

# FEELING ‘AT HOME’: RE-EVALUATING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY-MAKING IN CANADIAN CITIES

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## ABSTRACT

Since the 1950s the rural-urban migration among Indigenous<sup>1</sup> peoples across Canada has steadily increased with over half of the Indigenous population living in Canadian cities today (Howard and Proulx 2011). The predominant narrative in anthropological literature suggests that Indigenous peoples in urban environments risk cultural assimilation. This narrative, however, overlooks the transcendence of Indigeneity between rural and urban spaces, which have lead scholars to challenge notions of cultural abandonment when Indigenous peoples migrate to the city (Howard and Proulx 2011; Lawrence 2002; Newhouse and Peters 2003; Peters and Wilson 2003; Watson 2007). This paper will explore the ways in which urban Indigenous peoples in Canada construct, connect, and reinforce their identity within an urban environment. To approach these questions, this paper begins by exploring the historical context in which Indigenous urbanization has been situated. A theoretical framework of Indigeneity and place will be discussed, followed by an introduction to the emergence of Indigenous-run organizations nationwide, such as Friendship Centres. The Métis First Nations Friendship Centre in Saskatoon and the urban Inuit organizations in Ottawa will be showcased as exemplifying the dynamism and distinctiveness of urban Indigenous identities.

## INTRODUCTION

### *Historical context*

There are similar contributing factors that influence urban migration for both Indigenous peoples and settlers. In a survey conducted by the Environics Institute (2010), Indigenous men reported increased employment opportunities as a primary reason for

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to First Nations Peoples, Non-Status Indians, Métis and Inuit

migrating, whereas women reported reasons such as access to higher education and proximity to family. What distinguishes Indigenous experiences from other migrants is that Indigenous peoples are travelling within their ancestral territories (Newhouse and Peters 2003:6).

To better understand the processes of contemporary urban experiences, it is important to contextualize this process within the history of Indigenous land dispossession in Canada. Canadian cities were developed on lands typically used by Indigenous peoples as hunting and settlement areas. As cities expanded, the Crown implemented the 1876 Indian Act which sanctioned the forced relocation of First Nations communities to remote plots of land, often located great distances from urban centres (Newhouse and Peters 2003:6). Métis peoples were dispossessed of their land and compelled to settle on the outskirts of towns.

Not all reserves, however, were relocated away from urban centres. For example, the colonial expansion of the city of Victoria in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century encroached upon traditional Lekwungen <sup>2</sup> territory, leading to the Crown's designation of small plots of land around the Inner Harbour to the Lekwungen peoples (Blomley 2004:106). In the 1850s, these reserves were forcibly relocated to other areas in Victoria to make space for development and infrastructure. First Nations communities were perceived as "impediments" to urban growth (Blomley 2004:106-107). Today, the Esquimalt and Songhees reserves are located in the urban core of Victoria, with other Coast Salish and Nuu-Chah-Nulth First Nation communities situated in the Greater Victoria Area. While they may have been closely situated to the urban centres, the development of reserves disrupted ties between families and political relationships that are fundamental to Lekwungen social structures, contributing to the ongoing disenfranchisement that is on par with more remote Indigenous communities (Songhees Nation 2013:53).

By physically excluding Indigenous communities from urban areas, the Federal Reserve System institutionalized notions of 'difference' and 'otherness' that became historically embedded in the discriminatory treatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada (Peters and Andersen 2013:5). As Peters and Wilson articulate, "these mappings

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<sup>2</sup> Comprising the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations

of space and identity also came to mean that urban places were increasingly seen as places where indigenous peoples were ‘out of place’” (2003:399). The establishment of reserves and land dispossession naturalized the stereotype that Indigenous peoples belonged in rural areas, as their cultural practices and lifestyle were seemingly incongruous with the urban experience (Newhouse and Peters 2003:6). Urban migration, and departure from reserves more generally, continues to be misconstrued as a sign that Indigenous culture has been abandoned in favour of assimilation into mainstream society.

