

TOWARDS A CRITICAL DEMOGRAPHY: AN ATLANTIC SURVEY OF ABORIGINAL DEMOGRAPHICS

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"The true test of civilization is, not the census, nor the size of cities, nor the crops – no, but the kind of man [sic] the country turns out ..." exclaims Emerson.¹ Schumacher proclaims that a census "treats people as if they were units, whereas they are not. Each is a universe."² In *Proverbs*, King Solomon, a judicious ruler by some accounts, indirectly warns us about population measures when he calls the use of "diverse weights" and "false scales" an "abomination" to our Creator.³ Are these fair assessments of census and demographic information?

There is much at stake when devising population measures of societies which have persistently suffered injustice and wrongdoing at the hands of the dominant cultural group or groups. When the dominant group takes it upon itself to measure the disadvantaged groups, it must exercise extreme caution that its demographic measures do not add to the wounds and social hurts of the past. What is called for is a critical demography.

Those who practise this new, critical demography are aware of the social, economic, and political agenda served by traditional demographic approaches. In our case, critical demography must be a valid reflection of Aboriginal, not dominant, culture. A metaphor illustrates the limitations of traditional demography and the urgent need to create a critical one. Under ideal conditions, a perfectly balanced spinning top seems to hover with grace, defying its intrinsic tendency to wobble. Similarly, perfect demographic measures allow for a balanced sociological understanding of the phenomenon at hand.

When, however, our demographic spinning top contains imbalanced measures of a population, it quickly begins to wobble and spin out of control long before its allocated time. In a recent letter to the editor in the *Daily Gleaner*, an Aboriginal, in response to the use of demographic data of the Native population, sums up his or her critique by saying: "As if mere numbers could actually define and represent

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²Cited in E.M. Beck, *John Bartlett Familiar Quotations* (London: Macmillan, 1980) at 499.

³E.F. Schumacher, *Good Work* (New York: Harper & Row, 1979) at 145.

⁴*Proverbs*, 20:23.

our [Native] communities.”⁴ In a similar vein, we acknowledge the limitations of demographics in capturing the essence of contemporary Native culture.

There is no question that demography is vital to the understanding of any population, including the Aboriginals of Atlantic Canada. Population measures embody the social dynamics of the population around material goals that express Aboriginal aspirations. In practical terms, population dynamics have an impact on social services, housing, education, and jobs, just to name a few examples.⁵

Sources and Labelling Practices

The Aboriginal people constitute a small population relative to the dominant society. Census data for small populations carry estimate errors which are not present in those for larger populations. However, these errors are germane to any population. But what can specifically be said about the sources of Aboriginal demographic data?

Aboriginal census data are shrouded in cautionary tales. Statistics Canada for example, warns its readers that the “quality of the collected data” is “inadequate.” We are told that of the 858 Aboriginal reserves and settlements, some seventy-nine (or 9.2%) are “incompletely enumerated” in 1991.⁶ Five of these areas are located in New Brunswick and involve at least 1,694 people in 1981, roughly equivalent to all Maliseets.⁷ Statistics Canada calls these geographic areas “affected [sic].”⁸ How, why, or by whom these areas were affected is not clarified.

It is also quite common for other reports to indicate that data for on-reserve and off-reserve locations are “unreliable due to late and underreporting ...” and that the annual residency survey has a “fairly low response rate.”⁹ Delays in

⁴*Daily Gleaner*, Fredericton, 21 September 1993.

⁵R.H. Knox, *Indian Conditions: A Survey* (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1980).

⁶Statistics Canada, *Ethnic Origin: The Nation* (Ottawa: Feb. 1993). This figure represents an improvement over the 1986 census when 136 Indian Reserves and settlements (15.9%), representing about 45,000 people, were not covered. See P.R. Oberle, *The Incidence Of Family Poverty on Canadian Indian Reserves* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1993) at 1.

⁷They are Big Hole Tract (pop. 48), Burnt Church (pop. 637), Eel Ground (pop. 293), Kingsclear (pop. 259), and Tobique (pop. 457) (Statistics Canada, *ibid.* at 238).

⁸Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at 237.

⁹M.J. Norris, *Migration Projections of Registered Indians, 1982 to 1996* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1985) at 4.

reporting births and deaths have been known to be as long as 11 and 3 years, respectively.¹⁰ Deaths of infants are particularly susceptible to late reporting.¹¹

A recent survey by James S. Frideres informs us that "the data on the Native population continue to be plagued with ... sources of potential bias."¹² Norris speaks of the impossibility of obtaining migration data "either directly or residually ..." and says that "data for on- and off-reserve locations are unreliable due to late and underreporting."¹³ Norris felt compelled to devote 8 pages to discussing anomalies and discrepancies of reported data.

