

## "Limited Identities" Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History

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## “Limited Identities” Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History

AS EVERYONE IN THIS AUDIENCE is undoubtedly aware, it was Ramsay Cook who coined the term “limited identities”. He first used it in a 1967 article entitled “Canadian Centennial Cerebrations”, the main purpose of which was to attack the journal *Canadian Dimension* for demanding greater government support for Canadian publishers. Such a policy, Cook predicted, would only lead to further outpourings of books featuring “contemplation of the Canadian navel”. Indeed, he mused whether anything would be achieved by new books on “the great Canadian problem — our lack of unity and identity” and suggested that “Perhaps instead of constantly deploring our lack of identity, we should attempt to understand and explain the regional, ethnic and class identities that we do have. It might just be that it is in these limited identities that ‘Canadianism’ is found”.<sup>1</sup> Maurice Careless popularized the term in his oft-cited 1969 article, “‘Limited Identities’ in Canada”, in which he insisted that the “Canadian experience” must be “discerned and defined” through the “limited identities of region, culture and class referred to by Professor Cook”. Careless concluded that it was this very diversity which largely differentiates Canada from the United States and that “the whole may indeed be greater than the sum of its parts, producing through its internal relationships some sort of common Canadianism”.<sup>2</sup> Cook returned to this theme in a 1970 paper on “Nationalism in Canada, or Portnoy’s Complaint Revisited”, in which he argued that Canada has suffered “from a somewhat more orthodox and less titillating version of Portnoy’s complaint: the inability to develop a secure and unique identity”. As Cook put it, “Canadian intellectuals and politicians have attempted to play psychiatrist to the Canadian Portnoy” in order to provide Canadians with a national identity which would enable them to transform “self-deprecation” into “self-assurance”. Fortunately, Cook concluded, Canada “stubbornly refuses to exchange its occasionally anarchic pluralism for a strait-jacket identity. Perhaps it is this heterogeneous pluralism itself that is the Canadian identity”.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to keep in mind the political context in which these comments were made. Prior to the 1960s, Canadian historians had seen as their central responsibility the need to emphasize the economic and political unity of Canada as it evolved from a colony into an independent nation-state. After the Second World War that approach was virtually unchallenged. There were liberal nationalists such as A.R.M. Lower and Frank Underhill, and there were conservative nationalists such as Donald Creighton and C.P. Stacey; but virtually every English-Canadian historian accepted the legitimacy of the Canadian nation-state as a frame of reference. Their approach to

1 Ramsay Cook, “Canadian Centennial Cerebrations”, *International Journal*, XXII, 1 (Autumn 1967), pp. 659-63.

2 J.M.S. Careless, “‘Limited Identities’ in Canada”, *Canadian Historical Review*, L, 1 (March 1969), pp. 1-10. Reprinted in J.M.S. Careless, *Careless at Work: Selected Canadian Historical Studies* (Toronto, 1990), pp. 281-91.

3 The essay is reprinted under the title “Nationalism in Canada” in Ramsay Cook, *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 197-214 and 240-3.

Canadian history — similar to that of the consensus school in the United States — was to minimize the significance of internal divisions within Canadian society by focusing on the things which united Canadians and distinguished them from other peoples; they undertook to emphasize the challenges which Canadians had overcome in the past and, in the words of Frank Underhill, their ability “to do great things together in the future”.<sup>4</sup> The faith of English-Canadian historians in the distinctiveness of Canada and the viability of the Canadian nation-state was unquestioned and unquestioning.

However, by the later 1960s, Canadian nationalism faced a challenge from the rapid rise of the separatist movement in Quebec and some of the more perceptive in the Canadian historical profession, Cook and Careless among them, recognized the danger which this posed for the survival of the Canadian nation-state. Both, but Cook in particular, were admirers of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, who denounced all forms of nationalism, both Québécois and Canadian, as dangerous for the survival of a bicultural country such as Canada. It was this concern which led both Careless and Cook to embrace the concept of “limited identities” as an organizing principle for understanding Canadian history. “Canadian nationalists often forget”, Cook argued, “that Canada is far from a homogeneous country. Nationalism by nature tends strongly to centralism and uniformity: Canada is by nature federal, sectional and pluralist”.<sup>5</sup> From this perspective, Quebec’s assertiveness could be viewed positively, not as a nationalist challenge to the survival of Canada, but as an expression of a “limited identity” similar to that held by Canadians in other parts of Canada.