### *Misconceptions in systems of knowledge production*

It is important to deconstruct the misconceptions of urban Indigeneity that have become commonplace in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples’ imaginaries (Howard and Proulx 2011). Both anthropological and sociological systems of knowledge production have played influential roles in dictating where Indigenous peoples do and do not ‘belong’, both within and outside academia (Howard and Proulx 2011). Due to firmly imposed disciplinary boundaries, pre-1980s anthropological research focused almost exclusively on rural Indigenous peoples’ culture, history and politics. Conversely, sociology had long claimed authority over urban social issues. Lobo suggests this turf war led to, “an unspoken code by academics that anthropologists could ‘have’ Indians while sociologists could ‘have’ urban studies” (2001:14). As a result, sociologists problematized urban Indigenous experiences, emphasizing issues of substance abuse, crime and homelessness as chronic to the urban “culture of poverty” (Lobo and Peters 2001:13).

Successfully adjusting to cities was- and arguably continues to be- measured by an individual’s ability to successfully integrate his or herself into the dominant culture of the urban space. Notions of ‘success’ and ‘failure’ echo the Enlightenment rhetoric of sociocultural development as a linear progression from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’ (Howard and Proulx 2011:8; Stocking 1987). These binaries pervaded scholarly literature that emerged in the early decades of the Indigenous urban migration boom. David Newhouse (2011:23-26), a self-proclaimed urbanite who migrated from a rural reserve in Ontario, attests that mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century academic

literature about Indigenous peoples does not accurately represent the lived experiences of those communities. Dwelling on crime and substance abuse as characteristic of the urban Indigenous experience, Newhouse argues, neglects the degree of resilience and strength urban communities have demonstrated over the past several decades (2011:26).

*'Othering' mentalities among Indigenous communities*

Ideas of incompatibility between Indigenous identity and urban spaces pervades relationships among many Indigenous communities. Indigenous identity is often perceived as enhanced for those who remain in their ancestral homeland, as opposed to those who migrate to cities (Lawrence 2002). Urbanization, Bonita Lawrence argues, is frequently equated with 'whiteness'—in turn creating a social divide between Indigenous peoples who live in urban and rural areas. In an interview Lawrence conducted on Indigenous migration, a Northern Métis respondent described feeling out of place in leaving the city: "I go home, and I'm not quite fitting in now. It's like white values have come into my head a lot. So my friends treat me a little bit differently" (2004:202). The respondent articulated feeling a disconnect between her lifestyle, sense of humour, and social values from those of her friends and family living back home. Some individuals believe that Indigenous identity and culture deteriorate in the urban context due to the physical distance from ancestral homelands and decreased social interactions with other Indigenous peoples (2004:203). Evidently, Indigenous peoples who spoke to Lawrence verify that there are indeed instances where culture is at risk, and they have a difficult time reconciling their Indigeneity in spaces that are not their ancestral lands. Correspondingly, some urban Inuit peoples in Ottawa identify tensions between Inuit who migrated to the city from the Arctic, and those who were born and raised in the South. Conflicts have arisen over the degree of familiarity with cultural traditions and language fluency, with Inuk identity perceived to be stronger among Inuit who lived in the Arctic for some time before moving to the city (Tomiak and Patrick 2010:136). Evidently, ideas of incompatibility between Indigenous culture and the city create a complex terrain for Indigenous identity making and preservation among those navigating urban landscapes.

## THEORETICAL FRAMING

### *Identity*

Indigenous identity is of fundamental importance to Indigenous peoples living in cities, particularly due to the multifaceted nature of identity construction and retention (Proulx 2006:406). As Lawrence articulates, “Aboriginal peoples’ racial identities are fraught with complexities hinging on legal definitions of Indianness, cultural knowledge, and connection to Indigenous land base” (2004:173). Lawrence (2004), Proulx (2006) and Andersen (2013) suggest that in order to fully grasp the implications of identity and identification, we must engage with the political, economic and social processes in which identities are enmeshed. Doing so will enable us to reject the notion that identities are static and unchanging, as well as push us to recognize the processes through which they are constructed.

Stuart Hall (1993) provides an analysis of cultural identities in the context of ‘diasporic’ experiences that can be used to conceptualize urban Indigenous identities in settler states. Hall distinguishes between two competing and overlapping conceptualizations of identity as ‘essence’ and ‘potential’ (1993:223-225). ‘Essence’, he claims, refers to an “underlying, authentic presence that binds a people together” (in Andersen 2013:49). Indigenous identities reflect a united front based on presumed shared cultures and histories, including a fundamental spiritual relationship with the land. The ‘essence’ discourse can also be used to track the emergence of essentialist beliefs embedded in mainstream discourse and state policy, such as Indigenous identities being inextricably tied to land (Andersen 2013:49; Scott 2001). ‘Potential’ allows for identities to ‘become’ something, which calls attention to the *processes* of history, culture and power that continue to engage in the construction of Indigenous identities (Hall 1993). Urban Indigenous identities are drawn to both impulses throughout their lives (2013:49). Whereas identity as ‘essence’ provides a sense of community and commonality in an urban environment, identity as ‘potential’ “acknowledges the discontinuities and fragmentations marking our colonial experiences” (Andersen 2013:49) and challenges conceptions of identity as fixed in the past.

