoers sometimes travelling a couple of hours or more between daily stops — an effect that is consistent with Angus L. MacDonald's vision of turning the island into a kind of drive-through permanent heritage museum. In 2004, festival events took place in school auditoriums, parish halls, theatres, fire halls, recreation centres, museums, and other venues in over thirty communities from one end of the island to the other. This in turn encourages and even necessitates the active involvement of local community groups in the festival. Viewed in actor-network terms, festival organizers are attempting to enrol community groups as allies and to translate their needs and desires into the delegated form of the festival network — a network in which festival organizers have become "obligatory passage points" — so that, beneath the logo of Celtic Colours, the whole island sings, dances, and rocks for nine days at the height of autumn's splendour for visitors from abroad. The success of such attempts at local mobilization is not guaranteed. While organizers may wish to encourage local residents to identify with the festival's "expansive Celticity," the festival itself has been viewed by many as merely a commercially driven product aimed at tourists, not for the local community at all. A common complaint is that the price of tickets remains well above what most Cape Bretoners would be willing to pay to see their own (or off-island) performers. (While festival performances tend to be priced around $20, concurrent non-festival performances by local favourites charge half that or less for admission.) This tension reflects what one observer has called a conflict between the "two sides of the island," where one, the Sydney-centred eastern half, holds "the population and the political influence" while Inverness County on the island's western side holds "the island's *real* assets" (cited in Feintuch 2004: 97; emphasis added). And yet, the economic gains to be made have tended to overshadow any doubts for most of the communities involved, with hundreds of volunteers participating annually and thereby partaking in the spoils.

A further, and ultimately riskier, problem with the festival's imposition of Celticity onto the island's fall "colours" is the fact that Cape Breton has long been ethnically heterogeneous, with Gaels constituting only a substantial minority.[4] (There is an ongoing debate over the appropriateness of the term "Celt" over the historically more

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4.   According to official 2001 census figures, about 40% of Cape Breton Island's 146,000 residents listed their ethnic origin as Scottish, with over two-thirds of these selecting another category as well. No "Gaelic" category was provided.

resonant term "Gael," with its focus on the specific history of the Gaelic speakers who, ostensibly, colonized the Scottish highlands and islands from Ireland some fifteen hundred years ago.) Other islanders include those of French or Acadian, English, and Irish ancestry, as well as an indigenous Mi'kmak population and a potpourri of South and East Europeans, Lebanese, African-Canadians, and other "hyphenated Canadian" ethnicities centred in the urban areas around Sydney. Not surprisingly, there is competition for scarce state resources among these different groups, and potential contention around "who speaks for the land." Of these many groups, it is the Mi'kmaq who have the longest-running claims to Cape Breton Island, or Unama'ki, as it is known in their language. With a population of some five or six thousand, or about 4% of island residents, concentrated mainly in the island's interior near the saltwater Bras d'Or Lakes, the Mi'kmaq have played a disproportionately visible role in a series of recent environmental struggles. In an alliance with non-Native environmental groups, the Mi'kmaq played a critical role in a campaign against the forestry practices of Swedish multinational Stora, and later mobilized decisive opposition against a proposed granite quarry on Kelly's Mountain (Kluskap Mountain) (Hornborg 1994, 1998; Mackenzie and Dalby 2003; Stackhouse 2001). Attempts to reinscribe a Mi'kmaq identity onto the landscape, outside of their reservations and towns, have included the proposed construction of Kluskap Kairn to memorialize those who had fallen in the four centuries of "protracted holocaust" since the arrival of white Europeans (Mackenzie and Dalby 2003: 319).

