

*Frenchmen into Peasants: Modernity
and Tradition in the Peopling
of French North America*

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IF THE TITLE of this essay seems familiar, that is because it was inspired by a well-known study by Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914*. Weber argues in that work that in the late nineteenth century, peasants from the most primitive and isolated parts of France gradually became acculturated into full-fledged citizens of the modern French state.¹ Weber's title has been inverted here, for in many ways the record of the peopling of French North America is a record of exactly the same process, but in reverse. That is, the original emigrants were people from the most modern, dynamic, and outwardly turned parts of France, yet they founded a French Canada that until the 1960s was a counter-revolutionary's dream: rural, hierarchical, Catholic, a peculiar New World vestige of the

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1. Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976). Peasants, as defined by Weber, are country folk whose labors serve primarily to assure their own subsistence. By modernization, he means 'the passage from relative isolation and a relatively closed economy to union with the outside world' through communications and a money economy (p. xii). This process has implications, not only for material conditions, but also for mentalities and political awareness.

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ancien régime, or, as Stanley Hoffmann might say, a feudal hang-over. It is thus a paradox of reverse development that defines the structure of the first three centuries of French-Canadian history, even if, as we shall see, the backward progression was neither rapid nor entirely linear.

This emphasis on the modernity of French emigrants to Canada may be surprising, since it contradicts the traditional historiography of New France, whether in English or in French. In English, the authoritative voice is, of course, that of Francis Parkman, who viewed the French and British contest for North America as a struggle between past and future: on the one hand, a feudal society dedicated to authority, hierarchy, and visions of aristocratic prowess; on the other, a modern metropolis fueled by commercial savvy and individual initiative.² For Parkman, the outcome could never be in doubt. New France's resistance to British conquest was the hopeless, if heroic, last stand of an order condemned by history.

French-Canadian historians have basically espoused this same interpretation, while giving it a different twist. Writers such as *Abbé* Ferland and *Abbé* Faillon, could not, of course, deny that the British won the struggle for empire, but instead of dwelling on the defeat, they chose to emphasize what they called *la survivance*, survival.³ French Canadians, from 'a traditional semi-feudal, ignorant, priest-ridden, and backward people, impervious to change and sealed to the outside world,' became 'a devout, obedient, pastoral, and god-fearing people, entrenched behind parish and family life, endowed with the noble mission of permeating materialistic Anglo-Saxon America with spiritual values.'⁴ For these historians, no less than for Parkman, there was an attempt

2. Francis Parkman, *France and England in North America*, 12 vols. (Boston, 1851-92).

3. *Abbé* Jean Baptiste Antoine Ferland, *Cours d'histoire du Canada*, 2 vols. (Québec, 1861-65); *Abbé* Étienne Michel Faillon, *Histoire de la colonie française en Canada*, 3 vols. (Villemarie [Montréal], 1865-66).

4. Jean-Pierre Wallot, 'Religion and French-Canadian *Mores* in the Early Nineteenth Century,' *Canadian Historical Review* 52 (1971): 51. For a detailed discussion of Francophone historiography, see Serge Gagnon, *Québec and its Historians, 1840-1920*, trans. Yves Brunette (Montréal: Harvest House, 1982); Serge Gagnon, *Québec and its Historians: the Twentieth Century*, trans. Jane Brierly (Montréal: Harvest House, 1985).

to reclaim Canada's first *habitants* for the rural French heartland, *la France profonde*.

Parkman and his French-Canadian colleagues were great historians, but they were working within a nineteenth-century nationalist framework that is no longer our own. In recent years, as more and more data on the New French population have been analyzed, the old clichés about French exceptionalism have begun falling by the wayside.⁵ The interpretations proposed here are very much in line with this revisionist trend.

The emigrant sample used for this study was assembled from both French and Canadian sources: French sources being mostly passenger lists and contracts of indentured servitude; Canadian sources mainly compilations from the vital records, which were exceptionally well maintained for the time period.⁶ There was information on close to 16,000 emigrants: about 2,000 women or girls, and 14,000 men or boys. Only 1,700 of these emigrants travelled to what are now the Maritime Provinces (then known as Acadia), while the rest went to Québec.⁷

What proportion of the whole does this sample represent? The question is difficult to answer, for the overall number of emigrants is a very controversial issue for French, as for British, North America. For many years, historians relied on a 'consecrated' estimate of about 10,000 emigrants for the entire French regime; that estimate is obviously far too low. What it turns out to be, as Canadian demographers have recently shown, is a good approximation, not

5. See, for example, Hubert Charbonneau, Bertrand Desjardins, André Guillemette, Yves Landry, Jacques Légaré, and François Nault, with the collaboration of Réal Bates and Mario Boleda, *The First French-Canadians: Pioneers in the St. Lawrence Valley*, trans. Paola Colozzo (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1993).

6. As Hubert Charbonneau has pointed out, records comparable to those of Canada were rarely maintained even in France during this period, hence his statement, 'Our ancestors in the seventeenth century left anonymity behind in crossing the Atlantic.' Hubert Charbonneau, *Vie et mort de nos ancêtres: étude démographique* (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1975), 19. This and all subsequent translations are mine.

7. All statistics about French emigrants to North America are drawn from my dissertation, which also contains detailed information about the emigrant sample. Emigrants for the marginal French settlements in and around New Orleans were not included. See Leslie Choquette, 'French Emigration to Canada in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,' Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1988.

of gross migration, nor even of net migration, but of what they now term 'founding migration.' Founding migrants were those who, in the words of Mario Boleda, 'founded large families constituting what was to become the nucleus of the Québécois population.'⁸ This definition, it should be noted, implies not only permanent settlement, but also reproduction. Furthermore, its purview is restricted to Québec, leaving aside the French settlements in the Maritimes.