Craig Proulx (2006) also offers an important theoretical approach to conceptualizing identity, focusing on processes of identification when analyzing discourse surrounding Indigenous peoples in North American cities. Parallel to Hall's positioning of 'essence' and 'potential', Proulx maintains that identities are constructed and should be contextualized to bring to light the agency of Indigenous peoples. Identity, he argues, is consciously derived from the individual and is imposed upon them by discursive narratives. This process occurs at the individual level of thought, the level of social relations and the bureaucratic, policy-making layer (2006:411). In the context of urbanization, Indigenous peoples in cities "construct their identities differently overtime using the resources and discourses available to them at the time" (2006:411). This point illustrates how identities are constantly being shaped by and adapting to changing contexts and circumstances in the city, as a result of personal choice or necessity.

For example, Proulx (2006:411) demonstrates how first generation urban Indigenous peoples' processes of self-identification in Riverton, Manitoba were greatly shaped by the assimilatory discourses that characterized that region and time period. Indigenous automotive factory workers in Riverton in the 1950s endured racial discrimination from their non-Indigenous counterparts, invoking a sense of shame and outright denial of their Indigenous identities as a defense mechanism (2006:411). Identities are, have been, and continue to be imposed on individuals and groups by colonizers, media sources, and academics that have the power to define them, resulting in harmful and oppressive representations that Indigenous peoples living in cities internalize (2006:412). As Proulx poignantly maintains, "the drunken Indian is ten feet tall, but a sober one is invisible" (2006:414). Stereotypical discourses that essentialize urban Indigenous peoples as homeless and troubled eclipses the many who are not, branding them as 'inauthentic' (2006:414). Examining the multitude of discourses that pervade urban Indigenous identity construction unveils the manner in which identities are both internally-produced and externally-imposed.

### *Place*

Identity and place are inextricably linked. This relationship is fundamental to theoretically situating the experiences of Indigenous peoples in urban settings (Basso 1996; Environics Institute 2010:28; Watson 2010:271). Public policy has “incarcerated” Indigenous peoples to geographic regions, such as the Ainu in Japan as described by Watson (2010:269). The Ainu’s Indigenous identities have been publicly restricted to their ancestral homelands in northern Japan, a reality that neglects the lived experiences of Ainu cultural practices as they adapt to and transform the urban landscape. Defining ‘place’ exclusively in terms of a connection to a land base limits one’s ability to understand Ainu place-making in cities, a process Watson maintains is largely social. Watson conceptualizes ‘place’ as “a social construction and relational site, a ‘meeting-up’ point of social relations” (2010:414) with which identity is constantly engaged. For example, many Ainu have opened up restaurants and various other businesses in Tokyo, creating places for cultural promotion and forming links to the larger Japanese community (2010:271). The social practices that create the foundation for place-making must be more closely examined in order to better understand the role of place in urban Indigenous identity-construction and resistance to cultural assimilation (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:7; Watson 2010).

Framing Indigenous identities in the city as ‘diasporic’ allows for a reassessment of place and place-making and its interconnections with urban identity (Watson 2010:273). The increasing numbers of urban migrants across Canada does not signify a loss to a sense of place; rather, it denotes extensions and transitions of social identities that connect new places to the old. Many Indigenous peoples who live in the city maintain close ties to their ancestral homelands and remain in frequent contact with their families living outside city borders, an integral part of sustaining their traditional cultural practices and identities (Environics Institute 2010:29, Watson 2010:271). In interviews conducted with Anishinabek peoples residing in several cities across Ontario on the topic of urban Indigenous identities, participants claimed that they regularly returned to their reserves or ancestral territories because they remained very important in their urban lives. Returning to these areas “provided Anishinabek with a physical connection to the land that they could not always experience in cities” (Peters 2005: 346). Evidently, many Indigenous peoples maintain social linkages with friends and family that bind them to

several places instantaneously. Engaging with identity as diasporic challenges the cultural abandonment perspective when Indigenous peoples migrate to urban centres (Watson 2010:271). Diasporic identities allow for greater flexibility in conceptualizing identity as a multi-faceted process rather than something fixed.

