

DAMMING THE UNAMEN SHIPU ROMAINE RIVER:

Contemporary Transformations of Territorialities Among the Innu of Ekuanitshit

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ABSTRACT

Since 2009, Innu members of the community of Ekuanitshit have faced a major hydroelectric project on the Romaine River, Unamen Shipu in innu-aimun language, an integral part of the Nitassinan, their ancestral territory. In this paper, we study the project's impacts on the material and ideational relationship the Innu have with the river. We explore the idea that the project transforms the traditional relationship to territory into a more pragmatic one, marked by economic and political interests. Our analysis reveals that the Innu's territorialities, though partly transformed by increased contact—and sometimes conflict—with hegemonic non-indigenous society, remain anchored in a strong cultural heritage and a deep identification with territory. We argue that these seemingly differentiated conceptualizations, of traditions on the one hand and development on the other, are not incompatible. These conceptualizations comprise dynamic cultural, social, and political territorialities which are thus internal and external, ancestral and contemporary.

Key words: Indigenous territorialities, Innus, Resource development, Unamen Shipu Romaine River, Ekuanitshit, Nitassinan, Côte-Nord, Québec

Introduction

Major water, mining and forestry resource development projects in Northern Québec are disrupting indigenous territorialities (Asselin 2011; Desbiens and Rivard 2012). The Romaine hydroelectric mega-complex in the Côte-Nord region, which Hydro-Québec started in 2009, is no exception. The construction of four dams, power plants and reservoirs, at an estimated cost of CAN\$6.5 billion, is causing a great deal of economic, environmental and social upheaval at the local, regional and provincial levels (Guimond and Desmeules 2019; Vincent 2008). Bordering the river, the Innu community of Ekuanitshit, consisting of approximately 600 members, is particularly affected.

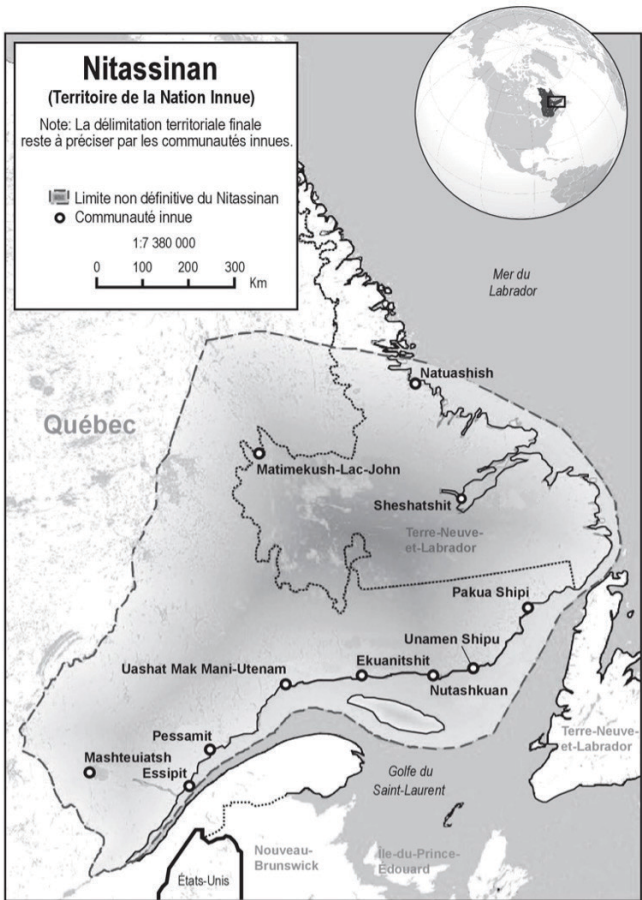
The impact study carried out on the Romaine project anticipated fairly positive benefits for the Innu communities of the region, including job creation, increased employability of Innu workers, business opportunities and an increase in income (*BAPE* 2009). The flooding of part of the territory and the addition of new access to it, as well as the changes in conditions for fishing, hunting, trapping and gathering, flowed more directly from the radical transformation of the environment. However, this study did not address precisely how the Innu experienced these transformations. Similarly, the environmental follow-up studies were limited to the measurable impacts on the use of the Romaine River by the Innu, and to an assessment of the mitigation measures in place (*Hydro-Québec* 2015). By limiting the impacts to their material dimension, these studies did not fully grasp their identity, cultural and socio-political significance, even though these aspects were strongly affected by the project.

Based on a cross reading of accounts provided by members of the Ekuanitshit community, Innu and non-Innu workers on the construction site and key regional players, the present article analyses the impact of the transformations on the territorialities of the Innu of Ekuanitshit. We examine the Innu relationship with the Romaine River in three parts: the river as it was experienced and represented prior to the major northern worksite; the context of the preliminary project negotiations, the arrival of the construction project and its impacts; and the participants' visions for the future in terms of post-Romaine and territorial development. To this end, we go back and forth between two scales of analysis: first, the river as an integral part of the Nitassinan at the material and symbolic levels, as experienced by the Innu; and second, the actual construction site and worker camps (Map 1, Map 2).

