[Traduction]

RECOGNIZING ONE OTHER: ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, MIGRANTS AND FRANCOPHONES IN THE (SMALL) NORTHERN SOCIETIES OF YUKON, THE NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND NUNAVUT

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ABSTRACT

Canada is often considered a pioneer or an "ideal type" society with respect to taking into account the multiple demands for recognition made by the groups that shape multiculturalism in this country. How do we correlate the cultural diversity that comes from immigration to the particular demands of Francophone minority and First Nations communities? This question is addressed through an account of the very particular situation faced by Canada's three territories (Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories) and the relationships among the various communities that live there. Over time, these northern societies have in fact become a unique "makeshift society" in Canada, but not without their challenges.

BACKGROUND: RECOGNITION IN CANADA

Canada is often considered a pioneer or an "ideal type" society with respect to taking into account the multiple demands for recognition made by the groups that shape multiculturalism in this country. How do the many demands correlate? The need to be recognized is not only directed at political authorities—from the bottom up—but across the entire Canadian political landscape; it therefore requires us to examine how to reconcile these "manifold diversities," as was amply demonstrated in the debates on the issue of "reasonable accommodation" in Quebec.

However, this reflection should hardly be limited to Quebec. It is becoming crucial in a country like Canada, where people are not satisfied with merely enshrining multiculturalism, but also want to help (re)define it according to the transformations that Canadian society in its entirety may experience. For example, all of Canada's Francophone minority communities demand recognition of their linguistic distinctiveness, particularly through official bilingualism, which represents an institutionalized opportunity for them to succeed with this demand. This distinctiveness goes hand in hand with the higher levels of Francophone immigration to the provinces, and it forces Francophone minority communities (FMCs) to reflect on their socio historical foundations in light of this Francophonie that "came from abroad". To what extent can this linguistic distinctiveness blend with the cultural diversity that came with the most recent waves of immigration? This question is pivotal to many FMCs (Traisnel and Violette, 2010) seeking, in partnership with the federal government, to ensure their linguistic vitality through the essential contributions made by these "new" Francophones.

This blending of distinctiveness and cultural diversity becomes even more complex in the unique context of Yukon, Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, for the following three reasons. Firstly, in these three Northern Canadian territories, bilingualism has led to official recognition of the equal status of French and English—a situation similar to the one in New Brunswick, and therefore somewhat unique in Canada. Secondly, official multiculturalism finds unique expression there, owing to a very high proportion of people in the three territories from migrant or immigrant backgrounds (and, therefore, born outside the territory). Thirdly, more than anywhere else in Canada, various Aboriginal communities are forcefully and visibly demanding recognition. This visibility has been strengthened by amending the status of the territories through the devolution process and enshrined by the official recognition of several Aboriginal languages, particularly in the Northwest Territories and in Nunavut. Given their lengthy presence and the rights that have been conferred on them, these communities enjoy a singular position within the three territories. The process of devolution tends to institutionalize this Aboriginal singularity a little further, specifically, by enabling these communities, through institutions and territorial governments, to command important leverage with respect to their political recognition.

NORTHERN SOCIETIES: MULTIPLICITY OF SITUATIONS, MULTIPLICITY OF EXPECTATIONS

Devolution and recognition of Aboriginal cultures in the face of migratory processes

First occupied exclusively by Aboriginal communities, these vast hunting and fishing lands immediately attracted the interest of trading companies, who later developed them: first, through the fur trade, and then later by mining the many resources that were found there. These companies consequently triggered the arrival of several waves of migrants who had essentially come from Canada's provinces, but also from abroad (United States, Europe, and Asia), to this vast land. The impressive and transitory history of the migrations surrounding the Gold Rush in the Dawson region of Yukon exemplifies the kind of migration that put the discovery and mining of resources above concern for sustainable development for the communities living there.

This process, of course, deeply disrupted the relationship between Aboriginal communities and European migrants. The migrants were no longer mere explorers or *coureurs des bois* traders, but communities that were settling more or less permanently, founding cities, developing infrastructures, and leaving their mark on the environment and the political and administrative organization of these territories. Land control thus became a major issue for the Government of Canada, which was mindful of asserting the region's sovereignty, while ensuring its economic development.

For a long time, Canada's northern territories were managed directly by Parliament. However, the situation progressively changed: a series of laws made it possible to create and then strengthen the **autonomy** of the three territorial governments through the creation of a legislative assembly and an executive council in each territory. In a certain sense, Yukon's style of government is almost comparable to that of a typical province. This is not (yet?) the case for the NWT or Nunavut, as Nunavut only recently dissociated itself from the NWT, on April 1, 1999. The process of devolution allows for decisions to be made based on local needs and gets the populations of the territories involved. Therefore, it better takes into account the needs and development issues that particularly affect the Aboriginal communities across the territories, particularly those situated far from the larger urban centres of Whitehorse, Yellowknife and Iqaluit. That being said, the territories are still very dependent on special transfers from the federal government through *Territorial Formula Financing*, which allows Canadians in Nunavut, Yukon and the NWT to be taxed at rates that are roughly comparable to those of southern Canadians while benefiting from a number of similar services.

