THE MI'KMAQ OF NEW BRUNSWICK: A RURAL ABORIGINAL PEOPLE RESISTING A NATIONAL URBANIZATION PROCESS[1]

André Duguay, a gradute student at the Université de Moncton in Moncton, New Brunswick, is also a project manager at the Institut d'études acadiennes of the same university. He is currently researching the historical migration patterns of the First Nations in the Maritime Provinces and Maine. André Duguay est un étudiant de deuxième cycle à l'Université de Moncton, Moncton, Nouveau-Brunswick et est également chargé de projets à l'Institut d'études acadiennes de la même université. Ses recherches portent sur les parcours migratoires historiques des Premières Nations des provinces Maritimes et du Maine.

ABSTRACT

In the first half of the 20th century, the urbanization process of the different Aboriginal populations of Canada was a marginal phenomenon. By 1951, less than 7% of these populations lived in urban centers, but by the census of 2006, more than half of Canada's Aboriginals lived in cities. If this new reality is very noticeable in Central and Western Canada, it is not as pronounced in New Brunswick. Even if New Brunswick's 13,000 Aboriginals are the fastest growing segment of the province's population, the vast majority of them still live in non urban areas, in the 15 First Nation communities of the province, which are divided in two distinct aboriginal groups, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet (Wolastokwiyok). This resistance to national urbanization patterns also does not correspond to the reality of New Brunswick demographics that shows a growing number of the rural population moving to urban centers.

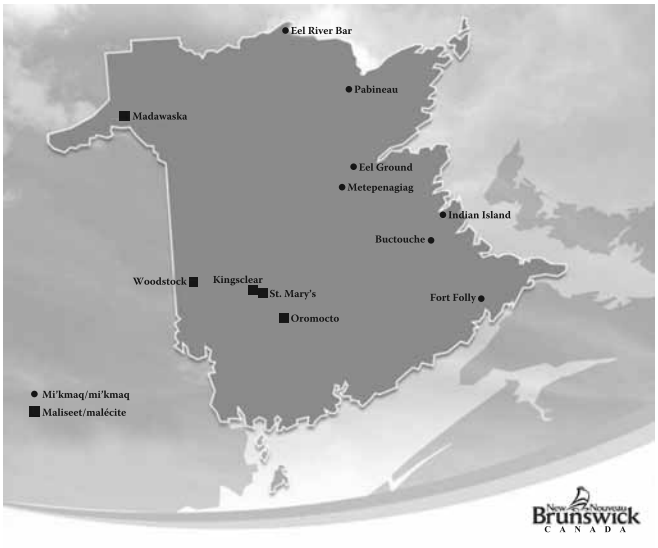
提要

20世纪上半叶，加拿大土著人口的城市化过程还是一个边缘化的现象。到1951年，这些人口中只有不到7%生活在城市，但根据2006年的人口普查数据，超过一半的加拿大土著人口生活在城市。如果这个新现象在加拿大中、西部非常显著的话，那么在新布伦兹维克就没有那么瞩目了。尽管新布伦兹维克共计1.3万土著人口是该省人口中增长最为快速的，但他们中的大多数仍然生活在非城市地区，仍然生活在该省15个第一民族社区中。他们主要由两个不同的土著群体组成：米尔马克人和玛里希特人。这种抗拒城市化的模式并没有顺应新布伦兹维克的人口现实，即越来越多的农村人口迁移到城市。

New Brunswick is one of the smallest provinces of the Canadian federation, but it is also one of the oldest, since it was one of Canada's founding provinces in 1867. Almost a third of its 729,997 inhabitants (2006 census) is Francophone, mostly known as Acadians. This is why New Brunswick has been Canada's only official bilingual province since 1969. Bilingualism, in the case of New Brunswick, is most of the time presented as its defining feature: on good days, official bilingualism is presented as an example for the rest of Canada, while on bad days, it is decried as a waste of money and the rule of the minority over the majority. To achieve linguistic peace in New Brunswick, politicians, community leaders, intellectuals, and ordinary citizens must then navigate the not always calm waters of the cohabitation of French and English.

This photograph of the province of New Brunswick is usually the one presented when briefly explaining the dynamics between Anglophones and Francophones, but it falls short of showing the more plural realities of the province. One of these realities that has become more and more vocal is the one regarding the Aboriginal population of New Brunswick. The province is home to two officially recognised First Nations: the Maliseet (Wolastokwiyok) and the Mi'kmaq[2]. New Brunswick has 15 First Nation communities (also commonly known as ''reserves''): 6 Maliseet communities and 9 Mi'kmaq communities.

