INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal Peoples: Canada's First Welcoming Community Where do Aboriginal-Immigrant Relations Stand Today?

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> *A contemporary reality to have a Canada that works for all of us [...] requires a fundamental change in how we phrase the conversation around who are the immigrants and First Nations People and then the interpretation and understanding of treaties, which bind all the people of this land.*[1]

This special edition of *Canadian Issues* looks at immigration from an innovative point of view. Although immigration has been at the heart of Canada's development for a long time, this has become increasingly apparent in the last 20 years. It has been the concern not only of politicians, but also of those in the economic sector, researchers, social workers, provinces and municipalities, and NGOs. Various aspects of immigration have been examined and reconsidered with a view to improving immigrant recruitment, reception, integration, and retention. The Metropolis Centre has played an important role in the development and advancement of more equitable immigration policies by bringing together all levels of immigration stakeholders to contribute their thoughts from the perspectives of citizenship and social integration; welcoming communities; families (women, children, and youth); housing and neighbourhoods; economic integration; as well as justice and security.

However, this in-depth reflection on immigration and integration in Canada has almost exclusively focused on the relationship between immigrants and the dominant group. There is little to no mention of the relationship between immigrants and Aboriginal people in the writings and discussions on immigrants.

And yet Aboriginals represented Canada's first welcoming community. In reflecting on welcoming communities and immigration to Canada, we surely have a great deal to learn from these communities. If multiculturalism is a fundamental value—one that is central to Canadian identity—it is thanks to First Nations Peoples. Their vision of one land—an abundance belonging to all—their tremendous sense of hospitality and sharing, their respect for all and for every living thing, have instilled their values in us and shaped the fundamental beliefs of our society. As Chief Robert Joseph said, "Every race, every colour, every creed belongs here. They have a right to be here. They have value. We all have purpose." Generosity, hospitality and multiculturalism—the core values of Canadian society—come from the fundamental beliefs of the First Nations Peoples. Canada is recognized as the first country to have developed a policy on multiculturalism (1971).

Unfortunately, the First Nations values of generosity and hospitality were misinterpreted by settlers. As Seema Ahluwalia explains in this issue, their generosity and role as a welcoming community were stolen from them. They are considered a distinct, second-class group and are therefore often highly undervalued. In addition, First Nations communities are not involved in discussions and decisions regarding the direction of immigration policies. Yet, the testimonies of First Nations Peoples on this issue show their desire to become involved and their conviction that the experience of having been the first welcoming community would significantly contribute to improving immigration policies and not repeating past mistakes. First Nations Peoples do have other concerns and priorities. They face serious psycho sociological challenges, which include redefining their identity and social integration challenges following the serious injuries and losses they have suffered. Nonetheless, according to Chief Robert Joseph (in this issue), immigration could be a cornerstone for building a better Canada for everyone.

First Nations communities are an integral part of the image of the Canadian dream; this is how immigrants imagine Canada will be when they arrive. Most immigrants do not know the real history of the First Nations, but rather their popular history—the myths and stereotypes that Hollywood largely contributed to cultivating by means of its immense body of American westerns. Although a tepee symbol is most often used to designate reserves on maps, immigrants who arrive on First Nations reserves are surprised to find themselves amidst small, poorly maintained houses that do not in any way represent the Aboriginal spirit and character they were seeking. Most immigrants and Canadians in general are unfamiliar with the richness and particularities of the various cultures and languages of First Nations Peoples in Canada. Instead, they see them as a homogenous group collectively referred to as Aboriginals.