In an attempt to overcome such difficulties, one study¹⁴ finds itself resorting to at least 3 sources of demographic data, namely the band lists,¹⁵ the Marginal Work World Research Program Employment Information Collection Forms, and key, well-informed individuals on various reserves.¹⁶ There are, however, conditions that result in undercounting Aboriginal people in the Atlantic provinces. For example, Kralt's 1983 study informs us that Aboriginals constitute a proportionally higher number of prison inmates than non-Aboriginals.¹⁷ Knox's survey¹⁸ informs us that Indians or Natives make up about 9% of the prison population compared to approximately 3 to 3.5% of the national population.¹⁹ Yet, the 20% sample census data (on which one must rely for Aboriginal data) excludes such "institutional" residents.²⁰

Moreover, there are labelling discrepancies in census data. For example, earlier data collected for band and non-band Indians are only approximations of the number of "registered" or "status" Indians.²¹ In other instances, the accrual

¹⁰G. Rowe and M.J. Norris, *Mortality Projections of Registered Indians, 1982 to 1996* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1985) at 5.

¹¹*Ibid.* at 9.

¹²J.S. Frideres, *Native Peoples in Canada* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1988) at 138.

¹³*Supra*, note 9 at 4.

¹⁴F. Wien, *Socioeconomic Characteristics of the Micmac in Nova Scotia* (Halifax: N.S. Institute of Public Affairs, 1983) at 2-3.

¹⁵Band lists contain the names of "all registered Indians who belong to a particular band" (*Ibid.* at 2).

¹⁶Note should be taken of the term "Marginal" Work World. Perhaps marginal for the dominant group, but not so for those who perform this type of work.

¹⁷Kralt as cited in *supra*, note 9 at 7 and 9.

¹⁸*Supra*, note 6 at 37.

¹⁹In 1981, 4% of the Atlantic Native population were in penitentiaries (cited in *supra*, note 12 at 203).

²⁰Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at 5.

²¹*Supra*, note 9 at 5.

of the Native population is due to legal recognition of such populations which were previously not recognized. The recognition of about 600 Micmacs in Newfoundland in June 1984 is a case in point.²²

Finally, some amount of symbolism can be derived from reported census data in Canada. If Aborigines are indeed the "First Nations", why is their enumeration found just above "Other" origins in the Canadian Census tabulations? Even such "factual" lists as census information are the subject of cultural encoding by the dominant groups. Similarly, demographers accord marginality to Aboriginal religious affiliation. It was only since 1981 that Statistics Canada enumerated "Native Indian or Inuit" religion²³ under the category of "Para-Religious Groups."²⁴ At least, the census takers did not classify Native religion as "Quasi-Religion," as they have done in the past. In any event, before 1981 we could not infer anything about Native spiritual kinship by examining census information.

Such highly variable sources of information would alone suggest that variations of demographic patterns are as likely to be attributed to the political and social context of demography as to changes in the population.

Population Size and Growth

Little is known about the actual size and growth of Atlantic Canada's Aboriginal population. A variety of factors account for this lack of knowledge. If it were not for the possibility that people could be excluded from certain inherent Aboriginal rights, this situation would present no difficulty. However, legal stipulations or requirements have led to demographic lines being drawn at points defying common or scholarly sense.

In an attempt to meet the legal, social, and demographic criteria, it is necessary to develop different demographic accounts, which I call "exclusive," "semi-exclusive," "semi-inclusive," and "inclusive." Each successive category generates a larger number of Aboriginal people in the Atlantic provinces. Chart 1 presents the number of Aboriginal people in the Atlantic region during the past four decades.