Multidimensional Territorialities

It is through territoriality that we explore the Innu relationship with the changing Unamen Shipu Romaine River. For this, we drew inspiration from the contrasting perspectives of Sack (1983) and Raffestin (1986; 1987), and we achieved this by employing a complementary approach, as do other researchers (Klauser 2012; Murphy 2012). Sack (1983, 1-2) defines territoriality as a desired, conscious strategy of spatial control: "to affect, influence or control resources and people, by controlling area." Raffestin (1987, 5) is more interested in processes than in finality and, for this purpose, in the relations determining territoriality, which he defines as a "set of relations maintained by man, insofar as he belongs to a society, with exteriority and alterity, with the help of mediators and instruments." In this way, we examine both the multiple relations that shape the territorialities of the Innu, as well as the desired purposes of control of, access to and governance of the Nitassinan.

Raffestin (1986) also raises the question of the "multidimensionality of territorial experience," an idea that provides us with a gateway to introducing the dimensions explored in the present research. For this purpose, we retain the tripartite conceptualization of territoriality – cultural, social and political – proposed by Bédard (2017, 25): "Territoriality works simultaneously in three complementary and interdependent registers of appropriation of and identification with the territory." The detailed results reveal these dimensions and their inseparable links. For now, let us just introduce how they are relevant to our analysis.



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Map 1: Nitassinan, Innu Nation

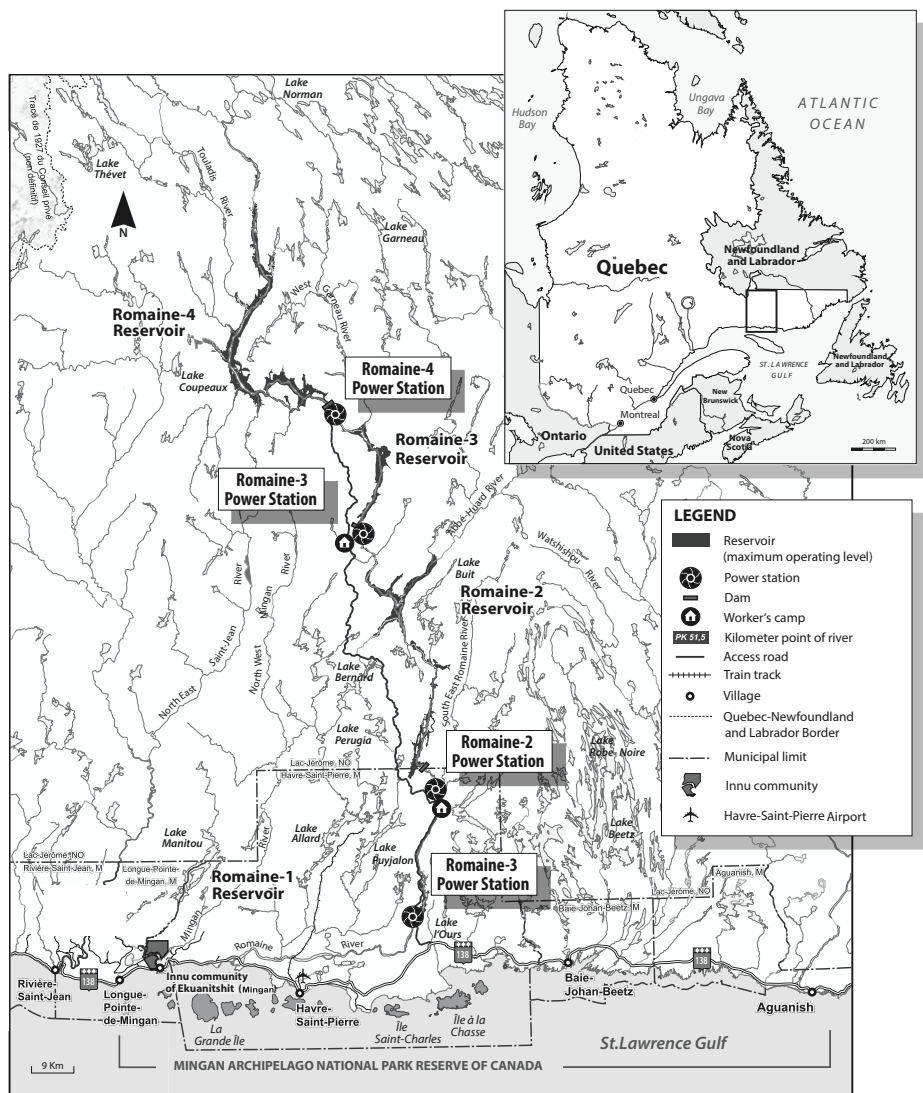
Source: Map modified by Mourad Djaballah, GÉOLAB, Geography department, UQAM.

