Francophone Migrants and Immigrants in Nova Scotia: Who Are They?

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For several years, Professor Louise Fontaine has been analyzing the professional career of an academic specializing in the social sciences. An eccentric and endearing sociologist, Professor Fontaine questions the life and prolific work of an intellectual whose ideas were forged during the second half of the 20th century but which remain topical to better understand the issues of our societies in the 21st century. In July 2021, she was elected co-leader of the Working Group (GT 15) Interdisciplinary Qualitative Analysis of the International Association of French-Speaking Sociologists (AISLF).

Professor Fontaine is also interested in the phenomenon of international migration from a political, economic, social and cultural point of view. She has conducted field surveys in Quebec, Belgium and also in Nova Scotia. This research led to the publication of a book in 1993, entitled: A square labyrinth like a circle. In addition, she has published scientific articles and book chapters in Canada, Belgium, France, England, the United States and Spain. She pursues interdisciplinary research that intersects both macrosocial and microsocial dimensions related to: temporalities and life courses; international migration and social inclusion/exclusion processes.

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The study of international migration is a task which is remarkably complex (Fontaine 2018). The specialized literature on the subject is voluminous – although there is relatively little published on the specific topic of francophone migration and immigration in Nova Scotia and the studies which exist are afflicted by a lack of uniformity in the terminology used to describe and attempt to understand the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the question – but which leave us in doubt concerning what is meant by terms like "francophone", "new arrivals" and other key terms. In 2020, for example we wondered how it is possible to compare the data presented by a study (Brennan 2015) prepared for the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse (CDÉNÉ) with census data prepared by Statistics Canada in the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS), or with the data to be found in the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB) of 2011, etc. (Fontaine 2020: 52-53).

"We note a lack of uniformity in the terms used in official documents to characterize individuals in their relationship to the French language. The criteria used vary : mother tongue, first official language spoken, knowledge of at least one official language, French-speaking immigrants [*immigrants d'expression française*], immigrants who speak French in both public and private life, etc. This fact makes it very difficult to conduct an accurate analysis since the question of exactly what one is talking about and whom is never entirely resolved." (Fontaine 2020: 57). There are also problems related to the relationship between the individuals being studied and the territory of Nova Scotia – not to mention the diversity of their socio-economic status and life trajectories.

Françoise Dureau (2014) calls to our attention a number of questions we should ask ourselves in the context of statistics on immigration. She asks: Why do we need to quantify ("*pourquoi des chiffres*": "Why the numbers" in English)? Why do we count? For whom do we count? Why are we often more interested in counting in-migrants than we are in counting out-migrants? These questions draw our attention to the use of numerical data to be fed into forms of rationality (or algorithms) oriented towards certain objectives. Statistical information can instruct us concerning an empirical situation, but they are not *de facto* reliable and significant as the description of a phenomenon. From our theoretical and empirical reflections concerning the Nova Scotian context, we draw the following conclusion: "*The compilation of statistical data is in line with the interests of public decision-makers (elected officials and administrators), the leadership of community organizations, whether they are associated with francophones, Acadians or other linguistic groups in the province, and sometimes with other sectors of the general population*" (Fontaine 2020: p.51).

To this remark, we add the following fact: "*With regard to the classical variables of sociology, in particular age, gender, level of education, income, etc., Brennan's study (2015) provides some basic information […]. However, it would be appropriate to bring some critical attention to the typical profile which is provided of the francophone immigrant. It is to be observed that the general configuration of the latter changes between 2001 and 2011. For all these periods, the portrait of 'French-speaking immigrants' ['immigrants d'expression française'] is to be related to the categories 'economic immigrant', 'refugee' and 'other non-economic immigrant'*" (Fontaine 2020: p.57).

We note that it is important to distinguish between basic notions such as "new arrival", "migrant" and "immigrant". These concepts are quite often used interchangeably, in spite of the fact that they refer to rather different universes. The new arrival is an individual who has recently become established in a geographic area which is unfamiliar to her because she was not able to become acquainted with it ahead of time – in a context where the process of becoming established takes place within a limited time, usually twelve months. The migrant, for her part, is an individual who voluntarily changes her place of residence in order to improve her conditions of life, to find work or for some similar reason (Guégan & Boschet 2017: pp. 20-24) but who remains within the same country. In Canada, it is easy to imagine leaving one province in order to establish oneself in another. In the context of Nova Scotia, this phenomenon was particularly observed in the 2000s when many Nova Scotian francophones and non-francophones left their home province to work and live in Alberta. In this case, we know that the situation reversed itself in a radical way in 2016 subsequent to the fires which took place in Fort McMurray in Alberta (Fontaine 2020: p. 59).

This geographical mobility can be for a short period of time or for a longer period extending to several years. In the case of the immigrant, this concept corresponds to an individual who is born outside of Canada and who becomes established in a Canadian province (Nova Scotia, for example), with the intention of taking up permanent residence there. These three concepts, therefore, new arrival, migrant and immigrant, carry multiple meanings when they are used to describe and to participate in social interactions with different historically constituted social groups in the province.

Relating these concepts to the term "francophone", in everyday life, it is not infrequent to participate in exchanges where one of the interlocutors passes from a more formal style of French (*le français "soutenu"; Sustained French in English*) to the more familiar and typically Acadian form of that language or even to English in order to be sure that the desired message will be conveyed. This previously observed form of linguistic pragmatism (Fontaine 2007, 2010) is of course also present among individuals and families more recently established in the province. These contacts of a linguistic and cultural nature are part of what induce constant change in Nova Scotian society, contributing to a high level of complexity and a corresponding level of richness in social interactions which occur in the population as a whole.

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