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Article

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Editor's Introduction to *aboriginal policy studies*

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Welcome to the first ever issue of *aboriginal policy studies*. The mandate of *aboriginal policy studies* is to publish original, scholarly, and policy-relevant research on issues relevant to Métis, non-status Indians, and urban Aboriginal peoples in Canada. In this context, we encourage the submission of articles by and for a wide audience of scholars, researchers, community activists, and policymakers. Though focused on Canada, the journal welcomes comparative work from an international Indigenous context pertinent to Canadian readers, and encourages a similarly broad scope of methodological approaches. The scope is relatively straightforward in the sense that it clearly demarcates its subject matter in a manner most scholars and policy actors who explore Aboriginal issues would probably recognize, but does so in such a way that scholars and policy actors will also recognize its deceptive simplicity. The boundaries and dynamics produced in the last century and a half of Aboriginal policymaking in and outside of Canada have tended to marginalize specific policy dynamics, and that is what we seek to explore in *aboriginal policy studies*.

Why a journal like this, and why now? Several reasons, in particular, have shaped the journey and conceptual parameters of *aboriginal policy studies*. "Locally," the idea behind increasing policy knowledge about Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal issues cannot be separated from the creation of the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and non-Status Indians (OFI) and its subsequent move from the Privy Council Office to under the broad umbrella of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) in 2004. Recognizing the gap in policy knowledge about the populations included in their mandate, OFI first set about creating an Aboriginal policy research initiative in collaboration with the Institute on

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Governance, an Ottawa-based think tank. That initiative, which concluded in the spring of 2010, yielded the Aboriginal Policy Research Series, a set of publications by new and established scholars working on independent research.[1] *aboriginal policy studies* was established in the wake of this achievement. It was developed by the OFI's Research Advisory Circle as a scholarly, arms-length successor to this prior initiative that, as an academic journal, would provide an accessible and enduring venue for high quality research and analysis. Like the original series, it is meant to encourage policy discussion and debate in the field among a wide range of readers, and editorial decisions are entirely independent of government influence.

Funding for the journal is provided by the Faculty of Native Studies and Library and Information Sciences at the University of Alberta and the Office of the Federal Interlocutor for Métis and non-status Indians. The only conditions placed on the journal were that it should reflect the broad interests of policy actors and academics and that it should be disseminated as widely as possible. The first of these goals is the responsibility of the editor and editorial board, who are some of the most experienced practitioners and leading scholars in this field, and of you, the readers of this first issue. We invite you most warmly to join our venture by submitting your work. Submissions may be journal articles, which are subject to blind peer review, or commentaries, described below.

The second task, of wide dissemination, was accomplished by making *aboriginal policy studies* exclusively online and "open-access," downloadable at no cost to the users.

The editorial board believes that *aboriginal policy studies* is warranted by the emerging demographic, policy-specific, and conceptual dynamics of Canadian society. While the policy ethos of Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal peoples has long existed in the shadows of "Indian Affairs" policies, the last decade has seen a shift in how these categories are understood and positioned in the overall "state" of Aboriginal policy. Demographically, for example, the "Métis" population has undergone a massive (and, from a traditional demographic perspective, perplexing) increase over the past decade, from slightly more than 200,000 to slightly less than 400,000 people between 1996 and 2006. Demographers have sought to emphasize the impact of "ethnic mobility" on this rise (i.e., the phenomenon by which people change their ethnic affiliation from one census to the next) and have pointed to a number of different events that might be fueling this increase—the recognition of Métis in the 1982 Constitution

Act, the recent debates around whether to "pardon" after the fact the Métis leader Louis Riel, and, perhaps most importantly, the significance of the 2003 Supreme Court of Canada *Powley* decision, which recognized the collective harvesting rights of the Métis, a "distinct" Aboriginal people according to the Canadian Constitution. Additionally, the category of "non-status Indian" has been affected in direct and obvious ways by changes in the Indian Act over the past century (for example, Bill C 31 in 1985 and this year's Bill C 3, enacted in response to the *McIvor* case).