Original map by Nation innue [<http://nationinnue.com>].

From the outset, we raise the question of the cultural dimension of territoriality, given our interest in the transformation of Innu identity as it relates to the construction site. Bonnemaïson (1981) and Di Méo (2002; 2004) place emphasis on the essential role played by relationships to the territory, as the geographical basis for the formation of identity. Territoriality reveals the way in which each individual forges their relationship to a territory via practices, identifications and representations (Di Méo 2006). Other researchers situate identity in the “magic triangle” of culture-territory-identity (Debarbieux 2006). “Substantial resources – both material and ideal – drawn from the territory, and particularly symbolic via objects, things, landscapes and places, construct and consolidate identity” (Gagnon 2013,

20). These assertions are especially fruitful in the study of indigenous territorialities, because the individual and collective identity of indigenous people has always been largely dependent on an “organic link with the ancestral land” (Leclair and Otis 2007, 14). However, we should not forget that many geographers go beyond the idea of a strictly internalized identity-related relationship with the territory by stressing that this relationship also stems from external influences: “It is therefore not incongruous that territoriality, whether indigenous or non-indigenous, is bound to change over time as social changes multiply in a given territory” (Desbiens and Rivard 2012, 562).

Desmeules and Guimond: Damming the Unamen Shipu Romaine River



Original Map by Hydro-Québec - Romaine project

Map modified by Mourad Djaballah, GÉOLAB, Geography Department, UQAM

Map 2: Primary infrastructure of the Romaine River hydroelectric project.

Source: Map modified by Mourad Djaballah, GÉOLAB, Geography department, UQAM.

Original map by Hydro-Québec – Romaine project, reproduced with authorization.

Methodology: Meeting the Innu of Ekuanitshit

Prioritizing oral histories and indigenous narratives (Maltais-Landry 2015; Vincent 2013), our privileged sources of information were qualitative interviews conducted with members of the Ekuanitshit community. In total, 18 interviews were conducted with 14 Innu from the community and four non-Indigenous who occupied special positions there, which gave them an intimate understanding of the issues related to the arrival of the Romaine project. Participants consisted of 10 women and 8 men between the ages of 25 and 67. The majority of them were between the ages of 35 and 55 (13/18).

The interviews focused on the material and ideational relationships to the territory of the Romaine River. More specifically, the participants were questioned about the activities practised there, their representations, the transformations underway, their relations with the non-indigenous people with regard to the project and the region, as well as their visions of the future in terms of post-Romaine and territorial governance. In addition to these interviews, some forty other complementary interviews were conducted, as part of a broader research project, with local, regional and extra-regional workers and former workers at the construction site, both Innu and non-Innu, in addition to key Minganois players. Alphanumeric codes, used throughout the article, were assigned to participants to ensure their anonymity (e.g. WKA11 is the code for “woman, key actor”).

The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and then analyzed using NVivo11 qualitative data processing software. The trends identified are expressed following the evolution of the river’s transformation – that is, before, during and after the project – given that our interest in each of these three periods is not identical, with the period during which the work was in progress attracting more of our attention. Our analysis first looks at the cultural and identity dimension of the territorialities so as to address so-called traditional Innu territorialities; we then examine its social and political dimensions to better understand its relational function.

Stream of Memory: the River as Legacy

To start, we explore the traditional relationship that the Innu of Ekuanitshit maintained with the Unamen Shipu Romaine River, as expressed through their representations of the landscapes and functions of this river before the work on the dams began. The vast majority of participants interviewed evoked its main historical function as an “ancestral path” travelled by canoe to reach the hunting grounds to the north. The choice of which route to take between the Romaine and the surrounding rivers (Saint-Jean, Mingan) depended on the location of each family’s ancestral lots. Because of the valleys, the steep terrain and the “impressive portages” of the Romaine River, many chose to join its course further north, at the planned location of the third and fourth dams. According to the accounts of two elders, the annual gatherings of Innu from all communities before the big autumn hunts were held near the planned location of the fourth dam (Map 2).

Although the participants pointed out that the river no longer served as a major route, since seaplanes and helicopters have long since replaced canoes, their representation of the river as an ancestral route reflected its role as a cultural and identity referent: “This is fundamental. That’s what we have to understand as Innu. Where we come from” (WKA11).

The second dominant representation of the river, intimately linked to the first, concerned the varied resources it contains and that are precious to the Innu:

The river reminds me of strength, something vast, something that has much to offer. The plants provide medicine, and the animals provide food. I see it as something infinite, really big, with lots of resources, as long as you respect them. That was before the project (W2).