Certainly historians in Atlantic Canada eagerly espoused the concept of “limited identities”, but their motivations were rather different. Indeed, it is easy to exaggerate the extent to which they were driven by some clearly defined ideological commitment. In retrospect, for example, the creation of *Acadiensis* is often seen as decision taken by a group of committed regionalists at the University of New Brunswick who were motivated by a sense of regional grievance and frustration. After all, the Department of History at the University of New Brunswick was run by committed regionalists such as Alfred G. Bailey and W.S. MacNutt, and the lead articles in the first two issues were written by younger members of the department, Ernie Forbes and Bill Acheson, whose work reflected and indeed justified the sense that the Maritimes had been let down by Confederation. All four of these scholars had deep roots in the region. The only problem with this scenario is that neither Bailey nor MacNutt ever considered themselves to be regional scholars and neither had much to do with the renaissance in regional history. They shared the same intellectual reservations about regional history as did the other nationalist historians of their generation.<sup>6</sup> They did not even have much to do with the founding of *Acadiensis*. My memory may be faulty, but I don’t think Bailey attended the committee meetings at which the founding of a new history journal was discussed, and while MacNutt may have, I had the distinct feeling that he had grave doubts about whether the journal was

4 See F.H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto, 1964), p. 70.

5 Cook, “Nationalism in Canada”, p. 213.

6 S.F. Wise, in his review of MacNutt’s volume in the Centenary Series, *The Atlantic Provinces: The Emergence of Colonial Society, 1712-1857*, described the series as an “unfortunate monument” to the “centralist assumptions” of the general editors: *Canadian Historical Review*, XLVIII, 1 (March 1967), p. 67. MacNutt undoubtedly shared many of those assumptions.

really needed (although he did agree to submit an article to the first issue). And great as their contribution would be to the evolution of Atlantic regional studies at the University of New Brunswick, neither Forbes nor Acheson were actively involved in the creation of the new journal. Forbes was teaching at the University of Victoria, and the first I knew of his existence was when I received in the mail the unsolicited paper which became the lead article in the first issue of the journal. While completing his M.A., Acheson had taught at the University of New Brunswick but he then enrolled in the Ph.D. programme at the University of Toronto. He had just returned from Toronto and he was still primarily engaged in working on his Ph.D. when the journal was founded. Ironically, all of those who were centrally involved in the founding of *Acadiensis* came from away.<sup>7</sup>

The two key figures, both of whom died prematurely, were Ken Windsor and David Earl. Both were Ontario “boys”, though drawn from opposite ends of the province; both were conservatives though of the “Red Tory” variety; both were anglophiles proud of their British ancestry and mildly anti-American; and both believed in the centrality of the Loyalist tradition in Canadian history. Indeed, I suspect it was this aspect of the region’s past, the fact that it was the most British and the most Loyalist part of the country, which most appealed to the two of them. It was Ken Windsor who initiated and eloquently defended the creation of a journal designed to “recover the past” of the Atlantic region.<sup>8</sup> It was also Ken who suggested that we borrow the title *Acadiensis* from an antiquarian journal which had been produced by David Russell Jack in Saint John between 1901 and 1908. It was David Earl who did the preliminary groundwork to show that such a journal would be economically viable. Although I agreed to become the editor of the new journal, I was the most junior member of the department and had never shown any particular interest in Atlantic regional history. In the second edition of *The Writing of Canadian History*, Carl Berger declared that “the existence for the first time of significant numbers of historians who lived and taught regional histories in the universities of the West and the Maritimes provided the initiatives for the founding and sustenance of such important institutional supports for reinvigorated regional history as . . . the revival of *Acadiensis: Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*”.<sup>9</sup> Literally this is true, but when the decision to revive *Acadiensis* was taken, I had been in Fredericton for two years, Ken for four and David for five. None of us were Atlantic regional historians. In fact, all three of us were expatriate Ontarians, who had spent their formative years at institutions of higher learning in Ontario, and in David’s and my case, in Britain. All three of us, somewhat ironically, had begun our academic lives greatly influenced by the work of Donald Creighton.