First Nations members of the Union of New Brunswick Indians/ Premières Nations Membres de la Union of New Brunswick Indians



Source: New Brunswick's Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat Website (www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/aboriginal_affairs.html)

There are roughly 13,000 Aboriginals in New Brunswick representing 2% of the provincial population[3]. Even if they represent a small percentage of the province's population, these Aboriginals have a rich history and have the distinction of being one of today's oldest First Nations in Canada to still resist "European influences", especially the Mi'kmaq, having been in contact with these influences since at least the 16th century[4]. This article will focus on the Mi'kmaq people living in the north, north eastern and south eastern part of the province, as shown on the map above. In Canada, according to the 2006 census:

> *[M]ore than half (623,470) of the 1,172,790 people identifying themselves as members of at least one of Canada's Aboriginal groups, that is, North American Indian, Métis or Inuit, resided in urban areas. Of this urban Aboriginal population, almost 34% (213,945) lived in five cities: Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary and Toronto[5].*

Contrary to this national demographic trend concerning the contemporary Aboriginal populations, the New Brunswick Mi'kmaq are still a very rural people. They have not experienced the urbanization process witnessed in Ontario's or Western Canada's Aboriginal groups. For some years now, they are also going through a new awakening of their spiritual traditions and have launched new fights for the preservation of their language and their traditional treaty rights[6].

FROM WARRIORS TO WARDS OF THE PROVINCIAL STATE

There is a lot to be said about the resilience of the Mi'kmaq people. When the French settled the colony of Acadie in the 17th century, the Mi'kmaq became their allies but kept most of their traditional ways and more importantly, their political autonomy. Since the Acadian population at that time was not very numerous (around 14,000 in 1755), the Mi'kmaq had a large sway over the lands they called Mi'kma'ki[7]. Canadian historian John Reid has recently studied the political military situation of the Mi'kmaq after the British conquest of Canada in 1763. His conclusions state that the Mi'kmaq people were much more influential in what was to become the Maritime provinces than standard historiography had previously explained[8]. But this situation was to change radically, when Planters from New England, followed by Loyalists fleeing the American Revolution, settled in the region and created the province of New Brunswick in 1784[9]. Loyalist families needed more land, so did the Acadian families and so did the new immigrants such as the Irish and other British settlers. This meant that large tracks of land in the province traditionally considered to be in the Mi'kmaq realm, were taken from them and given to these new settlers. The Mi'kmaq became more and more concentrated in small reserves, becoming the wards of the provincial government[10].

As elsewhere in British colonial Canada, provincial administrations were elaborating assimilationist policies that would see Aboriginals become good Christians and learn to farm the land instead of keeping their traditional nomadic ways. One could have believed that since the Mi'kmaq of New Brunswick were in permanent contact with European settlers since the early 17th century, they would have become more or less assimilated to at least several features of a "westernized" life style. But this was not the case. As Canadian professor J. R. Miller states:

> *To some degree, these policies failed because they were perverted to other ends. The efforts in colonial New Brunswick to assimilate the Mi'kmaq failed because New Brunswickers diverted British donations to colonial development and exploited the apprenticeship programs to secure cheap labor[11].*

As other colonial governments, New Brunswick had taken steps starting in the late 18th century to encourage young Aboriginal men to become apprentices on farms so that they could learn the agricultural techniques of the day. The province had commissioned lawyer Moses Perley at the end of the 1830's to visit all the province's aboriginal communities and present a report on their conditions to the legislative assembly of the province. In this report presented

in 1841[12], Perley was sympathetic towards the First Nations. In another publication, Perely described them as being formally a very "fierce and powerful tribe[13]". However, his romantic view of the noble savage did not differ much from the assimilationist policies of his time: the social and economic conditions of New Brunswick Mi'kmaq continued to decline, and even their traditional allies, the Acadians, whose new middle class was now climbing the social ladder, started to adopt condescending and racist attitudes towards them. One of the best examples of this new Acadian attitude was in 1881, when Acadian leaders wanted to choose a national feast day. When a delegate proposed Saint Anne as patron saint for the Acadians, another delegate replied that the feast of the "Tawailles" (a negative expression used to describe aboriginal women in the Acadian French language) was not appropriate for the new Acadian national holiday and to this, the crowd laughed and jeered.

RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE

By 1867, with the creation of the Canadian federation, the "Indian problem" had been transferred to the federal state. As Professor Donald Savoie of the Université de Moncton explains:

> *The provincial government was largely left on the outside looking in as a special relationship developed between the department of Indian affairs and the New Brunswick First Nations. This state of affairs lasted until after the Second World War, although some observers would argue that for the most part, it still survives today[14].*

But this transfer did not really change the status of the First Nations of New Brunswick. According to Mi'kmaq historian Daniel M. Paul:

> *We were designated "wards of the Crown" and as such were paternalistically treated as "non-citizens" and forced by the authorities – who shackled us with legislated and unwritten apartheid restrictions – to live in a very confined and regulated "non-person" world[15].*

This context had a considerable influence on the ruralization of the Mi'kmaq people. For instance, in 1911, the Indian Act was amended so that the federal government could forcefully move Aboriginal settlements considered too close to towns of more than 8,000 inhabitants. Mi'kmaq living on the outskirts the mining town of Sydney in the neighbouring province of Nova Scotia were ordered by a judge to move to the rural reserve of Membertou following this new disposition of the Indian Act[16]. In New Brunswick, no Mi'kmaq communities were close enough to small urban centers and the demographic realty of this Aboriginal people remained mostly centered on rural lifestyles. But their Maliseet neighbours living in the Fredericton area had to fight that disposition of the Indian Act in the 1940's[17].

By the late 1990's, the Mi'kmaq of New Brunswick intensified their resistance and proved that their culture was in fact very resilient. The Mi'kmaq Esgenoôpetitj Reserve (Burnt Church) made international headlines when Aboriginal fishermen from this northeastern New Brunswick community opposed Acadian fishermen and the Canadian Federal Fisheries and Oceans Department by demanding to be able to fish for lobster and sell their catch year round as a way to not always rely on federal subsidies[18]. This crisis can be understood in a larger context that was seeing Mi'kmaq leaders promoting a new awakening of Aboriginal culture, identity, language and spirituality. An example of this awakening was the changing of the names of the reserves from English to Mi'kmaq. This gesture was not only important for the Mi'kmaq people; for the first time in decades, journalists, politicians and ordinary New Brunswickers had to learn how to pronounce traditional Mi'kmaq place names.

In these cases (Burnt Church Crisis and return to traditional place names), rural was not equivalent to lack of leadership or resilience amongst the Aboriginal community. Historian Bill Parenteau of the University of New Brunswick has studied Mi'kmaq resilience in the colonial and contemporary context. According to his research, the Burnt Church fishing crisis can be linked to generations of struggle opposing the Mi'kmaq community of New Brunswick to the province's legal system. Parenteau's research sheds new lights on these lesser-known cases where Mi'kmaq men during the 19th century and the first part of the 20th century went before the courts to defend their traditional treaty rights. What can be seen today as an awakening for the Mi'kmaq of New Brunswick, thus was a long time in the making.

> *From the very beginning, Native people challenged the new regulatory regime that threatened their traditional way of life by asserting their treaty rights. While this resistance undoubtedly reflected the importance of fish and game in meeting basic subsistence needs, it perhaps also reflected the cultural importance of hunting and fishing to Mi'kmaq and Maliseet societies [...]. [T]he new state structures that emerged in the late nineteenth-century contributed to the development of a culture of survival and resistance among New*

> *Brunswick's Native people, a culture that continues to shape interactions between governments and First Nations. See in this lights, the recent conflicts over Native rights in the Maritime provinces seem to be the latest chapter in a historical struggle rather than an aberration*[19].

This resistance was more recently transformed into resilience as can be read in the fourteen article special series by New Brunswick's *Telegraph Journal* in 2010. Usually, mainstream media tend to be silent on Aboriginal news except when Aboriginals are presented in a negative way. Trying to present another image, this daily newspaper published articles with original interviews of Maliseet and Mi'kmaq explaining the past and current situation of New Brunswick's First Nations. These articles received first page treatment and constitute a rare photograph of the cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic situations of the province's Maliseet and Mi'kmaq[20]. The above mentioned resilience can be seen in these articles by the different projects proposed by Aboriginal leadership as strategies to keep the younger generation on the reserves with better standards of living.