The Romaine was in fact their ancestors’ “pantry.” It was certainly used as an access route, but this route inland was part of a circular way of life that followed the rhythm of the seasons and the animals, their main sources of subsistence. Although the participants admitted that the river’s role, use and frequentation have changed over time, it remains rooted in their culture. All the participants pointed to the role of their traditions as fundamental components: “Innu Aitun is still very much alive” (W17). Innu Aitun encompasses both traditional activities and values that guide the Innu in terms of respect for the environment and resources. The activities noted – and that are still practiced on the river – are, in order of importance, salmon fishing, small game hunting (beaver, hare, porcupine, partridge, etc.), migratory birds near the islands opposite the mouth of the Romaine River (bustards, ducks), large game (caribou, bear, moose, etc.), as well as the gathering of medicinal plants, cloudberries, cranberries, crowberries, partridgeberries (also known as lingonberries or redberries), blueberries and raspberries

The last representation of the pre-worksite river is more contemplative, even nostalgic, as participant spoke of untouched natural landscapes. They evoked images relating to the beauty of the river, its strength, and its grandeur, as well as the serenity, peace and calm it creates:

It also had therapeutic benefits. It had a calming effect. It’s really calm... you heard only the birds of the Romaine River. There’s one bird I can’t hear any more. I went to the Romaine this year, during goose hunting season, just to hear that bird, but I couldn’t hear it. I don’t know if it has disappeared. It’s a bird that actually sounds like flute music, extending far into the distance, like a stream (MKA5).

The Romaine River... the one I have in mind, the one I remember, is the pre-project river. That’s the one. It’s as if I wanted it to remain as it was, as powerful as it was before (WKA14).

The well-being associated with finding oneself “in the woods” is central to the self-definition of the Innu we met. When asked about their attachment to and identification with the Romaine River, and more broadly with its territory, they were unequivocal:

Innu who find themselves in the woods always feels good. It seems they understand that this is their place, the place where they feel good, where they feel complete, where they understand the reason for their being there (W2).

The territory and being Innu amount to the same thing. You can't be Innu without the territory (WKA14).

At the Confluence: From River to Reservoirs

The Pre-Project: the Reign of "Everyone for Themselves"

The second time period under discussion is the project start-up and implementation. As early as the 1960s and 1970s, preliminary studies conducted by Hydro-Québec had revealed the hydroelectric potential of the Romaine River, despite the fact that the economic and political juncture was not very conducive to the project's realization. This was the first factor underlying the feeling of powerlessness of the participants interviewed regarding the construction of the dams: "Everyone knew that there would come a day when they would be confronted with the project or have to express their views about it" (MNI8). One participant recalls the almost prophetic words of her father when she was still a teenager: "He used to say: look at my hands and arms; no matter how strong they are, I will never be able to stop Hydro-Québec. Even if we scream and shout, it's going to come about regardless" (W13).

This feeling of powerlessness on the part of the Innu of Ekuanitshit was also partly attributable to the fact that the processes utilized during the pre-project phases (information and consultation sessions, negotiation of agreements) were conducted with each Innu community and Minganie municipality separately and behind closed doors. Many believe that Hydro-Québec used this socio-geographic segmentation by locality to boost the project's social acceptability. The lack of solidarity, prior to the project, from neighbouring communities bred resentment and disappointment regarding the missed opportunity to establish real bargaining strength: "No one from the other communities came to support us, to say that they didn't want dams" (W19).

This feeling of bitterness was directly related to the Ekuanitshit Innu's attachment to the river. In fact, half of the people we interviewed believed that since their community, rather than the others, were "the most affected, historically, geographically and culturally" (WKA11), they should have been the first to be consulted and to give their opinion: "Why did they [Nutaskuan] sign the agreement, and why did they sign first? This is not their river" (W17). Other interlocutors made broader statements about the fact that the decision-making processes in place ignored the Innu vision of the territory and its development:

That's when I realized that there was a lack of respect in the relationship between the State Corporation and us. I was telling them that for us, the territory is sacred, something very important; it is where we lived, where our ancestors lived. All our spirituality is tied to the territory, including the entire animal world, and all would be affected. The answer I got was: here's the ice rink, and you will play on the ice with the rest of us (MKA15).

This quotation brings to mind an interesting analogy between the existing form of governance and a game whose outcome is known in advance: "it's a game you are playing, but one you are sure to lose" (WKA14). The very fact of entering into negotiations was in a way

tantamount abandoning the fight. The only room for manoeuvre resided in trying to maximise the benefits negotiated. Consequently, the Innu did not succeed in going beyond the existing framework.