Finally, these changes are taking place in the midst of major demographic change in the size and nature of Canada's urban Aboriginal communities. The proportion of Aboriginal people living in urban areas is now larger than any other locale (including on First Nations) and, perhaps more importantly, urban Aboriginal community and culture increasingly constitute an important engine of Aboriginal "meaning-making" in contemporary Canadian society. And, while we should not oversell their detachment from more familiar concepts and locales, neither should we undersell the distinctiveness in urban locales of what anthropologist Marshall Sahlins has elsewhere termed the "indigenization of modernity"—how Indigenous communities have made homes for themselves in urban landscapes in ways that do not merely mimic communities already there but, rather, constitute new and complex forms of Indigeneity.

To state the issue more bluntly, researchers still know far less than they know about the facts and issues in this field. In the urban context, questions about regional variation; program and policy sustainability; needs versus rights-based evaluations; nuanced, geographically distinctive data; and long-term evaluations of existing policies, among other matters, all still require answers. To date, this field has not drawn the weight of intellectual labour or the funding characteristic of more longstanding fields of study. Also, Aboriginal communities (urban included) are among the most challenging of research environs, for legitimate, historically specifiable reasons. In light of these realities, existing urban Aboriginal policy research is highly specific on regional, provincial, and even municipal levels. These disparate and largely isolated clusters of research are animated by differing levels and kinds of involvement by Aboriginal people, communities, and organizations; a dizzying array of methodological formulations (with associated heterogeneity in the relations of data design, collection, analysis, dissemination, and subsequent evaluation); and different (and sometimes even contradictory) epistemological and ontological premises about the

categories of people and policies under study. While such diversity is necessary and normal, especially given the regional and even municipal diversity of urban Aboriginal populations, it does complicate comparative study. This, in turn, has stunted policy evaluation and curtailed "best practices" discussions.

Policy issues specific to Métis and non-status Indians have suffered the effects of a similar gap in policy research. Some might object to placing these two categories side-by-side—Métis nationalists in particular will object to the fact that this juxtaposition confuses the boundaries between their relationships to government, not to mention muddying their internal boundaries. Yet as Métis scholar Paul Chartrand (2002) has pointed out, Métis and non-status Indians have been, for much of the twentieth century, different sides of the same policy coin; indeed, some of the membership of Métis communities and provincial Métis affiliates of the Métis nation is made up of individuals who lost status under Indian Act regulations (a situation further complicated by the fact that, culturally, many of these individuals might have self-identified as Métis, regardless). More generally, Métis policy issues are additionally complicated by the ways in which colonial policies have positioned Métis identity in terms of our "mixedness." In particular, the 2003 Supreme Court of Canada Powley decision has (perhaps forever) muddied these waters by failing to require a claimantto have an's ancestor's historical self-identification as Métis in order for him or her to claim a contemporary Métis identity. Instead, the decision requires instead mere "mixed ancestry" and separateness from historical "Indian" communities (as though "Indians," "Métis" or "Inuit" were categories that made the same sense historically that we imbue them with today). Such "racialization" enormously complicates the boundaries of Métis identity in its legal and cultural contexts enormously and shapes the kinds of policy directions that organizations dedicated to improving Métis' quality of life are likely to pursue. In *aboriginal policy studies,* we hope to provide a venue for the consideration of such issues, enabling them to be debated in the context of evidence-based policy analysis.

There are already a number of journals that explore the complex issues pertaining to Aboriginal policy. *Canadian Public Policy* and the *Journal of Urban Research* have touched upon some of the policy issues we aim to explore more centrally here. Similarly, Aboriginal policy issues have been more centrally explored by the *Indigenous Policy Journal*, *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, the *Journal of Aboriginal*