The context of devolution has made it possible to strengthen the cultural and political weight of the Aboriginal communities on many levels. First with regard to representation, because in the three territories several Aboriginal languages have been recognized, sometimes even together with English and French (in the NWT and in Nunavut). Genuine multilingualism is particularly visible in the three territories. The presence of Aboriginal communities is mainly evoked at places of remembrance (museums, monuments, community planning, commemorative sites) and in the various places where political power resides (assemblies, city halls, law courts). The substantial visibility of these languages in the territories reflects the demographic weight of Aboriginal populations, given that nearly 70% of Nunavummiuq claim Inuktitut as their first language (15% of Yukoners consider an Aboriginal language to be their first language) and that nearly half of the territories' residents claim an Aboriginal identity. With respect to services, Aboriginal communities are offered a range of cultural and economic development programs adapted to their realities and to the challenges they face (public health, education in schools across the Northern communities, forestry and fishery rights, human resources, housing). With respect to power and institutions, the various levels of government (territorial and municipal in particular) now allow Aboriginal people, through their representatives, to have a voice in each political entity.

French: An official language in the three territories

The process of devolution has not challenged the federal government's legal obligations with respect to official languages. On the contrary, in the territories it has led to the enactment of language legislation seeking both to ensure linguistic duality throughout the territory and to ensure the promotion and linguistic and cultural vitality of Aboriginal communities: in the NWT, the *Northwest Territories Official Languages Act,* enacted in 1984 and amended in 1990, recognizes nine Aboriginal languages (Chipewyan, Cree, North Slavey, South Slavey, Gwich'in, Inuinnaqtun, Inuktitut, Inuvialuktun and Tåîchô) in addition to French and English. The Act led to the creation of a position of Commissioner of Official Languages, responsible for monitoring compliance with the official multilingualism of this territory. Yukon enacted its *Languages Act* in 1988 and recognizes, apart from Canada's two official languages, "the significance of aboriginal languages," which has made it possible for several of those languages to achieve quasi recognition, which has resulted, among other things, in some of these languages becoming visible, particularly on public signage. In 2009, ten years after its creation, Nunavut enacted its own *Official Languages Act,* which recognizes French, English and Inuktitut on equal footing. Nunavut also created a Commissioner of Official Languages position at the same time.

In this context, the FMCs are small communities (for the territories on the whole, Francophones represent about 4% of the population) that offer, owing to their concentration around big cities (70% of Francophones live in Whitehorse, Yellowknife or Iqaluit), a wide variety of services in their language and a constellation of organizations structured around the *Association franco-yukonnaise*, the *Fédération franco-ténoise* and the *Association franco-nunavoise*—organizations that are closely linked to the implementation of language laws in the territories. Thus, as in the FMCs to the south, every community provides school boards, cultural services, early childhood services, guidance and counselling services, specialized health organizations and economic development organizations (RDÉEs). In addition to this associative network, some organizations are also involved in newcomer reception—an essential service for FMCs, given that most Francophones who live in the territories were not born there.

Almost 9 out of 10 Francophones are from migrant backgrounds

Another characteristic of the territories is that, more than anywhere else in Canada, people who live in the territories come from somewhere else. A few statistics provide insight into the significance of migratory processes in the social dynamics of the three territories. In the first place, these are very small communities (a little over 100,000 people in all three territories combined, or 0.3% of Canada's population) spread over an expanse that represents a third of Canada's total surface area. In total, nearly 7,000 residents of the territories were born abroad and nearly 12,500 of them are from Canada's provinces. Thus, the average mobility in the territories is 48%. In particular, 85% of Francophones were not born in the territories. Northern Francophone communities are therefore communities of migrants in which everyone faces the challenges of reception, settlement and integration, through a singular migration experience to a society that has harsh winters, is far from large urban centres, and is characterized by major differences from southern Canadian societies. In such settings, reception and retention are major challenges (separation from family, job scarcity, small host communities, high cost of living, limited interknowledge network, and so on) that result in rather short stays: on average, migrants settle only to move again a few years later (the average length of stay is about three years in Nunavut, four years in the NWT and five years in Yukon). Retention is therefore key to the vitality of these small communities which have developed a certain amount of know-how in this area. For several years, Yukon demonstrated this know how through the Carrefour d'Immigration Crossroad, which provides reception services for all immigrants settling in Yukon. The Carrefour was managed directly by the Association franco-yukonnaise, which hosted the service on its own premises.

Demands and expectations

The three territories are characterized by a threefold requirement in terms of recognition and cultural promotion:

1. Ensuring reception and settlement services for newcomers, while, at the same time, meeting the needs of the territories through adequate recruitment outside the territories, in particular to respond to retention challenges resulting from the shorter length of stays in the territories, compared with elsewhere.

2. Ensuring that Aboriginal communities have access to essential services that take into account the particularities of their culture, their language, and the challenges of living in a remote area; also, in connection with this requirement, making it possible for the communities to provide these services themselves by improving Aboriginal peoples' access to training and the labour market.

3. In a context characterized by the recognition of Aboriginal languages and cultures and the pervasiveness of English as the main language of communication, ensuring that Francophones receive the services they are entitled to.