In fact, in 2009 the community of Ekuanitshit was the last to enter into an Impact Benefit Agreement (IBA). Faced with increasing pressure to not “miss the boat,” it finally capitulated. In a community referendum held in March 2009, 78% of the members voted in favour of the project, despite the fact that the majority felt “there was no real choice” (WI7). Convinced that their protests would not stop the project, they sought at least to benefit from it as much as possible, especially in terms of royalties and work opportunities for the young people of the community.

Disturbed Landscapes

The start of the work in 2009 was a major turning point in the participants’ representations. They were very explicit as to the multiple environmental impacts of the project. Flooding and deforestation were the two mentioned most frequently, as they related to the disruption of ecosystems, the depletion and waste of resources the Innu considered precious (in particular salmon, game and medicinal plants), and the disappearance under water of very significant sites:

It is certain that with the flooding of the Romaine River, some of the stories and history of the Innu will be forgotten. There are important sites that will probably disappear: burial sites, places where customs and traditions are taught, temporary camps... The way the territory is occupied, you had the main camp, but the territories, the family lots, the portages... are so vast... It’s the history of the community (MNI8).

The project’s impacts affected not only the material landscape of the river, but also its ideational counterpart. The Innu’s identification with the river was apparent in their comments concerning the “broken,” “destroyed,” “massacred,” and “devastated” landscapes, and reflected a strong sense of belonging:

When I took off along the road, it made me so sad, damn it. Just imagine what it was like there, the entire road winding through the mountains. You could see the mighty river, and you could only imagine it, in a year, two years, perhaps three, it wouldn’t be the same (W1).

Our river... what a pity (WI9).

The identity and cultural ruptures documented among the Innu and other indigenous peoples (Dallman et al. 2013) demonstrate the fundamental importance of territory in the formation of their identity. One participant eloquently summed up the importance of identity: “Without territory, what are we?” (WKA11).

The Innu workers on the Construction Site: An Invisible Workforce at the Bottom of the Employment Ladder

Other than the vast ancestral territory of the river, we examined aspects of the construction site and its camps through the prism of the socio-territorial experience of the Innu who worked there. Their marginal status was a determining factor in the emergence of new territorialities.

Based on the preferential commitments and measures adopted by Hydro-Québec for the hiring of indigenous workers, many members of Ekuanitshit decided to try their luck. While more than half of the participants we met mentioned a significant hiring boom at the outset of the work, the general impression was that the numbers later dropped sharply, with only a few dozen of its members still working there. While their low numbers provided a first indication of their marginal place on the site, their status was revealed above all in the types of jobs occupied, which were at the bottom of the pay scale, and not very highly valued. The most recent statistics obtained by the Ekuanitshit Innu Business Corporation (*Société des entreprises innues d'Ekuanitshit SEIE* 2016) reveal that of the 144 Innu employed by the corporation in connection with the Romaine project, from the various communities, 108 worked in the cafeteria or for the housekeeping service. The two other sectors where they were also heavily represented were technical maintenance (12) and camp security (15). More than half of all the workers interviewed as part of the broader investigation noted that outside the camps the indigenous population held a subordinate status and were almost invisible: "I mostly see them in the kitchens, camp services, and so on. I don't see many working on the construction sites or machinery" (MNI20); "I am a cleaning lady. It's so demeaning; when you walk in the cafeteria over there, it's obvious they see you as an Innu woman" (WW30).

A number of factors may explain this situation: low levels of education and distance from training institutions; lack of experience on the labour market; difficulties in landing a job with the non-indigenous companies that were sub-contracting; problems in adapting to the work site lifestyle (rigid routines, long shifts and work cycles, strict supervision); and the challenges inherent in learning new tasks, particularly as French is the Innu's second language and when the deadlines imposed by a mega-site let little time for adequate training and support.

Relationships between Innu and non-indigenous workers at the site were tenuous, largely because the trades were segregated. Workers tended to mix with their close colleagues in the camps, resulting in the formation of "clans" and "closed circles." Various cultural and language differences exacerbated this socio-occupational cleavage. Contact between indigenous and non-indigenous workers was thus limited to everyday common spaces, and resulted in only sporadic and superficial interactions in the cafeteria, and in entertainment venues such as the bar-restaurant: "The Innu hang out with the Innu, and the white people hang out with the white people" (WXW24); "There are not really any meaningful relationships. It's chat, it's polite, but no more than that" (WXW26). These insignificant relationships were compounded by a marked indifference on the part of most non-indigenous people towards their indigenous counterparts. As a minority on the work site, the relationship with the Other was a more decisive factor for the Innu workers we interviewed. They were explicit about the multiple

interpersonal difficulties that affected them. From their perspective, the lack of connections stemmed from intercultural tension, persistent prejudice, discrimination, intimidation and even outright racism.