On a day of dialogue and activities with the Mi'kmaq community organized by CAIIMM,[2] whose purpose was to introduce a local First Nations community to immigrants and to strengthen ties between them, about 60 immigrants, established immigrants, and Canadians (representing 17 nationalities in all), spent the day with Aboriginal people at Metepenagiag Heritage Park in New Brunswick. This first-hand experience revealed how surprised Aboriginal people were—given their very negative self-image—that immigrants were taking an interest in them. Immigrants, on the other hand, were amazed that Canadians have little to no interest in these Aboriginal communities with whom they have been cohabitating for centuries, aside from stigmatized or folklorized representations. Mr. Ba, an immigrant from Senegal, made the following remark:

> [Translation]
> *I first asked myself why these people do not figure more prominently in Canada. Is the system to blame for their not integrating? Or does their way of life result in their feeling uncomfortable? I asked myself many questions. Secondly, I was surprised that, in the group, even those who were born here or have been here for a long time had never been on a reserve. I don't understand!*

Although they have different characteristics, these two groups acknowledge that they have a number of similarities. The Peoples of Africa, for instance, find similarities between their way of life in African villages and the way of life of Aboriginal Peoples. This link between Aboriginal cultures in Canada and certain African cultures was developed and well documented by Hyacinthe Combary in his film *Histoire de sable,* produced by the NFB in 2004. The film links the traditions and values of a young immigrant from the Gourmantche ethnic group of Burkina Faso with the animist traditions of the Attikamek First Nations of Canada. As Lucia Madariaga discusses in her article, Aboriginal people are more likely to feel like friends and colleagues of African immigrants and refugees because, in addition to having similar traditions and values, they find themselves in a similar situation in Canada, often having the same disadvantaged and marginalized status.

Pascal Pelletier, a Cree artist and community leader living in Moncton, added (mainly in reference to Aboriginal people in New Brunswick) that Aboriginal people who decide to leave their reserve have similar experiences to immigrants with regard to integration. He affirms that Aboriginal people feel just as disoriented as new immigrants and that they need the same amount of assistance and the same support services during their integration process. In his view, it is often this distrust of external society that is instilled in Aboriginal people that limits them to the reserves, where, most often, they lack resources and goals. He suggests establishing settlement services in order to facilitate the integration of Aboriginal people who leave their reserve.

As Lucia Madariaga-Vignudo[3] also discusses in this issue, little is known about the interactions between immigrants and Aboriginal people, and even less is known about how these two groups perceive one another. In a 2010 article on multiculturalism in Canada, Banting and Kymlicka already discussed the need to examine more closely interactions between immigrants and urban Aboriginal people. They found that, in several western Canadian cities, immigrants were living in close proximity to Aboriginal people and that, while they were subject to different laws and regulations, they often shared the same services and public spaces. Undoubtedly, these relationships need to be studied because they bring a new perspective and understanding of immigrants' integration problems and shed an interesting light on the dynamics of welcoming communities.

The movement of interest in such relationships is gaining many levels of actors in different regions: marginal initiatives were launched in various cities, and two round tables were organized as part of the 2009 National Metropolis Conference held in Calgary and the 2011 Conference held in Vancouver to address this shortcoming, ask questions, and consolidate a network of researchers and social stakeholders who are committed to this issue. In this edition of *Canadian Issues,* we highlight the key aspects of these round tables and give an account of various contacts between Aboriginal people, first welcoming communities, and immigrants in Canada. What are the different types of cohabitation relationships and the perceptions that develop between these two groups, given their different realities? What actions have been taken and why? What are

the similarities and particularities of each group? To what extent can the study of this aspect of immigration serve to build a truly multicultural and integrated society? What can we propose to politicians?

This issue is a modest first attempt to answer such questions. Through the various points of view of municipal and social stakeholders, researchers, Aboriginals, immigrants, and NGOs, the 10 articles in this special issue present the initial discussions of researchers, highlighting the relationships and perceptions developing between these two groups in different Canadian provinces. The new initiatives established in these provinces to improve these relationships are also presented in this issue.

The types of relationships that exist between these two groups can be placed on a continuum that situates them between two polar extremes, ranging from a "zero contact" or "two solitudes" situation to mixed marriages: from indifference and tension to harmonious relationships between immigrants and Aboriginal people.[4] In certain provinces, namely New Brunswick, Aboriginal people live mainly on reserves, isolated from Anglophone and Francophone communities; those who live off the reserves—urban Aboriginal people—are fully integrated, not identifiable, and have little contact with immigrants. However, this is not the case in Saskatoon or Winnipeg, where Aboriginal people and immigrants share the same spaces. As will be seen in the following articles, the provinces that have made the greatest strides in creating dialogue with Aboriginal people are those with the strongest Aboriginal presence and those where immigrants share spaces with Aboriginal people, such as British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.