Economic Development, and ***Pimatisiwin:*** *A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, to name but a few. In association with various partners, the Strategic Research Directorate for Indian and Northern Affairs Canada has produced a number of volumes dedicated to policy issues relating to historical, demographic, educational, economic development, health, gender, healing, housing, homelessness, governance, and legal aspects of Aboriginal policy issues. What separates *aboriginal policy studies* from these other projects is our specific conceptual focus and emphasis on issues in relation to Métis, non-status, and urban Aboriginal policy issues. We believe it's difficult (though, obviously, not impossible) to discuss Aboriginal policy relations *except* in a context that includes conceptually one of the foci of this journal. But, while we believe this specific focus warrants its own unified conceptual space for discussion, we offer this belief in an open-ended and processual, rather than proscriptive, manner: *aboriginal policy studies* is meant to *build* a field, not delimit it. With this in mind, let me set out some of the general objectives we hope to accomplish in the coming issues of *aboriginal policy studies*.

More Equitable Research Relations

Predominantly, Aboriginal people have remained outside of research conducted and directed about them, and they remain notably absent from the policy and programming process of planning, agenda setting, and evaluation. This is particularly the case in urban, Métis, and non-status Indian contexts. Métis, for example, comprise only a tiny fraction of community-based Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grants; a similarly small proportion of health-related research funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research pertains to Métis at all, let alone includes them in research relations. This is so despite the fact that existing research demonstrates that when Aboriginal organizations participate in research planning and execution, more effective, flexible, and culturally appropriate (read: more *useful*) policy is supported. Given that this is the case, why is it that so little urban Aboriginal policy includes Aboriginal organizational or policy voice? How can the various levels of government fund the kinds of projects that assure accountability while still producing high quality outcomes? How can we ingrain what Todd (2003) has called institutional relations of mutual respect into the common-sense practices of Aboriginal policy research relating to Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal issues? What role

does or should treaty relationships play in these contexts?

Challenging and Contextualizing Data Collection, Analysis, and Dissemination

Existing data analyses are only beginning to capture the variability among and within the categories of communities and population of interest to *aboriginal policy studies,* whether between provinces and cities or within the populations itself, or whether they are in quantitative or qualitative form. Does an increasing polarization within the Aboriginal population exist? Is an Aboriginal middle class emerging? If so, what are its demographic and attitudinal characteristics? Do we need sober discussion about the limits of *statistical* data collection and analysis for capturing the kinds of information we need to gain knowledge about our most pressing issues? How do we transmit information into the hands of the people who need it most and how do we do so in an idiom that requires as little specialized knowledge as possible? How can we use qualitative research to extend the insights possible with statistical information and in what ways can it shape the statistical categories through which we collect information quantitatively? Finally, in what ways can historical research contextualize and strengthen our interpretations of contemporary data collection?

A More Nuanced and Geographically Specific Evaluation of the Actors Involved in Producing Aboriginal Policy

Criticizing jurisdictional infighting between the different orders of government as a barrier to long term, stable policies has become a common strategy in the urban Aboriginal policy research field. While this is a legitimate critique, policy research needs, more systematically, to delineate the various institutional and organizational actors involved in directing, producing, and disseminating policy relating to Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal people. Too often, blaming jurisdiction has taken the place of actually examining how policy relations play out: do jurisdictional issues play out the same way in all provinces? In all cities? Does the presence of different Aboriginal organizational actors influence the extent to which jurisdictional issues can be overlooked in practice if not official policy? What does this tell us about how existing policy can be elided, piggybacked on or outright defied? What role does or should the federal government

take in these contexts and what role should they take? In this context, more robust discussion is needed about what policy initiatives appear to work, which do not and why.

Regional Specificity of the Urban/Rural Dynamic

While the most recent discussions of the urban dynamic have highlighted the symbiotic relationship between the urban and the rural and, particularly, between urban and reserve residence, how does this relationship play out across regions? Certainly, different provinces and cities hold different relationships with First Nations; how can we capture some of the regional diversity in these relationships? To use the context within which I live, for example, how does the "urban experience" of University of Alberta First Nations students who live an hour out of Edmonton compare with Inuit students who may live a six-hour, $3,000 plane ride away from Iqaluit in Nunavut? Moreover, to what extent do the tensions between nation-based and "community of interest" approaches play themselves out in different regions? Finally, to what extent can we think through these issues in an international comparative context—that is, what can a discussion about the dynamics of commonality and specificity across region, nation, and even continent enrich our discussions about Aboriginal policy making?