Toward "small northern societies" characterized by a diversity of cultural, linguistic and communal recognition

Conflicts may have arisen between the various communities—be they Aboriginal peoples, Francophones or newcomers—as a result of the difficult balance between these demands and a social context characterized by the heterogeneity of expectations. Some of these tensions were sometimes expressed during the semi structured interviews conducted with Francophones in the three territories during our travels (Robineau, Traisnel *et al.,* 2010). While these tensions are not caused directly by community representatives themselves, who clearly want to strengthen the ties and dialogue among the various communities, several reasons linked to certain behaviours were mentioned by Francophones themselves during the interviews: newcomers' lack of familiarity with the host society (at least initially); cultural biases; some Francophones' indifference to the lifestyle and social attitudes of local populations; some migrants' indifference to the cultural and linguistic demands of Aboriginal communities; at times, some Aboriginal peoples, like permanently settled Francophone migrants, grow tired of newcomers who leave too quickly, making it impossible to form strong and lasting bonds with them; the frustrations of certain Francophones who are willing to maintain lasting relationships with Aboriginal people but do not know "how to do it"; conversely, the overly practical approach of some migrants who have come "to make a quick dollar" and who are fairly indifferent about the host society in general and Aboriginal life in particular; some Aboriginal peoples' resentment toward Francophone organizations' access to a number of educational, healthcare and economic development services, while access to these same services sometimes remains very problematic for certain Aboriginal communities, particularly the most remote; and finally, irritation with Francophone representatives, who do not hesitate to put forward their language demands and petition the courts to assert their rights. There are a huge number of these clashes in these small northern societies.

These groups, whose expectations and points of reference vary greatly, are nonetheless in constant contact: the smallness of the societies and their relative isolation are added incentive to maintain relationships and cooperation, particularly in files that share a common problem (language, economic development, recruitment). Be that as it may, misunderstandings and sometimes diverging agendas are preserving a new form of "double solitude" that dissociates Aboriginal peoples from other Canadians and immigrants.

However, even though there are sometimes tensions, multiple points of intersection make it possible for migrants, Francophones who are members of minority communities and Aboriginal peoples to engage in dialogue: under the devolution process and the relative centralization of services, the urban centres in the territorial capitals have become major hubs for meetings and discussions in the fields of politics and economics, as well as culture and art. In this regard, Francophone know-how with respect to recognition and promotion of minority languages could in fact help Aboriginal communities develop their own demands regarding recognition of their languages and cultures. Conversely, Aboriginal peoples recognizing the importance of the vitality of Francophone communities in the context of Canada's North is essential to FMCs in their work to develop services in French. It then becomes necessary to think about the development of these services in terms of the cultural and economic issues within these territorial societies of atypical multiculturalism within Canada.

Moreover, this concern is reflected in the efforts made on all sides, and often with the help of the territorial and federal governments, to foster dialogue and hold discussions, particularly with regard to language issues. These discussions are organized through symposia on official languages and have been held in the three territories on subjects of official languages and language policies. These occasions provide important opportunities to foster a genuine inter-community dialogue on linguistic and cultural issues in the three territories. These efforts are also undertaken directly by the Francophone communities seeking to maintain closer relationships with the representatives of the various Aboriginal communities. This is also the concern of many Francophone migrants, who often state that one of their main reasons for settling in the territories is their willingness to discover Aboriginal cultures and traditions, and who are seeking, by various means (organizing parades, thematic meetings, festive and cultural events), to strengthen ties between Francophones and Aboriginal peoples. This willingness to better integrate into the territorial society and its various segments sometimes results in a more permanent settlement of these "Francophones from elsewhere." These Francophones, who are more permanently settled and sometimes linked by filial or marital relationships with people of Aboriginal origin, become conveyors, acting as liaisons between Aboriginal communities and newcomers. One example of a

"conveyor" is anthropologist Stéphane Cloutier, who played a key role in the release of a CD of multilingual (English, French and Inuktituk) songs in Nunavut. The production of this CD, which required the cooperation of Francophone and Aboriginal organizations and the participation of children from the various schools of Iqaluit, reflects the active effort to (re)discover a shared history of Nunavut made up of cultural meetings and exchanges between "old-timers" and "newcomers". The song *"ilititaa puuti naviri"* (*There was a little ship,* a distant legacy of French sailors in the 19th century, has become part of the heritage of Inuit songs), included on the album, illustrates this commitment to sharing a collective memory and the desire to consider it "together." [1]

It seems that in Nunavut, the NWT and Yukon, there is a rather singular experience of "creating a small society." The smallness, the remoteness from major urban centres, the archipelagic nature of the communities, the distance, the vastness of the land, and the very limited ecumene in effect make maintaining relationships of solidarity and mutual recognition essential, as they are to other small, remote communities.

NOTES

[1] ilititaa puuti naviri
ilititaa puuti naviri
kinavi jaa-jaa-javinaviri
kinavi jaa-jaa-javinaviri
uvii uvii...

"Un petit navire," Songs from the Children of Nunavut, CD. John Maurice, 2008.

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