

Atlantic Canadian Women and Gender History: Where Is It Going and Where Should It Be Going?

AT LEAST 200 BOOKS AND ARTICLES HAVE BEEN ADDED to the historiography of Atlantic Canadian women and gender in the last two decades. At the same time, Suzanne Morton's description of region and gender as an unhappy or at least complicated marriage in 2000 might be further updated as categories that have been merely living together all this time and are still hesitant to take the relationship to the next level.¹ Trends in the fields of women and gender history, Atlantic Canadian history, and the wider discipline of history suggest a preference for geographical boundaries as either specific government-defined locales or within Indigenous nations, or broader, imagined concepts that avoid any "lines," with little in between. Perhaps in tandem with the waning debate on the need for a national historical narrative, interest in defining the region seems also to have shifted²; it has been superseded by a series of debates in women and gender history, including on the uses of categories of analysis and intersectionality, and calls to action from both the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Black Lives Matter movement.

This article considers the field since 2000 (the year the last state of the field address was published), the major influences on the field today, and some predictions and encouragement for the future of Atlantic Canadian women and gender history. Much progress has been made in the last two decades, but not necessarily in how the history of women and gender has formed the region. We still urgently need to recover and flesh out racialized gender history in particular, especially in our duty as historians to address the legacies of racism connected to the histories of colonization and slavery in the region. And we

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- 1 Suzanne Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region: Thoughts on the State of Women in Atlantic Canadian History," *Atlantis: Critical Studies in Gender, Culture & Social Justice / Études critiques sur le genre, la culture, et la justice* 25, no. 1 (2000): 119.
 - 2 Historian Don Wright explains "the lack of a single national identity is a strength, not a weakness"; see Donald Wright, *Canada: A Very Short Introduction* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2020), 3.

must continue the seemingly unending fight to remove stereotypes of Atlantic Canadian backwardness and conservatism from national histories.³ While such stereotypes most often target our economic history, they also affect women and gender history as with early publications on suffrage.⁴

Suzanne Morton and Ian McKay both commented on regional history in 2000, and, in 2019, Mercedes Peters added an important Indigenous perspective. According to Morton, “So the big question that emerges is how do historians employ gender as an analytical tool and adapt its use to acknowledge the extent to which place or context contributes to its construction? . . . For despite the wealth of fascinating material generated, it is clear that women’s history and feminist theory have not yet affected the ways in which Atlantic Canadian themes are examined. Women and gender have been included in the region’s history but they have not fundamentally altered the way it is understood.”⁵ While Morton was ultimately optimistic about the potential of Atlantic Canadian gender history at the turn of the century, Ian McKay was pessimistic about perennial misunderstandings of the region by historians from outside the region. Referring to the explosion in categories of analysis and the inability to create a national historical synthesis, McKay asked: “Why even have a field of Atlantic Canadian history, if ‘Atlantic Canada’ is an empty space upon which we multiply our incompatible and incommensurate stories?” He suggested that a “strategy of reconnaissance” replace any further attempts at synthesis, especially as these attempts (including naturalized regional identity and structural-functionalist and socio-cultural approaches) had not been accepted outside the region, and the history of Atlantic Canada continued to be marginalized: “[Regional historians’ objections] are all so easily brushed aside, as so much ‘detail’ that disrupts the crucial task of synthesis; or as sheer negativity; or as parochialism.”⁶ Morton’s and McKay’s diagnoses do not conflict, but their prescriptions vary greatly. And while some of their concerns

3 E.R. Forbes, “Introduction,” in *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1989), 7 and Margaret Conrad, “Nothing, of course, ever happens down there’: Atlantic Canada in the National Consciousness,” *Canadian Issues/Thèmes canadiens* (Fall 2014): 33-7.

4 Cleverdon claimed “Nowhere has the traditional conservatism of the Maritime Provinces been more apparent than in the securing of political rights for women . . . it was *natural* that these provinces should exhibit varying shades of apathy” (emphasis added); see Catherine L. Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 156.

5 Morton, “Gender, Place, and Region,” 121, 123.

6 Ian McKay, “A Note on ‘Region’ in Writing the History of Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis* 29, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 90, 94.

have diminished, others persist. Recently, Mi'kmaw historian Mercedes Peters has added a new layer to defining the region, calling for "place-based studies of individual [Indigenous] nations." While acknowledging advances in the last decade, she notes Mi'kmaw historiography still lacks the precise connection to territory that is required for reconciliation.⁷ Perhaps answers to Peters's call will advance both Indigenous and non-Indigenous history in future decades.