Boleda has proposed two new estimates of migration to Québec. 'Observed migration,' or the portion of the movement that left documentary traces, totals at least 30,000, while net migration, calculated according to demographic techniques, stands at about 20,000.⁹ Estimates of return migration vary, but a return rate of about seventy percent for the period of the French regime appears plausible.¹⁰ Thus, based on a net migration of 20,000, we can postulate a gross migration to Québec of some 67,000 men and women, about double the number attested in the documents. In addition, perhaps 7,000 more made their way to insular and peninsular Acadia.¹¹

8. Mario Boleda, diss. abstract, in Université de Montréal, Programme de recherches en démographie historique, *Rapport de l'année 1982-3*, March 1984, Appendix 7: 115. See also R. C. Harris, ed., *Historical Atlas of Canada: From the Beginning to 1800* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), Plate 45.

9. Mario Boleda, diss. abstract, 121-27; Mario Boleda, 'Trente mille Français à la conquête du Saint-Laurent,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* 23 #45 (1990): 153-77.

10. Marcel Trudel has hypothesized, on the basis of very good evidence, a return rate of seventy percent for the entire population of Québec in the years prior to 1663. Archange Godbout argued that between two-thirds and three-quarters of Canada's indentured servants returned to France, while similar estimates for soldiers range between one-third and eighty-five percent. Louise Dechêne has proposed the lowest rate, thirty to fifty percent for the population of Montréal in the seventeenth century. Marcel Trudel, *Histoire de la Nouvelle-France*, 3 vols. (Montréal: Fides, 1963-83), vol. 3, t. 2: 71; Archange Godbout, 'Familles venues de La Rochelle en Canada,' *Rapport de l'archiviste de la province de Québec (RAPQ)* 48 (1970): 125; Marcel Fournier, *Dictionnaire biographique des Bretons en Nouvelle-France: 1600-1765*, *Collection études et recherches archivistiques* 4 (Québec: Archives nationales du Québec, 1981), 28; Yves Landry, 'La Population militaire au Canada pendant la Guerre de Sept Ans,' *Annales de démographie historique* (1978): 351; Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVII^e siècle* (Paris: Plon, 1974), 75-76.

11. The figure for Acadia is particularly controversial because the more traumatic nature of the British Conquest in the Maritimes meant that there was wholesale destruction of documents. The number cited here, 7,000, is a recent conservative estimate by the very meticulous genealogist Marcel Fournier. See Marcel Fournier, *Les Européens au Canada des origines à 1765* (Montréal, Éditions du Fleuve, 1989), 30.

The sample of 16,000 people, therefore, includes virtually all of the founding migrants, about half of the observable migrants, and perhaps a fifth of all migrants, as best we can determine. In other words, it is a fairly impressive sample, given the size of the original population. That said, what does it tell us?

First of all, placing the sample in its social and economic context makes clear, as was claimed earlier, that French emigration to North America was essentially a modern movement. Looking first at the regional origins of the emigrants, we are struck by the importance, though not the exclusive importance, of Atlantic France. Over two-thirds of the emigrants came from the Atlantic seaboard, broadly defined. Cartographically, an imaginary line between Rouen and Toulouse divides a western France with strong demographic ties to the colonies from an inland France less consistently engaged in the migratory process. Outside of western France, although Canada's catchment area was national in scope, the most important concentration of emigrants was in and around Paris. French emigrants to Canada thus came preferentially from the most outwardly turned sectors of the burgeoning Atlantic economy, whether in the northwest, center-west, or southwest, together with greater Paris.

The origins of women were considered separately because it is a truism of the demographic literature that migration is sex-specific. Migration streams are frequently segregated by sex, and even when integrated, they nearly always feature one sex more prominently than the other. In this case, what became evident was that women's origins further emphasized the connection between overseas migration and modernity, in that even economic prosperity was insufficient to set women in motion in more culturally conservative southwestern France. Male emigrants stemmed, after the northwest, center-west, and greater Paris, from the southwestern seaboard and the great valleys that prolong it: the Dordogne, the Garonne, and the Gers. Secondary female departures, however, were concentrated in the *pays de grande culture* (champion

regions) that radiate out from the capital in all directions: Ile-de-France, Picardy, Champagne, Burgundy, and Orléanais. Men and women thus exhibited fundamentally distinct migratory patterns, despite their participation in a common migratory enterprise.

The essential modernity of these regional distributions becomes even more pronounced when we consider the actual sending communities. The urban origins of French emigrants to North America were especially marked. At a time when eighty-five percent of French men and women lived in communities of under 2,000 inhabitants, nearly two-thirds of the emigrants came from towns. Furthermore, two-thirds of the urban emigrants came from what were then major agglomerations, cities with populations of over 10,000. French emigration to Canada in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries can thus be viewed as a mirror image of French-Canadian emigration to the United States in the nineteenth. It 'was not a process by which Old World peasants were suddenly and traumatically translated to tumultuous urban environments'; rather, the typical pattern involved residents of 'villages, towns, and cities settling on the land.'¹²

Those emigrants who were of rural origin came from regions that were well integrated into market economies, and where agriculture was incipiently capitalist. The countryside of Guyenne in southwestern France is a case in point. In the hinterlands of Bordeaux, agriculture was already intensive and speculative under the *ancien régime* (the *grands crus* as we know them date largely from the sixteenth century).¹³ Viticulture reigned, and small and middling proprietors joined large landowners in profiting from the commercialization of their crops. Farther from the city, in the Middle Garonne, the agricultural base was more diversified, with

12. Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1986), 26. As this quotation suggests, British emigration resembled French emigration in its urban emphasis. For a direct comparison, see Leslie Choquette, 'French and British Emigration to the North American Colonies: A Comparative View,' in *New England/New France, 1600-1850, The Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1989* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1992).