I cannot be entirely sure what Ken and David envisioned, but I suspect their initial goals for *Acadiensis* were quite limited. Certainly mine were. The other day I re-read, for the first time in decades, the editorial I wrote for the first issue of *Acadiensis* in the

7 But it should be pointed out that the support of Jim Chapman, effectively (though not nominally) the head of the History Department, and of Murray Young, both New Brunswick “boys”, was critical, as was that of Tom Condon, the Dean of Arts, who was another one of those from away (in this case, from the United States).

8 It was Ken Windsor who invented this wording of its purpose.

9 Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History*, 2nd edition (Toronto, 1986), p. 263.

autumn of 1971. The goals I outlined seem to me in retrospect incredibly modest. I noted simply that, while there were a growing number of scholars working on the history of the Atlantic region, they found it difficult to get their research published and concluded that "It is to provide an outlet for this research and to recover the past of the Atlantic region that *Acadiensis* has been revived".<sup>10</sup> Not exactly a ringing denunciation of nationalist historiography, is it? Nor a call for regionalists to shake off their centralist chains! I did declare that the journal was "devoted to focusing regional awareness", but I was deliberately vague about what that meant, declaring that the journal would include "within its geographical scope not only the Maritime Provinces and Newfoundland but also Gaspesia and Maine with further extensions into Central Canada and Northern New England when these seem relevant".<sup>11</sup> Who says all the imperialists live in Central Canada? In fact, during the first few years of the journal's existence, we carried mainly articles which filled in gaps in the history of the region. Many of the articles could easily have appeared in the *Canadian Historical Review*, if the journal had not been run by historians who identified Ontario with the nation.

Gradually, however, *Acadiensis* began to develop in a way entirely different from that intended by its founders. Many younger historians responded enthusiastically to the "limited identities" approach, with its emphasis on the diversity and pluralism of Canadian society, none more so than historians from the hinterland regions of the country who had long been annoyed by the centralist bias of Canadian history. *Acadiensis* provided an outlet for their work. Ernie Forbes contributed a trailblazing series of articles on the 20th-century Maritimes, while Judith Fingard focused on the 19th century. Les Upton added a series on the region's native peoples; Graeme Wynn wrote on the historical geography of the region; Jack Bumsted and Ian Robertson contributed articles on Prince Edward Island; and, with his influential studies of Newfoundland, David Alexander made it possible to justify *Acadiensis*' claim to be a journal of Atlantic and not merely Maritimes regional history. In a review article on "Canadian History in the 1970s", H.J. Hanham declared that "I am conscious in reading *Acadiensis* that work on Maritime History is cumulative in a sense in which work published in the *Canadian Historical Review* is not".<sup>12</sup> And, of course, he was correct.

Certainly in this period my own attitude toward Atlantic regional studies gradually altered. I was greatly influenced by Bill Acheson who became an increasingly important force within the history department at the University of New Brunswick. A few years later Ernie Forbes left Victoria and also joined the department. It was Bill and Ernie who began to turn me into a kind of ideological regionalist (though I might add, it is a title I have always worn with some reluctance). The second crucial factor was the decision to hold the first of what became the biennial Atlantic Canada Studies Conferences. My purpose was very utilitarian. I needed a steady supply of papers for *Acadiensis*, and the conference seemed a useful way of generating them. But the conference turned out to serve a much greater function. It brought together the majority of those working on Atlantic regional history and gave us a sense of common

10 P.A. Buckner, "Acadiensis II", *Acadiensis*, I, 1 (Autumn 1971), p. 8.

11 Ibid.

12 H.J. Hanham, "Canadian History in the 1970s", *Canadian Historical Review*, LVIII, 1 (March 1977), p. 10.

purpose. I can still remember walking across the University of New Brunswick campus with George Rawlyk, who turned to me and said: “Well, I guess we’ve shown those Upper Canadians a thing or two” (or words to that effect). At the time it seemed to me an odd thing for a boy from Thorold, Ontario, to say to a boy from Toronto, but in retrospect George was right. We were out to show those Upper Canadians a thing or two!