Considering what has (and has not) been published in gender and regional history plunges us into central debates around women, gender, and regional history. Since its inception, women's history has sparked contested definitions and debates ranging from fairly essentialist classifications of women's history to a broader range of relational, psychoanalytical, and socially constructed approaches that address gender and power. In a famous 1986 article, Joan Scott promoted a two-part, four sub-part approach to using gender, rather than women, as a category of historical analysis, which would "synthesize the proliferation of case studies in women's history," leverage the universality of gender as a concept, and raise the status of the field in the broader historical profession.⁸ While gender history grew, a parallel roaring defence of women's history enlivened the field. The debate that played out in Canada in *Left History* in 1995-1996 forged a path for growing the field of gender history, including histories of masculinity, sexuality, and queerness, while maintaining an esteemed place for those who preferred women's history, including for feminist reasons.⁹ Broad agreement grew that no one needed to choose between the closely linked fields, yet criticism of gender history continued. For example, in 2008, early American gender historian Jeanne Boydston argued that gender history had failed, with historians often still assuming "that whatever female people do is 'femininity' and whatever male people do is 'masculinity'" rather than positing "the relation of 'gender' as a social construction to designated 'male' and 'female' bodies." Most worrisome to Boydston was that "although we have argued for 'gender' as a historical process, we have frequently treated

7 Mercedes Peters, "The Future is Mi'kmaq: Exploring the Merits of Nation-Based Histories as the Future of Indigenous History in Canada," *Acadiensis* 48, no. 2 (Autumn 2019): 206, 214, 216.

8 Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (December 1986): 1055.

9 Joan Sangster, "Beyond Dichotomies: Re-assessing Gender History and Women's History in Canada," *Left History* 3, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 1995): 109-21; Karen Dubinsky and Lynne Marks, "Beyond Purity: A Response to Sangster," *Left History* 4, no. 1 (1996): 205-20; Franca Iacovetta and Linda Kealey, "Women's History, Gender History, and Debating Dichotomies," *Left History* 4, no. 1 (1996): 221-37.

that process as non-historically contingent. . . . We have largely disregarded the very local and particular character of the concept as most of us have come to understand and use it.”¹⁰ Morton’s advice in 2000 foreshadowed Boydston’s emphasis on how locales influence gender history, but Morton went further in a Möbius strip argument: not only does region influence gender history, but gender history must contribute to understandings of the region.¹¹

In the last decade, intersectionality – the necessity of considering how multiple forms of dominance (and privilege) form individual and community-based experiences (including those located in histories of race, gender, and educational attainment) – has become the strongest force in gender theory and methodology. The concept was first developed by African American legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and since then references to intersectionality have exploded not only among scholars but perhaps more significantly among activists, including in the Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and LGBT2S+ movements.¹² One of the markers of intersectionality’s influence is how right-wing conservatives rail against its threat to social hierarchies and power structures. As with gender as a category of historical analysis, intersectionality has its critics. In keeping with Boydston’s and Scott’s earlier concerns, respected historian Linda Gordon warns that “intersectionality, understood as diversity, can rely on essentialist assumptions,” either by “identify[ing] individual bodies as representing perspectives, assuming, for instance, that a female will defend women’s interests, an African American will defend the interests of blacks, a transgendered person the interests of transgendered people,” or by assuming “homogeneity” within categories such as race, gender, or economic status: “Thus efforts to bring representatives of different races or sex/gender identities may assume that each person represents her or his entire race, sexual preference, for example.”¹³

To evaluate recent trends in Atlantic Canadian gender history, PhD candidate Shelby Martens and I compiled a list from the tables of contents of *Acadiensis*, the *Canadian Historical Review*, *Labour/Le Travail*, and *Histoire*

10 Jeanne Boydston, “Gender as a Question of Historical Analysis,” *Gender & History* 20, no. 3 (November 2008): 559.

11 Morton, “Gender, Place, and Region,” 121, 123.

12 Katy Steinmetz, “She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ over 30 Years Ago. Here’s What It Means to Her Today,” *Time*, 20 Feb 2020, <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>.

13 Linda Gordon, “‘Intersectionality,’ Socialist Feminism, and Contemporary Activism: Musings by a Second-Wave Socialist Feminist,” *Gender & History* 28, no. 2 (August 2016): 347. Note that today “transgender,” or shortened to “trans,” is preferred.

sociale / Social History, and the “Recent Publications” section on Atlantic Canada in the *Canadian Historical Review* from 2000 to 2020. We classified the almost 200 books and articles into categories most common in international women and gender history and with the potential to have a regional focus: biography, boyhood, childhood, education, ethnicity, girlhood, health, Indigenous, labour, politics, religion, science, social history, and state. The first pass focused on titles and my familiarity with pieces, and in the second I employed quick reads, abstracts, and book reviews for further clarification. I acknowledge the crudeness of this methodology – including how authors rarely intend their work to reside in any single category – but it did reveal strong trends, especially in the largest categories: biography (43), labour (34), education (31), the state (22), and social history (11). I then delved further into each category.

In the biography category, African Canadian ethnicity and Acadian ethnicity were a primary consideration in six, including Anne Marie Lane Jonah’s research on two mid-18th century women residents of Louisbourg and Verna Thomas’s autobiography about growing up in Preston, Nova Scotia.¹⁴ Authors in the biography category were the most varied – professional historians, journalists, scholars from other disciplines (including English literature and philosophy), and primarily fiction authors. Methodologically, diaries were the main (sometimes sole) primary source of eight of the biographies. This category contained the most recovery history but also prototypical books, such as Jean Barman’s *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (2003). The McQueen sisters left Pictou, Nova Scotia, for better opportunities in the teaching profession in British Columbia in the late 1880s.¹⁵ Using correspondence between the sisters and their wider family, Barman reflects on their moralizing and domesticating influence as a form of nation-building.