Definitions

We require a broader and more basic discussion to assess the current hierarchy of views on terms like "Métis," "First Nation," "urban Aboriginal," "community," "policy," and even "research." Like all terms, these are not neutral and the meaning and context we imbue them with shape in powerful ways the policy relations they produce and issue from.

Policy Barriers

We need also to examine the structural and jurisdictional barriers to the creation of lateral partnerships by Aboriginal people living within cities and provinces. What impedes and what advances community cooperation? What definitions of "community" anchor these kinds of arguments and how does the different levels of power within Aboriginal policy contexts shape the ability of various policy actors to carry out their policy delivery?

A Respect for Conceptual "Density" Rather Than "Difference" of Aboriginal Policy Relations

Finally, *aboriginal policy studies* invites thinking not predisposed to proving the "difference" of Aboriginal peoples but rather, that assumes a conceptual *density*. Though this may sound "pie in the sky," assuming the density, rather than the difference, of Aboriginal people (whether Métis, non-status Indian, or urban Aboriginal) nevertheless holds enormous consequences for how we think about the construction, creation, and delivery of Aboriginal policy pertaining to these categories. In particular—and in the best legacy of collaborative policymaking and delivery—we hope that contributions will explore the appropriateness and utility of these policy relations *without* prescriptively presupposing what they should look like. This means that we should not assume that "culturally appropriate" Aboriginal policy will always differ from that of non-Aboriginal policy (although it may and, indeed, very often does), nor should we pass judgment on the "authenticity" of Aboriginal policy that seems recognizable in non-Aboriginal contexts. As political sociologist Claude Denis argues in an Aboriginal context, "it is not so much difference that matters, as separateness—and indeed wanting to self-govern expresses a will to be separate, autonomous, whether or not you want to do things differently than your neighbour" (Denis 1997, 82). Pre-supposing the density of Aboriginal/settler relations requires that we approach the issues with an open mind and an appreciation for the complexity and specificity of context within which policy making and delivery may be carried out.

Let me hasten to state that the objectives outlined above are in no way intended as a "laundry list" for scholars and practitioners to scrutinize in order to locate their own research interests. Rather, we envision *aboriginal policy studies* as an open and inviting format for exploring the *full* diversity and complexity of Aboriginal policy issues relating to Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal issues. This includes challenges of all sorts. We encourage contemporary and historical discussions; Canadian and international discussion; narrow and broad understandings of policy; and discussions that challenge the differentiation between urban and rural, on and off reserve. There are no archetypical journal submissions: in coming issues, for example, scholars present research that explores issues relating to violence against women, urban Aboriginal economic development,

Aboriginal gangs, the role of racism in natural resource policy, and historical Métis fur trade policy. We aim to reflect the full range of research that falls within our broad mandate. Moreover, we hope to offer an explicitly interdisciplinary platform where contributors will be able to strengthen and deepen the debate around Aboriginal policy, taking as their object of analysis policy issues specific to Métis, non-status Indian, and urban Aboriginal policy rather than simply understanding them as an "add on" to broader Aboriginal policy issues. Having said that, we of course recognize that in certain contexts, like understanding treaty rights, such connections may form an integral component of the discussion.

Likewise, although we hope to complicate the thinking around these issues, we are committed to making the contributions to *aboriginal policy studies* as friendly as possible to the widest audience possible and as such, open to non-specialist readers. Preference will be given to plainly written scholarly works in which the use of jargon is limited to the absolutely necessary. We hope that members of the general community, practitioners, and scholars will find the research contributions here useful to their own work.