The "colour" of Celtic Colours, and of Cape Breton as a whole, is thus a site of contention, as much as it attempts to inscribe a certain identity onto the island — one of singers, dancers, fiddlers, and drinkers (jokes about the latter activity serving as a running commentary at festival events). Where Glasgow's Celtic Connections has successfully "enrolled" a certain element of Celt-identified youth, electronic music fans, and "children of Albion rovers" (Symon 2002: 195), Celtic Colours opts for a more "traditional" sound (Thompson 2003: 44). Due to its seasonal and geographic specificity and to the nature of Cape Breton tourism, the festival's audience represents a more middle-aged and

Among the other options, "Canadian" was chosen by 45% (and exclusively by 25%); English by 22% (exclusively by 5.5%); Irish by 20% (exclusively by 2.4%); French (or Acadian) by 20% (exclusively by 4%); with several others numbering in the thousands of representatives (Canada 2001).

elderly demographic (44). Young audience members are nevertheless in plentiful evidence thanks in part to the popularity of Ashley MacIsaac, Natalie MacMaster, and other young Cape Breton musical stars. But this continuing interest cannot be taken for granted. Gaelic cultural activists have argued that the festival does not contribute much to the cultural and institutional needs of local communities. It is seen by them, rather, as merely a way of capitalizing on the fad for all things "Celtic." Frances MacEachen, editor of the bilingual English-Gaelic quarterly *Am Braighe*, has compared this Celtic fad with the tartanism of previous generations. "Before we were Celtic," she has written,

> we were Scottish. Not so long ago the promoters wanted us to adorn kilts and bellow clan cries. Now, it seems, we are more photogenic with fiddles and perhaps a less ethnic look: cosmopolitan rhythms linked with ancient tunes… world music… now we're talking. Of course, the almost-fallen-down barn makes a nice backdrop now and then. … The point is that all these images are based in myth and marketing, *nothing real* (MacEachen 1997b; italics added).

MacEachen and others have argued that what is much more important for the future of Cape Breton's cultural heritage is state support for Gaelic language education (Gaelic Council of Nova Scotia 1997; MacNeil 2000; Gaelic Development Steering Committee 2002). This point is underlined by the fact that there are only perhaps some five or six hundred fluent Gaelic speakers on the island today, down from a peak of over 80,000 a century ago.

MacEachan's point that "myth and marketing" are "nothing real," however, can be disputed. Certainly, in their effects, both are very real. The question of their "realness," then, is one that brings us back to the issues which opened this study: *whose* "reality" is being referred to, and by what criteria might different "realities" be compared? For MacEachen and others, myth and marketing are "unreal" because they are imposed from without onto "real" communities that have subsisted in more or less sustainable interaction with their surroundings for generations. Gaelic storytelling, song, fiddle and bagpipe playing, and step dancing were integrated into local traditions of family and community gatherings and "kitchen ceilidhs," all embedded within a life dominated by subsistence and local market agriculture, alongside other activities. Even though their history in Cape Breton is much younger than that of the Mi'kmaq, Gaelic communities can arguably be construed as fitting into Pramod Parajuli's category of "ecological ethnicities" (as can Acadian

fishing villages and other remnants of multigenerational subsistence practices). It is often noted that Gaels settled Cape Breton because of its resemblance to the islands and highlands they left behind, a claim that establishes a certain kind of historical "continuity by resemblance." Gaelic place names are inscribed on the landscape, as are those of Acadians and others.

The thorough imbrication of culture and nature might seem a foregone conclusion, then, but this would require ignorance of the larger political ecology within which subsistence activities have historically been enmeshed. Even the pre-Columbian Mi'kmaq population maintained trading networks extending down the coast and into the interior of the continent. When they entered into trading relationships with Europeans, their fur trapping activities became nested within an international network that resulted in substantial reduction of furbearing species and in other ecological transformations. Nineteenth and early twentieth century Cape Breton rural life was similarly integrated into larger market networks. Livestock, butter, crops, and timber from more prosperous "frontland" farms were sold to markets supplying the coastal fishing and mining settlements (as well as Halifax and St. John's, Newfoundland), which in turn supplied international markets with cod, coal, and other staples. Farmers and squatters on the less prosperous "backlands" barely eked out a living and regularly resorted to seasonal migrant labour in coastal fishing towns, coal mines, or as far away as Halifax and Boston. Beef farmers faced competition from the American Midwest, just as local fishing and mining industries responded to the rise and fall in world prices for their goods (Hornsby 1992; Donovan 1990; Pryke 1992).