13. Charles Higounet, ed., *Histoire de l'Aquitaine* (Toulouse: Privat, 1971), 307-10; Robert Boutruche, ed., *Bordeaux de 1453 à 1715* (Bordeaux: Fédération historique du Sud-Ouest, 1966), 104.

farmers engaging in an essentially commercial polyculture.¹⁴ Jean-Pierre Poussou has written that 'Within this regional ensemble, subsistence agriculture, economic autarky, scarcely existed; in the eighteenth century, the agriculture of the Southwest produced majoritarily to sell, and even where sales were only secondary, their role was not at all negligible. Furthermore, these sales were carried out largely for a distant clientele!'¹⁵ Emigration, unsurprisingly, was fairly dense throughout rural Guyenne. By the eighteenth century, its farmers had transcended the limits of a *comprador* economy, and integrated not only their production, but their migratory behavior, into circuits that were Atlantic in scope.¹⁶

Two other types of rural region are conspicuously absent from the cartography of emigration to North America: areas of extreme backwardness and areas of full-blown agrarian capitalism of the British or Flemish variety. An example of the first type is north-western Anjou, where peasants eked out a marginal living from infertile soil, and limited their market involvement to ensuring their subsistence. Cattle raising and linen manufacture were indispensable as complementary resources, but they failed to alter the 'extreme fragility' of the economy, or its fundamental isolation.¹⁷ Emigration from this region was practically nonexistent, involving only four out of several hundred Angevins. Three of them, moreover, came from the town of Craon, a local market center and collection point for the rural textile industry.

In areas of the second type, a 'rural bourgeoisie' of landowners profited from the labors of an agricultural proletariat of *journaliers* (day laborers) or *métayers* (sharecroppers).¹⁸ Capitalism thus pene-

14. Pierre Deffontaines, *Les Hommes et leurs travaux dans les pays de la Moyenne Garonne (Agenais, Bas-Quercy)* (Lille: SILIC, 1932), 130-31.

15. Jean-Pierre Poussou, *Bordeaux et le Sud-Ouest au XVIII^e siècle: croissance économique et attraction urbaine* (Paris: Touzot, 1983), 263.

16. Spanish historians have coined the term *comprador* to describe an economy in which a dynamic coastline is juxtaposed with a stagnant and isolated interior.

17. François Lebrun, *Les Hommes et la mort en Anjou aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles* (Paris: Flammarion, 1975), 21-23.

18. The term 'rural bourgeoisie' was coined by Georges Lefebvre. See his *Les Paysans du Nord pendant la Révolution française* (Bari: Editions Laterza, 1959), 40.

trated the countryside with farmers as its victims rather than its agents. From Poitou to the Belgian border, these zones of rural proletarianization showed themselves inimical to the lure of westward expansion.¹⁹ For emigration to occur in rural France, economic development needed to accommodate, not annihilate, social independence.

If we look, once again, at the separate geography of women's emigration, we find two differences from the overall pattern. The first difference is the progression of town dwellers from under two-thirds to over three-quarters, a progression for which the largest cities were entirely responsible. Whereas the percentage of women from small towns declined slightly, and that from villages plummeted to a mere fifteen percent of the total, the figure for the major urban agglomerations rose to well over half. An examination of the sex ratios reveals an actual feminization of emigration with increased community size; two of every ten urban emigrants were women, in contrast to one of every ten in the countryside. Perhaps women, less inclined to long-distance migration than men, required a more cosmopolitan environment from which to contemplate the drastic move across the Atlantic. They may also have been responding to adverse demographic conditions within this environment, for one of the distinguishing characteristics of urban demography under the *ancien régime* was a surplus of women, unmarried women in particular.

The map also reveals that except in the great cities, where departures concerned both men and women in varied proportions, emigration was surprisingly sex-specific by community. Fully half of the villages and a fifth of the small towns that sent women to Canada sent women alone; the overall proportion, including the great cities, was thirty-six percent. The strictly female places of origin accounted for only ten percent of the total female emigrant

19. For the rural history of Poitou, see Louis Merle, *La Métairie et l'évolution agraire de la Gâtine poitevine de la fin du Moyen Age à la Révolution* (Paris: SEVPEN, 1958); Paul Raveau, *L'Agriculture et les classes paysannes dans le Haut-Poitou au XVIe siècle* (Paris: Rivière, 1926). The situation in French Flanders is described by Emmanuel Todd in 'Mobilité géographique et cycle de vie,' *Annales: économies, sociétés, civilisations* (*Annales: ESC*) 30 (1975): 727-42.

flow because of the high degree of dispersion among rural and small town emigrants regardless of sex. Outside of the large cities, however, about a quarter of women and girls came from communities whose migratory contributions were exclusively female.

What are we to make of this widely divergent geography? Clearly, purely economic arguments cannot account for all the regional variations within French emigration to North America, since women's role in the movement fluctuated along the western seaboard between two and thirty-two percent, and since women often came from different communities than men. This accentuated tendency toward sexual specificity compels us to recognize the relative autonomy of migratory from economic phenomena. Emigration took place within parameters defined by the economy, but the economy did not call it into being *ex nihilo*. In addition to an economic context, the movement possessed a cultural context that defined its relationship to particular ways of life. It developed not in a vacuum, but in accordance with traditional repertoires of migratory behavior, to which we shall return shortly.

The social origins of emigrants to North America are somewhat harder to ascertain. The sources are at times deficient, so they give rise to problems of interpretation for which there are no ideal solutions. Nonetheless, tabulations of the available information produced results that are congruent with the analysis of regional origins. Only about a quarter of the emigrants were farmers, compared with about eighty percent in the French population overall.²⁰ The French as a whole were thus three times more likely to be farmers than were the founders of French Canada, whose peasant economy would ultimately outlast France's own. The artisanal component of the emigration was close to forty-five percent, a distribution characteristic of major cities such as Bordeaux, Rouen, or Paris, but not of the entire nation.²¹ The most important trades

20. Fernand Braudel and Ernest Labrousse, eds., *Histoire sociale et économique de la France*, 4 vols. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970-82), 2: 607.