In addition to scholarly articles, the journal will include a *Foundational Documents* section that will include some of the key documents in our policy area. In this inaugural issue, for example, we include the 1969 White Paper on Indian Policy, a position paper that, while justifiably critiqued, is less well read despite its central symbolic position (see Newhouse 2000). Each issue of the journal will include similar foundational works and represents one of *aboriginal policy studies'* contributions to building the field by making such documents more accessible to readers.

aboriginal policy studies also offers a "plain reading" commentary section in each journal issue, where one or more people with broad experience relating to relevant policy issues will provide a contribution concerned not so much in locating itself within an academic literature but, rather, on providing practice-based reflection on specific policy issues or speculation about future policy trends.

While these constitute our founding objectives, ultimately the success or failure of *aboriginal policy studies* will depend on the extent to which the journal resonates with our readers, contributors, and reviewers. We certainly hope that you will find *aboriginal policy studies* useful and we welcome any suggestions for how to improve, deepen, or even simplify our discussions and the modes of their evaluation. We also would also appreciate

your suggestions as to how to disseminate any knowledge gained to as wide an audience as possible.

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aboriginal policy studies' first issue came out of an all-day workshop held in Montreal, PQ at the 2010 Congress of Social Science and Humanities Annual Meetings. That workshop featured eleven separate presentations and, of those eleven, five contributed to the first issue. Each issue of most journals possesses its own distinctive personality and the first issue of *aboriginal policy studies* is no different – in this case, the issue explores, in a nuanced fashion, a number of distinct elements relating to urban Aboriginality in Canada's cities. It begins with Mary Jane Norris and Stewart Clatworthy's review of urban Aboriginal migration spanning the last half century. Examining twelve different locales, Norris and Clatworthy demonstrate distinctive differences based on population size, components of growth, and periods of urbanization, adding significant nuance to our demographic understanding that urban Aboriginality is not a "one size fits all" phenomenon.

More conceptually, Evelyn Peters' article discusses in some detail a bulk of the work around urban Aboriginal identities in the post-RCAP period (from the 1993 urban-specific report that preceded the final report). She explores the veritable explosion of research around this broad topic and notes some of its changes in focus and advances. In particular, she notes the movement away from the conceptual idea that "urban" and "Aboriginal" are incompatible. More legally, Ian Peach discusses some of the promise and the difficulties of using Canadian courts to advance Aboriginal policy more generally, and the specific impact this approach has had upon Métis, non-status, and urban Aboriginal peoples. He notes that while non-status Indians, Métis, and Aboriginal women have made real gains through the courts, the expensive and incremental form of change it engenders comes with its own costs. Similarly, Yale Belanger explores how Canada's 2010 endorsement of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* produces new tensions and challenges in the context of urban Aboriginal self-determination efforts.

The final peer-reviewed submission for *aboriginal policy studies'*

first issue includes a discussion by Frances Abele and Katherine Graham exploring the impact of the now-intergenerational lack of explicit federal government policy activity around urban Aboriginal issues in Canada's cities. In documenting this policy history, they suggest four areas for future discussion: issues around urban Aboriginal political self-determination; the relative powerlessness of cities in the larger context of Canadian federalism; the diversity of urban Aboriginal residents; and the intergenerational legacy of categories of Aboriginal policy populations in locales where they no long hold the same salience as perhaps they once did. Finally, we are honoured that Ellen Gabriel agreed to write the journal's first commentary. In the context of her long experience of political activism with her community, with Aboriginal women in Quebec and with Aboriginal issues more generally, she explores the impact of what she sees as the encrusted and calcified categories used to govern Aboriginal populations and their impacts on the Aboriginal women's movement in Canada, both on and off-reserve.

As you can see from these contributions, urban Aboriginal issues are likely to play a large role in the debates and discussions undertaken in this journal. However, given the field's newness and growth, we fully expect these and future articles to produce as many questions as they do answers. We see this as a good thing, and we hope that our readers will receive it in the spirit with which it is intended – to encourage high-quality, broadly based, and interdisciplinary debate and discussion around a set of social relations that, while certainly older than policy makers realize, nonetheless remain nascent and emerging. Again, we invite any comments and constructive criticisms you may have.

(Endnotes)

1. To access those papers, please visit: http://iog.ca/en/knowledge-areas/aboriginal- governance/aboriginal-policy-research-initiative

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