These work-related and social barriers could result in a lack of trust and self-esteem among the Innu, as well as other problems at the work site: loneliness, isolation, psychological distress, alcoholism and drug addiction. Although there were specific support services set up for them (psychologist, social worker, indigenous employment counsellor), as well as shaputuan, traditional indigenous sharing and gathering places, at the Murailles (kilometre 36) and Mista (kilometre 117) camps, many felt that these measures were inadequate in improving the Innu's experience at the work camps and encouraging them to stay. Some of these impacts would even affect the community of Ekuanitshit, as evidenced by an increase in drug use and family tensions related to debt, infidelity and the long absences of workers during their "runs" at the site. A more in-depth account of the Innu experience in terms of employment, space of encounter and sense of place at the Romaine worksite is available in Guimond and Desmeules (2018).

Reconciling the River and the Work Site: Innu or Hydro-Québec Territory?

The challenges and obstacles presented above shaped the Innu's relationship to the construction site territory, with the result that this relationship was becoming increasingly ambiguous. And how could it be otherwise when they lived and worked every day in a "White's" habitat and work environment in the heart of the ancestral territory to which they are culturally and historically attached? Asked about their feelings - or lack thereof - of being on indigenous territory, the workers' answers gave a glimpse of a sense of place marked by paradoxes.

Among the Innu who felt they were on indigenous territory, some of them shared vivid memories of walks in the forest and trips along the river. Others said that being surrounded by nature while they were at the work camp made them feel good: "Wherever they happen to be in the woods, Innu can feel at home" (WXW24); "I felt like I was in my territory" (WXW24); "I felt that the trailer [of the dormitory] was on my territory" (MKA5).

In contrast, other Innu workers did not hesitate to state that their land had been stolen from them and that it was now Hydro-Québec's territory: "This is no longer our territory. Someone stole it from us, took it from us. Actually, it's not just anyone, it's Hydro, to make money" (W17). The constant "surveillance" now imposed there was one of the main reasons given for this feeling (guards at the gatehouse, various security guards and inspectors at the camps, regulations, curfews and restrictions on certain activities [hunting and fishing], etc). They felt trapped or cut off from their culture:

The work site is like a prison. You have to go through security, and when you enter, they [the guards] are there, and they make sure no one else enters. You have to provide identification. It's stifling. The Innu like freedom (WXW24).

Many shared this representation of a hostile, remote and inward-looking place: "You feel like you're in a hole. You're afraid to breathe normally" (W13). The feeling of being trapped was also manifested as a malaise, or even as fear, embodied by "the presence of an evil spirit" (W13) at the work site. Some linked the uneasiness they experienced to the destruction of their natural

environment. In their view, there would henceforth be a cognitive and emotional dissonance among the Innu: they were certainly on the territory of their ancestors, but they would simultaneously be participating in its destruction and restricting its use and access to it.

However, for some of the indigenous workers not everything was negative. The services provided at the camps, including meals, accommodation and recreational activities, were valued. Some workers even went so far as to say that the training provided at the work site and the pursuit of healthy lifestyle habits (sports, sleep, food) provided a kind of “therapy” that “refocused” them and made them feel “serene.” Certain problematic, challenging or stressful situations experienced in the communities may help explain why life on the job site was considered a respite, as was previously noted by Rodon and his colleagues (2013) in the case of Inuit jobs at the Raglan mine in Nunavik. The camp could thus be represented as an “escape” from the ills experienced elsewhere.

The Post-Romaine Period

Individual and Community Benefits

The final period under consideration relates to future visions of the Innu regarding the economic and territorial development of the region following the completion of the dams. While, as just outlined, the spin-offs from the Romaine project for individual Innu did not seem to reflect the hoped-for employment opportunities, for a number of them the experience was positive. The handful of respondents who held specialized jobs, such as heavy equipment operators, said they were more fulfilled professionally, individually and socially. Nevertheless, it was mostly Innu from outside the Minganie and Lower North Shore regions who held these jobs. Having had other work site experience, they seemed to adapt and integrate more readily, and took pride in their success: “At meetings, I am the only woman, and Innu at that! The pride is twofold” (T26). Others experienced individual enrichment:

[The work site] has brought wealth. Wealth in the sense that there are people who have good jobs, are well paid, and have adapted to a work-camp way of life. Wealth in terms of training: with our agreement, we had access to training that was not available elsewhere. There are some who will leave with valuable work experience (MNI8).

On the other hand, debt was frequently raised as an important concern. Debts incurred following the purchase of houses, cottages, cars, snowmobiles, trips, etc., seemed to be more onerous without the high wages they had earned on the construction site. Some participants complained that the work camp had had a negative impact on their lifestyles, not only economically but also culturally. People were more stressed and, ultimately, the community was not really richer: “Things change. But I have the impression that it’s not changing for the better. People get used to this lifestyle. But it’s not our lifestyle” (WKA14).