But what is also interesting is our somewhat naive belief that the Upper Canadian scholars were prepared to listen. We thought we were writing the kind of “limited identity” history that Cook and Careless had been calling for and, as Ramsay Cook mockingly pointed out in article in *Acadiensis* in 1993, we sought their approval for what we were doing, even proclaiming Cook an honorary Maritimer because he had subscribed to *Acadiensis* from the beginning, an honour he apparently did not particularly want.<sup>13</sup> But increasingly we lost interest in their reaction. The number of historians working in the field of Atlantic regional history was not that large. We all knew each other and each other’s work. We met frequently at conferences and we felt we were engaged in a collaborative effort. Inevitably we formed close associations with those who also felt excluded from the historical mainstream, with working-class historians, with ethnic historians, with historians of women and of native peoples. Indeed, one of the reasons why I have never been able to take seriously the so-called fragmentation of the historical profession is the fact that it is patently absurd, at least when applied to the Atlantic region, as one can see from even a cursory glance at the articles in *Acadiensis* and from the programmes of the Atlantic Canada Studies Conferences. We also sought — with varying degrees of success — to form links with regional historians in the other parts of Canada. And we sought positions on national associations such as the Canadian Historical Association and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board, not because we sought to fragment the discipline, but because we sought to influence it.

Of course, there were (and still are) those who argue that regional history is by its very nature fragmenting since it focuses on the parts rather than the whole. The 1980 Quebec referendum convinced many Canadian historians that it was time to close ranks and re-emphasize their commitment to the search for a “national identity”.<sup>14</sup> In 1977, annoyed by the tone of some of the articles in *Canada and the Burden of Unity*, Ramsay Cook warned regional historians of the danger of ignoring the “national experience”. In 1983 he announced (in *Acadiensis*) that “as a tool of analysis, ‘regionalism’ is a concept whose time is gone”, and in 1995 he proclaimed that the phrase “limited identities” is “usually attributed to Maurice Careless and I have decided that he is welcome to it!”<sup>15</sup> As Cook was well aware, by this time Careless no

13 Ramsay Cook, “The New History of Atlantic Canada”, *Acadiensis*, XXIII, 1 (Autumn 1993), pp. 147 and 151.

14 Donald Swainson, “Regionalism and the Social Sciences”, *Acadiensis*, X, 1 (Autumn 1980), p. 144.

15 Ramsay Cook, “The Burden of Regionalism”, *Acadiensis*, VII, 1 (Autumn 1974), p. 115; “The Golden Age of Canadian Historical Writing”, *Historical Reflections*, V, 1 (Summer 1977), p. 148; “Regionalism Unmasked”, *Acadiensis*, XIII, 1 (Autumn 1983), p. 141; *Canada, Quebec and the Uses of Nationalism*, 2nd edition (Toronto, 1995), p. 230. See also his “Identities Are Not Like Hats”, *Canadian Historical Review*, 81, 2 (June 2000), pp. 260-65, which did not appear until after I had written this paper. I assume I am the “Buchner” referred to on p. 262.



longer wanted it either, for he too had come to the conclusion that the search for limited identities had gone too far and threatened the very existence of the Canadian nation-state.<sup>16</sup> More recently the same point has been made, somewhat crudely, by Michael Bliss and Jack Granatstein and with greater sophistication by Doug Owsram.<sup>17</sup> Much as I love quoting Granatstein, it is Owsram who deserves serious attention because he does not dismiss out of hand the scholarship of the last 30 years. He is not opposed to social history, and he is not based in Toronto like Careless, Cook, Bliss and Granatstein. Nonetheless, in an article in *National History* in 1997 he declared that "It is only a slight exaggeration to say that Canadian history collapsed in the 1970s and was replaced by groups of Canadian histories and that the Canadian historical profession was to a large degree supplanted by regional history and sub-disciplinary history".<sup>18</sup> That last section is very revealing: "national history" is apparently true disciplinary history, while all other kinds of history — whether thematic (intellectual or economic history) or focused on particular social groups (women's history or working-class history) — are apparently forms of sub-disciplinary history.