The point, then, is that "myth and marketing" seem less real than the musical and cultural traditions passed down from generation to generation because those cultural traditions were never marketed to larger consumption networks the way the staples of Cape Breton's economy have been. Today that situation has changed: song and dance have become the new cod and coal for many Gaelic Cape Bretoners. This point is perhaps neatly underscored by the fact that the current Minister of Tourism, Culture, and Heritage for Nova Scotia, Rodney Macdonald, happens to be an excellent young fiddler from Inverness County. Gaelic language activists like MacEachen see the popularity of Cape Breton music as an opportunity to revive the more institutionally demanding aspects of Gaelic culture, especially its

language; music, "by contrast," as Chapman puts it, "offers a pleasant and easy participation for the dilettante" (1994: 35). Analogously, Acadian communities have begun to cultivate their own international cultural networks, giving rise to a resurgence of interest in Acadian culture and language among its millions-strong Diaspora which, following the Great Expulsion of 1755-1763, has spread itself deep into North America as far as the Louisiana Bayou and beyond. In the summer of 2004, Acadian communities hosted a two-week long, province-wide World Acadian Congress (Congrès mondial acadien), which attracted over 200,000 visitors and featured about a hundred "family reunions" and a variety of concerts and cultural events, including a sweeping historical music-theatre epic, involving over two hundred mainly young performers, documenting the deportation of Acadians from their homeland by the British and promoting a resurgence of Acadian cultural identity and pride. As this suggests, Acadians and other Nova Scotians are variously striving to attract visitors to a place where nature and culture have always been intertwined, and where the social reverberations of their contrasting "intertwinings" have occasionally resulted in unpleasant, even genocidal, episodes.

"Culturing" Cape Breton's nature

The Celtic Colours International Festival, then, can be viewed as a form of network building unfolding on several scalar levels. It is one arm of a strategy by which some island entrepreneurs are repositioning Cape Breton as central within expanding global tourist flows, and themselves as crucial links or "obligatory passage points" within this redrawn circulation of commerce, tourism, and cultural meaning. It is a means by which a relatively cold maritime landscape is made attractive through a discursive linkage with the pleasing imagery of autumn foliage in the midst of scenic mountain and highland topography, and through which that landscape is painted "Celtic." It is a medium by which "Celticity" is redefined and shaped as a transnational cultural discourse linking a series of white Euro-Atlanticist cultures, musics, fashions, and political projects. And it is part of a set of contests and contrasts by which Cape Bretoners articulate their own identities, questioning and selecting from among those offered to them (deskilled labourers and unemployment recipients, kilt-wearing "Scots" and cosmopolitan "Celts") and crafting their own ("Gaels," "insiders" or "real islanders" as opposed to "outsiders," city folk and off-islanders) in opposition to

those offered. In forging the natural-cultural network embodied in festival imagery, what was once the most industrialized region of the Atlantic provinces now boasts the kind of expressive harmony between "nature" and "culture" that tourists increasingly seek. For visitors, mobilized by ad campaigns and word of mouth to participate in the inflow of money onto the island, the landscape of Cape Breton Island, seen primarily through the windshield and the camera lens and punctuated by visits to museums and souvenir shops, becomes organized through the festival's itinerary of cultural events.

