

Review of Ronald Rudin. *Kouchibouguac: Removal, Resistance, and Remembrance at a Canadian National Park*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2016.

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The federal and provincial expropriation of land from communities deemed “unimportant” has a fairly common history in Atlantic Canada, particularly in relation to the creation of national parks and historic sites. From the Cape Breton Highlands to the Gaspé’s Forillon to Newfoundland’s Gros Morne, Parks Canada has expended considerable resources to manufacture environments that had previously been occupied by people, to make them seem untouched or “natural.” Ron Rudin’s study of the creation of Kouchibouguac National Park, the park that expropriated the highest number of residents in the history of Parks Canada, examines not only the history of the former residents, but how residents of these communities resisted their removal, how the creation of the park became a metaphor for a new Acadian deportation during an era of a newly emerging Acadian nationalism, and how the communities and their resistance have been remembered and interpreted in public memory.

Rudin critically and thoroughly examines not only the history of the park and the people removed to create it, but also interweaves an analysis of Acadian national identity with events taking place around the park. He offers a refreshing take on what is so far largely undiscussed in academic works: the tensions that emerged within the Acadian community between its elites and its non-elites, between Acadians and Anglophones, particularly in New Brunswick, and the emergence of a new expression of Acadian identity which broke from the past extolling of the virtues of patience and the acceptance of one’s lot. While the Acadian conservative elites still favoured the sentimental symbol of Longfellow’s *Evangeline* put forward by the founders of Acadian nationalism in the late nineteenth century and abhorred the idea of protesting for one’s own rights, the new ethos emerging in the era of the Kouchibouguac expropriations lauded making noise and working outside the system to keep what was rightfully one’s own.

The story of the park is not really an Acadian one at first. The narrative only becomes prominently Acadian when Jackie Vautour, one of the residents served with an eviction notice from his land, protests by refusing to leave, and leads an effort to barricade the park. Violence ensues, which leads to Vautour being forcibly removed, his homestead destroyed and all traces of it wiped from the site that was once his property. With this one act, the land expropriation of the Kouchibouguac residents became a metaphor for a modern deportation. (The descendants of Cap-Rouge, an Acadian fishing community near Chéticamp, Nova Scotia, who were expropriated when the Highlands National Park was created, would certainly feel the echoes of this, even today—they, too, sing songs and write poems comparing the expropriation to a second deportation.)

Rudin describes the processes by which the federal and provincial governments decided that the lands on which the residents of the seven communities of Kouchibouguac were living were essentially worthless. The inhabitants were living in a “culture of poverty” that government assessors deplored—and which, in the view of those officials, encouraged the residents to cling to their land. What Rudin’s book makes clear, though, is that the assessors who were in charge of negotiating settlement packages with the residents could not grasp the value of land use by families for familial cultivation rather than commercial cultivation. Land that was used to gather blueberries and cranberries, to fish and hunt for the

family, but that was hardly ever used in the exchange of money, was beyond their means to value. Jean Chrétien, who was the minister in charge of Parks Canada at the time, kept insisting on receipts if the residents wanted to be reimbursed for the value of the resources used on their land, whereas the residents kept referring to the expense that would now be incurred by their inability to access these resources. If they couldn't fish, hunt, or gather, they would need to buy food for their families, an expense they previously did not have. As many prior residents of the park stated, "We weren't rich, but we weren't poor. We had what we needed" (56). Most government officials disagreed: the residents were living in poverty, and the only reason they wanted to stay was because they didn't know any better. The expropriation and rehabilitation was therefore for their own good, and the only reason they wanted to stay was because they knew nothing else (35).

Similar projects across Canada were undertaken by federal and provincial governments, not only for the sake of allowing "common access" to what was once private land, as in the case of Africville in Halifax, NS, but also in the name of "rehabilitation" or "job creation." The expropriation of residents in Louisbourg, NS, for the creation of the Fortress of Louisbourg National Historic site in the mid-1960s is still felt by locals today. That project was started under the auspices of creating employment for miners who had lost their jobs when the government shut down mines in the Cape Breton area, but most of these miners were from outside the Louisbourg area. Similarly, the Forillon National Park in Gaspésie experienced problems similar to that of Kouchibouguac, and Rudin draws a strong comparison between the two parks in the final chapter of his book. The fishermen of Gros Morne National Park, like those of Kouchibouguac, vigorously protested the destruction of their wharves and the discontinuation of their fishing licences. Thanks to the lessons learned at Kouchibouguac, Parks Canada not only allowed greater flexibility with the fishermen of Gros Morne, but it also revised its policy concerning expropriations, deciding that no expropriations would be permitted in order to create a park.

Rudin's work relies on a wealth of sources, which together form a rich tapestry depicting the life of the residents of the seven communities formerly located within Kouchibouguac National Park, the resistance of the residents to government officials, both provincial and federal, and the public memory that commemorates both the communities and their protests. The largest of these sources is the tens of thousands of government records, which, if they were not counterbalanced by the rest, would present a very different view of the lives of the residents before they were expropriated. The government records state that Kouchibouguac residents were living in shacks, without modern plumbing or electricity, and in filth.

On the other side of the spectrum, there are the records of CRASE (Conseil régional d'aménagement du Sud-Est), an agency that had been put in place by the provincial government in order to help with the expropriation effort, but that ended up being one of the loudest voices in support of the protest movement. That file consists of the artistic records of artists, filmmakers, and playwrights, and, most importantly, the narrative of the former residents themselves, collected by Rudin. Together, the CRASE records present an image of families living off the land. While their lifestyle was probably in danger of extinction even without the creation of the park—many people left the area before the creation of the park due to a lack of jobs—it is hard to justify the hastened extinction brought on by Parks Canada.

Also included in Rudin's source materials are letters and articles published by *l'Évangéline* that highlight the fractured nature of Acadian identity. With the founding of Université de Moncton in 1963 came a student movement that was no longer content with an Acadian identity founded on the notion of patience; instead, students in Moncton began to foment a new identity movement, based on noise,

revolution, and impatience. This coincided with the Kouchibouguac expropriation, which the students protested from the beginning. The Société Nationale de l'Acadie (SNA), on the other hand, the group that was supposed to lobby for Acadian rights, supported Kouchibouguac, seeing only job creation, and seemingly not caring a whit for the poor French-speaking residents who would be losing their lands and their fishing rights. *L'Évangéline* also supported the project from the beginning, and only began reluctantly speaking against it once Jackie Vautour became a folk hero who had returned to his land and stood his ground, and the expropriation became the new deportation. Rudin's work, then, shows the deep divisions that began with Kouchibouguac.

As Rudin states several times throughout the book, although not every resident family agreed with the protests or took part in them, every expropriated family eventually benefitted from them in the form of an improved settlement from Parks Canada or the province of New Brunswick. Today, a process of reconciliation has begun at the park, partially in consultation with the descendants of those who were expropriated, who are mainly concerned with preserving their heritage. It consists of panels at the visitor's centre that explain the history of the area, but mostly leave out the history of the protests against Parks Canada. Jackie Vautour remains on his property, and the Acadians of New Brunswick remain vigilant of their rights—thanks, in part, to the events of Kouchibouguac, which remind us that not only do we have rights, but we also have the right to fight for them.

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