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Einbahnstraße: on the Maritime Bus to Edmundston

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Raluca Bejan (</category/bios/raluca-bejan>) October 8, 2019

ENVIRONMENT (</ISSUES/ENVIRONMENT>)

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Wednesday, September 11, 2019. 19:30. Fredericton bus terminal. Enough time to grab water and have a smoke. Several packages change hands. Large brown cardboard boxes. Some of them labelled Canadian Blood Services.

Passing Kingsclear we step into a dreamlike world. Harvest sunsets, infinite skies, an assortment of pine and Christmas trees on both sides of the road. The landscape resembles Saint John. Sometimes Lamèque. The bus smells familiar. Scents often pass as accurate descriptors to many visual memories. There is a certain universality in scent-laden experiences. Engineering schools, for instance, always smell like gyms (or unwashed feet, depending on your preferred metaphor), whether they're in Oxford, Fredericton or New York. Underground urban railways can likewise be differentiated by scent. Montreal's metro has the same scent as Bucharest's. Similarly, the Toronto and New York subways smell alike. And the scent in the subway lines of Kyiv or St. Petersburg is probably like the London Underground, as they are buried equally deep in the ground.

The scent of the bus to Edmundston reminds me of the one that travelled, over 20 years ago, the route from Bistrița, Romania to the nearby villages of Cușma and Livezile. The universal scent of the rural bus serving remote destinations and little-known areas.

Even the fabric on the passenger seats -- fake brown leather with a black patch for the headrest -- looks the same as on the Bistrița-Cușma bus.

First stop: Woodstock. "There will be a 10-minute break," announces the driver over the microphone. About four smokers step out. There could be eight people on the bus. Or maybe six. Or maybe 10. Quite



Second stop: Perth-Andover. No break, just dropping off packages and picking up new passengers.

Third stop: Grand Falls. The primary language metamorphoses as we transition from one symbolic world to another. Announcements switch from English into French.

"On s'arrête juste pour prendre de nouveaux passagers; le reste sont priés de rester dans le bus."

Putting on his blue jacket, the driver steps out of the bus and squints for new commuters. A young man gets out of a Toyota. He goes straight to the bus and stores his boxes in the luggage compartment. The driver drops the Canadian Blood Services cases on the steps of the 649 Rite Stop.

The Rite Stop markets itself as the official agency for Maritime Bus route pick-ups and drop-offs.

"Worms for sale" are, in a like manner, advertised.

Returning to the bus. Checking and scanning the tickets, counting people, moving papers around and pencilling things in.

Back on the road. The scenery looks like Val-Comeau.

One more quick stop. About 10 Tesla chargers are plugged outside the Irving station.

23:30. Stop at Rue Victoria. The Edmundston terminal seems to be another Irving station. It takes 15 minutes to walk downtown. Right onto Rue l'Église and a second right onto Rue d'École-Cormier to arrive at Rue Rice. Crossing the bridge over Rue d'Église. All of a sudden my chest feels tight. Breathing gets hard. The pungent smell is impossible to escape. I cover my mouth and nose with my scarf and continue uphill on École-Cormier.

Thursday morning, September 12. At a restaurant. Beirut is playing on the radio. Six women nibble on their breakfast. The francophones seem to eat in a much quieter manner. The only English customer in the restaurant speaks so loudly on his phone that you can hear him from five or six tables away. The women's conversations are indecipherable.

Beyond the national headlines about Bianca Andreescu's conversation with Drake or the federal election, **local media stories** (<https://www.local.ca/nb/edmundston/news/>) reveal a world of peculiar sensibilities: 53 salmon escape from an aquaculture farm into the Madawaska River; a vigil for three New Brunswick Community College students who died in a car crash near Moncton over the Labour Day



from the pulp mill are one with the clouds.

The mill in downtown Edmundston is operated by the Twin Rivers Paper Company, a private firm owned jointly by **Atlas Holdings and Blue Wolf Capital Partners**

(<https://www.twinriverspaper.com/news/atlas-holdings-and-blue-wolf-capital-to-acquire-twin-rivers/>).

Atlas Holdings seem to invest in companies experiencing financial stress, specializing in bankruptcy purchases, out-of-court restructurings and organizational management. Blue Wolf Capital is a private equity firm investing in every imaginable high-profit industry, from pharmaceuticals, to environmental facilities, to health-care services. The usual story of the finance industry continually generating new ways to extract wealth from anything.

There is little **empirical data** (<http://nbmediacoop.org/2012/04/24/where-you-live-matters-new-brunswick-cancer-study/>) tracking the cancer rates by community in New Brunswick. The annual lung **cancer rates for Canada** ([https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/82-003-](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/82-003-x/1998001/article/3877-eng.pdf?st=mv9K7jcn)

[x/1998001/article/3877-eng.pdf?st=mv9K7jcn](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/82-003-x/1998001/article/3877-eng.pdf?st=mv9K7jcn)). sit at 90 for men and 40 for women per 100,000 population. **The New Brunswick incidence rates**

(/C:/Users/rbejan/Downloads/Cancer_Report_2_English-2.pdf) are slightly higher: 92.2 for men and 52.6 for women. But for Edmundston, these **numbers**

(/C:/Users/rbejan/Downloads/Cancer_Report_2_English-2.pdf) surpass provincial and national averages: 139.9 for men and 62.2 for women.

The common denominator between poor white and racialized communities seems to be environmental decay. What happens on the First Nations reserves close to Sarnia, Ontario (**the Chemical Valley** (https://www.vice.com/en_ca/article/4w7gwn/the-chemical-valley-part-1)) seems to occur across New Brunswick. In Ontario there has always been an undercurrent of resistance to the **equalization payments** (<https://nationalpost.com/news/on-sk-say-carbon-price-cpp-expansion-a-double-whammy-for-businesses>) from the haves to the have-not Maritime provinces. The underlying assumption is that the East Coast is perpetually **subsidized** (<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/can-only-one-man-see-that-canadas-equalization-program-is-broken/article4650756/>) by Ontario and the West. Yet I wonder how many Ontarians would put up with a pulp mill in downtown Elora, Picton or Niagara Falls.

Editor's note: "Einbahnstraße" is the German word for "one way."