The contributions in this issue will give us a picture of the situations in Alberta, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Canada's three territories: Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories. Several organizations that are aware of the need for dialogue have led projects or taken action in various provinces. Guided by the conviction that it is through dialogue that we come to know and understand each other and solve issues of cohabitation and perception, these initiatives attempt to create forums for dialogue between the two communities, Aboriginal and immigrant. Organizations including the NGO CAIIMM (now known as CAFI, mentioned earlier in this introduction) in Moncton, New Brunswick; *Actions interculturelles de développement et d'éducation* (AIDE) in Sherbrooke, Quebec, which started a dialogue between the African Canadian, Aboriginal, Colombian and Serbian Canadian communities by, among other activities, sharing the traditions of each culture through expressive dance and initiatives undertaken by the Finding Home™: How to Belong in a Changing World NGO; the Dialogues Project carried out by the city of Vancouver with the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh communities; Welcome Home program initiated by the race relations committee in the city of Saskatoon, as well as those introduced by teachers, social workers, and Aboriginal leaders such as Chief Robert Joseph in Vancouver and Pascal Pelletier in Moncton who work to educate and develop harmonious relationships and a positive perception of the various communities that make up Canada. Some of these initiatives are discussed to varying degrees in this issue.

This edition of *Canadian Issues* offers a sampling of articles that clearly illustrate the diversity and complexity of the relationships between Aboriginal people and immigrants in Canada today—relationships that are set against the backdrop of dismissal, ignorance, and a deliberate forgetting of historical events. That being said, this issue starts with a contribution from the Hereditary Chief of the Kwakwaka'wakw community, Robert Joseph, who provides some of his thoughts on immigration. Basing himself on the history of his people, and writing on behalf of the Aboriginal community that is still struggling to carve out a place for itself in the Canadian landscape, he argues that, in addition to being a strength, multiculturalism is a cornerstone of a better Canada. According to Joseph, immigrants can play an active role in defining a new and more inclusive Canadian identity. He feels that, by focusing essentially on the economy rather than on culture and the effects of immigration, current immigration policies pose a threat to multiculturalism. He advises immigrants to fight to stay themselves and all Canadians to initiate a meaningful dialogue that will result in a more inclusive Canada and a better society for all. He is convinced that Aboriginal people can greatly contribute with respect to immigration and to the dialogue on building a better, more tolerant society. In his view, it all starts with "You and I."

The six contributions that follow describe research and initiatives undertaken in various Canadian provinces. First, focusing on basic theories and the approach taken by her program, Jessie Sutherland presents the work of the NGO Finding Home, which she founded. This program aims to engage communities through dialogue and cooperation on the meaning, creation, and preservation of a feeling of belonging. Based on past experiences of dialogue between immigrants and Aboriginal communities in British Columbia's Lower Mainland region, she argues that dislocation from land and nature is experienced as an erosion of the feeling of belonging and that reestablishing this connection would strengthen that feeling. Furthermore, building on the theories of several authors, including Toynbee (1955), Wright (2005), Nahdi (2003), Marshall (2001), Diamond (2006), and Clarck (2002), she concludes that our capacity to create a feeling of belonging against the

backdrop of current local and global challenges may largely depend on our aptitude to form quality relationships with others, the environment, and ourselves.

Lucia Madariaga-Vignudo looks at how urban Aboriginal people and African refugees perceive one another. She draws from qualitative data collected in downtown Winnipeg for her exploratory study and presents the partial results of her research on the mixed picture of the way downtown Aboriginal residents perceive new African refugees. According to her study, some Aboriginal people have negative perceptions of refugees, primarily owing to an impression of competition between these groups for jobs and subsidized housing, while other Aboriginal people seem to have a positive view of refugees because they can relate to them as racial minorities.