Indigenous peoples feeling ‘placeless’ highlight the importance of ‘place’ in constructing and reinforcing identity in the city. In many cases, Indigenous peoples without close ties to a particular community outside the urban context endure a constant struggle to establish a form of collective identity in the city. Lawrence refers to these individuals as being “truly diasporic” (2004: 191) as they are unable to pinpoint places in which they ‘still belong’. This sense of placelessness often applies to those who were adopted, and whose families are scattered across the country. Nevertheless, the respondents who participated in Lawrence’s (2004) interviews all reported how they grounded their ‘diasporic’ identities by researching their ancestral ties. Lawrence demonstrates how one participant was able to trace her lineage to a specific Ojibway region in Manitoba, a discovery she said strengthened her self-awareness and identity by connecting it to a place outside her current home in Ottawa (2004:198).

Traditional languages are equally important for reinforcing and building cultural identity in an urban space. Language reflects essential aspects of culture, providing fundamentally different ways of understanding the world (Lawrence 2004:198). It shapes the way individuals who practice a culture think and engage in customs and traditions. One woman whom Lawrence interviewed explained how the process of learning Cree has played a significant role in anchoring her ‘diasporic’ identity:

For me, it feels like—language is where you draw your nationhood, your identity from. It’s like, what language are you from—that’s where you come from, that language. It’s not just words. I feel that there’s a physical presence of something (2004:198).

Language thus became a tangible link to a culture from which these women felt disconnected in the city, a bond that served to reinforce their sense of community and identity. Lawrence’s (2004) interviews demonstrate how Indigenous peoples who feel ‘placeless’

in the city often seek out diverse ways, such as language revitalization and tracing ancestral lineage, to create social linkages that bridge the ‘urban’ and ‘rural’.

## THE EMERGENCE OF INDIGENOUS-RUN ORGANIZATIONS

The increase of rural-urban migration of Indigenous peoples in the 1950s triggered a growing need for culturally-sensitive organizations in cities; a responsibility that lay primarily within the Indigenous communities themselves (Jedwab 2009:80; Lobo 2001:76; UATF 2007:70). Sustained in part by private funding and federal grants, urban Indigenous-run organizations such as Friendship Centres, employment and healthcare facilities, and other community centres became key resources for urban dwellers. Laliberte (2013:114), Quart (2013) and Yamanouchi (2010:288-289) view these organizations as instrumental for unifying urban Indigenous peoples, carving out spaces for solidarity and knowledge sharing within the city. Urban Indigenous organizations come to symbolize places of resilience and sustainability as they promote the preservation of Indigenous cultures and languages in an urban context. Exemplary of Watson’s theory of place-making in cities, urban Indigenous-run organizations “actively enable people to belong and, though highly mutable, facilitates one’s feeling at home” (2010:274).

Urban Indigenous organizations have also played a critical role in promoting kinship relations between Indigenous peoples of different cultural backgrounds, a vital part of identity-construction and reinforcement (Laliberte 2013:114; Yamanouchi 2010:285). As previously mentioned, the identities of urban Indigenous peoples are largely influenced by close ties to family and friends living in their ancestral places of origin. This is particularly true in Canada, where many urban Indigenous peoples maintain linkages to their families living outside the city, and report kinship as the most important part of their identity. Kinship networks often manifest in the city between Indigenous peoples of shared ancestral backgrounds, culminating in a form of social organization (Yamanouchi 2010:285). The diversity of urban Indigenous communities poses a challenge to the development of social relations between Indigenous peoples who fall outside these kinship ties, both linguistically and culturally. Urban Indigenous organizations then become a space for individuals who are not related

by kinship networks to meet and socialize. By engaging in the various programs offered by these organizations, places are created for cross-cultural interactions. For individuals who feel isolated from their kinship roots, these organizations can provide them with the opportunity to *re-identify* as Indigenous by partaking in cultural activities and engaging with the urban Indigenous community (Laliberte 2013:114; Yamanouchi 2010:288).

### *Community Building*

A fundamental outcome of local Indigenous-run organizations is a heightened sense of community in the city. Urban communities do not develop within bounded spaces as they do on reserve or in other rural areas. Rather, they emerge as fluid spaces that extend their boundaries to different corners of the city in a needs-based manner (Environics 2010:42; Lobo 2001:76). Communities adapt to the fragmentation and diversity of urban landscapes, characterized by networks of social relations that are often grounded in Indigenous organizations and other communal areas. Within this fluidity, communities are multiple, dynamic and loosely bound as a spatial unit (Lobo 2001:75).