It is also interesting that Owsram singles out "regional" history as particularly pernicious. As do most of those who argue in this vein, Owsram combines two very different arguments. One is an attack on excessive specialization, which he associates erroneously with local or regional history. Actually I have never been able to see how anyone comparing an issue of *Acadiensis* with an issue of *National History* or the *Canadian Historical Review* (even under its now more enlightened editorship) could come to the conclusion that the articles which appear in *Acadiensis* are more specialized than those which appear in the other two so-called national journals. Owsram's second call is for historians to return to their proper role as the interpreters of the "national experience". Owsram denies that he is an apologist for "a return to some mythical past when a small elite agreed on the shape of our national past and ensured it was dosed out with suitable degrees of patriotism". But he concludes that

we have written ourselves into an unnecessary corner. For this nation, so supposedly fragmented and 'limited', has had a common historical experience of considerable duration, living under common laws [which is actually a partial truth], social programs [which is also a partial truth], and with cultural and social ties that have national as well as local characteristics. In other words we may now have to look at the reverse side of limited identities if the profession is to progress toward an understanding of the whole. Beginning from the now well-established base of the existence of regional and local identities, historians might begin to look at the interplay between those identities and the way in which that particular and dynamic interplay distinguishes this country from the rest of the world.<sup>19</sup>

16 J.M.S. Careless, "Limited Identities — Ten Years Later", *Manitoba History*, 1, 1 (1980), p. 7.

17 See Michael Bliss, "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canada, the Sundering of Canadian History", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 26 (Winter 1991-92), pp. 5-17; J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto, 1998).

18 Doug Owsram, "Narrow Circles: the Historiography of Recent Canadian Historiography", *National History*, 1, 1 (Winter 1997), p. 11.

19 *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

## 10 *Acadiensis*

I have no particular objection to that last sentence, except for the way in which Owram got there. Call me naive, but I thought that is what we were always aiming at. As I wrote some years ago, much of the criticism which is made against regional studies seems to be based upon the assumption that regionalism is either, as Ramsay Cook put it in "Regionalism Unmasked", "a construct which served only to mask the [selfish] demand of the provinces for a larger share of the Canadian pie" or, as Careless and Granatstein seem to believe, a construct designed to justify the dismantling of the Canadian state.<sup>20</sup>

I can understand why these Ontario-based historians became annoyed with the critical tone of much that was being written in the 1970s and 1980s. Many of those writing about the history of the Atlantic region had been born in or now lived in the region. They believed that the Atlantic Provinces had not been fairly treated within Confederation, and they were concerned to document the roots of what had become a very unequal union. I cannot speak for all of those in the field, but it was two very different scholars who convinced me — and, believe me, initially I was as skeptical as Cook — that the Atlantic Provinces had legitimate grievances within Confederation. One was Ernie Forbes and the other was David Alexander. One had deep roots in the Maritimes, the other was a Newfoundlander by adoption, but both were passionately committed to creating a Canada in which regional disparities would cease to exist. So too were my other colleagues at the University of New Brunswick, Bill Acheson and David Frank. They convinced me that it was essential to examine the ways in which decisions taken in Ottawa have adversely affected — or, at the very least, ignored — the economic needs of the Atlantic region. I remain convinced that this theme is far from exhausted, and it is far too important an issue for those who live and work in Atlantic Canada for it to be abandoned.

Nonetheless, the emphasis on the underdevelopment of Atlantic Canada in the 20th century probably did reinforce the image of the region as a powerless victim unable to resist the forces of national integration and lent credence to what one might call the "Empty Harbours, Empty Dreams" version of Atlantic Provinces history. Indeed, the emphasis on "regional dependency" may also, as Colin Howell pointed out in 1986, have helped to perpetuate a "victimization ideology" which "has operated to preserve existing power relations in the past and the present".<sup>21</sup> Certainly it played into the hands of those who continue to see the Maritimes as a conservative backwater, where, as Frank Underhill so eloquently put it, "nothing, of course, ever happens". And it reinforced the belief in the Maritimes' comparative unimportance in the evolution of the Canadian nation-state and the Canadian national identity. Note this quotation, again written by Doug Owram, only in an earlier essay on "Intellectual History in the Land of Limited Identities": "It is worth emphasizing that this [the centrality of the intellectual history of Ontario] is not just a matter of Central Canadian conceit on the part of Ontario scholars. In many instances ideas emerging from Ontario have defined the national character, at least in their ability to be heard in Ottawa. Regional writers may dislike it but the Ontario identity has for a very long time been taken by many as

