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BOOK REVIEW

Monica Heller, Lindsay A. Bell, Michelle Daveluy, Mireille McLaughlin & Hubert Noël. (2015) *Sustaining the nation. The making and moving of language and nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

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The contradictions inherent to the management of mobility within a national framework are the subject of this monograph, which brings together years of ethnographic research undertaken by a number of different individuals in different sites – and in different languages – across Canada. In six chapters, the contributions of five authors coalesce into a single narrative, tracing the “mobility and moorings” of minority French speakers in Canada and the implications for nationhood. Thus, not only is the premise of the book innovative; so too is its writing. Aligning North and South, East and West, French and English, mobility and mooring, present and past, and the contributions of five separate co-authors is no simple feat. The final product is a book that tackles the unique challenges of late capitalism and offers convincing evidence in support of new theoretical perspectives on language and nationalism.

The monograph begins and ends with a focus on the Acadian World Congress, held in New Brunswick (Canada) in 2009. Acadians are descendants of the first French settlers in North America, who inhabited areas of Eastern Canada until deported by the British in 1755. The dispersion and subsequent marginalisation of Acadians (e.g. in contrast to Quebec nationalism in the Canadian context) has meant that Acadians have been in a unique position to be identified in a range of ways for different purposes. The authors contend that a tension exists between the homogeneity and “fixedness” required for these francophones’ legitimacy as a nation (crucial for access to resources allocated by the Canadian state) and a legacy of mobility that has afforded (and continues to afford) them the means of survival and success within and beyond the nation state. This tension continues to grow in the era of globalisation, where access to resources is no longer (only) tied to the nation-state and new opportunities for identification and social mobility have emerged that are distinctly at odds with those of the past. More specifically, the qualities of cosmopolitanism, bi/multilingualism, and diversity present new possibilities that supersede and challenge the historically prized pillars of the nation, such as monolingualism and authenticity. The authors demonstrate that Acadians navigate these contradictions in unique ways that bring into question the validity of traditional (and state-supported) understandings of nationalism.

While the writing of such an important and challenging book is commendable, it must be noted that despite its accessible style it is not necessarily an easy read. The authors themselves note that “the structure of the book [...] has taken some time to work out” (p. 59). Indeed, a complex structure underpins the six chapters and can make navigation difficult. Attempts are made to elucidate the structure, but at times these result in excessive anaphora, some of which are repetitious. Also, some structural choices are unorthodox. For example, the discussion of Canadian language policy and vitality in Chapter 6 occurs too late in the book to provide context for readers, who by this stage have already traversed many of the relevant complexities without introduction. While such issues may not pose issues for readers familiar with authors’ previous work (and in particular that of e.g. Heller 2003; Heller and Labrie 2003), for others it may be more difficult to follow. Similarly, if readers are familiar with the “territoriality principle” of Canadian language policy (e.g. McRae 1975; Morris 2010), the authors’ arguments about the tensions between “mobility” and “mooring” may seem perfectly logical; for the uninitiated, however, the reasoning might be more opaque. Finally, the absence of other theories concerning language and contemporary mobility (e.g. superdiversity, see Vertovec 2007; Blommaert and Rampton 2011) means that readers are left to draw their own conclusions about how to relate this valuable work on the Canadian context to other contexts and research being undertaken internationally. Nevertheless, as noted above, if this book is approached as the successor to previous work by the authors, then its significance and contributions to the field can be better appreciated.

In summary, this is not a conventional book. It does not make conventional arguments, nor does it follow a conventional structure by a conventional number of authors. Irrespective of convention, the authors convincingly demonstrate how global processes are transforming established notions of national identity by allowing existing transgressive practices (e.g. bi/multilingualism, mobility) to come to the fore, become commonplace, and serve as the means for *social* mobility. Thus, new and old ways of “being” francophone coexist in contemporary Canadian society. Given Canada’s international reputation for diversity management and language policy, the challenges highlighted in this book will be of interest to researchers of language and nationalism in other contexts.

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