Labour history, the second largest group, has progressed significantly since the publication of *Labour and Working-Class History in Atlantic Canada: A Reader*, edited by David Frank and Greg Kealey (1995), in which only two of the seventeen reprinted articles focused on women. The Maritimes chapter by Suzanne Morton and Ian McKay in the regionally organized edited collection

14 Anne Marie Lane Jonah, “Everywoman’s Biography: The Stories of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas at Louisbourg,” *Acadiensis* 45, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2016): 143–62; Verna Thomas, *Invisible Shadows: A Black Woman’s Life in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2002).

15 Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003).

The Workers' Revolt in Canada (1998)¹⁶ includes women and a gendered analysis throughout. Notably, ten pieces in the labour category crossover with health professions, especially Linda Kealey, Sasha Mullally, and Peter Twohig's important work on female-dominated health care professionals (nurses, lab workers, and occupational therapists),¹⁷ as well as with the fishery, shipbuilding, forestry, domestic service, textiles, and union activity; these include substantial contributions by Béatrice Craig, Judith Rygiel, Nicole Lang, Linda Cullum, and Heidi Coombs-Thorne.¹⁸

Professions – teacher, professor, or school inspector – were also a common theme of five of the thirty-one publications in the education group. The history of education is a prolific field in every region of the country, at least partly because faculties of education have included historians – although that trend is on the decline and we risk a parallel decline in writing the history of education in Atlantic Canada. The most innovative topics were four pieces on aspects of Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian education, including important pieces by Martha Walls and Bernice Moreau.¹⁹ The largest sub-theme was twelve pieces on post-secondary education, which included the 2004, nine-essay forum “Celebrating the Origins and Teaching of Women's History at Atlantic

16 Suzanne Morton and Ian McKay, “The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance,” in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 43-86.

17 Linda Kealey, “No More ‘Yes Girls’: Labour Activism among New Brunswick Nurses, 1964-1981,” *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2008): 3-17; Sasha Mullally, “Between Community and State: Practising Public Health in Cape Breton, 1938-1948,” *Acadiensis* 38, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2009): 98-115; Peter Twohig, *Labour in the Laboratory: Medical Laboratory Workers in the Maritimes, 1900-50* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

18 Béatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009); Béatrice Craig, Judith Anne Rygiel, and Elizabeth Turcotte, *Survival or Adaptation?: Domestic Rural Textile Production in Eastern Canada in the Later Nineteenth Century* (Leeds: British Agricultural History Society, 2001); Nicole Lang, “Les Acadiennes et le marché du travail : les revendications et les stratégies des militantes (1968-1991),” *Acadiensis* 45, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2016): 100-17; Linda Cullum, “In Whose Interest? Women Organizing on the Waterfront – St. John's, Newfoundland, 1948,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 22, no. 1 (March 2009): 108-44; Heidi Coombs-Thorne, “‘Mrs. Tilley had a very hasty wedding!': The Class-Based Response to Marriages in the Grenfell Mission of Newfoundland and Labrador,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 27, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 123-38.

19 Martha Walls, “The teacher that cannot understand their language should not be allowed”: Colonialism, Resistance, and Female Mi'kmaq Teachers in New Brunswick Day Schools, 1900-1923,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 22, no. 1 (2011): 35-68; Bernice Morneau, “Black Nova Scotian Women's Schooling and Citizenship: An Education of Violence,” in *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings*, ed. Robert Adamoski, Dorothy Chunn, and Robert Menzies (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 293-312.

Provinces Universities: A Symposium.”²⁰ A follow-up forum on teaching gender history in Atlantic Canada would be welcome, perhaps in 2024.

The fourth largest category, the state, is where we see the most headway in the last two decades, with pivotal publications on policymaking (and resistance) by and for women. These include three high-impact books: *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (2005) co-edited by Janet Guildford and Judith Fingard; *Making Up the State: Women in 20th-century Atlantic Canada* (2010) co-edited by Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton; and *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity: Canadian Social Welfare through the Life of Jane B. Wisdom, 1884-1975* (2014) by Suzanne Morton. The ten pieces in *Mothers of the Municipality* recount various state or state-sanctioned agencies’ regulation of “problem” women and children; the influence and motivation of women social reformers; and feminist strategies of resisting state control both within and outside government. Focusing on the variety of women’s activism within provincial and national structures, *Making Up the State* includes articles related to crime, taxation, health care, suffrage, the law, nursing professions, and Bill C-31 – the federal law that removed Indian status from Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men.²¹ Thirty years ago Gail Campbell recommended an edited collection on Atlantic Canadian women’s history, and since the publication of these two collections, along with Guildford and Morton’s 1994 collaboration, the well-known *Separate Spheres: Women’s Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes*, any expectations have been exceeded.²² These three collections, published in 1994, 2004, and 2010, show the vibrancy of the history of women, gender, and the state in Atlantic Canada, and provide North American gender historians with no excuse to exclude the Maritimes from comparisons with other regions’ state and gender histories; historians of Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia have also been producing much in this field. Five of the ten *Separate Spheres* pieces focus on the state, perhaps

20 Gail Campbell et al., “Forum: Celebrating the Origins and Teaching of Women’s History at Atlantic Provinces Universities: A Symposium,” *Acadiensis* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 68-104.

