

Concluding Thoughts

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Post-Colonial Optimism: The news is not good. The news is good. I find it difficult to make sense of the activities that are all around us. We watch and listen to the apology for the residential schools, the second apology in a decade; We read reports on the lack of potable water in First Nations communities across the country; We listen to the music of the JUNO Aboriginal music award winners; We listen to our national leaders lambast the government for their inaction on economic development, training, education, treaty rights, self government and health; We access traditional healers through Aboriginal-controlled health care centres; We use Indigenous Knowledge in our everyday work lives alongside the knowledge we gained in colleges and universities. We watch as Aboriginal peoples move into urban centres looking for better lives; as others move to reserve communities to escape from urban poverty and violence. Indians become Aboriginal and First Nations and Indigenous and Métis and Inuit. Cree become Neyaw; MicMac become Mik'maq; Eskimo become Inuit; Blackfoot become Siksika; Ojibway become Anishnaabe (or Anishnabeq or Anishnawbe).

Study after study documents the difficult living conditions that many of our brothers and sisters face: racism and prejudice, low incomes, poor education that doesn't provide the skills necessary to work in a rapidly changing economy, poor physical and mental health, poor housing, to list just a few of the many indicators that measure and report on our lives. When examined over a lengthy

period of time, there is a distinct worsening of social and economic conditions. There is no shortage of explanations for this phenomenon. They are all correct in some way or another.

The statistics however do not tell the whole story; What they are not able to do is to illuminate the spirit and ethos of the people they report on. It is here that I find a case for optimism: the increase in the number of small businesses indicates a reawakening of the entrepreneurial spirit among Aboriginal peoples; the increase in the number of Aboriginal artists, writers, film-makers is a reawakening of the Indigenous imagination; the move to use Indigenous Knowledge as a central informing aspect of daily life, both at home and work is a reawakening of the Indigenous mind; and the Aboriginal governance movement is bringing aboriginal lives back under aboriginal stewardship. The healing movement represents a desire to deal with the mental and physical effects of colonialism. Our political leaders work long and hard to overcome the political legacy of colonialism and to create places of dignity and respect for us within Canada.

As Aboriginal peoples, we are now aware of colonialism and its legacy. We are determined to do something about it and in collaboration with many non-Aboriginal peoples, are working to ensure that colonization does not happen again. We are imbued with what I call a “post-colonial consciousness.” Anger at past actions is channelled into concrete effort by individuals, community and political leaders, Aboriginal organizations and governments as well as many allies outside our communities and territories.

This journal, by showcasing CANDO economic development award winners and the lessons from experience, illustrates ‘post-colonial consciousness’ in action. The work of economic development officers directed at improving the quality of Aboriginal lives is the type of practical, direct action that is necessary and important if improvements are to take place. It also makes an important contribution to the development of a post-colonial Canada by bringing Aboriginal peoples into the economic life of the country in significant ways, helping to end the century and a half of marginalization since Confederation.

Animating the work of economic development officers is a vision of Aboriginal life; one that sees Aboriginal peoples as self determining, confident, assertive, prideful, respected, able to share in the wealth that this land now represents, and participating in meaningful ways in the economic life of the country and above all, able to pursue their own dreams as best they can. This is also post-colonial consciousness in action.

I see this vision everywhere in Aboriginal country today, in the everyday work of business people, Aboriginal community leaders and politicians, students, teachers, nurses, and artists to name only a few. Post-colonial consciousness and its effects are not yet captured by the statistics. Its effects are only starting to be felt within our communities. I am optimistic that the next decade will see real improvements in the quality of Aboriginal lives. Our journal editors and editorial committee members will continue to promote, document, and share these efforts and the improvements they bring.