21. See, for example, François-Georges Pariset, ed., *Bordeaux au XVIII^e siècle* (Bordeaux: Fédération historique du Sud-Ouest, 1968), 350; Michel Mollat, ed., *Histoire de Rouen* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 245-46.

of the emigrants, apart from the military, were building and wood-working, the maritime trades, and textiles and clothing. Through their backgrounds and occupations, French emigrants to Canada were far more closely linked to the minority urban sector than to *la France profonde*.

The unrepresentativeness of emigrants as a whole was, once again, even more pronounced in the case of women. The probable farm component shrank from over a quarter to under a fifth, with the difference accruing to both the urban *petit peuple* and the elites. The proportion of noblewomen and *bourgeoises* was virtually identical to that of wealthy residents within a large city; the same can be said for women of artisanal background. The social origins of female emigrants were thus an extreme case of the general situation. Characteristically urban elements predominated, and while the estimates are subject to caution, they appear to have done so to an even greater degree than the already skewed urban/rural distributions would lead us to suspect. The women who embarked for Canada were a very peculiar cross-section of the French population indeed.

Just as their regional and social origins marked French emigrants to North America as essentially modern, so too did their religious origins, which were characterized by diversity. This may come as a surprise, since beginning in 1627, French law explicitly forbade non-Catholics to settle in Canada.²² Yet even Cardinal Richelieu, who promulgated the law, could not exclude religious minorities from the colony entirely. The temporary presence of Protestants was tolerated for most of the French regime, and some emigrants of Protestant and even Jewish background managed to become permanent settlers.

It was possible to identify about 300 emigrants of French Protestant background, a small but not insignificant number, especially

22. This exclusion was made explicit in the Charter of the *Compagnie des Cent-Associés*. For the text of the document, see Marc-Antoine Bédard, *Les Protestants en Nouvelle-France*, *Cahiers d'histoire* 31 (Québec: Société historique de Québec, 1978), 20.

when we consider that it is roughly equivalent to the number of emigrants from a small northwestern province like Perche or Anjou. In keeping with the vanguard role that Protestants played in the French economy, fully eighty-six percent of these emigrants were urban, and over a quarter of them belonged to the elites. Like their French counterparts, Canadian Protestants were an economically privileged, if legally disadvantaged, population.

The sex ratio among Protestants was quite unusual. One in every four Protestants was female, as opposed to one in every eight emigrants overall. The reasons for this enhanced presence are not entirely clear. Perhaps, as Louis Pérouas has suggested, women were simply more amenable to conversion than men.²³ Emigrants must have been aware that settling in Canada would require outward conformity to Catholic practice, and such a prospect may well have elicited different responses from the two sexes. A second possibility has recently been suggested by Nelson Dawson, who believes that French ecclesiastics sometimes dumped on the colony impoverished young women whom they had 'saved' from Protestantism and placed in institutions. In shipping them to Canada, so the argument goes, they hoped to prevent these women from returning to their Protestant milieu, while at the same time freeing themselves from the obligation to support them.²⁴

Jews, as opposed to Protestants, could at no time declare their faith openly and remain in Canada. There was evidence of one forced conversion, one expulsion (involving a young woman), and one prudent exodus.²⁵ By the same token, the arrival of Marranos

23. For example, of the roughly 300 abjurations that occurred in La Rochelle in the three years following the siege of the city, fully eighty percent concerned women. According to Pérouas, 'The principal explanation for these conversions appears to be the jump in the birthrate, habitual in the aftermath of hecatombs, doubtless linked to the disappearance of numerous young Protestant men. Even supposing that the vital records are not fully complete, we must admit that the movement toward conversion barely affected the Huguenot population as a whole.' See Louis Pérouas, 'Sur la démographie rochelaise,' *Annales: ESC* 16 (1961): 1133-34.

24. Nelson Dawson, 'Les Filles à marier envoyées en Nouvelle-France (1632-1685): une émigration protestante?', *Revue d'histoire de l'Église de France* LXXII (1986): 286-88. Dawson's hypothesis, while fascinating and plausible, nonetheless lacks conclusive proof.

25. The expulsion, which took place in 1739, involved a young woman named Esther Brandeau, who compounded her already serious predicament by assuming male attire and

in the colony seems to have passed unremarked. Joseph da Silva *dit Le Portuguais*, a creditor of the New French government resident in Montréal, was quite probably a Jew; Joseph Costes, a wine merchant from Gaillac (Tarn), and Jacob Costa may have been as well. Genealogical research has revealed that Étienne Gélinas and his son Jean, carpenters who embarked for Canada in 1658, were of Jewish origin. At the time of their departure, they resided near La Rochelle, but Étienne was raised in Saint-Vivien de Pons, an ancient Jewish quarter. Although the family had been nominally Christian since the sixteenth century, 'the Canadian Gélinases preserved numerous Jewish traditions,' including circumcision and the familial Sabbath supper.²⁶

Thus, whether we are discussing regional, social, or religious origins, the social and economic context of emigration to North America was one of modernity. French Canada's subsequent history as a citadel of rural traditionalism can in no way be explained in reference to an influx of sturdy, pious, and backward-looking peasants. Such a group unquestionably emerged, but, ironically, it did so from roots that were urban, mercantile, and, above all, mobile.

Although social and economic analysis is highly illuminating, we also saw by looking separately at women that it could not fully account for the diversity of French emigration to North America. Migrations, as a form of cultural behavior, have a sexual, social, and geographic specificity of their own. The influence of eco-

identity. The forced conversion concerned a Dutch Jew named Joseph Moïse Kel, who tried to sail to Québec, probably to trade, in 1752. The prudent exodus took place around 1760, after a Jewish sailor named Joseph Daniel Hardiment foolishly eloped with his thirteen-year-old Catholic girlfriend. See Letter of Hocquart to the Minister, September 15, 1738, *Archives des colonies (AC)*, C11A 70: 129; Letter of Hocquart to the Minister, September 27, 1739, *AC*, C11A 71: 134; Baptismal Register, 1752-54, Vital Records of Louisbourg, *AC*, G1 408-9; Témoinage de liberté au mariage, June 2, 1767, *Archives du Séminaire de Québec (ASQ)*, ms. 430.