21 Janet Guildford and Judith Fingard, eds., *Mothers of the Municipality: Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2005); Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Making Up the State: Women in 20th-Century Atlantic Canada* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 2010); and Suzanne Morton, *Wisdom, Justice, and Charity: Canadian Social Welfare through the Life of Jane B. Wisdom, 1884-1975* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

22 Gail G. Campbell, “Canadian Women’s History: A View from Atlantic Canada,” *Acadiensis* 20, no. 1 (Autumn 1990): 195.

foreshadowing this growth area.²³ At the same time, there remains lots of room in this field – especially the relationship of Black and Indigenous persons and the state (i.e., healthcare, social funding, education, and the military), though I note the important contributions of Martha Walls, Fern Marie Paul, Lisa Perley-Dutcher and Stephen Dutcher.²⁴ In Newfoundland, research on the state has tended to focus on Confederation issues so much still needs to be done with women and gender’s intersection with the state. Interestingly, Linda Callum and Marilyn Porter’s fine 2014 edited collection *Creating This Place: Women, Family, and Class in St John’s, 1900-1950*²⁵ situates women’s activism and leadership more within families, churches, and communities rather than as part of the state. There is certainly room for a *Mothers of the Municipality*-style collection on St. John’s.

The robustness of the historiography of gender and the state in Atlantic Canada extends to chronological breadth. Pieces by Rusty Bittermann and Margaret McCallum on 18th-century Prince Edward Island “lady landlords,” Julian Gynn’s research on Nova Scotia women litigants, and Trudy Johnston’s work on property law and inheritance in 19th-century Newfoundland mark one end of the chronological continuum.²⁶ On the other end we are benefitting from late 20th-century reproductive politics and health research, particularly with five articles on abortion – including on New Brunswick by Lianne McTavish and PEI by Katrina Ackerman.²⁷

23 Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton, eds., *Separate Spheres: Women’s Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes* (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994). Though the title may seem out of date today, *Gender & History* almost used the same name when it was founded in 1988; see Lynn Abrams, Eleanor Gordon, and Alexandra Shepard, “Twenty-five Years of Gender & History,” *Gender & History* 25, no.1 (April 2013): 1.

24 Martha Walls, “The Disposition of the Ladies: Mi’kmaw Women and the Removal of the King’s Road Reserve, Sydney, Nova Scotia,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 50, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 538–65; Fern Marie Paul, “Bill C-31: The Experiences of ‘Indian’ Women Who ‘Married Out’” (master’s thesis, University of New Brunswick, 2003); Lisa Perley-Dutcher and Stephen Dutcher, “At Home But Not At Peace: The Impact of Bill C-31 on Women and Children of the Tobique First Nation,” in Guildford and Morton, *Making Up the State*, 197–215.

25 Linda Callum and Marilyn Porter, eds., *Creating This Place: Women, Family, and Class in St John’s, 1900-1950* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014).

26 Rusty Bittermann and Margaret E. McCallum, *Lady Landlords of Prince Edward Island: Imperial Dreams and the Defence of Property* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008); Julian Gwyn, “Female Litigants before the Civil Courts of Nova Scotia, 1749-1801,” *Histoire sociale / Social History* 36, no. 72 (November 2003): 311-46; Trudi Johnson, “Women and Inheritance in Nineteenth-Century Newfoundland,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 13 (2002): 1-22.

27 Lianne McTavish, “Abortion in New Brunswick,” *Acadiensis* 44, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2015): 107-30; Katrina R. Ackerman, “In Defence of Reason: Religion, Science, and the

As Joan Scott insisted in 1986 and others have reiterated, any idea of gender is best considered relatively (though not binarily); yet about one-quarter of the 200 published articles and books in our list consider women as an essentialist category rather than across socially constructed identities. So we are more accurately dealing here with women's, men's, and gender history, with some but not all of the first two groups also belonging in the gender category and all of the gender category also fitting in the former two categories. Pigeonholing is risky here, but I think grouping these articles and books into categories of women, men, or gender (largely accepting titles' inferences) is useful for at least crudely demonstrating the ongoing strong preference for women's history over gender history, and the underdevelopment of the history of masculinity in Atlantic Canada as elsewhere. My grouping – the faults of which I acknowledge – shows a staggering 84 per cent of the almost 200 publications considered were focused on women, with gender a distant second at 13 per cent, and men just 3 per cent. Although masculinity is still miles behind women's history in the region, Robert McIntosh's *Boys in the Pits: Child Labour in Coal Mines* (2000), and articles by Willeen Keough on Newfoundland sealers (2010), Deborah Stiles on leather tanner Martin Butler (2003), and Sharon Myers on the Saint John Boys' Industrial School (2019) are important exceptions; it is notable that three of these are about boyhood, a field rarely explored in Atlantic Canada before 2000.²⁸

Neither queer history nor gender fluidity is yet visible in the historiography, with the exception of Rebecca Rose, *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities, 1972-1984*.²⁹ There is a real need for an Atlantic Canadian equivalent of Valerie J. Korinek's *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (2018), as well as more local studies.³⁰ We see foreshadowing of future publications in

Prince Edward Island Anti-Abortion Movement, 1969-1988," *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 31, no. 2 (2014): 117-38.