In discussing identity construction, Basso describes how “knowledge of place is therefore closely linked to knowledge of the self, to grasping one’s position in the larger scheme of things, including one’s own community” (1996:34). Indigenous organizations thus come to symbolize places in which individuals can engage with and situate themselves in the broader urban community without having direct access to a ‘traditional’ land base. Conceptualizing communities as contingent on relationships, rather than ethnically-homogenous places, allows for a better understanding of the way in which community manifests in a city (Watson 2010). In interviews conducted by the Environics Institute on urban Indigenous identity, respondents identified the importance of belonging to a community in an urban space, as a means of strengthening pride in collective and individual identities (2010:42). Among First Nations peoples, Métis and Inuit, 61 percent of respondents claimed family was fundamental to their sense of community in an urban context, and 58 percent answered friends (2010:50). Relationships with parents, relatives, neighbours, friends, and non-Indigenous peoples are foundational to

urban-based communities, as they work to shape identities by transmitting social and cultural values through everyday interactions (2010:42).

### *Emergence of Friendship Centres*

Native Friendship Centres (NFCs) exemplify the mobilization of Indigenous peoples in carving out places for cultural retention and identity construction in the urban landscape (Peters and Andersen 2013:25). In British Columbia, the Friendship Centre movement mobilized as a response to the growing demand for support services by Indigenous peoples for Indigenous peoples moving to Vancouver (BCAAFC 2014). During their inception, Indigenous organizations were perceived by the federal and provincial governments as being temporary, responsible for familiarizing Indigenous peoples with the dominant, settler culture until ‘successful’ integration was achieved (Ouart 2013:135). NFCs in the 1960s were intermediaries between Indigenous peoples who were new to the city, and pre-existing social service agencies. Although they provided a space for conversation and community gatherings for Indigenous peoples in urban settings, the primary role of NFCs in the early years of the migration boom was to provide referrals to government services for healthcare, employment, and social assistance (BCAAFC 2014; Ouart 2013:135).

The 1970s witnessed the growth of partnerships between social service agencies and NFCs across Canada. This growth was due in large to the agencies referrals of urban Indigenous peoples to Friendship Centres for more specialized, culturally-sensitive service provisions. Today, there are Friendship Centres located across Canada in most major cities. NFCs constitute the largest off-reserve Indigenous institutional network in Canada, playing a significant role in asserting the legitimacy of Indigenous organizations in an urban context (Jedwab 2009:80; UATF 2007:20).

## CASE STUDIES

### *Case study #1: Saskatoon Indian and Metis Friendship Centre*

The Saskatoon Indian and Métis Friendship Centre is exemplary of the ways in which Friendship Centres shape place-

making and identity construction in an urban environment (Ouart 2013:137). This Friendship Centre, established in 1968, was the first of its kind in Saskatoon. In order to get approval for funding from the City Council, the First Nations Board was compelled to frame their proposal as a means of integrating Indigenous newcomers into mainstream society, by providing referrals to non-Indigenous organizations (Ouart 2013:138). The Friendship Centre secured its funding from different levels of government by 1971, and began hosting organizations including sports clubs, Alcoholics Anonymous, arts groups, and the Native Youth Movement, among others. The multiplicity of volunteers involved in running the organization demonstrated the strong level of support the Friendship Centre received from the Indigenous population living in Saskatoon (Ouart 2013:139).

Participation from Indigenous peoples (primarily First Nations and Métis) in running the Centre enabled it to become a place of familiarity and community for the urban population. The organization was able to shift from the subordination of Indigenous cultures to the celebration of the diversity and distinctiveness of Indigeneity in the city. As Pamela Ouart maintains, the Friendship Centre “resisted ideas about the inevitability and desirability of assimilation by strongly supporting cultural activities and traditions” (2013:148). This specific organization set an important precedent for future Native Friendship Centres that would emerge across Canada with the objective of promoting Indigenous identities in urban spaces. It exemplifies the mobilization of urban Indigenous peoples in creating places for cultural retention that work to change the landscape of the city (Watson 2010).

