

Seeking New Autonomies: State Rescaling, Reterritorialization and Minority Identities in Atlantic Canada

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Introduction

Canada's federal system is one of the most decentralized in the world, with its ten provinces constitutionally endowed with broad jurisdictional and taxing powers which make them crucial political actors – either solely or in concert with the federal government – in most fields of Canadian public policy. Not only is it the dominant institutional framework for Canadian politics, federalism is also the primary influence shaping political discourse, the system of interest group representation, and individual political identities (Simeon 2009). The study of regions and regionalism in Canada, with its highly regionalized geography, economy, and politics, has been similarly affected by the omnipresent reality of strong provincial governments standing in as claimants to be the legitimate political voice of regions, making federal-provincial relations the main mechanism for negotiating and resolving regional differences and grievances (Meekison, Telford & Lazar 2004).

The reasons for this more or less direct substitution of province for region are several. It can be understood as a straightforward function of the predominant role of provinces in the daily lives of individual Canadians due to their constitutional role in the provision of educational, health, and social services, their extensive regulatory power over civil society, and their direct control over municipalities. An additional significant factor has been that the historic role of Quebec as the primary homeland and defender of the rights of Canada's French-speaking minority has had a long-term, decentralizing impact on the Canadian federation (Gibbins 1982). Finally, the predominant political role of 'provinces as regions' is also a function of what many have argued (over many years) is poor institutional design, in particular the failure to provide Canadians with a politically-legitimate group of national legislators elected on the basis of equitable regional representation, and with a mandate to represent regional interests and identities within the national legislature and federal government. Without such a body – equivalent to the elected Senates of the United States or Australia, or the members of the German Bundesrat – the protection and promotion of regional interests within the Canadian House of Commons (historically dominated by population-heavy central Canada) has been woefully inadequate. This has left the provinces as the only effective channel for the routing of regional claims, interests and grievances, further entrenching their position and empowering their role and claim to be the only effective and legitimate voice of region (Bickerton 2007).

In many ways, the gravitational pull of provinces has been a 'black hole' for other forms and expressions of region in Canada.¹ The virtual fusion of province and region has privileged the study of federalism as the 'main game' of Canadian domestic politics, with the admittedly beneficial result of producing a long and distinguished list of federal scholars and a copious literature that explores federalism's role within and effects upon virtually every facet of Canadian politics and governance. A less positive effect of the tendency to collapse regions into provinces has been the relative neglect of other political expressions of regional and minority identities and the relegation of all other forms of spatial politics – with the notable exception of the study of regionalism in national party politics – to the relatively under-examined fields of provincial and urban politics. In other words, this conflating of province and region and the subsuming of regionalism under federalism has often entailed a loss rather than gain of explanatory power. Of course, federalism is itself a form of government that is based on institutionalized regionalism; nor can there be any denying that the provinces generally act and operate as highly-institutionalized regions. Therefore, while it may be understandable that

provinces as ‘uber-regions’ inevitably will cast a large ‘shadow of hierarchy’ over other types of region in Canada, this should not be allowed to totally obscure the latter as legitimate objects of study, or similarly the complex relationships between various types of region and the federal system more generally.

One problem with realizing a more sophisticated and nuanced understanding of regional and other forms of spatial politics has been the dominance, arguably even overdevelopment, of the analytical frameworks and concepts associated with federalism, to the exclusion of other modes of spatial analysis. In particular, Canadian political scientists have been slow to incorporate the insights of geographers, sociologists, and political economists who have been developing and applying new spatial concepts and analytical frameworks that are not primarily derived from or influenced by the study of federalism, and are therefore less likely to be ‘captured’ by its prevailing assumptions and empirical foci. The emergence – some say ‘re-discovery’ – of critical spatial theory, and the development of a more refined vocabulary and conceptual framework of space and society, opens possibilities for the examination of political expressions of territorial identities and affinities *other than province*, the construction of these identities, the diverse autonomy and empowerment strategies that have been employed, and the interplay between federalism and these potential or emergent autonomies, particularly in light of the shifts in national and global political economy that have altered the conditions and strategies for regional and local development.

Scale and Territory

In a recent review of critical geographical scholarship, Neil Brenner identifies four geographical dimensions that are co-constitutive of social space (sociospatiality): place, territory, scale, and network.² This study will concern itself primarily with application of the concepts of territory and scale. *Territory* and territoriality entails the enclosure, bordering and parcelization of social relations (for example, through the national or regional state). State territorial structures demonstrate considerable rigidity, providing a “fixed, stable and immobile grid of institutionalized sociospatial divisions – a world of parcelized, bordered spaces – for the process of capital accumulation”. Once established, these bounded territories are difficult to modify, creating a “deep structure” of sociospatial organization, “an element of fixity on an otherwise changing geographical landscape” (Brenner 2009a: 39).

Scale and scaling entails the vertical differentiation of social relations among, for example, global, supranational, national, regional, urban, and local levels. For Agnew, scale is “the focal setting at which spatial boundaries are defined for a specific social claim, activity or behavior” (Agnew 1997: 100; cited in Keil and Mahon, 2009: 8). Byron Miller adds that scale is not just about the vertical differentiation of territorially-constituted institutions, but also the assignment of responsibilities and the social construction of capacities of those institutions (Miller 2009: 53). This raises the possibility of *rescaling*. There have been many instances of state-initiated rescaling processes in the history of the Canadian federation. For example, social services have been rescaled upward from the municipal to provincial level out of concern for geographic and social equality in access to services; the provision of economic infrastructure has been variously rescaled from the provincial to federal or municipal to federal level as part of regional and urban development programs. On the other hand, social housing was rescaled from the federal to provincial to municipal level during a period of federal austerity and downloading

of responsibility, with negative results for social equality and the problem of homelessness in major urban centres (Mahon, Andrew, & Johnson 2007).