At the community level, the Nishipimian agreement, concluded in 2009 between Ekuanitshit and Hydro-Québec, provided for the payment of CAN\$75 million in royalties, staggered until 2070. Various initiatives were set up to manage the money received: an economic

and community development fund, a training fund, an Innu heritage fund, a remedial work and access-to-the-territory fund, an Innu Aitun fund, an archaeological research program and a business support program. In the eyes of many indigenous and non-indigenous interviewees, the community of Ekuanitshit would benefit from the most lucrative agreement. It received the most royalties, and the 19 businesses created in parallel, grouped together as part of the Société des entreprises innues d'Ekuanitshit (SEIE), were "successful" (MNI93). Respondents working in community economic development were also quite optimistic about the future of these new diversified businesses, believing that they would continue to prosper after the completion of the dams.

Despite all this, slightly less than half of the participants were disappointed with the hoped-for benefits. The projects carried out were in fact one-time projects, and some promises have not yet been fulfilled, such as the paving of streets, the construction of an arena and a new community centre, more activities for young people, and so on. People have the impression that they are not seeing "the colour of their money" (WKA11). Royalties are "administered like a puzzle": one piece at a time, one project at a time, and lacking a long-term strategic vision (WKA14).

The Innu Aitun Fund, according to more than half of the interviewees, stood out as the project's most positive spin-off for the community. The Fund, renewable every 50 years, in other words "negotiated in perpetuity" (MKA15), aims to maintain and continue the community's cultural activities. It is the fund that defrays the cost of seaplane or helicopter transportation required by families who wish to stay in the territory. It also finances an ongoing project for the construction of 32 new four-season cottages on the ancestral territory. Finally, it supports the extra-curricular activities of the Innu Aitun program at the primary and secondary school levels, aimed at transmitting traditional knowledge and customs to young people through various workshops and outings on the territory.

Access, Opening and Control of the Nitassinan

Cultural and identity-related characterization of the Innu territorialities of Ekuanitshit leads inexorably to a consideration of its political dimension. Referring to Sack's (1983) definition that territoriality is a conscious and desired strategy of territorial control, we now explore one of its concrete manifestations. The opening up of and access to the territory once the work has been completed is a major concern raised by more than half of the participants. Thus, the gateway to the Nitassinan is no longer the Romaine River but becomes, rather, its modern counterpart, the new 150-kilometre road joining the four hydroelectric power stations. This road symbolizes the idea of control in a tangible way. For now, the river seems inaccessible to the Innu accustomed to using it in the past: "It's blocked. My grandfather is 78 years old. He has wanted to go see the construction site twice now. He's not allowed to go there or go through the barrier" (W1).

When it comes to the future of this road, it is seen as both an advantage and disadvantage by the respondents. On the one hand, the territory will certainly be more easily accessible, especially since, with the Innu Aitun Fund, transportation costs to travel there will be borne collectively. On the other hand, the new road will be public, and therefore open to everyone:

150 kilometres to go see your territory is a long way to travel. Seaplane or helicopter costs amount to perhaps CAN\$1000-1200. Now, you can also travel by land. However, the drawback is that the road will be public (MKA5).

When we used to take the seaplane or helicopter, we were isolated; we had peace. Now anyone can travel there (W2).

There is already a very long waiting list for cottage leases, and for the cottages to be built by the road and alongside the lakes dotting the area. Hunting and fishing activities are very popular with the Minganois and Innu, though the arrival of the construction has increased the number of restrictions and the tensions with which these are associated. According to the respondents, clashes between Innu and non-Innu are now more common, especially near the mouth of the river where the former used to set their fishing nets. Others have concerns about “dangerous white hunters” (WKA11) and their methods, which are often disrespectful towards animals. Another believes that the Innu are going to have their fish “spots” stolen from them (MW3). In short, a new road means more people, more cottages, more activities and a concomitant loss of exclusivity for the Innu. During the early negotiations, the Innu did try to obtain control over the management of the road once the construction had been completed. However, roads in Québec belong to the public sector.

Contemporary Indigenous Territorialities, Between Interiority and Otherness

In the end, for the clear majority of the Ekuanitshit Innu we met, the project constitutes a sacrifice (of the Unamen Shipu Romaine River) rather than a development opportunity. For a little less than half, it is both a sacrifice and an opportunity. Finally, for a small minority, it is an opportunity. The Innu view that they had made a sacrifice can be explained, first, by the general impression that the pre-implementation phases of the project had been conducted hurriedly and under pressure. There is a common feeling that the project would be implemented regardless of any resistance, and that the indigenous population had to reach an agreement in order to benefit from it even minimally – and on an equal footing with the other groups involved. In short, there is a feeling of powerlessness with no real possibility of co-management. Second, given that environmental and social concerns continue to outweigh the positive benefits, which are taking a long time in coming, the sacrifice of the Romaine River looms particularly large. Finally, this feeling is reinforced by the Innu’s continued strong attachment to the river as a source of identity:

It was a very beautiful river. I think that the people who campaigned for the dam, for the economic aspects, for royalties or for employment, had no idea what they were going to destroy. They only saw the economic and monetary sides (WKA11).