### *Case study #2: Inuit experience in Ottawa*

A more recent example of an urban Indigenous organization highlights the resilience of Inuit peoples living in Ottawa. Inuit urbanization in Canada is occurring at a lower rate than other Indigenous groups, with “fewer than 30% living in cities and fewer than 20% living outside of the four territorial regions of Nunatsiavut, Inuvialuit Settlement Area, Nunavik and Nunavut” (Patrick and Tomiak 2009:57). However, there has been a steady increase of rural-urban migration from Northern areas in recent decades. The large

population of Inuit peoples in Ottawa demonstrates the fluidity of their identity that extends beyond Arctic landscapes. Much like other urban Indigenous peoples, however, their identities are ‘diasporic’ and transnational, embedded in social linkages that connect them to their urban communities and ancestral homelands (Tomiak and Patrick 2010:138). Furthermore, the urban population of Inuit in Ottawa is by no means homogenous, with each Inuk experiencing a different urban reality (Patrick et al. 2011:72). By engaging in traditional practices such as speaking Inuktitut, throat-singing and eating food deriving from the Arctic, ‘diasporic’ Inuit identities are individually and collectively reinforced in the urban environment.

Inuit-run organizations have emerged in response to the growing number of migrants to Ottawa, illustrating another form of Indigenous place-making as resistance to assimilation in the urban context. The urban Inuit population in Ottawa are fairly tight-knit and unified based on their shared cultural traditions and ties to the Arctic, as well as their common experiences of socioeconomic marginalization in the city (Patrick and Tomiak 2009:59). The distance from home and the discrimination that they encounter from non-Indigenous urban dwellers prompted the creation of several Ottawa-based Inuit organizations. Centres such as the Ottawa Inuit Children’s Centre (OICC) recognize the importance of place-making through culturally-appropriate service delivery and cultural and linguistic preservation among the urban population. These services are critical when considering the financial constraints that inhibit the Inuit from travelling up North (Tomiak and Patrick 2010:139). Patrick et al. maintains, “The social and cultural spaces provided by Aboriginal institutions are crucial sites where Aboriginal identities are shaped and valorized” (2011:81). Linguistic continuity is a key factor that urban Inuit identify as being critical to ensuring their cultural identity is transmitted to future generations, a need that urban-based programs aim to address. Having language capabilities facilitates communication with families and communities up North, which are integral to the strengthening of individual and collective Inuk identity (Patrick and Tomiak 2009:64). The OICC plays a complex role in addressing the diverse needs of the urban Inuit, providing a linkage between the social processes involved in identity construction, reinforcement, and connection in the urban Inuit experience (2009:64).

Lynda Brown and Heidi Langille demonstrate how the process of identification shifts in response to the changing social and political climate (Patrick et. al. 2011:76-78). Both Brown and Langille are first generation urban Inuit and experienced their own identity construction in the 1950s and 60s when the “general discourse downplayed the value of their Inuit identity”, both in the media and in Canadian politics (2011:78). They reported their Indigenous identities instilled them with a sense of shame and embarrassment as children (Patrick et al. 2011:76; Proulx 2006:411). However, overtime, their identities were reinforced and validated by increased engagement with their urban community. Brown has been heavily involved in Inuit-run community centres in the Ottawa region, and reports feeling proud to see an emergence of cultural performance arts in the city in recent decades. Inuit organizations have provided her and her family with a space to practice Inuktitut, as well as engage in customary dances and songs (Patrick et al. 2011:77).

Despite the difficulties in travelling up North, Brown maintains ‘diasporic’ ties to the Arctic by teaching younger generations of urban Inuit throat singing, drum dancing and other cultural activities in these community-based programs. Brown claims that these programs give kids “a sense of who they are and pride, something I didn’t have when growing up...a sense of what it means to be part of a community” (Patrick et al. 2011:77). Similarly, Langille developed a strong sense of “Inuit-ness” later on in her life when she began her career at several Ottawa-based Inuit and Pan-Indigenous organizations. She worked for the Head Start program for preschoolers at the OICC, which she claims imparts a sense of collective identity in the children (2011:77). Brown and Langille both expressed pride in ensuring cultural and traditional Inuit values were being transmitted to future generations in the urban community (2011:76-77). The experiences of these two women and their involvement in urban projects illustrate how identification is an ongoing process, continuously shaped by and adapting to wider historical, political, and social contexts. These case studies also demonstrate how the Inuit community is actively engaged in creating places in the city for friends and family members to be proud of their cultural identities.