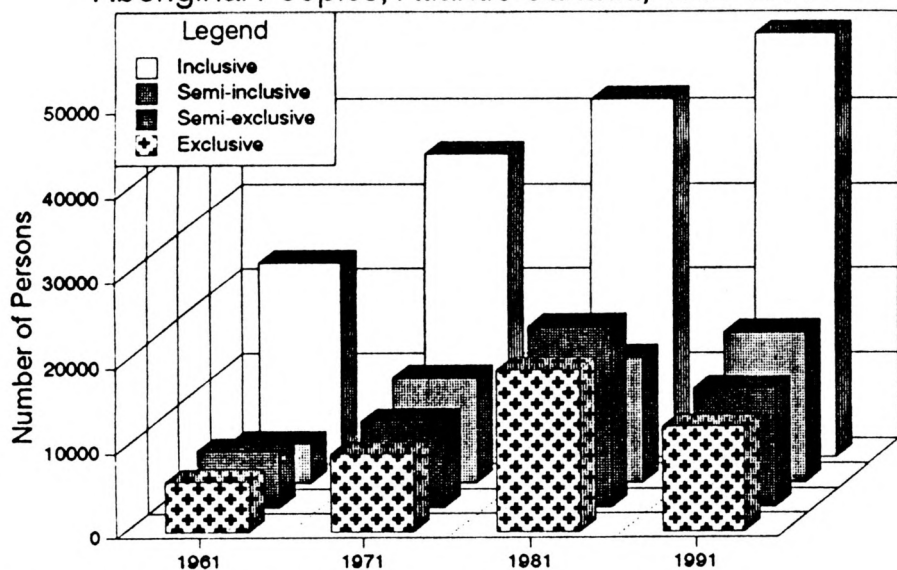
²²*Ibid.* at 11.

²³Statistics Canada, *Religions in Canada: The Nation* (Ottawa: June 1993) at 302.

²⁴Incidentally, in 1991, there were 150 Aborigines who identified themselves as belonging to Native Indian religion(s). See *ibid.* at 16. There were 55 in 1981. See Statistics Canada, *1981 Census of Canada: Population, Ethnic Origin* (Ottawa: Feb. 1984) at Table 1.

Chart 1

Aboriginal Peoples, Atlantic Canada, 1961-1991



Note: "Inclusive" categories (1961-1981) based on estimates.

Under the "exclusive" category, one takes account only of Indians under the strictly legal definition of "registered" or "status" Indians. In this category, the Indian population of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick in 1991, would, conservatively speaking, total 2,096, 6,409, 330, and 3,594, respectively, for a total of 12,430 people.²⁵ This roughly corresponds to the population of Edmundston, New Brunswick. While Siggner suggests that the counts available from the Indian Register are about 1 to 3% lower than the figures from Census Canada,²⁶ we are more likely to agree with Norris' later estimates that the Register is 10.8% lower than the census.²⁷

The "semi-exclusive" category corresponds to the official census figures and includes an upward adjustment of the number of people who are regarded as registered Indians. With these adjusted figures in mind, there are almost 14,000

²⁵Adjusted 10.2% from the 1991 census. See Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at 24.

²⁶A.J. Siggner, D. Perley, and D. Young, *An Overview of Demographic, Social and Economic Conditions Among Nova Scotia's Registered Indian Population* (Ottawa: Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 1982) at 3.

²⁷*Supra*, note 9 at 8.

North American Indians in Atlantic Canada.²⁸ As Bill C-31 (*An Act to Amend the Indian Act*) partially reinstates those people who had lost their Indian status, the higher estimates of the Indian population may reflect this change.²⁹ The complexity of claiming band membership involves a slow process, creating a new group, namely "status" Indians without band affiliation.³⁰

The "semi-inclusive" category includes all Aborigines, such as Indians, Inuit, and Métis, and not only North American Indians. Even in this more inclusive category, the proportion of the population with Aboriginal background is only slightly higher than in the semi-exclusive category. There are 5,340, 7,530, 395, and 4,270 Aborigines in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, respectively.³¹ With a total of 17,500 people, the Aboriginal population corresponds in size to that of Albert County, New Brunswick.

The "inclusive" category takes into account all people who, by multiple response, indicate Aboriginal descent. One is struck by the large proportion of the population who include Aboriginal ancestry, a total of 50,000. This is approximately the size of Fredericton, New Brunswick. As a consequence, the Aboriginal population would amount to 13,110, 21,885, 1,880, and 12,820 in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick, respectively. By taking reports of any Aboriginal origins as the basis for estimates, we have increased the Aboriginal population in the Atlantic provinces by at least 258% and to as much as 527% (see Chart 2). As Aboriginal issues and approaches become increasingly socially accepted by the larger population, the number of people who trace Aboriginal descent will also increase.