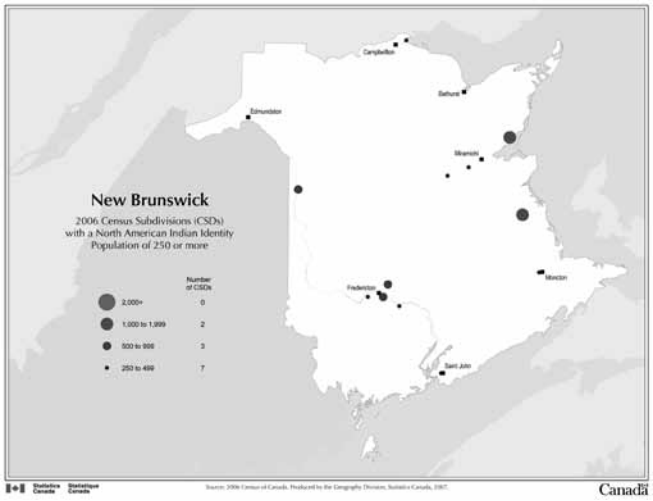
In Canada, generally speaking, the urbanization process is a common fact amongst the Canadian population, including the Aboriginals, and even in a small province such as New Brunswick, which was for centuries a very rural province. In fact, the Francophone Acadian minority of the province, traditionally a rural people, is leading this provincial urbanization trend[21].

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics of New Brunswixk Mi'Kmaw

NEW BRUNSWICK	LIVING IN COMMUNITY	LIVING OUTSIDE COMMUNITY
Eel River Bar	350 (55.5%)	280 (44.4%)
Pabineau	80 (33.3%)	160 (66.6%)
Eel Ground	560 (62.2%)	340 (37.8%)
Metepenagiag	460 (82.1%)	100 (17.9%)
Indian Island	88 (58.7%)	62 (41.3%)
Bouctouche	65 (59.1%)	45 (40.9%)
Elsipogtog	3000 (89.1%)	366 (10.9%)
Fort Folly	35 (32.4%)	73 (67.6%)
Esgenoôpetitj	1170 (72%)	455 (28%)
Total	**5808 (75.5%)**	**1881 (24.5%)**

Source: Statistics Canada, 2006 and interviews conducted by journalist Jennifer Pritchett with the leadership of the nine Mi'kmaq reserves of New Brunswick, 2010.

As shown in table 1, the urbanization process is not a characteristic of New Brunswick Mi'kmaq. Even those who live off reserve are barely present in major New Brunswick cities, like Moncton, St. John and Fredericton. Capital city of the province, Fredericton could be considered as an exemption because of the historic presence of two neighbouring Maliseet communities, Kingsclear and St. Mary's. But these reserves remain rural and the map below clearly shows that New Brunswick's Aboriginal peoples do not belong to the urban dynamics. It is in this rurality that they find the solutions and the scenarios to their new awakening even if the social economic problems, like high unemployment rates, are still appalling.



CONCLUSION

In the introduction of this article, it was stated that New Brunswick is mostly described as a bilingual province where the Francophones are in a minority situation. This population is undergoing an important urbanization process where cities like Moncton and especially Dieppe have become hubs of contemporary Acadian culture. The New Brunswick urban world is nevertheless an Anglophone world and the Francophones face many challenges to preserve and promote the French language and their Acadian identity in the province's cities. However, the Aboriginal perspective on this urbanization trend can be seen as resisting the pull of the city by investing in the rural reserve. It is as if the Mi'kmaq leadership and youth are trying to propose new ways of maintaining their population on their ancestral land. For Andrea Bear Nicholas, a Maliseet scholar and chair of Native Studies at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, the federal and provincial states must invest in the province's First Nations as they did for the Acadian people. Like she clearly asked in an op-ed piece for CBC New Brunswick in September 2010, ''How is it that the profound connection between language, culture, and well-being is to be so highly valued for one people in this province, and so utterly rejected for others?''[22].

For now, solutions put forward by the New Brunswick Mi'kmaq are essentially constructed in a rural context, so distinct from the Canadian national urbanization trend. By doing this, the Mi'kmaq people of New Brunswick remain faithful to their five hundred year old struggle to keep their culture alive. They are true to the definition of their First Nation's name, ''those who wait''.

FOOTNOTES

[1] This article is a modified version of the paper presented at the *Canada-China Forum on Migration and Identity,* Fudan University, Shanghai, China, July 6th 2010.

[2] New Brunswick is also home to a small population of Passamaquoddy people in the south western part of the province that are not officially recognized by the Canadian federal government. See historian Ronald Rudin's documentary film on Passamaquoddy recognition claims, *Life After Île Ste. Croix,* National Film Board of Canada, 2006.