Scale-shifting refers to changing the relationships, the sets of participants, and the resources involved as a strategy of contentious politics; depending on the circumstances, both ‘scaling-up’ and ‘scaling-down’ can produce a more favourable political opportunity structure for particular interests (Miller 2009: 53-4). Political actors naturally attempt to gain standing at the scalar level that best suits their objectives, but also wish to control or have an influence over the process by which responsibilities and capacities are rescaled. The process of scale-shifting or scale-jumping to gain political advantage also relates to the existence of extra-local rule regimes, referred to by Peck as *interscalar rule regimes*, “that constrain and channel the strategic options and tactical behavior of local actors” (Miller 2009: 55). Higher level institutions establish and limit the scope for policy and action at lower levels, enabling or preventing democratically-made decisions. Since governance authority or capacity can be shifted among different levels in a nested scalar hierarchy, political struggle will shape the powers associated with scale as level (Miller 2009: 56). In this way, rescaling becomes a process for “empowering, or disempowering, particular groups or classes” (Miller 2009: 57). Besides shifting responsibilities and capacities between levels of government, rescaling also can involve the invention of new scales of action. Thus, according to Latour, “scale is the actor’s own achievement” (Keil and Mahon 2009: 15), while Magnusson claims that “[W]e scale politics to our own purposes” (Magnusson 2009: 106).

Also important to the ‘geopolitical economy of state space’ (Brenner 2009b: 124) is the concept of *uneven spatial development* (USD). This is a process – the production of geographical difference under modern capitalism – that differentiates global, national, regional, urban and local scales, which are both a medium and a product of USD under capitalism (Smith as cited in Brenner 2009a: 28). The state is central to these processes. Existing not just as a *site* – a stable platform of institutional organization – through which political strategies can be mobilized to influence patterns of uneven spatial development, state scalar organization also can be examined as a key *mechanism* and *outcome* of political strategies (Jessop as cited in Brenner 2009b: 126). The nested, hierarchical, scalar structures of the state are ‘historically malleable’, subject to rupturing and reweaving ‘through the very political strategies they enable,’ and a ‘key means through which social forces may attempt to rejig the balance of power.’ They can become “important platforms for social forces confronting USD and harnessing the institutional resources and capacities of the state in pursuit of these agendas,” whether to manage the contradictory social relations of capitalism, to pursue more balanced development, or to alter inter-group or inter-region relationships (Brenner 2009a: 41; 2009b: 26). Ultimately, understanding the rescaling of state spaces means relating these processes to “shifts in economic conditions, state spatial strategies, political-territorial alliances and the balance of social forces” (Brenner 2009b: 135).

It may be that the sociospatial theories of radical geography and geopolitical economy can usefully augment and perhaps reinterpret the many insights of more traditional approaches to the study of federalism and regionalism. Furthermore, this interpellation of perspectives ideally could be employed in a fashion that complements the philosophical, political and legal theorizing about cultural pluralism, minority rights, democracy, and political stability. While such a melding of literatures is beyond the scope of this study, it does suggest a potential confluence of discrete empirical studies and theory construction that could transform the study of regions by

initiating or revisiting scholarly inquiries into a wide variety of territorial and cultural communities.

As previously suggested, federal state structure and institutions exercise powerful path dependency effects on the emergence and spatial political strategies of distinct communities that are potential seekers of new autonomies, either within or outside federal structures. In Brenner's terms, the leaderships of these communities have employed rescaling strategies in an effort to transform inherited socio-spatial configurations by contesting the 'scalar architecture of uneven spatial development.' Inevitably, these strategies have collided with the 'inherited landscapes of state scalar organization' (Brenner 2009b: 134). In this collision, it can be expected that the architecture of federalism will frustrate and constrain, but also may offer possibilities for the emergence of new autonomies, territorial or otherwise.

The New Regionalism

While the starting point for political regions is usually that they are institutionally-based and endowed with administrative and political structures, their further 'construction' usually involves bringing them into existence as 'imagined communities' able to sustain a vision around the theme of development. Institutions, culture, and leadership matter to this continual process of region-building (Keating, Loughlin, Deschower, 2003). In theorizing about the relationship between institutions and regional development, various schools of thought associated with what has come to be known as 'the new regionalism' have contributed a number of insights about the success or failure of regions: the importance of 'institutional thickness' at the regional level, the often key role of 'associational economies' that are socially-embedded in territorial space, and in the same vein the presence of local collaborative networks that both contribute to and rely upon social capital (which is itself seen as directly relevant to social cohesion, political stability and development). Path dependency is another concept central to the thinking of new regionalism scholars: the observation that decisions and choices are constrained by previous decisions and choices, and likewise that established institutions (a distillation of the norms and values embodied in past decisions and choices) have a powerful influence on both the conceptualization and resolution of problems, such that different societies can remain on different trajectories even when faced with the same problems and external pressures (Keating, Loughlin, Deschower, 2003: 23).

Further, culture – which provides a framework for collective action and a rationale for social cooperation – also matters. It is increasingly recognized that distinct local cultures can be an asset to development and a means of coping with globalization. Traditional cultures – in the form of a modernized tradition that sustains a vision of region while projecting a dynamic image – have been revalorized coincident with the 'rediscovery' of local and regional production systems and state restructuring on a territorial basis, suggesting the interaction between cultural reinvention and economic restructuring. Similarly, there is a growing consensus, fostered by a new middle class, on the desirability of minority languages as a symbol of identity and as a useful piece of human capital, as opposed to their previous association with backwardness and parochialism (Keating, Loughlin, Deschower, 2003: 181-2).

Finally, leadership assumes a strong role in building the region by synthesizing divergent elements into a regional project that further contributes to the construction of the imagined regional community. In essence, regions are built and rebuilt by political and social actors in

given contexts. Culture and identity are both a condition under which leadership operates and a product of that leadership as they invoke cultural images and identities – make use of culture – in their pursuit of the regional development project (Keating, Loughlin, Deschower 2003: 27). This makes the presence of an elected regional government key to social mobilization and collective action. It creates the region as a political space and endows it with democratic legitimacy and institutional boundaries within which actors must operate, making it difficult for any of them to ‘defect’ (Keating, Loughlin, Deschower, 2003: 183).