The "nature" being produced on the island, however, is very much a cultural production. Even the most "natural" of the four themed trails making up the tourist's Cape Breton, the Cabot Trail and the national park it loops around, offers a designed experience of nature. At its very inception, the national park was intended as a drive-through showpiece of visual scenery — the "coastal sublime," as historian Alan MacEachern (2001: 48) has called it. The road was to be the park's "signature attraction," and the province supported its creation in large measure for the road building it would make possible (64-65). Once the park boundaries were defined, land and property owners bought out and "squatters" resettled, and new land use restrictions set in place, the "final stage" in making it a park was "to give it a single meaning, to make the part establishment and the park itself *seem natural*" (68, italics added). In the "tartanist" spirit of Angus L. MacDonald's Nova Scotia, this meant to make it an "intrinsically Scottish" place. Where previous descriptions of the area had included comparisons to Scandinavian fjords, Bermuda beaches, and Scottish highlands, now that interpretive pluralism would be reduced to the latter alone. Government documents in 1936 compared the area's landscape to Scotland's, the new provincially run hotel was renamed Keltic Lodge, and the holes of its golf course were given Scottish names, such as "Tam O'Shanter," "Muckle Mouth Meg," and "Cuddy's Lugs" (MacEachern 2001: 70; McKay 1992: 31). Although the name of the park itself was intended by acting superintendant James Smart to be a signifier of both the French ("Cap Breton") and Scottish ("highlands") pasts, by its official opening in 1941, "complete with kilts and bagpipes," the "smattering of French-, Scottish- and English-Canadian communities encircling a largely unknown interior" was transformed "into a single unit with a single owner and a single theme" (MacEachern 2001: 70-71). A hybrid landscape was thus translated and refashioned into a "New Scotland" that was both older

and more fantastic than the one left behind by Cape Breton's Gaelic settlers.

Today the Cabot Trail winds its rollercoaster-like way along or near the coastline, offering views of mountains, cliffs, stunning drops to the shore and its expanse of ocean, and of roadside gift shops and hints of the (now much quieter) fishing villages that still span much of the coast. As the road's eastern arm crosses northward across the park boundary, an interesting transformation occurs, as all traces of "lived culture" disappear and are replaced by what Wilson (1992) would have called "the culture of nature": signs directing visitors to scenic overlooks, roadside parking areas, and numbered trailheads, all stitched together by the familiarly minimalist semiotic of yellow-on-brown National Parks signs — a question mark indicating an information booth, an upside-down "V" for a camping area, a stick-figured, circle-headed, binocular-holding humanoid indicating a lookout point, and so on. As the highway winds through the area of North Mountain and South Mountain, both the lookout points and the cars in their parking lots increase in number, and, at the height of fall, the foliage blazes in remarkable colours from the wall of highlands facing the cars and onlookers. Of the few cultural markers recognized in the parks signage, the Lone Shieling seems a lonely remnant of a long lost culture, a fixture of a Scottish Highlanddom now firmly canonized as "heritage," not a living one but merely one that haunts (though the house was never lived in to start with). Finally, a dozen or so scenic viewpoints later, as the visitor departs the park's western boundary, the landscape seems suddenly "real" again, with the white and pastel-coloured Acadian homes, with their gently-pitched, seaward-sloping roofs, straddling the road, and the hardware stores, doughnut shops, and bed and breakfasts of the seaside village of Chéticamp. It is almost as if a black-and-white — or green — screen has suddenly burst into living colour, abounding in the lived culture of human livelihoods being made, with even the optimistic economic sign of fishing boats in the harbour. Or is it the other way around, with the national park's muted signage highlighting the living colour of its scenery, while this thoroughly "cultured" world outside it serves as its black-and-white foil? This simple drive across the park boundary suggests how the "colouring" (and "discolouring") of the landscape is an always cultural affair, one made of political decisions and spatial and semiotic practices demarcating between land set aside as "nature" and that which is manifestly a hybrid intermingling of humans and nature, but which, in the Cape Breton context, always also represents "heritage."