20 See Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*, p. 72.

21 Colin D Howell, "Economism, Ideology and the Teaching of Maritime History", in P.A. Buckner, ed., *Teaching Maritime Studies* (Fredericton, 1986), p. 22.



the Canadian identity. Intellectual historians have a duty therefore to recognize the extent to which Ontario themes have been translated into national ones".<sup>22</sup>

Of course, the critical point is that the "many" to whom Doug refers, who have taken the Ontario identity as the Canadian, have been historians in or of Ontario. What they seem unwilling to accept is that they are just as much regionalists as those working on the history of Atlantic Canada. Prior to Confederation how else can one study Canadian history except as a series of diverse geographical, economic and cultural regions, loosely united under the British flag after 1763. After 1867 all of these regions eventually became part of the new Dominion of Canada, and it may be true that Ontario played a larger part in defining Canada's national policies and national institutions than the other regions. However, one should be careful of accepting Ontario or even Central Canadian domination as a given. Ontario could not impose its views on the other regions, and the creation of national policies and national institutions involved not just conflict and resistance but also negotiation and accommodation between the different regions. Indeed, while Atlantic regional historians ought to continue to explore the ways in which regional disparity has been perpetuated and consolidated, they should also challenge the stereotype of regional passivity. As Colin Howell points out in a recent issue of *Acadiensis*, regional scholars have been moving in this direction for some time, focusing "not upon victimization at all, but on the ways in which people in the region have found room to manoeuvre and make choices that they hope will improve their lives within the existing structures of power and authority that confront them".<sup>23</sup> My only quarrel with this approach is that we must be careful not to see the Atlantic region as simply a marginalized region full of marginalized peoples reacting to external structures of power and authority. Agency is always a difficult concept, but let us not read back in time the political weakness of the Maritimes since the First World War or indeed overemphasize its powerlessness since then.<sup>24</sup> Contrary to O'oram's claim, Maritimers did help to shape the Canadian federal union and did play a major part in the evolution of the country's national policies, its national literature and every other aspect of its national culture.

A number of years ago, during the debate over the Meech Lake Accord, one of my colleagues, a vociferous opponent of what he considered to be the extravagant and unacceptable demand for the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, gave me a lecture on why Canadian regional historians must assume some of the responsibility for unleashing the forces which were destroying the Canadian nation-state. But I supported Meech Lake because I believed, and indeed still do believe, that it would have helped to preserve the Canadian nation-state, although I was perhaps in a minority among regional historians. I do not believe that most regional historians have

22 Doug O'oram, "Intellectual History in the Land of Limited Identities", *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 24, 3 (Fall 1989), p. 122.

23 Colin Howell, "Two Outs; Or, Yogi Berra, Sport and Maritime Historiography", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 1 (Autumn 1999), p. 107.

24 I had not seen Ian McKay's "A Note on 'Region' in the Writing of Atlantic Canadian History", *Acadiensis*, XXIX, 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 89-101, when I wrote this paper but I note that he makes a very similar point on pp. 99-100. I am, however, not convinced that "the Boston-Halifax axis" was as important, at least in the 19th and 20th centuries, as he claims (p. 93) nor that "one of the region's defining historical characteristics" was "its subtle, complex, communitarian critique of the liberal order" (p. 100).

ever had any difficulty in reconciling a commitment to the Canadian nation-state with a belief in the existence of regional or local identities. Part of the problem is with that term “limited identities”. I think it implied to Cook and Careless that you could divide the Canadian identity into its component parts — perhaps 25 per cent of Canadians’ identity was based upon their regional identity, another 25 per cent on their ethnic identity, another 25 per cent on their class identity and the final 25 per cent on their gender identity. Then you could simply add the limited identities together to form a composite national identity. If the sums didn’t add up, then you simply declared that the whole — that is to say, the national identity — was larger than the sum of the parts. This is, of course, nonsensical.