Atlantic Canada: A Region of Regions

Atlantic Canada is comprised of the four provinces adjacent to Canada’s Atlantic coast: Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island. All four are small in population, ranging from 150,000-950,000, and taken together amount to only 7% of the total population of Canada. The four provinces have existed as separate political entities since 1784, entering the Canadian federation with their political boundaries intact (Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in 1867, PEI in 1873, Newfoundland in 1949). The region is further fragmented by its geography (two of the provinces are islands and one is a peninsula). Economically the region prospered during the 19th century, specializing in a fishing, shipping and shipbuilding role within Britain’s global maritime empire. Its economic fortunes were more mixed in the 20th century. Industrialization in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick stalled after the First World War when consolidation and centralization processes led to the concentration of industry in Central Canada (southern Ontario and western Quebec), while Newfoundland (the fishery) and PEI (agriculture) remained primarily resource based economies. The existence of significant economic disparities between the region and the rest of Canada was apparent as early as the 1920s, but it wasn’t until the late 1950s that the Canadian state began to address the situation through a fiscal equalization scheme and various regional development programs (Bickerton 1990). Today the region still trails the rest of Canada on most economic indices, though the development of offshore oil has dramatically altered the economic and fiscal situation of Newfoundland and Labrador.³ Ethnically and linguistically New Brunswick stands out from the other provinces because of its significant minority of French-speaking Acadians. Otherwise the region is fairly homogeneous in terms of its predominantly Anglo-Celtic lineage, though there are notable Acadian and African minorities in Nova Scotia, and a small Aboriginal population scattered throughout the region.

Atlantic Canada’s long history as a peripheral economic region generally has not provided a basis for autonomist or secessionist movements, parties or governments, with a few notable exceptions. Nova Scotia spawned the first secessionist movement in Canada when it stated its objection to Confederation in 1867 by returning mostly anti-confederates to Parliament, and later electing a provincial government on a secessionist platform. In the 1920s, during a period of de-industrialization, a regional protest movement led by local business and political elites gathered momentum, developed a platform, and swept political sympathizers into office. While it did extract some policy concessions from the federal government of the day, these were largely ineffectual and the movement eventually petered out (Forbes 1979). Since that time the region has been relatively quiescent politically, seeking accommodations and concessions through the national party system and federal-provincial relations, particularly in the forms of

political patronage, regionalized social programs and development policies, and most importantly, inter-provincial fiscal equalization (Bickerton 1999; Savoie 2007).

Over the past half-century there has been some movement toward both convergence and divergence within the region. An economic merger or political union of the three 'Maritime provinces' (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and PEI) has been promoted from time to time as a solution to the region's economic ills, and was the object of a major intergovernmental study in the late 1960s. While various forms of regional cooperation resulted from this initiative, its recommendation for political union generated little popular support and was quickly dismissed by provincial politicians (Bickerton 1994). Standing somewhat apart from the Maritimes, Newfoundland and Labrador, a late entrant to the federation and perennially the poorest province in the country, has witnessed the emergence of a prominent strain of neo-nationalism and autonomist politics. This persistent political orientation draws on the province's distinctive history, culture and identity, and is fueled by resentment toward external political and economic forces that have been blamed for the province's historic disappointments and difficulties. It recently appears to have been strengthened by the prospect (now being realized) of a high-growth, resource-based economy based on offshore oil and gas, the discovery of huge mineral deposits, and major hydroelectric capacity (Bannister 2002).

Thus, while 'Atlantic Canada' can be classed a region, this does not extend beyond certain limited purposes. It has proven a convenient construct for federal administrative purposes, as a composite spatial term that handily designates a physically-adjacent grouping of provinces that for decades have occupied the lowest rungs on provincial growth and development indices, and as a sometimes useful self-designation for regional advocates taken on for lobbying or defensive purposes when the interests of the four provinces happen to coincide. Beyond this, there are no substantive institutional supports for an Atlantic region; nor is there a shared regional identity of any consequence. Instead, the four provinces – with their extensive institutional and political architectures, their broad powers and responsibilities, and their distinctive political histories, party systems and associational networks – have fostered entrenched provincial attachments that have a functional, political, and to some extent cultural basis. For most intents and purposes, then, provinces constitute the only regional political identities that have abiding significance and relevance for the citizens of Atlantic Canada. At the same time, there is no indication, with the somewhat qualified exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, that these regional affinities and identities have weakened or detracted from a strong sense of national identity as Canadians (cite survey data). In this sense, national and regional identities continue to co-exist within the region in a benignly-complementary, if not mutually-reinforcing, nested hierarchy of political identities, one that is largely unperturbed by 'normalized' and institutionally-contained outbreaks of federal-provincial disagreement and conflict.

The historic dominance of this federal-provincial, national-regional political dynamic, reflected in institutional arrangements and political discourse, is the central reality of national and regional political life. The same can be said for scholarly focus and interest. One unfortunate consequence of this, as previously noted, has been the dearth of attention (and a measure of disciplinary blindness) toward other manifestations of region, regionalism, or spatial politics more generally, or alternatively their somewhat ill-fitting incorporation into the conceptual frameworks and modes of analyses of federalism and intergovernmental relations.

Yet there have been and continue to be other regions of note within the province-regions of Atlantic Canada. These are variously rooted in historical claims of nationhood and autonomy, ethno-linguistic, cultural and socio-economic community, and/or territorial and place-based affinities. Their pursuit of cultural recognition and preservation, equality, development, and territorial justice has recommended or supported, depending upon particular circumstances and context, political projects tending toward increased regional integration with the broader economy and society, or more political autonomy, and when perceived to be mutually linked or supportive toward community concerns and objectives, both in tandem. The remainder of this study will briefly examine two of Atlantic Canada's 'regions within region': Acadie and Cape Breton.