26. On Marranos, see Benjamin Sack, *History of the Jews in Canada from the Earliest Beginnings to the Present Day* (Montréal: Canadian Jewish Congress, 1945), 21. For the history of the Gélinas family, see 'Rapport des assemblées mensuelles, 1978-79,' *Mémoires de la société généalogique canadienne-française* 30 (1979): 145.

nomics is indirect, for as Jean-Pierre Poussou has written, 'migratory movements have their own laws, their internal logic, indeed, their own tradition.' Although Poussou himself has done invaluable research on the economic context of migrations, he also recognizes that once established, migratory currents can acquire a life of their own. There is, in his words, 'an inertia of migratory flows.'²⁷ This importance of tradition requires us to reconsider the pattern of French emigration to North America in the context of migration history. In many ways, the movement toward Canada occurred as a by-product of other, more perennial movements such as the rural exodus and interurban labor migrations.

When we recreate the migratory context of French emigration to North America, we discover that most traditional forms of French labor mobility contributed to the formation of this new migration stream. At the regional level, the secular and massive movements from country to town, and from small town to regional capital, sometimes spilled over, against all expectations, into Québec or Acadia. Among long-distance migrants, we find in Canada mountain people who migrated annually to the big city, and native town dwellers with a tradition of complex interurban itineraries. Emigration could occur as an accidental deviation from, or as a simple extension of, established channels of mobility. It was at the confluence of familiar migratory flows.

To begin with, emigration was closely linked to urbanization. Cartographically, there was an overlap between local immigration into cities and Canadian departures. In the region of Nantes, for example, villages that sent emigrants to Canada were usually prominent on maps of rural immigration into the city. Conversely, communities without significant demographic ties to Nantes tended to be absent from the cartography of emigration.

These local patterns of immigration into Nantes explain an

27. Jean-Pierre Poussou, 'Réflexions sur l'apport démographique des études consacrées aux migrations anciennes,' *Migrations intérieures: méthodes d'observation et d'analyse, Actes du IV^e colloque national de démographie du Centre national de la recherche scientifique* (Paris, 1975), 149-50. Tradition, in this context, refers to long-standing patterns of demographic behavior, rather than to a way of life predicated on isolation and stability.

anomaly in the regional geography of emigration to Canada, that is, a breach in the geography of modernity. Emigration from the region of Nantes generally focused on prosperous areas in close economic contact with the city: the southeastern part of the diocese, the Loire Valley, and provincial towns. There was, however, one narrow band of sending communities in the impoverished north, in the vicinity of Blain.²⁸ At the same time, the Nantes/Rennes axis, though important economically, produced very few emigrants. These aberrations disappear when we broaden our purview beyond economics to consider migratory tradition. Nantes's demographic basin, it turns out, included not only the southeast, the Loire, and the towns, but also, as Jacques Depauw has shown, the economically fragile region around Blain. Likewise, the Nantes/Rennes axis, despite its economic role, channelled few immigrants into Nantes until the 1770s and 1780s, a generation after the loss of Canada.²⁹

On an individual level also, we see that villages and towns in the vicinity of cities were important for both urban immigration and emigration to North America. Jacques-Joseph Le Geay, 'native to Noyon in Picardy and living in Paris,' and Emmanuel Bergeron, born in Saint-Germain-en-Laye and working as a journeyman baker in the rue de la Draperie, left their provincial towns for the capital before moving on to Canada.³⁰ From the countryside around Paris came domestics and artisans for the city, then for Canada, like the cook Alexandre Picard from Le Mesnil-Saint-Georges in Picardy, and Ambroise Leguay, 'native to Coubron four leagues away from Paris gold and silver plater.'³¹ Combining these two types of mobility, from the countryside and the provincial town, the servant Suzanne Dionnet was born in rural Sain-

28. Jean Béranger and Jean Meyer, *La Bretagne de la fin du XVII^e siècle d'après le mémoire de Béchameil de Nointel*, Université de Rennes, Institut armoricain de recherches économiques et humaines, *Textes et documents* 1 (Paris: Klincksieck, 1976), 133.

29. Jacques Depauw, 'Immigration féminine, professions féminines et structures urbaines à Nantes au XVIII^e siècle,' Université de Nantes, Centre de recherches sur l'histoire de la France Atlantique, *Enquêtes et documents* 2 (1972): 40-60.

30. 'Témoignages de liberté au mariage,' *RAPQ* (1951-53): 44; Témoignage de liberté au mariage, September 12, 1766, *ASQ*, ms. 430.

31. 'Témoignages de liberté au mariage,' *RAPQ* (1951-53): 44, 67.

tonge, worked for eight years in the nearby town of Tonnay-Charente, then immigrated to the important regional city of Rochefort before leaving for Canada in 1751.³²

It should be noted that these migratory currents into cities from their demographic basins were often segregated by sex, and that this segregation was reflected in their migratory spillover. Male and female emigrants to North America thus came from different communities because many places specialized in exporting either their women or their men.

Long-distance currents of internal migration, like regional currents, also fed into emigration to North America. First, the temporary movements of mountain folk could sometimes be diverted, which helps to explain why regions like the *Massif central* and the Alps appear at all on the map of Canadian departures.

Mountain folk traditionally left their barren farms for France's great cities, where they worked on a seasonal or multiannual basis, and where their peculiar appearance, language, and customs were highly visible. City dwellers often noted the affinity of certain groups of mountain folk for particular types of work. An eighteenth-century Parisian wrote, for example, 'the Auvergnats are almost all water carriers; the Limousins masons.'³³ As it happens, both of these specialized migratory currents can be identified in the movement toward Canada.