It was a sacrifice because we are Innu. We experienced a rupture, in our pride in being Innu and in our Innu way of life. We have been cut off from all this (WI7).

All these elements reinforce the impression that an important part of the community’s territory, history and identity has been ceded in exchange for benefits that are insignificant for

the majority of the population. If the political weight of the Innu had initially been greater, if their aspirations and concerns had been more widely shared and appreciated and, consequently, if the significance they attached to the river had been more highly valued, the project might perhaps have been able to improve intercultural dialogue on a daily basis and at the decision-making level. The validation and incorporation of indigenous knowledge and know-how in the deployment of natural resource development projects are more and more common (Jackson 2005; Tipa and Nelson 2012), though they are still contentious in Québec (Sioui 2018).

The fact remains that the tension between sacrifice and opportunity, between the ancestral and new meanings attached to the territory, and between heritage and future, is forging new relationships to the territory. The arrival of this project, by calling into question the traditional territorialities of the Innu, has given rise to new uncertainties, if not identity, political, and economic transformations. It has thus inevitably propelled a relationship to the river that was previously more internalized towards a relationship modulated instead by the Other, be it a worker from Southern Québec, a State Corporation or the public sphere. Under the impetus of this project, the territorialities of the Innu are being called into question, and must be renegotiated. As a result, they are in a way being driven, be they aware of it or not, to defending their material and emotional relationship to the Romaine River in the eyes of dominant society.

One thing is certain: the Innu territory is on the one hand a politicized entity given the claims made on and the intercultural relations with the majority population and its decision-making bodies. On the other hand, the territory is also an everyday living environment, constantly inhabited and meaningful both from the material and an ideational standpoints, the object and subject of a living culture seeking to reconcile its ancestral roots with its new aspirations. The Innu are indeed very sensitive to contemporary neo-liberal development projects, and are increasingly caught up with it, be it directly, in terms of employment, or indirectly (particularly through the creation of businesses). However, their increased visibility in regional development did not seem to signal any weakening in Innu identification with their territory, or in the ancestral relations they have with it. On the contrary, this visibility contributes to underscore their presence. Even if they have consented to the construction of the dams, the territory remains at the heart of their collective identity and their daily life.

The example of the Romaine project studied here illustrates that new ideas are not necessarily incompatible with traditions. Nash (2002, 225) states that “the relationship between sacredness and modernity, far from being incommensurable, is continually under (re)negotiation.” In this respect, the Innu Aitun programme is a noteworthy illustration of the tension between rupture and preservation. For the Innu interviewed, the establishment of this fund is a major counterbalance to the loss of important sites; it provides easier and more extensive access to the remainder of their ancestral territory. Paradoxically, from this perspective the Romaine project is both the source of the wound and the remedy. In other words, even if the project is a sacrifice for the majority of the participants, it is also a likely basis for re-appropriating the larger territory. The fund provides a glimpse of reconciliation between the preservation of identity and economic development, or at least a compromise that seems acceptable.

This is the case because in our view the project serves as a catalyst for dynamic and hybrid territorialities (cultural, political and social), in constant dialectic with daily experiences and

new structural and socio-spatial relationships. In other words, these territorialities should no longer be studied in isolation as regards to its internalized components, but rather as a form of hybridization between heritage and becoming, sometimes voluntary, sometimes adopted and sometimes imposed, and which testifies, ultimately, to the complexity and uniqueness of the relationship to the territory maintained by the Innu of Ekuanitshit.

We worked mainly with the community of Ekuanitshit, however, extending this research to the other communities affected by the Romaine project would allow for interesting comparisons so as to better understanding the variables that shape relationships with the river (geographical proximity, land use, links with Hydro-Québec). In addition, given the major changes brought about by Northern development and resource exploitation, similar case studies on indigenous territorialities should be multiplied. Such in-depth studies are essential because there remain broader questions about the territorialities of the Innu and indigenous peoples, both here and elsewhere: Can traditional heritage and neo-liberal values really be reconciled by way of indigenous participation in development projects? To maintain their authenticity, must the role played here by indigenous people be limited to that of “protectors of nature” (Carter and Hollinsworth 2009)? Is this the only way to simultaneously safeguard their culture? How can their role be extended and their current marginal position in territorial development be surmounted while respecting their values (Desmeules et Guimond 2018)? In sum, more studies with a geographical perspective would provide a better understanding of contemporary indigenous territorialities.

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