Acadie

In the 17th and 18th centuries, the region now referred to in Canada as 'the Maritimes' was known as Acadie. While it remains a recognizable region today, with a prominent place in the history and identity of those Maritimers who are French-speaking or of French-speaking descent, Acadie now generally refers to not the whole region, but only those areas that are home to predominantly Acadian communities. These are concentrated in northern and eastern New Brunswick, southwestern Nova Scotia, some areas of PEI and Cape Breton, the Magdalen Islands, and a few settlements elsewhere (the Gaspé region of Quebec and southern Newfoundland). As such, Acadie is a geographically-fragmented region, but all the same a distinctive community held together by the durable bonds of a shared history, language, religion, and culture. Numbering about 300,000 people, Acadians are the descendents of the first European settlers in what would later become Canada, with their origins dating back to Samuel de Champlain's 'Acadian years,' pre-dating his founding of Quebec in 1608. A century after their initial settlement, they constituted a prosperous and self-contained agricultural community spread over the more arable valleys and marshlands of the region, which through their extensive labours they had successfully diked and developed.

By the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, political and military control over the lives of the Acadians had passed for the last time to Britain (suzerainty over them having changed hands between the French and English more than a dozen times during the previous century). While the Acadians conveyed to British colonial authorities an oath of strict neutrality in the event of further military hostilities, the French and British Empires continued to vie for control of the region, and with yet another European war looming in 1755, an absolute oath of loyalty to the British Crown was demanded from community leaders. When this was not immediately forthcoming, the seminal event in Acadian history occurred: the deportation of the Acadian population, known to the Acadians as the Grand Dérangement. Eight years later by the Treaty of Paris, France ceded all of its claims and possessions in continental North America to the British, and the dispersed Acadians were soon thereafter permitted to return from exodus. That a fragment of the former Acadian population did so and managed to re-establish themselves in the region (though not on their former agricultural lands, which had been granted in their absence to New England settlers) became the foundational element and myth of Acadian history and identity: perseverance and redemption in the face of calamity, injustice and insuperable odds (Griffiths 1973; Basque 2010).

While some assimilation to the Anglophone world occurred, what followed for most Acadians was a century of virtual isolation from the surrounding (now majority) English-speaking community, due to their language, religion, territorial remoteness, but also by community choice, an historical period memorialized by renowned Acadian author Antonine Maillet in her book, *Cent ans dans les bois*.⁴ In the mid-19th century, a movement began to establish colleges, convents, and other Acadian-controlled cultural and social institutions, and by the 1880s a full-blown Acadian renaissance was underway. This paralleled in time a similar nationalist surge in Quebec, but with each French-speaking society organizing its own national society, and choosing its own distinctive flag, anthem, and national day. Though their communities remained peripheral within the region, tied to resource industries and relatively impoverished, over the next several decades Acadian business, professional and political elites emerged. And despite their continued minority status, and the dominance of English-speakers within the realms of economy and politics, there were a number of gestures toward Acadians on the part of both the federal and provincial governments that gave legitimacy to their belief that they constituted a distinct nation within Canada (Basque 2009).

An early turning point in the relations between the English majority and French minority in New Brunswick was the Caraquet Riots of 1875. Prior to that point, electoral appeals to sectarian loyalty were common in New Brunswick politics.⁵ The issue which sparked the riot in the Acadian region of Caraquet was the 19th century flashpoint of Catholic Schools. The resolution in the aftermath of the violence, which left two dead, was concessions to permit separate Catholic schools within the public system. The agreement was worked out quietly and without public fanfare by elites of the two sectarian communities, beginning a tradition of consociational elite accommodation in the province referred to as *bonne entente*. This system was effectively institutionalized over the next quarter-century by long-serving Premier A.G. Blair, who carefully avoided politicization of sectarian issues (religion and language) and governed on the basis of omnibus coalition cabinets (Aunger 1981).

In 1871, when the first Canadian census was taken, about 87,000 Acadians were enumerated. One-half of these were in New Brunswick, constituting about 15% of the provincial population. By 1960, thanks to a consistently higher population growth rate than the Anglophone community (the so-called *revanche des berceaux*: revenge of the cradle), this provincial percentage had grown to nearly 40%. The political role, status and rights of Acadians, especially those in New Brunswick, would change dramatically over the next three decades. A new Acadian elite that had emerged in the postwar years was pressing for major change. It was not long in coming. In the 1960 provincial election, in a surprise result, New Brunswick's first Acadian premier came to power. The young, passionate, dynamic and determined Liberal party leader Louis Robichaud was, as they say, the right man at the right moment. Robichaud and his Liberals would remain in power for a decade, and the massive changes that occurred during that period in many ways can be compared in their scope and impact to the Quiet Revolution that was happening simultaneously in Quebec (Laxer 2006; Savoie 2009).

Robichaud's revolution was centred on his Equal Opportunity Program, establishing the Université de Moncton as the sole degree-granting French language institution of higher learning in New Brunswick, rebuilding and revamping the public service, setting in train the most wide-ranging and controversial socio-economic reform package in the province's history, and passing legislation making the province officially bilingual. The Program was pushed through over the

strenuous objections of political opponents, English-language media, wealthier regions, and the province's legendary economic barons. When Robichaud was defeated in 1970, his Anglophone replacement as Premier left these changes and reforms intact, and carried them further in subsequent years by having the equality of the two linguistic communities entrenched in provincial law and finally the Canadian constitution (Savoie 2009: 67-76).

Not all Acadians were content to continue with the politics of accommodation through the mainstream party system and provincial state. In 1971, the nationalist Parti Acadien was formed on a program of territorial autonomy leading toward a separate Acadien province. However, popular support for the party never went beyond 10% and it failed to win a seat in the provincial legislature; it was disbanded in 1986 (Savoie 2009: 105). The most obvious explanation for the failure of a territorial autonomy project to gain widespread support was the fairly rapid transformation of the political and economic climate for Acadians in New Brunswick. This can only be fully understood within the larger context of Canadian politics during this period, and particularly the programs and policies of the federal government during the 15-year Prime Ministership of Pierre Trudeau, beginning in 1968. Trudeau's determination to combat Quebec separatism by enlarging the role of French Canadians within the federal government and by promoting bilingualism throughout Canada, and particularly through state support for French-Canadian minorities outside Quebec, meshed perfectly with the political agenda of Acadian leaders like Robichaud. Official bilingualism, inclusion of minority language rights in the 1982 Charter of Rights and Freedoms, federal encouragement and funding for Acadian organizations, and the expansion of social and regional development policies associated with Trudeau's call for a 'Just Society' provided broad institutional and fiscal support, as well as reinforcing the political legitimacy of the Acadian quest for cultural, linguistic and social equality.

