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15th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE ON THE CANADIAN FRANCOPHONIE
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Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

OUR LANGUAGES, OUR MOTHERS, OUR LAND

Disregarded by History

Text prepared by Serge Bouchard, anthropologist, writer, presenter and conference speaker, for the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie, as part of his keynote address entitled :
“ Francophonie and Aboriginal languages in Canada: from past to future “
delivered on June 22nd, 2010, in Yellowknife.

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One day we will have to rewrite the history of Canada or, we might also say, the history of America as a whole. We will have to rewrite it with the positive goal of us all acknowledging one another. Because so far, our tendency to forget and a certain amount of bad faith have misled us. When we speak about languages and cultures, it is often in superficial terms. Can today's Canadians refer with ease to the Amerindian languages spoken in their country from 1500 to 2000 – Athapascan, Algonquian, Iroquoian, Lakota, the Salish languages, Inuktitut, and so many more? Can they even name the dead languages, or those that have survived, are still spoken, or will be spoken tomorrow? Those that are dying before our eyes in 2010? I don't believe that we as Canadians are concerned about these questions. And that is really too bad. The same is true of French, which has often been viewed as an anomaly, an intrusive presence, a peripheral phenomenon that had to be accommodated. And very few people today know that French and the Amerindian languages have long kept company and frequently shared the same fate. From 1600 to 1945, it was Francophones who most often learned and spoke North America's Amerindian languages, from Acadia to California, from Pittsburgh to Great Slave Lake.

The languages of America have never received the attention that, in all fairness, was their due. I say "the languages" because there are many of them, Aboriginal languages, living languages that were so crucial to exploration, trade, and discovery, to the very survival of the explorers and traders, colonists and *voyageurs*, to the creation of wealth, and therefore to the lives of all those men and women who may be said to have built this country. The entire history of America is called into question when we approach it in a way that is respectful of its original cultural and linguistic diversity. The faculty of speech is certainly the most marvelous part of being human, because words reflect consciousness. Amongst humans, consciousness of the world is always culture-based. Do we have a sense of cultural diversity and pride in that diversity? Do we instinctively delight in our pluralism, finding ourselves better off with diversity than without it? Are we as sensitive to cultural diversity as we are to the world's natural and biological diversity?

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Languages are valuable assets. We can never say enough about how closely language is linked to culture. In fact, we never do say it. Generally, people don't think about it or may not even talk about it at all. It's rare to discuss the nature, richness, and beauty of a language, let alone reflect on the value of the cultural identities emerging from it. This is not part of the current rationale.

To understand one another well, it is essential to talk of the importance of culture. To understand one another better, it is essential to know what we're talking about, to at least know what a cultural reality is. Culture is not a legal status, nor is it a superficial traditionalism or some form of valid ID, like a passport. No. A culture is a mother tongue. The mother tongue is a matrix within which the represented world is organized, a world conveyed through the intelligent memory of a community recorded in time and space, not to mention history. In anthropology, we speak of a worldview.

A culture is also and above all a nostalgia, a frame of reference, an anchor point. Each individual refers to a core cultural identity, which is a discriminating, complex memory of landscapes, of mother-tongue sounds, of smells, lights, atmospheres, faces, stories told and retold, and the music of everyday life. Food, drink, aromas, everything passes through this filter, from sentiments to remarkable deeds. Often the details escape us, the timeline blurs, the objective perspective is lacking. And that is just fine. Nostalgia is, conversely, a subjective movement, stronger than we are, a wave as vague as it is profound and powerful. This movement defines us, one by one, because all human beings are already caught up in their own intimate nostalgia, which is that of their younger days. We are each on a journey through time, and when we age, the feeling of being on a journey becomes stronger, and it becomes increasingly clear that we cannot retrace our steps.