Particularly noteworthy is the large number of Atlantic Canadians claiming Aboriginal descent: almost 23,000 in 1961, and almost 50,000 in 1991. While the population in Atlantic Canada grew by 21.2% between 1961 and 1991,³² the number of people claiming Aboriginal descent grew by 117.7%.³³ The implications of such "growth" of Aboriginal identity will, in the future, make it increasingly more difficult to determine the exact size of the Aboriginal population. Boundaries between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal population are becoming less clear, most probably on account of intermarriage. As a consequence, it will

²⁸Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at 24.

²⁹In 1986, 242 persons had their Band membership restored and the Department of Indian Affairs restored the status of 772 other persons, while another 2,334 had pending applications. See *supra*, note 12 at 14.

³⁰*Ibid.* at 13.

³¹Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at 24.

³²From 1,897,425 in 1961, to 2,299,481 in 1991.

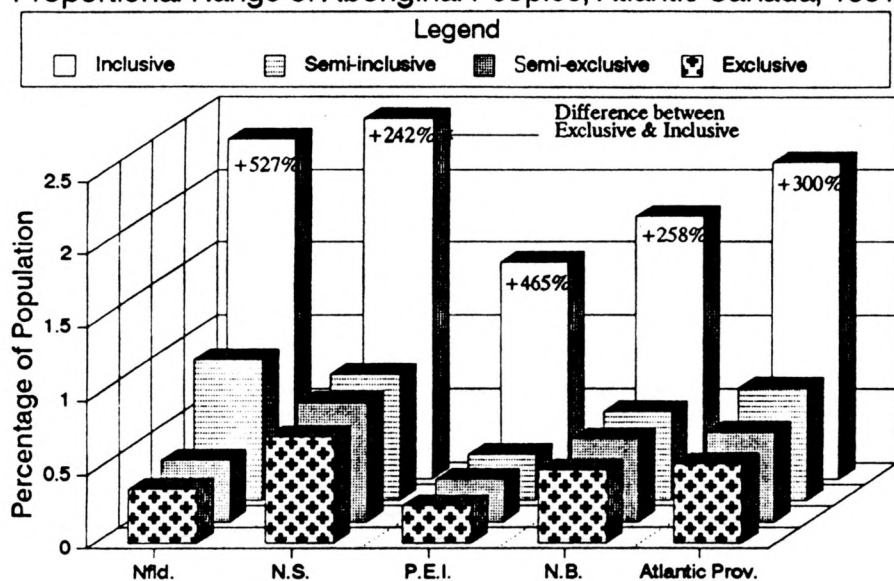
³³In 1961, there were 22,829 people claiming Aboriginal descent, while in 1991 there were 49,695.

become more difficult to define Aboriginal identity either in terms of legal status or by residence. With such growth, band lists may increasingly become a social artifact, outweighed by the expanding number of people who are not on the band lists and, yet, claim Aboriginal descent.

How are such demographic differences related to the provincial distribution of Aboriginal people? Chart 2 indicates the relative size of the original population in each of the Atlantic provinces.

Chart 2

Proportional Range of Aboriginal Peoples, Atlantic Canada, 1991



Under the "exclusive" category, the Indian population of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, would, conservatively speaking, comprise 0.37%, 0.72%, 0.26%, and 0.50% of the 1991 total population, respectively.

The "semi-inclusive" category shows that the proportion of the population with Aboriginal background is only slightly higher, namely 0.96%, 0.85%, 0.31%, and 0.60%, for Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and New Brunswick, respectively.

In the "inclusive" category, the Aboriginal population would amount to 2.3%, 2.5%, 1.5%, and 1.8% in the 4 provinces, respectively, or 2.2% for Atlantic Canada as a whole.

For the Atlantic region as a whole, the number of people with Aboriginal descent grows by 300% when we examine the "inclusive" count. The number of all Newfoundlanders who wish to trace their descent along Aboriginal lines is 527% higher than the group of legally-defined First Nations people. Undoubtedly, a special case can be made for Labrador. For the other Atlantic provinces, these figures are still quite high: 465%, 258%, and 242% for Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia. Can we infer that in areas with the highest increase in the "inclusive" category, the process of assimilation is also the highest? Can we attribute this process to intermarriage, or is it because highly assimilated people would not claim Aboriginal descent, or any other kind of descent for that matter?

Birth Rates

The birth rate of Canada's First Nation people is as high as it was for the Canadian population at the turn of the century,³⁴ but is declining rapidly. The Indian "baby boom" of the late 1950s and early 1960s, experienced 8 years earlier by the population as a whole,³⁵ has resulted in a high proportion of Native people who are now in their thirties.