## DISCUSSION

### *Non-Indigenous perceptions toward urbanization*

Destabilizing the colonial mentality that many Non-Indigenous peoples have internalized is critical to the processes of recognizing and creating space for Indigenous cultures in the city. The Environics Institute surveyed 250 non-Indigenous, adult Canadians in several major cities including Montreal, Edmonton and Toronto in 2009 as part of an ongoing research project tracking attitudinal changes in the public. The objective was to gauge participants' perceptions toward Indigenous communities in urban centres. A noticeable outcome was the growing awareness of Indigenous presence in the city, and the valorization of urban Indigenous issues such as health, education, and poverty (Environics 2010:140-142). Although most respondents were familiar with the mainstream historical narrative of the state and its relations with Indigenous peoples, very few were aware of the contemporary experiences of the urban population. However, the majority of those interviewed expressed the desire to expand their knowledge base, acknowledging the inadequacy of the Canadian education system in fulfilling this goal (2010:142). The failure of the school system in educating the public about issues pertaining to Indigenous peoples in both rural and urban spaces should not be understated.

Lawrence affirms how non-Indigenous perceptions of 'Indianness' in casual conversations "range from a generalized tendency to believe that Native people have died out, to high levels of resentment when Native people assert their hunting and fishing rights, to the increasing prevalence of New Age desires to appropriate Indian realities" (2004:135). The general willingness to learn more about Indigenous peoples' experiences in the contemporary context, as expressed in the Environics (2010:142) survey, provides a hopeful perspective toward shifting stereotypical mentalities. This study also illuminates the pressing need for an improved curriculum in the mainstream education system that rejects narratives of Indigenous cultures within the urban landscape.

### *Anthropological approach to the problem*

Anthropology is undergoing a paradigmatic shift in their approach to research with urban Indigenous peoples, which has influenced the ways in which urban Indigenous peoples choose to engage with academia. The topic of urban Indigeneity emphasizes the recognition of relationships, kinship networks, and community as being integral to urban Indigenous place-making and identity reinforcement (Newhouse 2011:26). Part of anthropology's decolonization process involves recognizing the agency, resilience, and diversity of urban Indigenous peoples within in Canadian cities. As Gupta and Ferguson (1997:46) state, anthropology must re-evaluate its conceptualizations of Indigenous peoples being spatially and temporally anchored, and strive to be more attentive to the way in which places manifest in the city. It is the responsibility of non-Indigenous peoples to consciously alter these internalized, racist beliefs of 'otherness', an objective in which public education systems play a pivotal role.

Newhouse argues that there must be space made for the diversity of Indigenous identities to be recognized and reinforced in an urban context: "I am not advocating urban life for everyone; what I advocate for is the ability to choose...Racism, like extreme poverty, takes away the privilege to choose" (2011: 26). Lawrence (2004) stresses that Indigenous peoples, and arguably academics, must re-conceptualize 'belonging' and 'cultural authenticity' if they are to challenge assumptions of culture being lost in the city. A participant in Lawrence's interviews maintained "that Native people had to rethink what was meant by 'Indian land'—that when Native people agreed to limit 'Indian land' to reserves, they were ignoring the fact that all the land had once been theirs" (2004:204). Recognizing Indigenous identities as 'diasporic' and fluid, rather than temporally and spatially sedentary, enables us to deconstruct colonial narratives of the past while allowing for the possibility of a different, more inclusive future (Scott 2001:96).

## CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the resiliency of urban Indigenous identities amidst the predominant narrative of urban cultural assimilation. Identities are constantly being shaped, constructed, and transformed by issues experienced by urban Indigenous peoples in

their daily lives, through processes of community building, engagement in Indigenous organizations, language and cultural revitalization in Friendship Centres, as well as other forms of place-making where collective and individual identities come to be reinforced in the city. Julian Lang articulates the way in which Indigenous peoples continue to create spaces for themselves in urban settings despite the political, social and economic barriers that they encounter in the process:

It's true, you know, that enough can't be said about how destructive the city has been to Native peoples over the generations. However, I for one have left behind many fond memories, friends, and loves in the city...and I realize that going back to the city is a lot like returning home to the family (2001:151).

It is clear, however, that the practice of decolonizing knowledge systems that perpetuate 'us' versus 'them' mentalities in mainstream and academic discourse will be an ongoing challenge. Rejecting longstanding assumptions of Indigenous urbanization being incompatible with cultural retention begins at the individual level, through the actions of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike.

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