People speak the same way they walk, without thinking about it. We speak *our* language naturally, as though there were nothing to it. We don't think about each word, or each expression. Everything comes to us automatically. It's when we begin learning a second language that the strangeness, the difficulty, and even the marvelousness of the thing really strike us. Everything surprises us — the phonetics, certainly, but also the grammatical pairings, word constructions, mysterious semantics, and finally, the native speakers' total competence. It is amazing to see someone who masters a language, his language, perform like a musical virtuoso who elegantly and powerfully puts all the resources of harmonies, symphonies, and melodies to use, pushing his instrument to its limits. We are always in exile from our youth, nostalgic for our childhood, which makes us all displaced people, because we are only passing through. Even without moving, even without leaving our village, we humans are condemned to exile. We will have been on our life's journey, and our experience is universal.

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For one reason or another, the general trend among states in world history has been toward homogeneity and standardization. In the nation-building process, languages have been left to die; when they did not die on their own, they were made illegal and prohibited, in hopes of well and truly killing them off. This seems to be part of the maliciousness of humanity: one language often ends up suppressing the others. The phenomenon is not peculiar to Canada, but is universal, in time and space. However, on the particular subject of Canada's history, both French and English indulged in excess and exaggeration. Quebec was traditionally Francophone and Catholic, nostalgic for dusty old France. So New France worked furiously to convey this "national" and religious fervour in its toponymy. All the names of saints were used. It was almost a miracle that any Amerindian or authentically Franco-Amerindian place names survived among the Saint-Tites, Saint-Lins, Saint-Jeans, Saint-Maurices, Saint-Hyacinthes, Saint-Télésphores, and so on that would fill page after page. Quebec was therefore "Saint" Lower Canada, more French than the French, more Catholic than the Pope.

In very British Upper Canada, it was the same exercise, carried out with the same zeal. But in lieu of the Catholic saints, all the resources of the monarchy were used, from King's this to Queen's that, through the Reginas and Windsors of this world, the Victorias, the Prince Edwards, and the Yorks. The names of towns and villages from all over the English countryside were even imported in a fanatical effort to establish superiority by branding the landscape with familiar names. In this cultural and linguistic duel, where the nostalgic nationalist elites from the two mother countries boldly went head to head, the Amerindian languages and cultures, as well as the Métis world, took a beating. Fortunately, through oversight and chance, some great place names – Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Canada – survived the frenzy.

Why this one-upmanship in exclusion and exclusiveness? Was the memory failing, or the heart absent? The real reason probably lies in the idea of esteem. From there, an historical dynamic will be seen to develop around high and low esteem. Who do we hold in the highest esteem, and do we believe we are all valuable in our respective diversities? Recognition of the Other involves general esteem for his identity in History and in the future. We all have a wonderful shared history. But do we know how to value it? Our communities were looked down upon.

The shared history has been buried in memory, a victim of the official versions produced by the authorities – the national legends of the Americans, English-Canadians, or *Québécois* – ill-intentioned versions designed to promote a single viewpoint to the detriment of any others. The result is a persistent silence about the First Nations, the Métis and, especially, the Franco-Americans. The great Francophone dream of the West, Manitoba and Assiniboia; the Métis utopia; the flavour of a New World; and the Amerindian tragedies are too quickly passed over. It is this silence that must be broken. New stories would have to be told, and Yellowknife is a good place to start.

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In Canadian popular culture, Alexander Mackenzie is a remarkable explorer who travelled to the Arctic and Pacific oceans during the heroic eras of discovery. He gave his name to "the great river", known as the Deh Cho in Athapascan. But Alexander Mackenzie didn't do anything all on his own. The Dene helped him visit their country. And before this Scot, the Dene had welcomed and introduced to their country countless French-Canadians, who also took part in the official explorer's explorations.

Alexander Mackenzie was the "Lewis & Clark" of Canada; but Canada never had the mythic sense of the United States. The Canadian epic remembers, of course, and English-Canadians are very proud of Mackenzie, without, however, having figured out how to mythologize his explorations, American-style. He is resolutely unknown to Francophones, who consequently are unaware that it was French-Canadians who largely enabled him to succeed. For his 1793 voyage to the Pacific, reached at Bella Coola on July 22, Mackenzie was accompanied by Charles Doucette, Joseph Landry, François Beaulieu, Baptiste Bisson, François Courtois, Jacques Beauchamp, and a Dene family.

