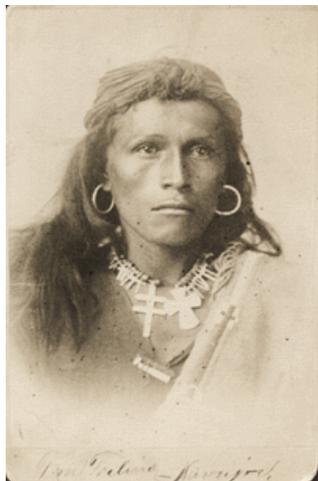


History of Native Women

By Patricia Nadeau

“I dream for our liberation in our land... I dream for our people to stop dying, to stop feeling so alienated and so marginalized. I dream for our collective and individual well-being... We need liberation not only from the colonial legacy of the proverbial white man, we need liberation from our untruths” (LaRocque, 1975).

This powerful quote certainly represents the numerous struggles Native people have had to go through for many years. It also represents the dreams that are part of their lives and that will hopefully come true someday. Native people have encountered plenty of difficulties for many years and still today, people try to deal with those differences and stereotypes that have been exaggeratedly labelled to their communities.



Canada certainly helped in the improvement of the native's condition of life, but the country has also been a problem for some communities. Indeed, the Canadian government has always refused to recognize these Native communities under the *Indian Act*. The Mi'kmaq community is a great example of this problem and according to Anderson and Lawrence, they are not the only ones. “The struggles of Newfoundland Mi'kmaq people, however, are not unique. From

non-status Algonquins in Ontario to Métis communities out West, there are hundreds of Native communities across Canada whose very existence is threatened because of the country's denial of fiduciary responsibility to them” (Anderson & Lawrence, 2003). Meanwhile, the women who remain in these communities nurture the traditions and hopes for the future, and they continue to welcome their migrant community members whenever they manage to return.

Today, Native women face many issues stemming from the circumstances and events of Canada colonial history. The imposition of a patriarchal system on egalitarian indigenous societies also figures among the numerous difficulties encountered by Native women. Despite differences, aboriginal women have some common concerns. Like aboriginal men, they are concerned with the many effects of colonization on their nations, communities, families and individuals. “Reeling from the loss of their land throughout the 19th century, of their traditional livelihood and self-sufficiency, from the overpowering social, economic and political marginalization, the racial stereotyping, discrimination, and the loss of culture, language and often pride, the aboriginal people of Canada entered into a period of abject poverty and powerlessness” (McNab, 2009). As stated by Albers “A lack of education, skills, employment, opportunities and income affects many aboriginal communities, both urban and rural, and injures women and their children”(Albers, 1983). Aboriginal women clearly express the need to resume self-determination, acquire and develop resources to improve their lives and generate opportunities and chances for themselves and their children.

Moreover, Native women face unique problems that were unfortunately fed by stereotypes of them perpetuated by European men since the earliest contacts. “The image of the Indian princess gave way to that of the promiscuous "squaw" which renders indigenous women vulnerable to violence and mistreatment, and vindicates their violators” (Acoose, 1995).

Unfortunately, extremely high rates of domestic violence afflict native women throughout North America. Indeed, the Aboriginal Peoples Survey carried out by Statistics Canada (1993) reported that 40% of respondents believed family violence was a problem in their community. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba (1990) cites findings that 1 in 3 aboriginal women suffers abuse at the hands of her partner.



As stated by Acoose, “In much of Anglophone Canadian fiction, Indigenous women are misinterpreted in images that perpetuate racist and sexist stereotype” (Acoose, p. 55). The propagation of such stereotypes helped increase the stereotypical image of indigenous women as helpless victims which fosters cultural attitudes that encourage sexual, verbal and psychological abuses toward these women.

Hopefully, Indigenous people’s wisdom will help their community improve the situation of women and permit their image to be embellished. From now on and forever more, a wind of respect and equality should blow over these communities to enable them to live without any alienation and rejection from others.

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