Clearly, Acadians had a powerful ally in the federal government for a 'linguistic and social equality' solution to their minority political and relatively underdeveloped economic status. The availability of such an ally, and the considerable resources and supports this afforded, was surely a significant factor in their rejection of the confrontational, high-risk alternative of attaining majority status within an autonomous territory either within or outside the boundaries of the provincial state (Savoie 2009: 113-15). That Acadians may simply have been recruits in the larger political struggle to keep Quebec in Canada does not diminish the major influx of political, financial, programmatic, legal, and discursive resources that clearly contributed to the protection and advancement of their community identity and interests.

If the Québécois were proclaiming themselves *mâitres chez nous* by using their control over the provincial state to transform Quebec society in the interests of the linguistic majority, Acadians had to find other ways to seize control of their communal destiny. The strategies variously pursued were attuned to historical circumstances and the political opportunity structure, and included reliance on *de facto* territorial and social autonomy, participation in consociational models of governance, reducing community disparities through programs of regional and social equality, mobilizing behind and utilizing legal and constitutional reforms, and finally accomplishing the wholesale transformation of a provincial state in order to become 'co-equal masters' over a significant portion of their historic territorial home.

These several political strategies employed by Acadians over more than two centuries as a minority nation within the Atlantic region of Canada involved both territorialization and state

rescaling processes at both the provincial and federal level. Most significant from the overall strategic perspective, perhaps, was the incremental reterritorialization Acadian identity and community boundaries. From the mid-19th to mid-20th centuries, this involved the formulation of a political agenda and the negotiation of structured compromises and accommodation practices that represented a degree of empowerment of the Acadian minority in New Brunswick that was unrealizable for the smaller Acadian communities elsewhere in the region. After 1960, within a particularly favourable political opportunity structure, the attention, interests and identity of the majority of Acadians became narrowly focused on the project of transforming the New Brunswick provincial state in order to create a bilingualized, co-equal partnership within its territorial boundaries. As a result, the linguistic and cultural position of the Acadian nation within New Brunswick was stabilized (at about one-third of provincial population) and its political and economic position enhanced, while elsewhere assimilation processes continued, inevitably taking a toll on the size and viability of French-speaking Acadian populations (Laxer, 2006). At the same time, of general advantage to all Acadians was that the creation of a relatively secure territorial and institutional base in New Brunswick gave young Acadians the option of pursuing higher education and ultimately relocating within the region as a way of dealing with assimilation pressures (Laxer 2006; Basque 2010).

The role and significance of state rescaling processes are also readily apparent in this case. To a limited extent this was the ‘solution’ to the schools crisis of the 1870s, when effectively if not formally, control over local educational practices was ceded to the community level in Acadian areas of New Brunswick. But it was with the implementation of Robichaud’s Equal Opportunity Program provincially and Trudeau’s political and constitutional reforms federally that state rescaling, and revision of the interscalar rule regime, became a major strategy of community empowerment and equality seeking. Equal Opportunity, by shifting responsibilities for taxation, education and social services from the local to the provincial level, dramatically altered the disadvantaged position of poorer, rural Acadian communities within New Brunswick. Bilingualism legislation and ultimately constitutional entrenchment of linguistic equality, by making language use a question of legal right adjudicated and enforced by the courts, similarly advantaged Acadians, who are predominantly bilingual. State rescaling was also apparent in the numerous interventions of the federal government in both the regional economic development field and through proactive federal support for civil society organizations, which according to Acadian historian Maurice Basque effectively underwrote the creation of a francophone civil power in the province that he refers to as *Acadien d’État*, or state-sponsored Acadians (Savoie 2009: 248).

Finally, it can be surmised that the inherited landscape of state scalar organization both constrained in certain ways but also offered possibilities for an Acadian nation seeking to contest a sociospatial configuration and scalar architecture that had entrenched their political and economic subordination. The significant growth in the Acadian share of New Brunswick’s population and historic consociational arrangements provided the context for the minority nation’s post-1960 equality-seeking agenda. But it was the happy coincidence of strong provincial and federal leadership sharing a similar vision and working in tandem toward virtually the same political objectives, and the high priority each government gave these objectives, that enabled clear and continuous gains for New Brunswick Acadians over the next three decades, while marginalizing the autonomist option. Community and individual empowerment through the further economic and political *integration* of Acadians into New Brunswick society – under

conditions of increasing political and linguistic equality, minority rights, institutional reform and regional institution-building, and progressive social changes initiated and supported by both levels of government – created a favourable set of conditions for the economic and social advancement of Acadians in both the public and private sectors. Whether an alternative autonomist strategy was ever truly available to Acadians, it is clear that this would have been sub-optimal (and indeed was perceived by the majority of Acadians as such) given the confluence of factors and conditions favourable to an integrative strategy.

Cape Breton

While Acadie exists as a linguistic and cultural region in Atlantic Canada fragmented by its geography, Cape Breton is territorially compact and contained, an island which forms the northeastern portion of the province of Nova Scotia. During the 17th and 18th centuries it had a separate colonial existence first under the French as Isle Royale – a military outpost protecting the Gulf of St. Lawrence and a major fishery – and also briefly under the British from 1784-1820, during which time it was settled primarily by dispossessed Catholic immigrants from the highlands and western islands of Scotland. This gave Cape Breton a distinctive ethno-cultural character which persists today. The second central feature of the Island that has been seminal to its history is its extensive undersea coal deposits. By the late 19th century coal mining had become the dominant industry and subsequently the basis for a program of industrialization. Coal and steel remained the backbone of the local economy throughout the 20th century, though in decline since the 1950s (Bickerton 1990). After several bouts of downsizing, the last remnant of the industry was closed in 2000 (Johnson, 2007).