The fertility rate of registered Indian women in the Atlantic provinces in 1981 was below the national Indian average.³⁶ The rate has been declining, however, since the 1970s, although the decline was higher for the overall population.³⁷ In 1981, there were proportionally over 3 times as many births to Indian women as compared to the total population in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island.³⁸ It seems, however, that the fertility rates for both Indian and non-Indian women are converging across Canada,³⁹ and the Atlantic Provinces in particular. Birth

³⁴H. Lautard, *An Overview of Registered Indian Conditions in New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island* (Ottawa: Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1987) at 18.

³⁵*Supra*, note 5 at 23.

³⁶*Supra*, note 34 at 24.

³⁷*Ibid.* at 26-27.

³⁸*Ibid.* at 27.

³⁹*Supra*, note 26 at ix; J.L. Perrault and M.V. George, *Population Projections of Registered Indians, 1982 to 1996* (Ottawa: Statistics Canada, 1985) at 21.

control measures, according to one study, are suggested as having "a significant influence."⁴⁰

Among Indian women aged 15 to 19, the rates of birth outside marriage were very high in 1981. The relatively higher incidence of births to unmarried Indian women implies more single mothers than is the case among the general population.⁴¹ This situation, according to Frideres, may have be due partly to "unwillingness on the part of Native women to lose Indian status through marriage to non-Indian men."⁴² Other observers leave us with a more cryptic message in their attempt to explain the high rates of birth outside marriage by saying that they "may reflect cultural differences as to the importance of formal marriage."⁴³ Divorcing birth-rate statistics from their social, political, and cultural contexts, as has often been done, provides us with no valid meaning about such rates.⁴⁴

Death Rates

The infant mortality rate of Atlantic Canada's Native population may be lowest in the country for Natives (22.4 infant deaths per 1,000 people), but it is still nearly one and half times the rate for all Canadians.⁴⁵ The greatest difference in death rates between registered Indians and the general population occurs between the ages of 1 to 4 and 20 to 44 years, respectively 3 and 4 times as high; these rates were expected to increase in 1982.⁴⁶ The high number of deaths among Native young adults reverberates throughout Native and non-Native society.

The higher percentage of deaths through accidents, poisonings, violence, and diseases of the respiratory and digestive systems⁴⁷ provides telling evidence of the

⁴⁰*Supra*, note 14 at 8.

⁴¹*Supra*, note 34 at 27.

⁴²*Supra*, note 12 at 144. The *Indian Act* has been changed since 1981 by the passage of Bill C-31. Indian women no longer lose their status by marrying non-Indian men.

⁴³*Supra*, note 5 at 24.

⁴⁴One could argue that traditional or conventional demography rightly takes the approach of speaking of fertility rates of women. After all, only women, and only those of childbearing age, have babies. Others might claim that the traditional approach, while including women who do not bear children, exempts men from the equation of fertility. Demographers might do well to explore the possibility of including both women and men in arriving at the fertility rate of a given population.

⁴⁵*Supra*, note 26 at 14.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* at 10.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* at 25-26.

social and cultural tensions that attend the lives of all Aboriginals.⁴⁸ Some of these causes account for at least one-third of all Native deaths, as opposed to 10% for all Canadians.

It was estimated 8 years ago that the life expectancy for Native women and men, 69 and 62 years, respectively, was at the 1945 level for the Canadian population as a whole.⁴⁹ However, mortality among the older Native population is lower than among the Canadian population as a whole. Trovato believes that members of a deprived minority who survive through the high mortality years of infancy, youth, and young adulthood experience lower mortality rates at older age.⁵⁰ Such beliefs offer little or no comfort to a member of a minority. Moreover, it is ironic that there are so few older Native people relative to the number of older people in the general population, given the honoured position of elders among Native people.

When will life expectancy of the Native population converge with that of other Canadians? One recent study does not foresee such a convergence; instead, in 2006, the Native population will merely be 25 years behind where the Canadian population was in 1981.⁵¹ If it takes 5 years for the Native population's life expectancy to catch up to one year of that of other Canadians, we may well expect a convergence sometime around the year 2034, well after today's middle-aged persons have become octogenarians! (see Chart 3)

Although it appears that the birth rate has been declining steadily since the 1970s, the Aboriginal population of Atlantic Canada is growing rapidly, about twice as fast as the non-Aboriginal population. Sharp declines in infant mortality⁵² have compensated for declining birth rates, resulting in population growth, despite the worrisome increase of deaths in the 20 to 24 year old age group.⁵³ Policy makers should take it upon themselves to focus, with due speed and care, on members of this age group, haunted by suicide and violence.

