

A Region and Its Journal

Guy Gautreau

Not long ago, I spoke to a friend's father who explained to me how in the 1970s he and a few others adopted 'alternative' farming methods in areas of Northeastern New Brunswick. As I was being educated on the adventure of the project, which had created heartfelt memories for the golden-aged man (perhaps because of the tinge of entrepreneurial anarchy involved), I couldn't help but make associations with International Relations. Specifically, the project in question seemed to both defy and illustrate principles of the Green Revolution and the Green Perspective.

The group experimented with a biodynamic farming technique whereby a historically significant food staple for the region—buckwheat—was used in rotation with other crops. This plant is very good at drawing nutrients back into the soil and in addition, a white-flowered type of buckwheat is particularly attractive for bees. This man, having been trained in the almost abstruse art of apiculture, knew that good honey could be produced along with the growing of buckwheat. In a matter of months, agricultural yields increased, buckwheat flower was being sold to a small supplier in Japan and the honey, apparently of fine quality, was being exported to a kosher food market in New York. The project's dynamic wilted when the Japanese buyers insisted on there being less sand particles mixed in with the flour, which was impossible due to the soil quality.

The connection between the lives of local farmers, local call-center employees or local golf course managers and international affairs is made less arbitrary by a deeper understanding of how both the local and the global spheres are interrelated. Making these types of connections is most often the purpose of International Studies journals such as this one. So what of the lives of Atlantic Canadians? What parallels and responsibilities then, if any, exist between

what the *Atlis* journal explores and the events taking place this side of the sea? Although Atlantic Canada is often characterized as being predominantly 'local' (due to its small population, its high rural to urban demographic ratio and its almost tangential place in federal politics) its relation with the larger international stage is more problematic. Theoretical frameworks such as those applied in this journal may surely be applied similarly to Atlantic Canada as a whole in an attempt to answer this question.

Regionalism concerns political integration among neighbouring states and economic integration among free-trade areas, but also multidimensional relations between governments and citizens. Coping with lower equalization payments than in years past, replacing the fishing industry with sporadic local tourist sites and the emergence of new institutions all have significant impacts on Atlantic Canada.

Consider the following example. The concept of *Atlantica*—also dubbed the International Northeast Economic Region—is based on the idea that a trade corridor would extend roughly from Halifax to Buffalo. The project is promoted by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS), a Halifax-based think tank, which asserts among other things that *Atlantica* would lead to trade-related growth. The Halifax-Boston gas pipeline appears to be one of their selected symbols for this alliance. *Atlantica* they argue, would allow for increased competition in the airline industry, ensure Halifax benefits from Chinese cargo destined to Boston or New York by intercepting naval trade routes passing via the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and lead to the formation of a more coherent common market (of 5-8 million people) for goods and services. The theory is rooted in a book by Perry Newman, and holds that the region is characterized by common historical, economic and political bonds, as well as underemployment and

low population and should thus somehow be amalgamated. As a result however, more resources would have to be invested in infrastructure, especially roads, and countless other concessions made.

As for social capital, apart from the fact that people can travel to the most hidden hamlet in the area and begin a conversation based on the weather, there are obviously very complex systems of meanings binding the inhabitants of Atlantic Canada. In her attempts to find exactly what these are, Margaret Conrad, Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies at UNB, looks with a certain curiosity at the factors behind social relations in Atlantic Canada and identifies 'historical consciousness', among others, as especially relevant. For instance, prominent Acadian cultural figures have argued that the modern significance of the Deportation lies in the fact that its memory has been appropriated to fill an identity void left open by the fact that there exists no distinct Acadian territory; in this sense, the Deportation represents the cornerstone of a common social structure.

Furthermore, Conrad argues that a 'debilitating conservatism in social outlook and public policy' is sustained by 'romanticized notions of pre-industrial utopias,' with regards to Atlantic Canada. The significance of history in creating regional identities appears at once authentic and subservient. Even now, it is not clear to me whether lighthouses are being saved because of historical importance or as tourist attractions. Atlantic Canadians seem attached to the idea of self-sufficiency despite the fact that they import more than three quarters of their food.

A couple years ago, I attended a presentation by John Ralston Saul during which he declared that he was likely one of the few who believed 'globalization' was already nearing its end. Instead, he proposed that regions exactly like Atlantic Canada exemplified a type of social livelihood to come, which to me seemed to be explained by a synthesis of Huntington's 'Clash' and Fukuyama's 'End'. Economic integration across borders will persist, but alongside a resurgent desire among individuals to discover cultural roots, reconfigure social identities and 'attach' themselves philosophically to something more timeless than social trends that come and go.

Although theoretical frameworks in most cases elucidate the impact of international affairs on localities, sometimes the locality becomes the model explaining international affairs. The processes of globalization are not restricted to international events; they are also evident in the smallest of anecdotes. Learning about one will teach us about the other. Increased awareness of issues such as the plight of AIDS victims, economic development in India and melting ice caps may finally encourage Canadians to be more attentive to aboriginal communities' hardships and successes in the region. I have met many people who have traveled to sub-Saharan Africa, but none to this day who has really visited a Canadian aboriginal reserve. Some writers in this journal undoubtedly have little in terms of relationship with Atlantic Canada yet took part in this project. They may ultimately reveal things about another 'Atlantic Canada.' Making links between 'local and local' instead of 'local and global' might eventually be where these types of projects are bringing us.