Cape Breton has had a volatile history, marked by industrial strife and class conflict. The industrial works were owned by non-resident and foreign capitalists such as the Montreal-based British Empire Steel and Coal Corporation (BESCO), at one point the largest industrial conglomerate in the British Empire, and later the British-owned Dominion Coal and Steel Corporation (DOSCO). Strikes were common and often bitterly-contested as owners attempted to maintain or restore their profit margins by squeezing wages. The Canadian state became directly involved in the industry through policing actions against the workers, and later through tariff adjustments and various subsidies to facilitate transportation, maintain production levels, or encourage modernization of the operations. Employment levels were generally maintained until the post-WWII period; even in the 1970s coal and steel still employed a unionized labour force of 10,000 in a total Island population of around 170,000 (Bickerton 1990).

Typical of coal-mining regions based on scattered collieries, Cape Breton was divided between an urbanized, working-class, industrial area, itself politically fragmented into a small city and several towns, and surrounding rural communities that were somewhat isolated, lightly-populated, and more ethnically-homogeneous, but the source and sustenance of the Island's predominantly Celtic-inspired culture. This combination of peripheral location, island geography, a shared sense of class solidarity and external exploitation, and a distinctive cultural heritage created both a strong sense of community identity and a suspicion and mistrust of the motives of external political and economic actors. This was expressed in Island politics, as the only region east of Ontario to consistently return socialist politicians to national and provincial legislatures, and political resentment towards what were often seen as distant and unsympathetic, if not outright hostile governments in Ottawa and Halifax (Bickerton 1990).

The seminal economic and political event in the Island's modern history was the so-called DOSCO crisis of 1966-67, when the British multinational, despite the pleadings and offers of financial assistance by government, announced the impending closure of Cape Breton's mines and mills. The short-term resolution of the crisis, which otherwise would have triggered a community-wide economic and social collapse, was the 'socialization' of the coal and steel operations through the creation of two state enterprises. A federal crown corporation – the Cape Breton Development Corporation (DEVCO) – took over mining operations and included an Industrial Development Division with a mandate to diversify the Island's economy. The province of Nova Scotia was left with the steel mills, over which they reluctantly agreed to assume control (through the creation of the Sydney Steel Corporation or SYSCO). Over the next three decades the economic fortunes of these industries fluctuated, with significant amounts of modernization funds sporadically invested, but from the mid-1980s onward operations were steadily downsized, until even these were shuttered altogether in 2000 (Bickerton 1990;1998; Johnson, 2007).

The fate of Cape Breton's heavy industrial base is a familiar portrait of many similar industrial districts in North America and Europe which have undergone wrenching adjustments due to changes in the trading environment and international division of labour, the global renewal and relocation of production facilities, and the sweeping economic and technological changes that have reduced domestic demand for the products of older 'rust-belt' industries. However, while SYSCO's death as a state enterprise was truly the end of steel-making in Cape Breton, leaving behind a legacy of pensioned workers and what is acknowledged to be the largest and deadliest toxic waste site in Canada (the Sydney Tar Ponds), DEVCO lives on as a regional development agency, restyled in 1987 as the Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation (ECBC). Even this seemingly benign transition, however, proved to be a difficult one politically, since it involved reducing the autonomy of the agency, which in its former existence reported to no other political or bureaucratic authority but Parliament.⁶

This political sensitivity to the level and site of control and decision-making concerning the Island's development is understandable in the context of its political and economic history, its strong sense of distinct identity, and the prior state rescaling and reterritorialization exercise that set Cape Breton apart as a quasi-autonomous political entity and development region. This relates particularly to the state response to the industrial crisis of the 1960s, which put into effect no less than three substantive shifts: it shifted control over and responsibility for the region's economy from the private sector to the Canadian state; it shifted primary responsibility for the Island's economic development, normally within the scope of provincial jurisdiction, from the provincial to the federal state; finally, a third shift was to augment the functions of the liberal welfare state with those of an activist developmental state. The latter derived from the interventionist nature of the economic diversification mandate, twinned with the task of gradually phasing out mining operations with minimal social disruption, giving DEVCO's role and presence a peculiarly broad ambit with significant social as well as economic responsibilities.

In this sense there was a functional, and to some extent political reterritorialization of the Island, partially removing it from the provincial sphere and providing it – in some dimensions – with a degree of regional autonomy from higher levels of government and the market that for Canada, at least, was unique. Political leadership in the region was loath to lose this 'special status' and this explains the political struggle that was later fought to prevent it.⁷ Regardless,

ECBC continues to operate with a high degree of operational autonomy and discrete funding, and has used this to nurture regional partnerships and to collaborate in the construction of a regional development strategy through networking relationships with local political and business elites, higher education institutions, as well as social and cultural organizations (Johnson 2007).

A second notable instance of state rescaling which has had significant, and to some extent unanticipated political effects on the Cape Breton region – both internally and its relations with senior levels of government – was the 1995 amalgamation of thirteen separate municipalities into one regional government: Cape Breton Regional Municipality (CBRM). While this new government did not encompass the whole of the Island, it did bring all of industrial Cape Breton and its adjacent rural districts, constituting most of the Island's population, under the umbrella of one regional government with an elected mayor, council and administrative apparatus. The rationales offered for the forced merger of the thirteen municipalities, which had always jealously guarded their own autonomy vis à vis their neighbours, was the usual: economies of scale, more coherent regional planning, ending destructive competition, and increasing horizontal equity. However, perhaps most important to the provincial government's decision to 'force march' local politicians into a merger was the worsening fiscal situation of most of the affected municipal units and an austerity context for the province (created by cuts to federal transfer payments) that had them searching everywhere for cost savings and economies (Stewart 2000).