⁴⁸From 1974 to 1976, motor-vehicle and train accidents and burns account for nearly half of all accidental deaths in the Atlantic region. See *ibid.* at 28.

⁴⁹Perrault and George, *supra*, note 38 at 24. Female life expectancy at birth is 3 decades behind that of the Canadian population as a whole (*supra*, note 10 at 32).

⁵⁰Cited by Rowe and Norris in *ibid.* at 19.

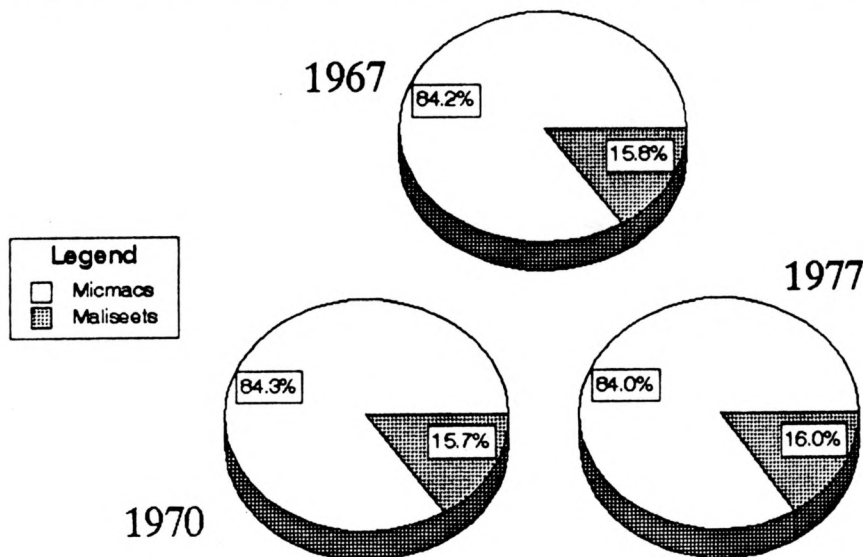
⁵¹*Ibid.* at 36.

⁵²*Ibid.* at 15.

⁵³*Ibid.* at 17.

Chart 3

Proportion of Micmacs and Maliseets, Atlantic Canada, 1961-1991



Population Distribution

Micmacs and Maliseets are present in all the Atlantic provinces. Historians have documented the relationships of these two groups, with the former constituting the larger proportion, about 84%, of all Natives in this area.⁵⁴ As few as 5% of the Native population in Atlantic Canada live in relative geographic isolation from the rest of society, the lowest figure for all of Canada.⁵⁵ In comparison, over 80% of the Yukon population live in relative isolation from urban centres.

Bands and Reserves

The registered Indian population in Atlantic Canada belongs to 29 bands on 67 reserves, with fewer than 10% of the population belonging to 10 bands in settlements of less than 250 people. Almost 40% of the population live in communities of between 250 and 500 people. Just over 15% of the population live

⁵⁴Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, *Linguistic and Cultural Affiliations of Canadian Indian Bands* (Ottawa: Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 1967, 1970, 1977).

⁵⁵*Supra*, note 12 at 156.

in 3 communities of between 500 and 1000 people. Over a third of the population are found in communities of between 1000 and 3000 inhabitants.⁵⁶ We note that virtually two-thirds of the population live in settlements with under 1,000 people. Bearing in mind the steady growth of the Native population, one wonders about the extent to which such growth will exact pressures on reserves in terms of issues such as housing and education. Already, it is expected that reserve land per person on-reserve will soon decrease to seven and one-half acres, down from just under 9 acres in 1982.⁵⁷

Yet, Atlantic communities show a higher proportion of urban bands, or bands located within fifty kilometres of the nearest regional centre by year-round accessible roads, than in the rest of the country.⁵⁸ Whether such proximity to urban areas is desirable or not is a matter of debate, but its impact is felt in terms of employment, education, and migration to and from the reserve.

Men and Women

Significant differences exist with respect to the distribution of Aboriginal men and women. In the mid-1970s, men were more likely to be found in blue-collar jobs, while women were found in pink-collar occupations such as clerical and sales work, teacher's aides positions, social counselling, and nursing assistant positions. The study by Wien shows that Micmac women are more likely to work off-reserve than men.⁵⁹ This observation relates to a later finding that off-reserve residence tends "to be more prevalent among females than males."⁶⁰

By 1991, it was expected that for every 100 females, there would be 80 males, an important decrease from 1981, when there were 94 males for every 100 females.⁶¹ Such gender ratios are highly uneven and have an impact on patterns of marriage, child-rearing, education, and employment of Aboriginal people.