- 28 Robert McIntosh, *Boys in the Pit: Child Labour in Coal Mines* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Willeen Keough, "(Re-)Telling Newfoundland Sealing Masculinity: Narrative and Counter-Narrative," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 21, no. 1 (2010): 131-50; Deborah Stiles, "The Gender and Class Dimensions of a Rural Childhood: Martin Butler in New Brunswick, 1857-1871," *Acadiensis* 33, no. 1 (Autumn 2003): 73-86; Sharon Myers, "'Suffering from a Sense of Injustice': Children's Activism in Liberal State Formation at the Saint John Boys Industrial Home, 1927-1932," *Histoire sociale / Social History* 52, no. 105 (May 2019): 1-30.
- 29 Rebecca Rose, *Before the Parade: A History of Halifax's Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Communities, 1972-1984* (Halifax: Nimbus, 2019).
- 30 Valerie J. Korinek, *Prairie Fairies: A History of Queer Communities and People in Western Canada, 1930-1985* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

such local projects as the New Brunswick Queer Heritage Initiative, founded in 2015, and Jacqueline Gahagan's work establishing an LGBTQ2S+ archive at Dalhousie's Killam Library.³¹ We can also fairly safely anticipate that ongoing LGBTQ2S+ advocacy in Atlantic Canada will drive research agendas – just as feminism in the 1970s and subsequently has generated a great deal of women and gender history. Provincial school curricula, such as described in a 2018 *Active History* blog on New Brunswick,³² will help advance this area. With queer studies well embedded in the national historiography for three decades now, it is disappointing that it is so slow to develop in Atlantic Canada. There are many, many opportunities here, especially if oral history is employed.

The geographical emphasis within Atlantic Canadian gender history has shifted slightly in the last two decades, but regional approaches remain rare. Of the nearly 200 books and articles, 30 per cent (55) concern Nova Scotia (or its communities) – affirming the province as the most common geographic focus since Atlantic regional history became an identifiable field. Newfoundland, however, is nearly on par with 29 per cent (52), a significant expansion after so much of their early history focused on the fishery and Confederation. New Brunswick and PEI are farther behind with 20 per cent (36) and 10 per cent (18). Just 11 per cent combined more than one province, and roughly half of those are Maritime and half Atlantic Canadian. Gender historians are only slowly accepting Morton's 2000 call that "Halifax examples cannot make claims for the regional level and not all questions or issues about gender may be appropriate or relevant to examine in terms of region or locality. . . . If a feminist understanding of gender is going to truly reshape our understanding of the Atlantic region and add to national narratives, we must adapt."³³ There is no question that it is harder to study gender on a regional scale, including the expense of travelling to sources – often multiple provincial archives – which largely restricts research to university historians with research grants. The same applies to Indigenous gender history; it is usually more manageable

31 New Brunswick Queer Heritage Initiative, https://search.canbarchives.ca/new-brunswick-queer-heritage-initiative?sf_culture=fr; "Dal Health Researcher Championing LGBTQ+ Health Equity," https://www.dal.ca/faculty/health/news-events/news/2020/06/25/dal_health_researcher_championing_lgbtq_health_equity.html; "Nova Scotia LGBT Seniors Archive - Dalhousie University," <https://halifax.bibliocommons.com/v2/record/S135C1978953>.

32 Casey Burkholder, "Queering Social Studies Education in New Brunswick," 18 September 2018, <https://activehistory.ca>. Blogs such as *Active History* and *Acadiensis* often are harbingers of new scholarship, but neither has seen an uptick in gender history focusing on non-binary sexualities in Atlantic Canada, except for the 2018 post cited here.

33 Morton, "Gender, Place, and Region," 126.

to study one reserve rather than a nation, especially Indigenous nations that occupy more than one province. Our lack of significant progress in producing regional approaches to gender history continues to make us vulnerable to stereotyping or exclusion from national narratives, inexcusable as that is. More positively, however, we have grown the historiography to the degree that gender-based studies of the Atlantic provinces may now be put side-by-side to make Atlantic Canadian comparisons, including research on women teachers (Sheila Andrew, Martha Walls, George Perry, and Kay Whitehead and Judith Peppard)³⁴; women labour activists (Linda Kealey and Linda Cullum)³⁵; and post-Second-World-War-era feminist activism (Nicole Lang, Gail Campbell, and Nancy Janovicek).³⁶ At the same time, there are substantial studies that beg to serve externally as comparisons with other regions, including on enslaved women (Harvey Amani Whitfield and Ken Donovan),³⁷ Irish women emigrants (Willeen Keough and Sandra Barney),³⁸ and women's lived religion (Bonnie Morgan and Hannah Lane).³⁹ As with other categories, there is room