Vehicular mobility is central to this experience of Cape Breton, as it is to the practice of attending the Celtic Colours festival. So it is perhaps a little surprising that the most recent addition to the festival program has been the introduction of Celtic Colours Walks, a series of twelve guided walks "through many of Cape Breton's most beautiful hiking trails and towns" (Celtic Colours Festival Society 2004). Organized by the Cape Breton Island Hoppers Volkssport Club, the walks program is consistent with the "Trails for all Seasons" idea, which the Cape Breton Tourism Road Map Destination Development Plan (Economic Growth Solutions Inc. 2003) has identified as a priority development opportunity for the island. Cape Breton receives some 750,000 non-resident visitors every year, and over half of them engage in some form of leisure walking or hiking (Economic Planning Group of Canada 2003: 3, 33). Some community groups have been developing their own trails strategies to take advantage of the tourist resource, thereby extending visitors' stays in the area. One of these groups, the Cape Mabou Trail Club, has restored old settlers' cart tracks and produced a bilingual English-Gaelic map of the Cape Mabou Highlands, featuring Gaelic place and trail names with English phonetic pronunciations. Heritage tourism, in this case an interest in the Gaelic settler history of the highlands, dovetails with ecotourism in this area the club calls "coastal wilderness," though much of it had been cleared for farms by early settlers and still shows the signs of former trails, farms, and ruins of old coal mines.

The potential for similar hybrids of cultural-natural heritage tourism is great in the region. This article has only explored a few of its existing forms, but there are others which can be foreseen in the future development of tourism on the island, including in the Acadian fishing villages and Mi'kmak reservations. If Cape Breton Highlands National Park best represents a seemingly "pure" or "pristine" nature, the kind most attractive to ecotourists and nature photographers, the more hybrid ethnoecologies such as the Cape Mabou trails and aspects of the Celtic Colours festival itself may better represent the "real" history of the island. To call these "*ethnoecologies*" may seem a misnomer. Hiking, photography, and attendance at cultural performances and *ceilidhs* are very different ways of engaging with a place than are farming, fishing, or mining. Yet each is nested within a set of larger networks within which ideas and images of nature, of cultural identity, and of place are generated and circulated. Ecologies, of course, also include other forms

of life — other kinds of agency besides the human. These range from the wildlife of the Cape Breton Highlands National Park interior to the whales and puffins off the coast to the weather itself, and they are differentially affected by the management regimes of the national park and of the world outside its boundaries, but these must remain a topic for another discussion.

Conclusion

Cape Bretoner ethnoecologies have always been heterogeneous, dynamic, and entangled in larger networks. Mi'kmaq ethnoecologies, until the arrival of Europeans, may not have changed quite as rapidly as those of the last hundred years, but today's island communities face decisions in which change and adaptation loom large. Viewing nature, culture, and their intertwining, as products of social, economic and ecological practice, heterogeneous network building, the pertinent questions become: how are cultural and natural identities reconfigured by the different network-options facing a region? How does each of these redraw local networks and manoeuvre them into larger, more global networks of culture, fashion, politics, and economics? How might they redistribute agency and power among local constituents, positioning some as central intermediaries for marginalized others? Issues of representation and mediation crop up in the many nodes at which a network is assembled. For instance, in the case of Cape Breton tourism, if the island is rearticulated as a "seat of ancient culture," as the provincial tour guide insists, whose ancientness is being referred to? Should it be the transplanted ancientness embodied in the Lone Shieling (thereby upstaging First Nations claims to the land), or that of the Mi'kmaq whose struggles would be monumentalized in Kluskap Kairn? How does this articulation affect the various contenders for the "ancient" past, the nascent future, the "real" and the "unreal" present? How ought collective identities reshape themselves in response to the warp and woof of broader political ecologies of production, consumption, power and desire, ecologies which are always plurally cultural and laden with difficult choices?

Questions such as these suggest, at the very least, that the stitching together of people and place, cultural identity and landscape, is never a straightforward process and is rarely settled for very long. They are, indeed, part of the ongoing colouring and recolouring of the landscape,

a process that today is as global as it is local, regional, or national. It is a process that intensifies the production of distinct cultural identities at the same time as it blurs the distinctions between culture and commerce. Cape Breton Island, in this analysis, is thus as central a node to global cultural change as any other.

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