The two articles that follow present two different viewpoints (Baldwin Wong and Karen Fong from the city of Vancouver and Aboriginal leader Wade Grant) on the Dialogues Project, a large scale initiative developed and implemented by the city of Vancouver in cooperation with Aboriginal communities. In their article, Baldwin Wong and Karen Fong, respectively the project director and coordinator of the Dialogues Project, give a useful overview of the project undertaken by the city of Vancouver, with the goal of increasing understanding and strengthening ties between the city's Aboriginal and immigrant communities. Established in 2010, this project includes five major initiatives: discussion circles, research, cultural visits, a program for youth and the elderly, and a neighbourhood stories project. Over two thousand people have participated in this project so far. A book entitled *Vancouver Dialogues* and a video about their process are among the project's major achievements. This description is followed by the testimony of Wade Grant, co-chair of the project and councillor for the Musqueam Indian Band, from the National Metropolis Conference in 2011. A Métis himself (Chinese-Musqueam), he led discussion sessions with Aboriginal people (urban and other) and immigrants. In his testimony, he described personal experiences that prompted him to join this initiative and the experience he gained from it. He saw the Dialogues Project as a unique opportunity to learn and to understand cultural differences, forge relationships, overcome prejudices, and acknowledge the similarities between different stories, personal journeys, and aspirations. For these reasons, he argues that the Dialogues Project should be expanded throughout Canada.

Becky Sasakamoose Kuffner and Smita Garg report on the actions taken by the city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, where various Aboriginal Peoples have always lived. They present the unique situation of Saskatoon, whose founding has preserved its historical and symbolic meaning: the shared project of two nations—the Aboriginal people and the settlers—working and living together peacefully. However, this utopia did not last. Over time, the settler—Aboriginal relationship shifted in favour of the settlers. A number of treaties and acts were made that strained relations between the two groups. The municipality, aware of the social challenges and convinced that "the participation and contribution of all citizens in the development of our community is vital to meeting the challenges of the future,"[5] adopted a recommendation in 1989 to establish a race relations committee to collectively resolve the existing problems. Since then, this inclusive committee has participated in a host of innovative activities through recreation, culture, and the business sector, activities aimed at building stronger ties among Aboriginals, immigrants, and the general public. Their article begins with the moving account of an immigrant who took part in these activities.

Christophe Traisnel discusses the cultural diversity created by immigration and the demands of Francophone minority and First Nations communities. He addresses the very specific situation of Canada's three territories: Yukon, Nunavut, and the Northwest Territories. He provides considerable background information and then examines the relationships among the various communities. He says that over time these northern societies have, in fact, developed into a unique, "make society," but one that still has its challenges.

The article by Harrison and Norris offers a new comparative perspective. Aware of the differences with respect to demographic, geographic, social, economic, and other characteristics, they state that Aboriginal peoples and immigrants are affected by similar factors having to do with the evolution of their languages. They present a comparative study of the evolution of the three most widely spoken Aboriginal languages (Cree, Inuktitut, and Ojibwa) and the three most widely spoken immigrant languages (Chinese languages, Italian, and German). Using data from the 1991 to 2006 censuses, they analyze the demographic, family, and community factors relating to the growth, continuity, and situations of these six languages in Canada. The results reveal the similarities and differences of the factors associated with the changes observed in the two population groups, and the implications for the future of their languages.

Seema Ahluwalia contributes an impassioned plea to return to Aboriginals the "generosity" that was stolen from them. Relying on historical facts and a detailed analysis of the ideologies, national myths, and prejudices that have led to Canadians' lack of knowledge about and denial of the true history of Aboriginals in Canada, she dissects the process that resulted in the types of relationships that

currently exist between Aboriginals and immigrants. According to Ahluwalia, relations between immigrants and First Nations Peoples must be examined in light of the fact that, whether we were born in the colonized territory or have immigrated to live on Aboriginal lands, we, as settlers, have benefited from the usurpation of lands from Aboriginals and the ongoing oppression of these peoples. Peaceful coexistence between Indigenous Peoples and Canadian settlers can commence once we begin to practice truth telling, the precursor to decolonization and respect for Indigenous land rights.