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- 34 Sheila M. Andrew, "Gender and Nationalism: Acadians, Québécois, and Irish in New Brunswick Nineteenth-Century Colleges and Convent Schools, 1854-1888," *CCHA* [Canadian Catholic Historical Association] *Study Sessions*: 7-23; Martha Walls, "'Part of That Whole System': Maritime Day and Residential Schooling and Federal Culpability," *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 30, no. 2 (December 2010): 361-85; George Perry, "'A Concession to Circumstances': Nova Scotia's 'Unlimited Supply' of Women Teachers, 1870-1960," *Historical Studies in Education* 15, no. 2 (September 2003): 327-60; Kay Whitehead and Judith Peppard, "Placing the Grandy Sisters as Teachers in Pre-Confederation Newfoundland," *Historical Studies in Education* 17, no. 1 (March 2005): 81-105.
- 35 Linda Kealey, "No More 'Yes Girls': Labour Activism among New Brunswick Nurses, 1964-1981," *Acadiensis* 37, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2008): 3-17; Cullum, "In Whose Interest?"
- 36 Nicole Lang, "Les Acadiennes et le marché du travail : Les revendications et les stratégies des militantes (1968-1991)," *Acadiensis* 45, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2016): 100-17; Gail G. Campbell, "Are We Going to Do the Most Important Things? Senator Muriel McQueen Fergusson, Feminist Identities, and the Royal Commission on the Status of Women," *Acadiensis* 38, no. 2 (Fall 2009): 52-77; Nancy Janovicek, "'If It Saves One Life, All the Effort . . . is Worthwhile': Crossroads for Women / Carrefour pour femmes, Moncton, 1979-1987," *Acadiensis* 35, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 27-45.
- 37 Harvey Amani Whitfield's forthcoming *Enslaved Black People in the Maritimes: A Biographical Dictionary of African and African American Slaves in Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island* (Acadiensis Press and University of Toronto Press, 2022); Ken Donovan, "Female Slaves as Sexual Victims in Île Royale," *Acadiensis* 43, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2014): 147-56.
- 38 Willeen G. Keough, *The Slender Thread: Irish Women on the Southern Avalon, 1750-1860* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Sandra Barney, "Another Drop in the Well: Exploring Irish Women's Immigration to New Brunswick before the Famine," *Acadiensis* 44, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2015): 95-105.
- 39 Bonnie Morgan, *Conceiving Christianity: Anglican Women and Lived Religion in Mid-20th Century Conception Bay, Newfoundland* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019); Hannah Lane, "Tribalism, Proselytism, and Pluralism: Protestants,

for more history from all four Atlantic Canadian provinces, but this scan suggests particular need from PEI and New Brunswick as well as more effort in furthering a regional approach. If there is a caution here, it is in terms of the high prevalence of biographies from specific locales that are vulnerable to McKay's criticism of "multiply[ing] our incompatible and incommensurate stories."⁴⁰ Although the 200 books and articles published in the field in the last two decades have certainly increased the breadth and depth of our knowledge of the region, it has not necessarily theorized the region or grappled with the concept of the region – especially when compared to the debates in the broader field of gender history. The ongoing tendency to focus on one province, if not locale, reiterates Morton's earlier concerns: significant gains have not been made in the last two decades in analyzing how women and gender history has shifted how the *region* is understood. Comparative studies are still underused, with notable exceptions, including the use of multiple sites of analysis in the work of Nancy Janovicek, Shirley Tillotson, and Janis Thiessen, for example, and the approach of Jean Barman in *Sojourning Sisters*.⁴¹

The list of Canadian Historical Association prizes awarded in the last two decades offers additional opportunities to reflect on trends in women and gender history. The CHA began awarding five regional Clio prizes in 1979 "for meritorious publications or for exceptional contributions by individuals or organizations to regional history."⁴² In the last 20 years, Bonnie Morgan's 2020 Clio prize for Atlantic Canadian history for *Ordinary Saints: Women, Work, and Faith in Newfoundland* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019) is the only overt example of the award going to women's history. On the other hand, at least a third of the books on the prize list, including Renée Lafferty's award in 2014, Béatrice Craig's in 2010, Rusty Bittermann's in 2007, Naomi Griffith's in 2006, and Margaret Conrad and James Hiller's in 2002, all include significant women and gender analysis in combination with state, economic,

Family, and Denominational Identity in Mid-Nineteenth Century St. Stephen, New Brunswick," in *Households of Faith: Family, Gender, and Community in Canada 1760-1969*, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002), 103-37.

40 McKay, "Note on 'Region,'" 90.

41 Barman, *Sojourning Sisters*; Nancy Janovicek, *No Place to Go: Local Histories of the Battered Women's Shelter Movement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2007); Janis Thiessen, *Snacks: A Canadian Food History* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017); Shirley Tillotson, *Give and Take: The Citizen-Taxpayer and the Rise of Canadian Democracy* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).

42 CHA website, <https://cha-shc.ca/english/what-we-do/prizes/the-clio-prizes.htm>.

rural, and other forms of social history.⁴³ The Canadian Historical Association's Best Scholarly Book in Canadian History Prize (renamed in 2018) has been awarded to only three books based on Atlantic Canada in its 53-year history, and all in the last two decades. Of these three very impressive books, Béatrice Craig's *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (2010) is the only one with a significant women and gender analysis. Again, however, I note that some additional prize-winning books include regional Canadian women and gender content and analysis, including Shirley Tillotson's *Give and Take: The Citizen-Taxpayer and the Rise of Canadian Democracy* (2017), which won the 2019 CHA book prize and the 2020 François-Xavier Garneau Medal (the latter awarded every five years). A third national prize, the Canadian Committee on Women's History book prize for best books published in English and French (one prize each) on an aspect of women's history, has been awarded three times since 2014 for an English monograph and once for a monograph in French. Of the four books awarded, one is on Atlantic Canadian women's history: Gail Campbell's "*I Wish to Keep a Record*": *Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick Women Diarists and Their World* (2017).⁴⁴ The increasing number of nationally recognized awards for Atlantic Canadian women and gender history is promising, as is the broader appreciation that history, including gender and region, is valuable.