[3] This figure was obtained by journalist Jennifer Pritchett of New Brunswick's provincial Anglophone daily newspaper, *The Telegraph Journal,* for her series of articles entitled *First Nations in New Brunswick,* published between March 13th and March 30th 2010. See http://telegraphjournal.canadaeast.com

[4] For more on their struggles, see: Bill Parenteau and James Kenny, ''Survival, Resistance, and the Canadian State: The Transformation of New Brunswick's Native Economy, 1867-1930", *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association,* Vol. 13, N° 1, 2002: 49-71.

[5] Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, *Fact Sheet - Urban Aboriginal population in Canada.* http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/ofi/uas/fs/index-eng.asp

[6] See *First Nations in New Brunswick...*

[7] William Wicken, «Re-examining Mi'kmaq-Acadian Relations, 1635-1755», in Sylvie Dépatie, Catherine Desbarats, Daniel Gauvreau, Mario Lalancette et Thomas Wien (eds.), *Vingt ans après, habitants et marchands: lectures de l'histoire des XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles canadiens = Habitants et marchands Twenty Years Later. Reading the History of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Canada,* Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998: 93-114.

[8] John G. Reid, *"Britannica or Pax Indigena?* Planter Nova Scotia (1760-1782) and Competing Strategies of Pacification", *Canadian Historical Review,* Vol. 85, No. 4, December 2004.

[9] John G. Reid, '' Empire, the Maritime Colonies, and the Supplanting of Mi'kma'ki/Wulstukwik, 1780-1820", *Acadiensis,* Vol. 38, N° 2 Summer/Autumn 2009.

[10] See L. F. S. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists: Indian-White Relations in the Maritimes, 1713-1867,* Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1979 and Harald E. L. Prins, *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation and Cultural Survival,* Fort Worth (Texas), Harcourt Brace, 1996.

[11] James Rodger Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada,* Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000: 404.

[12] Moses Henry Perely, *Report on Indian settlements, &c.,* Fredericton, Queen's Printer, 1842.

[13] Jennifer Reid, Myth, *Symbol, and Colonial Encouter: British and Mi'kmaq in Acadia, 1700-1867,* Ottawa, University of Ottawa Press, 1995: 39.

[14] Donald J. Savoie, *Aboriginal Economic Development in New Brunswick,* Moncton, The Canadian Institute for Research on Regional Development, 2000: 49.

[15] Daniel N. Paul, We *Were Not the Savages: Collision between European and Native American Civilizations,* Winnipeg, Fernwood Publishing, 3rd Edition (2006), 2008: 220.

[16] Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq and the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology, *Mikwite'lmanej Mikmaqi'k: À la recherche des anciens Mi'kmaq,* Halifax, Nimbus Publishing, 2001: 52.

[17] Martha Walls, ''Countering the ''Kingsclear blunder": Maliseet Resistance to the Kingsclear Relocation Plan, 1945-1949", *Acadiensis,* Vol. 37, N° 1, Winter/Spring 2008: 3-30.

[18] Herménégilde Chiasson, *Ceux qui attendent* (documentary film), Ottawa, National Film Board of Canada and Les Productions Phare-Est, 2002; Alanis Obomsawin, *Is the crown at war against us?* (Documentary film), National Film Board of Canada, 2002; See also Pier Bouchard and Sylvain Vézina, ''Complicité et tensions entre minoritiés: une relation à redéfinir entre Micmacs et Acadiens au Nouveau-Brunswick", *Francophonies d'Amérique,* N° 16, Fall 2003: 85-96.

[19] Parenteau and Kenny, *Survival, Resistance, and the Canadian State...*: 71

[20] Since then, in the Fall of 2010, journalist Jennifer Pritchett published in the *Telegraph Journal* a darker side of First Nation realities with a series of articles exposing corrupt practices in the financial governance of New Brunswick reserves.

[21] Greg Allain, ''Innovation organisationnelle acadienne pour les minorités francophones en milieu urbain. Le centre scolaire communautaire en Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick et son essaimage ailleurs au Canada", in André Magord (ed.), *L'Acadie plurielle: dynamiques identitaires et développements au sein des réalités acadiennes,* Centre d'études acadiennes, Université de Moncton, Institut d'études acadiennes et québécoises, Université de Poitiers, 2003: 535-565.

[22] Andrea Bear Nicholas, *Saving First Nations languages from extinction,* CBC News New Brunswick, September 2, 2010. (www.cbc.ca/canada/nbvotes2010/story/2010/09/02/nbvotes-analysis-andrea-bear-nicholas-first-nations-language)