

John C. Kennedy. Encounters: An Anthropological History of South- eastern Labrador. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-77354-493-2

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Volume 33, numéro 1, 2018

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1055877ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1055877ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Faculty of Arts, Memorial University

ISSN

1719-1726 (imprimé)

1715-1430 (numérique)

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Citer ce compte rendu

Richling, B. (2018). Compte rendu de [John C. Kennedy. Encounters: An Anthropological History of South- eastern Labrador. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-77354-493-2]. *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, 33(1). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1055877ar>

rewards focused attention but does not demand it, that uses several complex narrative techniques but always in the service of the story.

If there is a critique, it mostly arises by considering the audience. Newfoundlanders who tell their own stories and read the ones others tell may find — for lack of a better term — the texture of the stories somewhat thin, lacking some nuance and dissonant voices of this imagined home Delisle is trying to recapture. Likewise, we find, once again, that the home and the larger identity of Newfoundland itself are always historically receding, somewhere back there, not here and never now. But I do not want to blame a book for what it never tries to be, and what this book attempts to do is worth the writer's efforts and the reader's time.

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On its publication in 1995, John C. Kennedy's *People of the Bays and Headlands* became the first historical account of what Kennedy dubbed the "Unknown Labrador," the portion of Canada's Atlantic shoreline stretching northward from Chateau Bay to Hamilton Inlet. His characterization was a fair one at the time, the region's population, together with the forces influencing their past and present way of life, having garnered relatively little attention from researchers compared to the extensive scholarship on the Inuit, Innu, and settlers of northern and central Labrador. Of late, however, interest in the area has surged, a good deal of it aimed at supporting the claims of local residents to constitutionally protected rights and titles arising from their mixed Inuit-settler ancestry (e.g., Kennedy, ed., 2014;

NunatuKavut Community Council, 2010). In the spirit of that ongoing ethno-political project, one in which he has participated, comes Kennedy's latest book, *Encounters*. Covering much the same ground as *People of the Bays and Headlands*, the new volume's greater heft — to the tune of some 100 pages — broadens the scope of the original by drawing on his own and others' recent findings, and by examining major developments currently unfolding in this corner of Labrador. These last include lingering social and economic ramifications of the federal moratorium on cod fishing implemented in the early 1990s, and the politics surrounding assertion of indigeneity and the people's struggle for autonomy in the home territory they now call NunatuKavut, "our ancient land."

Sad to say, the story of the *unknown* Labrador is an all-too-familiar one. At base, it is the story of asymmetrical economic and political relations born of colonialism in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, and perpetuated thereafter by the policies and practices of an indifferent and sometimes feckless state. Its opening acts, recounted at length (if not always in depth) in *Encounter's* first six chapters, feature a cast of metropolitan (chiefly British and Newfoundland) merchants who exploited the region's natural wealth, as they did the labour and custom of those for whom southeastern Labrador was already home — or would become home over the years. As Kennedy explains, the area's population traces its origins to Inuit whose permanent occupation of this span of coastline dates to the very dawn of the contact era, and to settlers, mostly ex-servants of mercantile firms, who married Inuit women and started families after completing their terms of service. Self-identifying as settlers, not as Inuit or Métis, they forged a hunting and fishing mode of existence suffused with Indigenous knowledge and shaped by a demanding subarctic environment and by the exigencies of global commodities markets in staples such as fish and fur.

The next four chapters take up the eclipse of mercantilism by a neo-colonial state and its denominational proxies from the late 1800s onward, again in considerable detail. The author depicts the effects of

this system at the local level as uneven: while its social dimensions (e.g., education and health care) proved beneficial in the main, its economic and political impacts, most a result of twentieth-century industrial and population centralization schemes, typically favoured external interests over those of ordinary folks. Relying heavily on unpublished and printed sources to this point, Kennedy switches gears in the book's penultimate chapter, drawing on his 2013 fieldwork in the region's scattered villages to summarize the state of affairs in each and to examine the more momentous changes currently underway. Of these, the emergence of Inuit-Métis identity and formation of the NunatuKavut Community Council to promote the population's collective interests are arguably of greatest consequence. But with resolution of their land claim pending since the early 1990s, it remains to be seen just how consequential this organized claim of identity is.

As a work of social history, *Encounters* most noticeably improves on *People of the Bays and Headlands* in lifting the inhabitants of south-eastern Labrador out of the background of their own story where its earlier incarnation had stranded them, apparently for lack of sufficient documentary material. This fuller portrayal owes a primary debt to Kennedy's exhumation of first-hand observations of the local scene scattered through previously unexamined archival and published sources. Though confined to relatively few pages, the main beneficiary on this score is doubtless his beefed-up depiction of the region's Inuit population in the nineteenth century. The evidence he presents, combined with recent archaeological findings, serves to refute the long-standing assumption that by this late date, so-called traditional Inuit territory in Labrador lay entirely to the north of Hamilton Inlet. To this reader's mind, however, the book's most thought-provoking section is its account of the long and arduous journey that took the self-ascribed Inuit-Métis of today to the threshold of self-determination as an Indigenous people from a starting point rooted in colonial-era rejection of their indigeneity. In the light of that generations-deep rejection, one is left to wonder whether the contemporary end point, as Kennedy supportively writes, "more accurately

[constitutes] the ‘reformulation of an existing ethnic identity’ than it does creation of a brand new [one]” (333). If the answer hinges solely on acknowledgement and embrace of mixed ancestry, a common enough idea and one that Kennedy’s treatment suggests, then, no, nothing new has been created. But unless the process also traces back to their “self-conscious historical development *as a people*,” an argument gaining currency of late and on which *Encounters* offers little convincing evidence, then the emergent Métis identity takes on the feel of the “evocative realm of twenty-first century expediency” (Gaudry and Leroux, 2017: 116).

On a separate plane, the title under review, like its predecessor, offers a rough read. Rather than providing what the blurb describes as a “compelling narrative,” the writing vacillates between folksy and ploddingly opaque, with occasional awkward constructions and lots of repetition of basic facts thrown in for good measure. As compensation, two helpful maps of the region and a selection of historical and contemporary photographs accompany the text.

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