At that time, the Scots of Montreal, not content with waging war against the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), were warring amongst themselves. There was the Frobisher group, the McTavish group, and that of John Gregory and Peter Pond. Alexander Mackenzie worked for John Gregory's group. Peter Pond had discovered the rich Lake Athabasca Basin, where he had established Fort Chipewyan. It became clear that the fratricidal war amongst the Scots would lead to losses for everyone but the HBC. In 1787, it was decided to form a single company uniting all factions, the North West Company (NWC).

From Montreal, the NWC would explore the entire continent for the benefit of the fur trade and to fight the hegemony of the HBC. Its route began in Lachine and ended in infinity. It was the route taken by explorers, *coureurs de bois,* men who had "gone native," rebels, and, ultimately, the *voyageurs*, paddling canoes from Montreal or the North. As far as Lake Superior, it was the old route familiar to the French, recognized by Étienne Brûlé in 1630; followed by Des Groseillers and Pierre Esprit Radisson, who went as far as Minnesota and Nipigon; and retraced in 1673 by Nicolas Perrot, Guillaume Couture, and Louis Jolliet. In 1737, Pierre Gaultier (de La Vérendrye) and his sons went further west into the unknown, venturing beyond Lake Superior's Grand Portage to Rainy Lake, Lake of the Woods, and on to the Dakotas and the Canadian Prairies.

Fifty years later, the Scots were continuing the voyages, with the help and knowledge of the French-Canadians, who were hardened to the land. Mackenzie's voyages were part of this picture. In 1787, when the North West Company was founded, Mackenzie was put in charge of the operations in the Lake Athabasca District, a vast, fur-rich territory that Peter Pond had discovered. At Lake Athabasca, he oversaw the complete construction of Fort Chipewyan. Two years later, he undertook his first great exploratory voyage, heading due north beyond Great Slave Lake to the Arctic Ocean. With him were a dozen Dene (Who were they? Did they go down in history?); four French-Canadians, two of whom were accompanied by their Amerindian wives; and a German. The voyage was made during the summer of 1789 and lasted 102 days, there and back. The team had reached the delta of "the great river". Joseph Landry, Leroux, and Charles Doucet were on that first voyage. The Mackenzie River, as we said earlier, is known as the *Deh Cho* in Dene. With no offence to the memory of the Scottish explorer, it should be called the *Deh Cho River*, because Mackenzie and his group had crossed the territories of the Dene nations, and those territories were already named in detail in the Athapascan languages. A case in point: the Missouri River is not called the Lewis River.

In 1791, after six years of service in the field, Mackenzie took a break and went back to Scotland, where he spent an entire year learning how to use instruments to map *terra incognita*. Upon his return to Fort Chipewyan in 1792, he prepared another great expedition, this time venturing westward, beyond the imposing barrier of the Rockies. He wanted to find the route to the Pacific. For this epic and potentially mythic voyage, nine men were at his side: Alexander Mackay, the *Canadiens* Joseph Landry, Charles Doucet, Jacques Beauchamp, François Beaulieu, Baptiste Bisson, and François Courtois, as well as two anonymous Dene.

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As early as 1780, French-Canadians working for the fur companies were rebels, and many of them settled in the territories in which they worked, in the American or Canadian West or the Northwest. Often they were quite solitary *voyageurs*, quite eccentric individuals. Being illiterate, they kept no written record of their vast and profound cultural experiences. They married Amerindian women from various nations, and, instead of books and reports, they left progeny. Their names were Lafrance, Ménard, Primeau, Laframboise, Janis, La Fantaisie, and so on.

They were present in the Great Northwest and are part of the history of the Dene. François Beaulieu married a woman from the Shintagotine nation (mountain people) and never returned east. He was the father of the first Franco-Dene Métis we know of, François Beaulieu the Second, born in 1771. That is to say, French-Canadians were living in the region long before the arrival of Peter Pond and the Scots. François Beaulieu the Second was a well-known personality in his time. Employed by the North West Company at Fort Chipewyan, he was a guide and advisor to Arctic explorer John Franklin. He was baptized by Father Taché in 1848, at the age of 76. At the time, he was living in the vast region of Yellowknife (Sombak'e). He died in 1872, five years after Confederation, at the venerable age of 101.