As with virtually all such amalgamations, neither the functional gains that were expected nor the consensual political fusion that was hoped for were realized in the short term. What was eventually set in train, however, long after the provincial government that initiated it had been defeated, was a nascent if largely ineffectual secessionist movement advocating provincial status for the Cape Breton region.⁸ It also spawned a political and constitutional challenge to the policies and practices of the province from the new regional government. This challenge was launched by the popular mayor of CBRM, first elected in 2000 and re-elected in 2004 and 2008 with landslide majorities of more than 80%.⁹ In its appeal to the courts, the regional government submitted that it stood "almost apart in Canada" as an urban region experiencing severe localized disparities, over an extended period of time, without receiving effective government intervention to rectify underlying structural economic problems and thereby significantly ameliorate the resulting economic disparity. In this connection, CBRM alleged that the province of Nova Scotia had breached its constitutional commitments as set out in section 36 of the Canadian constitution in that it hadn't given the regional government sufficient fiscal capacity to provide a comparable level of public services for a comparable tax burden. Additionally, the region claimed that the Province had failed in its constitutional duty to further economic development to reduce disparity in opportunities between the citizens of the Cape Breton region and other Nova Scotian communities.¹⁰

To date, the regional government has been unsuccessful in the courts, though the court action, and the political stand-off with the province, continues.¹¹ As well, the regional government has accepted the recommendations of a commissioned study that the region tackle some of its long-term development issues by taking further steps to consolidate a regional identity, restructure to access additional federal funds, and alter regional planning to spatially concentrate both existing and new services (Fraser 2010).

The municipal amalgamation that created CBRM seems clearly to have been a case of functional reterritorialization, the result of a state strategy to achieve diverse functional objectives by creating a new regional scale of government. The subsequent political strategy of the new regional government, apparently with the strong support of local voters, has sought to reduce internal political fragmentation and reinforce regional coherence and solidarity by mobilizing historical grievances and resentments against external political control as the cause of regional economic and governance problems. Clearly the election of a regional government and the emergence of strong regional leadership has contributed to a process of region-building that has both identity and development aspects. The vertical clientelist politics that were so often dominant in the past (Bickerton 1990) seem increasingly to have been superseded by a horizontal community-building dynamic with at least the potential for more inclusive and solidaristic outcomes. Furthermore, with the raw materials of a well-defined and unique regional history, culture, and identity to be mined, region-building political and social leaders can be expected to make use of these materials in their efforts to mobilize the local population behind a collaborative regional development project that requires the maintenance if not the extension of a substantial degree of regional autonomy.

The Cape Breton case also illustrates a classic example of utilizing the strategy of ‘scale-jumping,’ to confront an inherited scalar architecture of provincial-municipal relations perceived to be unfavourable to the region. This is evident in the attempt to bypass stalled negotiations with the provincial state and access Canadian constitutional law to make a direct appeal to the courts (likely a first in Canadian history for a regional or municipal government) in order to overturn an interscalar rule regime that places hard limits on the regional government’s capacity to provide adequate services at tax levels that will allow the region to remain competitive in the pursuit of its long-term development goals. While losses in the courts to date are a setback for this scale-jumping strategy, this could prove a moot point if the region is able to move ahead with the social and political construction of a more inclusive development coalition and coherent development strategy, one of the benefits of which might well be a strengthened hand for the region in fiscal and political negotiations with senior levels of government.

Rescaling, Reterritorialization and Minority Identities

Clearly, this brief introduction to these cases of ‘new autonomies’ or ‘autonomy seeking’ regions within Canada’s federal system, bereft as it is of a meaningful degree of historical and empirical detail, is inadequate from the point of view of a full understanding of their particularities and complexities. However, what is gained by even a brief comparative overview is some sense of the internal regional diversity, and the variety of spatial and rescaling strategies pursued by minority community, state and other institutional actors.

The case of Acadie illustrates that “minority rights cannot follow an all-or-nothing approach” and that the principle of equality for minorities requires that different situations require different responses at different times; and further that “there is nothing wrong if autonomy is recommended in some circumstances and not in others” (Palermo 2009: 4).¹² In important ways, there was a reterritorialization of Acadian identity that has some parallels to the process which took place during a similar period in Quebec, whereby French Canadians became ‘Québécois.’ In a similar fashion, while not shedding their Acadian cultural identity, for most intents and purposes Acadie became synonymous with New Brunswick and Acadians became francophone New Brunswickers. The Robichaud government’s policy agenda in the 1960s –

scaling social services and taxation to the provincial level (EO program), establishing a francophone university for Acadians, and ‘bilingualizing’ the province – was the key development in shaping and determining the primary political strategy of Acadian nationalism. It confirmed that the path to political, cultural and economic equality for Acadian New Brunswickers lay through pursuit of equality within the province, rather than some form of territorial political autonomy. While there was significant resistance to this equality-seeking program within the majority Anglophone community (which initially, at least, included some powerful interests), it was muted by the fact that the EO program was designed to benefit all poorer communities (not just the Acadian districts), and by the strong support and parallel policies being pursued at the federal level during the long tenure of the Trudeau regime.

As for Cape Breton, in many ways it is typical of small islands that seek special status arrangements, shared sovereignty, and unique forms of autonomy. Here too, asymmetrical spatial rescaling has been an aspect of state response to the unique circumstances, historic claims, and political demands of a distinct island community. In contrast to the case of Acadie, the extension and consolidation of provincial control often has been seen as antithetical to the interests of the region. Instead, the main tendency of Island politics has been the fairly consistent pursuit of the goal of an autonomous Cape Breton region through accessing a range of mechanisms and processes: rescaling up from the provincial to the federal level in a manner that enhances regional autonomy; consolidating a new scale at the regional level through rescaling governance capacities from localities and engaging in various region-building processes and practices; and seeking enhanced autonomy for the region by using ‘scale jumping’ tactics in an attempt to lever a further transfer of governance capacity from the provincial state. Over the past four decades regionalization has occurred (to varying degrees) in government, economic development, higher education, hospitals and health care, social and municipal services, and taxation and revenues. Much of this has been functionally-driven, but political, cultural and place identities have been a germane and sometimes primary factor and consideration in political struggles around these processes. And here, too, the federal government played a significant role in supporting and facilitating region-building processes and – through scalar shifts and reterritorialization processes – the emergence of a unique form of regional autonomy.