Among the eighteenth-century Parisians who enlisted to serve in the Canadian army were natives of the *Massif central* like the Auvergnat Pierre Rivet, a water carrier, and the Limousin André Lecompte, a mason. Rivet, a day-laborer's son, arrived in Paris at the age of seventeen, and worked there for ten years before returning to Auvergne for a visit. Lecompte, who went to Paris as a mason's helper at the age of fifteen, also put in ten years in the capital before signing on for Canada.³⁴

While these are only individual examples, it is no accident that

32. 'Témoignages de liberté au mariage,' *RAPQ* (1951-53): 5.

33. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Le Tableau de Paris*, ed. Jeffrey Kaplow (Paris: Maspero, 1979), 142.

34. Témoignage de liberté au mariage, September 12, 1766, *ASQ*, ms. 430; 'Témoignages de liberté au mariage,' *RAPQ* (1951-53): 43-44.

they both concern men. Men dominated internal long-distance movements, as they did emigration to North America, because women's place in migrations tended to decrease with distance. The typical long-distance migrant, whether in France or the colonies, was a young male travelling in search of work.

Other important long-distance currents concerned natives of cities, for as Jean-Claude Perrot has written, 'Two demographic networks connected the city to the outside world: one was nourished by the countryside; the other ran from city to city irrespective of national borders, and constituted the second homeland of the city dweller.'³⁵ One of the most interesting kinds of interurban mobility, or more accurately hyper-mobility, was that of the *compagnons* of the *Tour de France*; it too contributed to the flow of emigrants to Canada.

The *compagnons* were the members of three interregional confraternities of journeymen artisans, known variously as the *Enfants de Maître Jacques* or *Dévotants*, the *Enfants du Père Soubise*, and the *Enfants de Salomon* or *Gavots*. They joined these societies in their late teens, after completing an apprenticeship, and provided they did not marry, they could remain active members until their mid-twenties.³⁶

The heart of *compagnonnage* was the *Tour de France*, a voyage that enabled the young artisan to perfect his skills, see his homeland, and sow his wild oats at the same time. The *Tour de France* had no fixed duration, but as a rule it lasted between three and

35. Jean-Claude Perrot, *Genèse d'une ville moderne: Caen*, 2 vols. (Paris: Mouton, 1975), 1: 522.

36. Of the many works dealing with *compagnonnage*, see Pierre Barret and Noël Gurgand, *Ils voyageaient la France: vie et traditions des compagnons du Tour de France au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1980); Jean-Pierre Bayard, *Le Compagnonnage en France* (Paris: Payot, 1977); Luc Benoist, *Le Compagnonnage et les métiers* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966); Émile Coornaert, *Les Compagnonnages en France du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions ouvrières, 1966); E. Martin de Saint-Léon, *Le Compagnonnage: son histoire, ses coutumes, ses règlements et ses rites* (1901; Paris: Librairie du compagnonnage, 1977); Agricol Perdiguier, *Le Livre du compagnonnage* [sic] (Paris, 1841); Agricol Perdiguier, *Mémoires d'un compagnon* (1854; Paris: Librairie du compagnonnage, 1964); Daniel Roche, ed., *Journal de ma vie: Jacques-Louis Ménétra, compagnon vitrier au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Montalba, 1982); Cynthia Truant, 'Solidarity and Symbolism among Journeymen Artisans: The Case of Compagnonnage,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 21 (1979): 214-26.

seven years. While on the *Tour*, *compagnons* would move from town to town at irregular intervals, travelling by foot, stagecoach, or ferry as their budgets allowed. Upon arrival in a new town, they would descend on an inn affiliated with their society, and seek out the *rouleur*, or *compagnon* in charge of job placement. The length of a *compagnon*'s stay in any one town would vary from a few days to several months, depending on the state of the labor market in his trade and his personal whims. In choosing his next destination, he would generally respect a traditional itinerary that conveyed him from town to town according to a recognizable pattern; however, this itinerary was 'very variable depending on the society, and also changed depending on the location of work.'³⁷

By its very flexibility, the *Tour de France* was highly vulnerable to short circuits, and could end elsewhere than at the point of departure, sometimes prematurely, sometimes after prolonging the period of mobility. An offer of marriage, an enlistment in the military, even a Canadian indenture could break the normal circularity of the *Tour*, and destroy the loosely structured itinerary of the *compagnon*. Witness the case of Antoine Boudin *dit* Saint-Germain, a Parisian *compagnon* who 'lived with . . . [his master] for five years to learn the trade of mason, after which having done his *Tour de France* for close to three years he indentured himself in Bordeaux from whence he returned to Paris to say farewell to his father, and from there came to Brest where he embarked for Canada.'³⁸

Thus, tradition, along with modernity, played a part in creating the migration stream between France and North America. Local immigrants into cities could eventually cross the Atlantic, as could their long-distance counterparts, whether they were rural or urban in origin. Taking tradition into account helps us to understand the sexual specificity of French emigration to Canada, and additionally, perhaps, its poor staying power. Migration streams composed largely of temporary emigrants could not only send, but also recall,

37. Bayard, *Le Compagnonnage*, 177.

38. 'Témoignages de liberté au mariage,' *RAPQ* (1951-53): 48.

people from Canada. In contrast, British North America had a much lower return rate, in part because Britain had few temporary migrants comparable to the French mountain folk or *compagnons*.³⁹

Yet the notion of tradition still fails to explain why Frenchmen, once in Canada, became peasants. For this was tradition predicated, not on the time-honored and static routines that Fernand Braudel termed 'material life,' but on movement; this was tradition that revealed the often neglected vitality and dynamism of the French *ancien régime*. In order to understand the paradox, we need to look beyond the French background of the emigrants, and examine the evolution of French-Canadian society.