The truth is that Canadians, like other peoples, hold multiple identities simultaneously. Indeed, they have always done so. In the 19th century, most anglophone Canadians could comfortably combine a sense of being British with a sense of being English, Scottish, Welsh or even in many cases Irish, and of being also a Nova Scotian or an Upper Canadian, as well as a Haligonian or a Torontonion. After 1867 the sense of also being a Canadian was, with varying degrees of ease and speed, added to this list, although some Maritimers resisted this development, just as some Newfoundlanders did after 1949. Over time some of these identities have become weaker; even people of British ethnic origins rarely identify themselves as British anymore. Others have become stronger; indeed, the growth of Canadian nationalism may have weakened provincial loyalties in the Maritimes but it probably strengthened the sense of being a Maritimer. I am less convinced that the concept of being an Atlantic Canadian means much, except to bureaucrats. But why should the changing emphasis which Canadians put upon one identity over another be surprising? All identities are socially constructed, and all are fluid and unstable and frequently in a state of re-negotiation. If we have learned anything about the construction of identity in the past 20 years, it is surely that identities are self-determined and that people have the ability to maintain a considerable number of identities simultaneously, even ones which historians believe ought not to be compatible.

Regionalism, of course, ultimately begins with the proposition that geographic location — or a sense of place — matters in shaping identities. I do not think that this means that it matters more than other forms of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, class, age and sexual orientation. It is the interrelationship between all these variables which is important in creating regional and local identities. Regional boundaries are cultural rather than geographic, and they reflect not environmental determinism but historical, economic and political factors in their definition. We must avoid the tendency to talk of the region as if it had a single, monolithic culture. We should also not fall into the trap of segmenting Canada into a series of regional isolations by overemphasizing the exceptionalism of the different regional cultures. In one sense every region — indeed every place — is exceptional. But one of the most important developments in recent international historiography is an increasing emphasis upon inter-connectedness. No place is an island (not even those that are genuine islands). For nearly two centuries (longer in some cases, shorter in others) all the parts of North America which became Canada were part of a global empire. Membership in this empire was critical in the evolution of the various British North American colonies before 1867 and the evolution of Canada and Newfoundland after 1867. Simultaneously, the remnants of the first British Empire faced growing pressure from

the United States, which gradually extended its influence across the continent and formed a new global empire in the 20th century. The interplay between these two empires shaped the culture of Canadian communities regardless of where in Canada they were located. But geographical location and local resource endowments, the pattern of migration in and out of the region, the degree and kind of interaction with native peoples and between the various ethnic groups within the region, and the extent to which particular communities were integrated into or isolated from national and international developments all meant that there were regional and local variations in the response of Canadians to these global factors.

This does not mean that Canadians could not evolve a collective sense of being part of a new imagined community called Canada. One of the great myths of modern times is that nationalism and the nation-state are historical relics doomed to be swept away by the tide of modernization and globalization. The reality around the globe is that what are being swept away are multi-national states, in the process creating smaller but ethnically more homogeneous nation-states. I hope it won't happen, but Canada may well follow that pattern. If it does, it will be because the majority of those who "imagine" themselves as "Canadians" cannot reach an accommodation with the minority who "imagine" themselves as "Québécois". But even the separation of Quebec would not necessarily lead to the complete fragmentation of the Canadian nation-state and the loss of a sense of Canadian identity, though it might unleash powerful disintegrative pressures.

It is time to put to rest the great myth about non-francophone Canadians — that they have no sense of national identity. This myth is based upon three fundamental fallacies. First is what I call the ethnic origins fallacy. I am tired of being told that Canada is a nation of immigrants. It isn't. From its foundation in 1867 Canada was, and it still is, composed predominantly of the native-born and of the descendants of immigrants. The original immigrants came from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds and some of their descendants retain a very strong sense of their ethnic origins and wish to maintain aspects of their ancestral identity; others do not or do not wish to. But overwhelmingly the native-born in Canada today, regardless of the ethnic origins of their forebears, have a sense of being either Québécois or Canadian, and a growing number of the latter, as the census data show, would define themselves as *ethnically* Canadian!<sup>25</sup>

The second fallacy is what I call the civic nationalism fallacy. This is the attempt to draw a distinction between ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism. This approach assumes that older European states have evolved nation-states which are based on a shared sense of ethnic nationalism, while New World societies which lack ethnic homogeneity must be based simply on a shared sense of civic nationalism. Implicitly this distinction seems to be based upon the curious notion that there are a finite number of ethnicities in the world, that at some point in the distant past the number was frozen and that new ethnic identities can never come into existence. This ignores