The last two decades have seen clear advances in publishing the three important collections on women and gender history in Atlantic Canada mentioned above – or more specifically on Halifax, the Maritimes, and St. John's – but has the visibility of the region improved in national collections as has so long been the goal (and complaint) of Atlantic Canadian historians? A review of the three most often used collections – Lara Campbell, Tamara Myers, and Adele Perry's *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (2016); Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek's *Feminist History in*

43 Bonnie Morgan, *Ordinary Saints: Women, Work, and Faith in Newfoundland* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2019); Renée N. Lafferty, *The Guardianship of Best Interests: Institutional Care for the Children of the Poor in Halifax, 1850-1960* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); Rusty Bittermann, *Rural Protest on Prince Edward Island: From British Colonization to the Escheat Movement* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006); N.E.S Griffiths, *From Migrant to Acadian: A North American Border People, 1604-1755* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005); Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists*; Margaret Conrad and James K. Hiller, *Atlantic Canada: A Concise History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002).

44 Gail Campbell, "*I Wish to Keep a Record*": *Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick Women Diarists and Their World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017).

Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation (2014); and Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson's *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History* (2019) – reveals a complicated answer.⁴⁵ The seventh and most recent edition of *Rethinking Canada*, first published in 1986, comprises twenty-four articles, each introduced with a primary document. Eight articles focus on Quebec (one-third of the collection) and five articles on Ontario (almost one-quarter), and Atlantic Canadian content continues to be underrepresented with just two articles (less than 10 per cent of the collection). The topics of the two articles – Anne Marie Lane Jonah's "Everywoman's Biography: The Stories of Marie Marguerite Rose and Jeanne Dugas at Louisbourg" and Jennifer Harris's "'Ushered into the Kitchen': Lalia Halfkenny, Instructor of English and Elocution at a 19th-Century African American Women's College" (first published in *Acadiensis* in 2016 and 2012 respectively), suggest that pre-20th-century ethnic and racialized gender and women history is most sought after by national collections trying to decentre colonial histories.⁴⁶ *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation* contains thirteen articles, only half of which refer to a specific geography. Here the two original New Brunswick articles provide the collection's Atlantic Canadian content: Gail Campbell's essay on 19th-century male and female diarists, and Anthony Hampton's essay on late 20th-century feminist political activists. There is less to infer here about regional representation other than the obvious downplaying of it overall. The third collection, Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson's *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History*, brings together historiographical appraisals of key women and gender history fields, including Indigenous, immigration, sexuality, reproduction, and feminist waves. A few decades ago such a collection might have been arranged around region, but now that is unimaginable; we depend on individual chapters to consider regional variety, which they do to varying degrees.

Despite being published within five years of each other, these three collections imply the importance of geography to gendered historical

45 Lara Campbell, Tamara Myers, and Adele Perry, eds., *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Woman's History*, 7th ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2016); Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek, eds., *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work, and Nation* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014); Nancy Janovicek and Carmen Nielson, eds., *Reading Canadian Women's and Gender History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

46 Jonah, "Everywoman's Biography," 143–62; Jennifer Harris, "'Ushered into the Kitchen': Lalia Halfkenny, Instructor of English and Elocution at a 19th-Century African American Women's College," *Acadiensis* 41, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 45–65.

experiences to differing degrees. But all suggest the sole tying of region and gender – or place and gender – has been superseded by other approaches that decentre national histories, although New France/Quebec remains a clear exception. The inclusion in these collections of articles on Acadienne and African-Acadienne women disseminating Acadian identity, an African Canadian woman leaving Nova Scotia to teach in an American college, and New Brunswick women writing and advocating across centuries, shows that Atlantic Canadian historians are working to right the same imbalances. Incorporating Atlantic Canadian history in national histories, however, remains tenuous.

Rather than provide more specific advice on where Atlantic Canada women and gender history should be going, I will conclude by recommending the effective approaches of five relevant recently published monographs that could assist us in advancing the field.

Gail Campbell's *"I Wish to Keep a Record": Nineteenth-Century New Brunswick Women Diarists and Their World* (2017) is based on the diaries of 28 New Brunswick women writing between 1795 and 1875. In 15 chapters, Campbell contextualizes the women in their "time and place," sharing their views and experiences from their closest relationships and spaces in their family homes while also flowing outward to such arenas as education, courtship, religion, paid and unpaid work, politics, and social reform. She moves seamlessly from micro aspects of her diarists' lives – such as descriptions of the weather, daily work of family members, and leisure – to macro issues in New Brunswick and the world, including elections, questions of faith, and the economy. Campbell offers significant gender analysis as she probes the diarists' wide web of family and community relationships. The sheer number of largely thematic chapters shows the plethora of topics on which women's diaries can contribute when well-mined and read against the grain. The author's national award from the Canadian Committee on Women's History reaffirms the importance of diaries to women's history, and signals a reassuring appreciation for Atlantic Canadian history that has been historically scarce.

Bonnie Morgan's *Conceiving Christianity: Anglican Women and Lived Religion in Mid-20th Century Conception Bay, Newfoundland* (2019) is a rich and unique microhistory linking rural religious belief and practice with household labour. A fine example of the "religious turn" and concept of lived religion proposed by Robert Orsi, the book presents a compelling argument (and story) based on church, government, newspaper records, and 500

cemetery headstones as well as about 60 oral histories. Every chapter has at least one unique morsel, often of a local custom or variance on British custom (for example, not using scissors on Sundays). I recommend this as a model for studying lived experience or micro history.