Finally, Wang Hongyan concludes this series of articles by proposing an inclusive curriculum for schools that includes cultural information and examines Aboriginal perspectives. This recommendation follows those made in several other articles in this issue. However, Wang Hongyan goes a step further by presenting models of inclusive programs that are already in place in some Canadian provinces and that have enhanced mutual understanding and improved relations between Aboriginals and immigrants. She then proposes interesting improvements to these programs so that they better meet the needs of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

The articles in this issue illustrate the variety of actions that have been taken, as well as the various levels of awareness, with respect to the integration of Aboriginals in municipal and provincial dialogues in Canada. In Vancouver and Saskatoon, for instance, this issue has been given priority, and a considerable amount of money and effort has been invested, including by Aboriginals, in cities; while, in Moncton, New Brunswick, the city council is still considering requests from Aboriginals living off reserves to have the Mi'kmaq flag fly permanently in front of city hall (alongside the Canadian, British, New Brunswick, Moncton and Acadian flags) and to give an Aboriginal name to Riverfront Park (along the Petitcodiac River), which is a historic site for the Mi'kmaq and other Aboriginal Peoples in the area. This situation is not unique: in other cities, the question is not even being asked yet. In numerous parts of Canada, the "two solitudes" persists, and there is much work to be done to educate people in order to break down taboos and move forward.

As the authors show, this education is being done through dialogue. To improve relations between Aboriginals and immigrants, to create a better society for our youth, to develop a multicultural society that is better integrated, more and broader dialogue is needed in every province. It is through such dialogue that we will be able to forge ties, educate people, raise awareness, redefine the terms immigrant and Aboriginal, rehabilitate the past, come to terms with the country's history (as well as with others, ourselves, and nature), and finally feel at home in Canada.

To achieve this, it is important that all levels of government and all citizens answer the call. Immigration offers an opportunity to create a more balanced society. As Chief Robert Joseph said, our hope resides in our mutual humanity and in the possibility of immigrants contributing to the remodelling of the Canadian human landscape with a view to becoming more receptive, kinder, and more inclusive—"Aboriginal people should be a part of this new reflection."

This issue of *Canadian Issues* is a starting point. We hope it will open doors, encourage further discussion, and suggest possible actions for all of us—all different, but all Canadian.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the participants of both round tables organized as part of the 2009 and 2011 National Metropolis Conferences. We would also like to express our gratitude to all of the First Nations people we met for their inspiration; the authors who agreed to be involved in this volume; Raymond Blanchard and Alicia Cleaver for reviewing the articles; and *Canadian Issues,* the National Metropolis Centre, the Atlantic Metropolis Centre, and the Welcoming Communities Research Domain of the Atlantic Metropolis Centre, for their assistance in organizing, translating, and producing this issue, as well as for their financial support.

NOTES

[1] Testimony of an immigrant from Saskatoon, taken from the article by Sasakamoose-Kuffner and Garg.

[2] CAIIMM is a reception and integration centre for Francophone immigrants that we founded in Moncton in 2005. It is now known as CAFI, the Centre d'accueil et d'accompagnement francophone des immigrants du Sud-Est du Nouveau-Brunswick (http://caiimm.org).

[3] In 2010, Lucia Madariaga (Vignudo) wrote the first Master's thesis on this topic, entitled "Refugee-Aboriginal relations: A case study of a Canadian inner city."

[4] This was the case for two authors in this issue. Wade Grant is the grandson of a Chinese immigrant who married an Aboriginal person from Vancouver's Musqueam community, while Seema Ahluwalia is an Indian immigrant from Punjab (India) who married an Aboriginal person from the Sicangu Lakota Oyate community in British Columbia.

[5] http://www.saskatoon.ca/DEPARTMENTS/Community%20Services/Communitydevelopment/Documents/CDRR_Policy.pdf

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