⁵⁶*Supra*, note 34 at 12-13.

⁵⁷*Ibid.* at 16.

⁵⁸*Ibid.* at 12.

⁵⁹*Supra*, note 14 at 93.

⁶⁰*Supra*, note 34 at 35.

⁶¹*Ibid.* at 35.

On-Reserves and Off-Reserves

Between 1966 and 1971, the off-reserve population in Atlantic Canada steadily increased for all age groups, except the 15 to 29 year old group.⁶² Since 1975, there has been a proportional decline in the number of people living off-reserve, to just over 20% of all Aboriginal people in Atlantic Canada.⁶³ Demographic data are cross-cut with reference to on-reserve and off-reserve populations. These references underscore legal and political agendas, they minimize our ability to more deeply reflect on the social dynamics that underly Aboriginal life, and they provide a continuing stereotypical view of "Indian life."

The political interest in gauging the number of people who live off-reserve is high. There are few, if any, governmental obligations with respect to North American Natives living off-reserve. Such lessened obligations, in all fairness, are set off by support for Friendship Centres and similar organizations. However, such indirect assistance is of a different character than that offered to those living on-reserve.

This beguiling distinction suggests that the two geographically divided Aboriginal populations are quite separate, and should be treated as autonomous categories. This particular kind of demographic treatment of the Aboriginal population reveals little about the complexity of on-reserve and off-reserve residence, and the ongoing interactions of the two populations. Let us look at some of these possible interactions.

First, it appears that people moved off the reserves when the possibilities of employment were high, as in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁶⁴ The flow is reversed when such possibilities are declining.

Second, the gender ratios of people on-reserve and off-reserve are proportionally different: while there are more males on-reserve, the off-reserve population has a much higher proportion of females.⁶⁵

Third, the on-reserve population is clearly much younger than the off-reserve group.⁶⁶ The large number of young children on the reserves seems to account for this difference. What can be drawn from the fact that there is a higher proportion of women living off-reserve, while one finds a larger proportion of

⁶²*Supra*, note 26 at 21-22.

⁶³*Supra*, note 5 at 135.

⁶⁴*Supra*, note 14 at 11.

⁶⁵*Ibid.*

⁶⁶*Ibid.* at 56.

young children on-reserve? Does this mean that women, when leaving the reserve to find work off the reserve, tend to leave their young children with family and relatives? Can we conclude that women perceive off-reserve life as detrimental to the raising of young children? One study suggests the opposite, saying that comparatively "unattractive social and living conditions for women on reserves may also influence their decision to move off reserve."⁶⁷ Attempts to categorize populations in terms of living on-reserve or off-reserve does little to explain the social dynamics which underlie the interaction of both groups.

The single-minded focus on calculating the number of First Nations people living on-reserve and off-reserve has not brought us any closer to creating a clearer understanding of First Nations people, and has instead been a vehicle for reinforcing stereotypical views about reserve life. We learn, for example, that the off-reserve population is at risk, "falling" outside the program jurisdiction of the Department of Indian Affairs.⁶⁸ At the same time, we learn that on-reserve conditions are "poor", and a major factor in off-reserve migration.⁶⁹ Few studies speak of the positive role reserves play in this migration pattern.⁷⁰

Age Pyramid and Dependency Ratios

The Aboriginal population in Atlantic Canada is a comparatively young one, with the post-war "baby boom" generation now turning middle-aged.⁷¹ More than half of the Native population consists of people 24 years of age or younger,⁷² while for the Canadian population as a whole, the equivalent percentage is 35.3%.⁷³ In contrast, the number of Native people 65 years of age or older is only one-third of that of all Canadians. Such wide differences between North American Indians and other Canadians may mean that officials deliberately and consciously make decisions for health, education, and employment that are out of step with the general population.

⁶⁷*Supra*, note 5 at 136.

⁶⁸*Ibid.* at 146.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰See *supra*, note 12 at 152 where Frideres, an exception, talks about the reserve providing "security and roots ..." where people "have grown up among family and friends." As well, however, he speaks of reserves as "potential hotbeds of political and social discontent."

⁷¹*Supra*, note 34 at 35.

⁷²Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 6 at Table 3.

⁷³Statistics Canada, *supra*, note 23 at Table 2.