There are a number of observations that might be made about the factors relevant to state rescaling and reterritorialization processes in connection with territorially-concentrated minority communities seeking political and social empowerment, culture and identity preservation, and territorial justice. A first point is that federal institutions and structures do constrain and shape the strategies of such regions, but they do so in ways that simultaneously have provided opportunities and supports that would be unavailable or less available in non-federal systems. While provinces are the primary political regions within and toward which other regional communities must orient and insert themselves, the federal government can provide significant sources of support for these regions that can be used to consolidate their political position and further their goals and objectives. As well, politics will play a role in determining the terms and conditions of regional integration into the structures and policies of both provincial and national states, the character and extent of autonomy that can be exercised by regional authorities and agencies, and the extent of regional access to fiscal and organizational resources. So while federal institutions and structures have effectively captured and routinized what might be termed ‘big R’ regional politics in Canada, scope remains for other forms of region to carve

out other regional spaces within the interstices and overlapping powers and jurisdictions of federalism.

There are a number of factors and conditions that are relevant to whether regional communities are frustrated within the federal system, accommodated in a manner that will encourage their deeper integration into the province-region, or alternatively propelled to seek out new autonomies. These include but are not restricted to state governance strategies and functional considerations (economic and administrative); the availability to regions of multiple venues of political representation and program administration; constitutional access to (and the general orientation of) legal channels for regional and minority community claims and demands; the strength of regional solidarity and identities; competent and committed regional leadership; and finally the creation of a strong institutional base that can build regional networks and identity, social capital, and the capacity to formulate and pursue in a sustained fashion regional interests and a collaborative development strategy.

Finally, in both of the cases reviewed here, since they continue to be peripheral regions, new challenges associated with globalization and the new information economy will sorely test their survival and adaptive capacities. Migration to larger urban areas continues to drain energy, talent and population. Immigrants to Canada continue to be attracted primarily to large urban agglomerations, while the low birth rates common to all developed societies (and for the Acadian community, the increasing prevalence of mixed marriages) strain the long-term prospects for population stability, let alone future growth. At the same time, arguably the institutions that both regions need to survive have been put in place; the onus is now on regional elites and individuals to ensure that their respective communities can use these institutions not only to counter tendencies toward decline and further marginality, but to thrive economically and culturally. In this connection, place attachment, and the community's desire and will to maintain minority cultures and identities, will continue to be an important if not determining factor.

¹ Region can be defined in a generic way as a territorial entity distinct from either the local or the nation-state level that constitutes an economic, political, administrative, and/or cultural space, within which different types of human agency interact, and toward which individuals and communities may form associated attachments and identities. Regions may be nested within other regions, nations, and even supra-national collectivities, and these various levels of territorial affiliation and identity may be benign, complementary, mutually supportive, competitive, or antagonistic. The character of these relationships depends upon a host of factors, including institutional and fiscal arrangements, redistributive policies, cultural factors, historical grievances, economic constraints and opportunities, and so on, and thus is subject to change over time.

² *Place* entails geographical proximity, the embedding of social relations within particular locations and patterns of area differentiation. It is a bounded site of direct interaction and face-to-face relationships, is closely tied to everyday life, has temporal depth, and is linked to collective memory and social identity (Keil and Mahon, 2009: 7). As noted by Massey, its specificity "derives from the fact that each place is the focus of a distinct mixture of wider and more local social relations" (Keil and Mahon, 8). *Network* and networking entails the establishment of transversal interconnections across geographically dispersed locations or organizational units (for example, through information technologies) (Brenner 2009: 31-2).

³ As of 2010 Newfoundland and Labrador enjoys the highest provincial GDP per capita next to oil-rich Alberta and is no longer a recipient of fiscal equalization.

⁴Antonine Maillet, *Cent ans dans les bois* (1981).

⁵ The New Brunswick Premier fought and won a landslide victory in the 1874 election on the simple but effective slogan, "Vote for the Queen Against the Pope" (Aunger 1981: 110).

⁶ As a federal crown corporation, DEVCO fell under federal legislation that placed it at arms-length from federal politicians and the departmental bureaucratic structure, requiring only annual reports to Parliament. In 1987, the Industrial Development Division of DEVCO was transferred to the Cape Breton-based ECBC, which was placed under the authority of a new Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), which as one of several federal regional development agencies was itself subsumed under the government's Industry department (Bickerton 1990b).

⁷ Cite newspaper articles and legislative debates on this question in Parliament.

⁸ The regional government went so far as to commission an academic study on the economic, fiscal, political, legal, and functional implications of political devolution or provincial status for the Island (see Locke and Tomblin, 2003).

⁹ As mayor, lawyer-businessman John Morgan has sponsored a major conference on Cape Breton's political status, a plebiscite on the size and organization of regional government, and persevered in the region's legal challenge to the provincial government despite defeats in the lower courts (Fraser 2008; 2010). He has also resisted entreaties to step down as mayor to run for provincial or federal office.

¹⁰ Section 36 of the Canadian constitution contains the following clauses: 36(1) Without altering the legislative authority of Parliament or the provincial legislatures, or the rights of any of them to the exercise of their legislative authority, Parliament and the legislatures, together with the government of Canada and the provincial governments, are committed to a) promoting equal opportunities for the well-being of Canadians; b) furthering economic development to reduce disparity in opportunities; and c) providing essential public services of reasonable quality to all Canadians. 36(2) Parliament and the government of Canada are committed to the principle of making equalization payments to ensure that provincial governments have sufficient revenues to provide reasonably comparable levels of public services at reasonably comparable levels of taxation.

¹¹ In the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia, *Cape Breton Regional Municipality v. A.G.N.S.*, 2008 NSSC 111, April 23, 2008.

¹² It also may raise questions about the meaning and applicability of the concept of autonomy, particularly if autonomy is understood in contrast to dependence, rather than integration; 'autonomy to do' rather than 'autonomy from.' See Keating on the concept of autonomy (Keating 2010).

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