Looking first at New France, the society the emigrants created bore little resemblance to the *Gemeinschaft* of historiographical fantasy. Communitarian visions were prevalent in New France, as in New England, in the early years, but they faded as quickly, indeed more quickly, from the French scene as from the English. In 1643, *Abbé Olier* (who never visited Canada) described the newly arrived residents of Ville-Marie as 'living for the most part in common . . . , some from their private revenues, but all living in Jesus Christ . . . representing, in a way, the form of the early Church.'⁴⁰ By mid-century, however, Ville-Marie had already become Montréal, a rough and ready marketplace for Indian furs and illegal whiskey.

The settlement pattern, meanwhile, privileged isolated farmsteads along both banks of the St. Lawrence, hardly a demonstration of community. Louis XIV attempted to remedy this situation in the interests of royal absolutism, and in 1663 he decreed that the New French population should henceforth live in agglomerated villages. In 1667 three such villages were created, and three

39. See Peter Clark and David Souden, eds., *Migration and Society in Early Modern England* (Totowa: Barnes and Noble, 1988), 33-34, 242.

40. 'Les véritables motifs de messieurs et dames de la société Notre-Dame de Montréal pour la conversion des sauvages en Nouvelle-France,' *Mémoires de la société historique de Montréal* 9 (1880): 20. The term *Gemeinschaft*, or community, refers to an organic, hierarchical society that privileges the notion of consensus. On the New England Puritan community and its dissolution, see Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

more were set up later, all in the neighborhood of Québec. But that was all. As the historian Emile Salone wrote in 1905, 'Even today, in this province of two million inhabitants, we would not know what a village is . . . , if it were not for what remains of the work of Jean Talon.'⁴¹

Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, administrators charged with representing the French state in New France complained of the individuality and recalcitrance of the Canadian population, or urged that domestic policies be adapted to colonial realities. Intendant Duchesneau warned the French Minister in 1681 that

we should not consider the cultivation of land and the raising of livestock . . . as solid means to establish this country, since it is only commerce that will make them pay, and the number of inhabitants, who will never be drawn here except by profit, gentle government, and the hope of living more comfortably than in France.⁴²

Six years in Canada had transformed this instrument of absolutism into an advocate of free enterprise and cheap government!

Others were less complimentary in their assessment of the Canadian environment and its effect on their countrymen. Jacques Raudot, who served as intendant at the beginning of the eighteenth century, wrote,

The French have never been . . . suitable for settlements, they want to sow and reap at the same time . . . , they want besides to . . . get rich in

41. Émile Salone, *La Colonisation de la Nouvelle-France: étude sur les origines de la nation canadienne-française* (1905; Trois-Rivières: Boréal Express, 1970), 191-92. Although villages were a familiar part of the Québec landscape in 1905, as they are today, they were not villages in the traditional sense. Founded, for the most part, in the early nineteenth century, they were 'entirely new structures of settlement that confirmed both the state of development attained by the local community and its clear choice of insertion into the market economy.' In other words, they 'were really small towns with genuinely urban functions of commerce, administration, and industry.' See Serge Courville, 'Croissance villageoise et industries rurales dans les seigneuries du Québec (1815-1851),' in François Lebrun et Normand Séguin, eds., *Sociétés villageoises et rapports villes-campagnes au Québec et dans la France de l'Ouest, XVII^e-XX^e siècles* (Trois-Rivières, Rennes: Centre de recherche en études québécoises, Presses de l'Université de Rennes, 1987), 209-10; Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 196.

42. Letter of Duchesneau to the Minister, November 13, 1681, *AC, C11A* 5: 316.

a short time; that is the conduct and the spirit of the greatest part, there are even some who are so bad that they do not hesitate to sacrifice a whole country provided they can get rich.⁴³

Even the agricultural settlers themselves came in for criticism, with Intendant Bigot writing in 1748 that the *habitant* was 'avid for gain.'⁴⁴ The very term *habitant*, incidentally, reflects a changed reality, having been coined by prosperous farmers to distinguish themselves from peasants. As early as 1684, the army officer La Hontan could observe that

The peasants here are very comfortable, and I would wish such a good cuisine on our whole petty nobility of France. What am I saying: peasants! my excuses to these good sirs. The word, taken in its ordinary sense, would put our Canadians in the fields. A Spaniard, if one called him a villager, would not frown more deeply, or bristle his moustache more proudly. These people are not wrong after all; they do not pay the salt tax or the *taille* [assessed on persons or property, the *taille* was the keystone of royal taxation during the *ancien régime*]; they hunt and fish freely; in a word, they are rich. Would you want to compare them with our raggedy peasants?⁴⁵

Thus, the label *habitant*, that direct of insults for the twentieth-century Quebecer, had a thoroughly opposite connotation during the French regime.⁴⁶

There was, nevertheless, a problem. France, like the other colonial powers including Great Britain, viewed its North American

43. Memorandum of Raudot, August 20, 1708, AC, C11G 6: 39½. Within two years, however, Raudot was sounding just like Duchesneau, only more so. He not only enthused over the growing trade with the Antilles, but proposed that allowing free trade with the English would produce a good profit! Letter of Raudot to the Minister, February 27, 1710, AC, C11G 75.

44. Letter of Bigot to the Minister, November 7, 1748, AC, C11A 92: 189.

45. François de Nion, ed., *Un outre-mer au XVII^e siècle: voyages au Canada du baron de La Hontan* (Paris: Plon, 1900), 14.