25 See Edward T. Prior et al., "Measuring Ethnicity: Is Canadian an Evolving Indigenous Category?", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 15, 2 (April 1992), pp. 216-33; Monica Boyd, "Canadian, eh? Ethnic Origin Shifts in the Canadian Census", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXXI, 3 (1999), pp. 1-19; Madeline A. Kalbach, "Becoming Canadian: Problems of an Emerging Identity", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, XXXI, 2 (1999), pp. 1-16.

the fact that many European nation-states, of which many are not much older than some of the New World states, began as monarchies or republics whose subjects were drawn from a range of ethnic origins, and that the citizens of these states only gradually evolved a collective sense of belonging to the same ethnic group. And it denies the reality that new states may come into existence, and if they survive long enough and command the loyalty of their citizens, a new sense of ethnic identity may follow. In the end, ethnicity is self-determined. Does it really make any sense to deny that American and Mexican and Australian can be ethnic identities? Canada is different from these examples only because it is the home of two conflicting ethnic identities, with one large ethnic minority sufficiently geographically concentrated to be able to “imagine” a separate national identity from that of the majority of Canadians. I do not mean to imply that all “Canadians” have to define themselves as ethnically Canadian. One may be a citizen of Canada and call oneself a Canadian without defining oneself as ethnically Canadian, but it is foolish to deny that many of the Canadian-born have no other sense of ethnic identity.

I also do not mean to imply that all of those who think of themselves as Canadians are united in their values or beliefs, nor do I imply that they should be. This is to fall into what I call the “national unity” fallacy. There has never been nor can there ever be a single, uncontested sense of what it means to be Canadian (or American or Australian). There is no one version of what it means to be Canadian which is truer than all others. As one Australian historian has written, all definitions of national character are “intellectual constructs, neat, tidy, comprehensible — and necessarily false”.<sup>26</sup> This does not mean that national identities do not exist. It simply means that they cannot be reduced to a single formula. There is more than one way of imagining the nation, just as there is more than one way of imagining a region or a locality. I do not object to the fact that Jack Granatstein has a different vision of Canada than I do. I object to the fact that his is a myopic vision which excludes the possibility of other definitions of national identity and equates disagreement with something bordering on disloyalty.

In a country as large and diverse as Canada, the state has never been able to establish a single, hegemonic vision of the nation. It never will. Canadian history is about immigration and pluralism, about the way in which individuals from diverse ethnic origins and with diverse backgrounds came together to form an imagined community. Regionalism was part of that process, but too much emphasis can be placed upon the divisive impact of regional differences. Regionalism has also been an integrative force, placing regional issues on the national agenda. Indeed, the creation of regional myths may help the populations of small and peripheral populations to define a place for themselves within a larger national community. Far from acting as a divisive force, I think that Atlantic Canadian regionalists have helped to create an imagined Canadian community with which Atlantic Canadians may identify by ensuring that there is at least some recognition of the regional diversity of Canada. We have not made all the progress we would like, but at least no one today would issue an anthology on Canadian literature that did not include a number of Atlantic regional authors or a collection of essays on Canadian history which did not include any

26 Richard White, *Inventing Australia: Images and Identity, 1688-1980* (Sydney, 1981), p. viii.

studies of Atlantic Canada. The recent spate of textbooks shows far greater sensitivity to regional issues than their predecessors. The prophets of doom who predict the collapse of the Canadian nation-state may be right, but personally I think that Canada as an imagined community is in stronger shape, at least outside of Quebec, than they think.<sup>27</sup> When we began writing regional history 30 years ago, we did not set out to weaken the Canadian nation-state. At the very first Atlantic Canada Studies Conference Dalton Camp gave a keynote speech in which he called upon us not to lose sight of the nation. We did not intend to do so, and I do not think that we have done so or ever will.

P.A. BUCKNER

27 For a very different view see Ian McKay, "After Canada: On Amnesia and Apocalypse in the Contemporary Crisis", *Acadiensis*, XXVIII, 1 (Autumn 1998), pp. 76-97.