Béatrice Craig's *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (2009) is an economic history of the Madawaska Valley, which borders on New Brunswick, Quebec, and Maine. Craig deftly argues against the primary role of the timber industry, explaining instead that "development occurred in the middle economic layer, the one between over-the-fence barter and export trade." Rejecting the staples thesis, any other "stage thesis of development," or even the influence of Acadian culture, Craig focuses on how the household economy rippled outward.⁴⁷ As such, a gendered analysis of production and consumption is key to her analysis as is the concept of the Madawaska Valley as a region. Her spirited response in the 2010 roundtable honouring her Canadian Historical Association book prize called for "shift[ing] the paradigm away from reductionist models and toward ecological ones." This is apt advice for women and gender history in Atlantic Canada.⁴⁸

Mary Jane Logan McCallum's *Indigenous Women, Work, and History: 1940-1980* (2014) presents case studies of four kinds of Indigenous women workers: domestics, hairdressers, community health representatives, and registered nurses.⁴⁹ While focused on Ontario and Manitoba, McCallum's assessment of the co-existence of colonialism, state control, and women workers' agency is a fine model for analyzing racialized women workers in other regions in the post-Second World War era (including Atlantic Canada). McCallum dispels assumptions that Indigenous women existed primarily in the private sphere, and that Indigenous men's work was perceived as more important.⁵⁰ This book is groundbreaking both for its content and its gender analysis. In the first chapter, for example, we learn how common Indigenous women's paid domestic work was in private homes, hotels, non-Indigenous hospitals, and homes for the elderly, while the interconnectedness of race and gender oppression is nuanced and persuasive throughout.

47 Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists*, 22.

48 "Macdonald Roundtable," *Canadian Historical Review* 93, no. 1 (March 2012): 106, 107.

49 Mary Jane Logan McCallum, *Indigenous Women, Work, and History: 1940-1980* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014).

50 McCallum, *Indigenous Women*, 7.

Shirley Tillotson's *Give and Take: The Citizen-Taxpayer and the Rise of Canadian Democracy* (2017) is *not* a book about Atlantic Canadian women or gender history, but its methodology has much to teach us about the necessary perspectives of gender and region in national histories. Tillotson uses municipal records from Halifax and Saint John, in addition to Vancouver and Toronto, and analyzes the impact of the regional politics on tax protests. Her broad argument, that citizenship and taxation are closely tied to democracy, includes a sub-argument that enfranchisement was an implicit right for white men, but women and racialized communities had to fight for it. Gender also permeates her analysis of tax protests, including married women's refusal to work during the Second World War if they were going to be taxed.⁵¹ Arguing "who pays tax says a lot about Canada," Tillotson naturally and regularly turns to gendered and regional content and analysis and thus explains much about power and politics inside families, the community, and even nationally. Let us hope those historians who dare to write national histories without attempting to understand Atlantic Canada will emulate Tillotson's good example and be convinced by the book's many accolades.

The steady growth of Atlantic Canadian women and gender history since 2000 has indirectly helped define the region, but suggestions by Morton and McKay in 2000 on beefing up or giving up, respectively, the emphasis on region over locale have been largely ignored, with the exception of Peters's insistence that the specificity of Indigenous nations' history must be prioritized over broad strokes. Most notable is the significant expansion in women and gender state-related histories, Newfoundland topics, and recovery history particularly through biographies. A core of Atlantic Canadian women and gender historians are employing intersectional analysis – especially through the growing historiography of Indigenous and racialized women, which regularly reads traditional sources against the grain. Recent books such as those by Campbell, Morgan, Craig, McCallum, and Tillotson model how we might all answer the call to include more gender analysis in our work.

When viewed alongside national and international trends in the discipline in the last two decades, the most obvious gaps and underdeveloped areas are in queer, disability, emotive, racialized, and childhood and youth Atlantic Canadian gender history. Methodologically, oral history, film, and photography are underused, and theoretically there is a lot of room for gender

51 Tillotson, *Give and Take*, 202.

analysis itself to take a more central space within women's history. Where I am most optimistic is the history of the state. Many existing gaps in Indigenous, racialized, disability, and queer history can be addressed within the history of the state: there are, for example, the abuses at Indigenous day schools, the prosecution of sexuality, and anti-Black racism in the school curriculum. The Black Lives Matter movement's focus on police brutality, trans and pro-choice activists' challenging of healthcare access, Indigenous hunters and fishers' demands that their treaty rights be respected, and disability advocates' questioning of "new-genics" (the state's updated version of early-20th-century eugenics) will all drive this research as long as history departments are supportive. As scholars such as Laurel Ulrich have noted, in the late 20th century historians of women were "dismissed as activists rather than scholars." We must challenge this dismissal when and where it happens to avoid any such bias with 21st-century activism and promote the idea that good history benefits from the "combination of deep scholarship and continuing social turmoil,"⁵² which is, in fact, the context in which *Acadiensis* was formed 50 years ago.

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52 Laurel T. Ulrich, "Afterword: Useful History," *Gender & History* 29 (November 2017): 733.