The matter of the so-called "dependency" ratios is an important measure in the analysis of the age structure of population. According to demography, persons under the age of 15 and over 65 are considered "dependents." Critical demographers take issue with the idea of "dependency ratios." It assumes that persons between 15 and 65 are fully employed and, hence, "independent." This demographic measure corresponds more directly to social processes which attend to industrial society, where legal working age assumes primary importance in establishing population dynamics. Rural populations and those living in the so-called "periphery" exhibit different age-related processes; the idea of "dependency" poses both descriptive and analytical difficulties. Dependency can occur, as we know, at any stage of one's life, regardless of age. Nevertheless, the relatively greater young age-dependency ratios of the Aboriginal population (higher unemployment, lower income, and so forth) mean that there are even greater demands placed on those with fewer material resources.

Migration

The process of defining migration is a highly charged one, for it attempts to record shifting geographical characteristics of any given population. From the migrant's point of view, migration can be permanent, tentative, or temporary. From the point of view of the non-migrant, migration can be viewed as an intrusion and perhaps even a threat to an existing population. Finally, there are disagreements as to what constitutes the sending and receiving area of the migrant. In a general case, members of a family may construe their move from one neighbourhood to another in the same city as drastic as a move between cities or even countries, but the move might never be recorded by demographers. In other words, demographers and the measured population do not share the same understanding about what constitutes a migration. Hence, some demographers prefer using the less charged term "mobility."⁷⁴ What can be said about the mobility of Atlantic Canada's Aboriginal population?

According to Lautard, 79% of the Aboriginal population who report New Brunswick as their place of birth live in the province.⁷⁵ For Prince Edward Island, this figure stands at 73%. The Atlantic provinces are losing more Aboriginal people through emigration (5%) than they are gaining through immigration (4%).⁷⁶ However, the difference is so small that we can speak of a relatively stable Aboriginal population in this region. It appears that Native

⁷⁴See, for example Lautard, *supra*, note 34 at 18.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*

⁷⁶*Ibid.* at 20-21.

migration, like that for the Atlantic Canadian population as a whole, generally occurs westward.

In terms of movement within the Atlantic region, the Aboriginal population is generally more mobile than the whole population, but is more likely to confine its movement to within the community.⁷⁷ Given the comparatively younger age structure of the Native population, it is not surprising that one finds more migrants among Natives than among other Canadians. Off-reserve Native people are more mobile than those who live on the reserve, moving "across municipal, provincial, or international boundaries."⁷⁸ In fact, off-reserve people are 7 to 8 times more likely to move than those who live on-reserves.⁷⁹ According to one study, nearly one-quarter of Nova Scotia band members live outside the Atlantic provinces, with over one-fifth living in New England and other places in the United States.⁸⁰ On-reserve people are more likely to move short distances.

Conclusions

The Aboriginal people in the Atlantic provinces are a young population, more mobile than people in the rest of the region. In a sense, Aboriginal young adults are very much like the barometer of wellness in the Native communities, and their needs are urgent, not only because they are relatively more numerous than those of the non-Aboriginal population, but also because they are the gateway between the past and the future. If proper attention is not paid to these young adults, they will become an obstacle and an impediment to the younger generation instead of an open door to future possibilities. Any optimism should be guarded, in light of the violent deaths among young adults and the uneven gender ratios. Although life expectancy is steadily increasing and infant mortality rates are declining, seldom has there been a time when the possibilities for the future depend so much on how young adults, especially young adult women, are cared for and encouraged.

The possibilities of contorting and twisting demographic data are great, and much is at stake in fairly presenting Aboriginal demographics. How reliable can one be when legal and social circumstances have demographically created four concentric groups of Aboriginal people, the smallest circle of which would fit into Edmundston and the largest circle comparable in size to Fredericton? Hence, we need a critical demography to heighten a sense of the social and political agendas

⁷⁷Between 1966 and 1971, registered Indians were less likely to move than the general population. See *supra*, note 12 at 154, citing Siggner.

⁷⁸*Supra*, note 34 at 21-24.

⁷⁹This is partly because the reserves themselves are treated in census data as municipalities.

⁸⁰*Supra*, note 14 at 21.

that drive mainstream demography. Would demography raise different questions if it asked about male, rather than female fertility, and if it realized that the idea of dependency colours our perception of the interdependence of all people? We must look at what we can do to increase our ability to more deeply reflect on the social dynamics that underlie Aboriginal life.