46. It should be noted that while seigneurial tenure existed in New France, the burdens it placed upon ordinary farmers were far less onerous than in France. The situation in Acadia, according to Naomi Griffiths, was even more laissez-faire. She writes, 'In my view, if control of the colony by England between 1654 and 1670 did nothing else, it made nonsense of any seigneurial structure as the basis of land-ownership within the colony.' See Brian Young and John Dickinson, *A Short History of Québec: A Socio-Economic Perspective* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), 44-45; Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701-1744: A Supplement to Europe* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1987), 198; Naomi Griffiths, *The Contexts of Acadian History, 1686-1784* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992), 20.

possessions in mercantilist terms. In practice, it was torn between desire for a healthy, expanding colony and fear of colonial competition; however, the fear won out often enough to compromise seriously Canada's ability to capitalize on economic opportunity. In 1704, for example, the governor and intendant earned a stinging rebuke from the king for their proposal to establish a factory with immigrant hemp weavers, and the policy was not reversed until 1750.⁴⁷

This resistance to Canadian exports was especially crucial in the domain of agriculture. The privileged farmers of La Hontan witnessed yield ratios that, in the early years, equalled those of Holland and Flanders.⁴⁸ Without reliable markets, Canadians risked a crisis of overproduction.

Such a crisis did occur in the late seventeenth century, causing *curés* to refuse the product of their tithe as unsaleable, and administrators to rejoice over heavy November rains that could stem the price decline. In 1710, when the French experienced the last large-scale famine in their history, Canadians suffered also—from a persistent glut of the market that dated from 1702!⁴⁹

Under these circumstances, Canada's *habitants* began slowly to transform themselves from Frenchmen into peasants. As Louise Dechêne has remarked, 'It looks as though the colonists, from the first decade of the eighteenth century, gave up producing above their needs and the urban demand that they could immediately count on.'⁵⁰ We should not, however, exaggerate the extent of this development. The grain trade, legal or illegal, with the Antilles, Louisbourg, and the Thirteen Colonies increased throughout the eighteenth century, and 'on the very eve of the catastrophe that would violently separate metropolis and colony,' Canadians were trying hard to market their wheat in Paris.⁵¹

47. Memorandum of the King to Vaudreuil and Beauharnais, June 14, 1704, *AC*, B 25: 107; Letter of the Minister to Bigot, April 15, 1750, *AC*, B 91: 19 [246].

48. Salone, *La Colonisation*, 374. See also Miquelon, *New France*, 199, 317–18.

49. Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, 340–42.

50. Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands*, 342.

51. Salone, *La Colonisation*, 377. See also Jacques Mathieu, *Le Commerce entre la Nouvelle-France et les Antilles au XVIII^e siècle* (Montréal: Fides, 1981). Although this discussion has

Mercantilism alone, therefore, cannot explain the subsequent backwardness of French-Canadian society. We need also to consider the results of the British Conquest, which were at least as important as the legacy of the French regime.

A first assumption might be that the insularity imposed by the Conquest was crucial in cutting French Canadians off from their modern roots, and to the degree that direct contact with France was indeed prohibited, this is no doubt true. Nonetheless, it appears that the most dramatic change in French-Canadian society took place later, around the middle of the nineteenth century. Serge Courville has written of early nineteenth-century Québec, 'To the classic image of a society devoted entirely to agriculture and living closed in on itself, detailed studies . . . permit us to oppose that of a much more diversified world, marked by village growth and by the rise of a market economy, sanctioned by the unprecedented flourishing of rural industry. Beside zones where the market economy permitted only the consolidation of traditional ways of life, there . . . emerged veritable islands of modernity. Up until the 1850s, Québec seems to have behaved like the other developed countries of the North Atlantic world economy.'⁵²

For Courville, the situation deteriorated significantly only after the advent of industrial capitalism, owing to the inability of French Canadians 'to acquire and control large-scale capital.'⁵³ This eco-

focused on the St. Lawrence, current investigations of Acadia are yielding very similar results. Naomi Griffiths writes, 'The stereotype of Acadians as a people living in a land isolated from the rest of the world, self-enclosed and inward-looking, inbred and exceptionally fertile, has to yield to the reality of a people with considerable links to communities other than their own, welcoming outsiders into their families, and with a fertility level not significantly higher than that of other Euroamerican communities of the time.' In fact, she notes, 'trade made the Acadians the very reverse of an isolated peasantry.' As this quote suggests, the Acadian port of Louisbourg, with a population of 8,000 in 1758, was one of the foremost ports in North America. See Griffiths, *Contexts of Acadian History*, 25, 47; Christopher Moore, 'The Other Louisbourg: Trade and Merchant Enterprise in Ile Royale, 1713-58,' *Histoire sociale/Social History* 12 (1979): 79-96.

52. Serge Courville, 'L'Habitant canadien dans la première moitié du XIX^e siècle: survie ou survivance?', *Recherches sociographiques* 27 (1986): 177.

53. Courville, 'L'Habitant canadien,' 192-93. Meanwhile, population growth was fueling agricultural colonization onto the less fertile soils of the Appalachians and Canadian

conomic change, moreover, was accompanied by a political shift. In 1837–38 Québec's liberal bourgeoisie were defeated in a failed revolution against British rule, and their disappearance left the field open for the one remaining Francophone elite, the Catholic clergy.⁵⁴ Since this clergy was heavily reinforced in the mid-nineteenth century by an influx of militant traditionalists from France, the conservative Catholicism of French Canada was more a product of France's post-revolutionary quarrels than of the *ancien régime*. Ultimately, the irony of Frenchmen becoming peasants is compounded by yet another irony: the archaic traditional society whose epitaph Parkman wrote and whose survival beyond the grave Ferland and Faillon celebrated was not really archaic at all, but a recent historical development, one that had literally taken place within these historians' lifetimes.

shield, and as Gérard Bouchard has shown, this process of colonization was 'accompanied by a sort of regression.' Agricultural techniques, social relations, and cultural practices all assumed more primary forms, and farm products were 'very feebly commercialized.' See Gérard Bouchard, 'Co-intégration et reproduction de la société rurale: pour un modèle saguenayen de la marginalité,' *Recherches sociographiques* 29 (1988): 284, 291.

54. Young and Dickinson, *A Short History of Québec*, 141–59. Seigneurs were also discredited by the rebellion, which led to the abolition of seigneurialism in 1854.

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