Think about these family names, all found amongst the Dene of today: Pierre *Catholique*, Vital *Bonnetrouge*, Jimmy *Bruneau*, Madeline *Gibot*, Frank *Laviolette*, Eddie *Bellerose*, the prophet Joseph *Pierre*, George *Blondin*, Jerry *Antoine*, Raymond *Sonfrère*, Julia *Crapeau*, Jacques Nade *Beaulieu*, Patricia *Modeste*, Wilbert *Kochon*, Julienne *Taureau*, and Alfred *Baillargeon*. Leader Steve Beaulieu is a direct descendant of François Beaulieu, who accompanied Mackenzie on his two voyages.

In his ill-fated and extreme explorations of the Arctic tundra in 1820, Franklin had the following men with him: a certain Saint-Germain, a certain Beauparlant, Solomon Bélanger, Jean-Baptiste Bélanger, Emmanuel Cournoyer, Mathieu Crédit, and the Iroquois Michel Teroahauté.

Stories of Francophone North Americans abound. Twenty-two of the 45 members of Lewis & Clark's legendary 1803 expedition to the Pacific were Francophones, *Canadiens* and Métis. Most of the members of Astor's 1811 expedition to the Pacific, or about 65 individuals, were *Canadiens* or Métis. Even today, some American historians estimate that 80% of the trappers and hunters in the Western mountains were *Canadiens* and Métis. Altogether, we're talking about several thousand rebels, freemen, "creoles," Métis, men "gone native," men who were as Amerindian, many American and Anglophone observers would say, as the Amerindians. David Thompson and Simon Fraser would never have been able to travel and survive without these people who spoke French and the Amerindian languages, and had the skills of the *voyageurs* and hunters

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For several years, on the airwaves of Radio-Canada, I have been telling stories in French of remarkable individuals who, remarkably, have slipped from the pages of North American and Canadian history. There are Anglophones, of course; however, those most often overlooked are the Francophone Amerindians, women, Métis, and *voyageurs*. In our long-running series, called *De remarquables oubliés* ["Remarkable but Forgotten"], we have told the stories of Donnacona, the Iroquois who confronted Jacques Cartier; Tessouat, the great Algonquin who stood up to Champlain; Membertou, the Mi'kmaw who welcomed the French to Acadia; Pontiac, the illustrious Ottawa who was at the source of British treaty policies; Tecumseh, the famous Chouanon (Shawnee) rebel; Mistahimaskwa (Big Bear), the Cree who confronted the Canadian government in 1885; but also of Crowfoot, the Siksika (Blackfoot); Black Hawk, the great Sauk chief of Chicago; Matonabbee, the Chipewyan Dene who saved Samuel Hearne; and Blue Jacket, another important Shawnee. We have told the stories of great women: Marie Iowa Dorion, the sole survivor of the Astor expedition; Suzanne Laflèche Picotte, an Omaha, the first female Amerindian doctor in America; Isabelle Montour, a noted Métis who spoke French, Algonquin, Iroquois, and English; Shanadithit, the last of the Beothuk; the adventurer Sacagawea, wife of Toussaint Charbonneau and mother of Jean-Baptiste Charbonneau; and the Métis Pierre Dorion, Gabriel Dumont, and Georges Drouillard. Étienne Provost, born in Chambly, was the greatest hunter in history among the mountain men. The fastest rider in the West, on the Santa Fe Trail, was François-Xavier Aubry, from Louiseville near Trois-Rivières. One of the most colourful characters in the early Colorado of hunters, mercenaries, and bandits was Jean-Baptiste Chalifoux (Juan Baptista Chalefou), from Charlesbourg near Quebec City. The first mayor and first millionaire of the city of Los Angeles was Prudent Beaudry. And one of the most common family names among the Lakota Sioux today is *Robidoux*.

Ultimately, this Francophonie creates a kind of symphony, the echo of which is never-ending. Jean-Louis Légaré, of La Talle des Harres Rouges (Willow Bunch), Saskatchewan, is part of the Canadian history of Sitting Bull. He was a close friend of the famous Sioux chief and spoke fluent Lakota. Are we familiar with his remarkable story? What do we know of Father Albert Lacombe, who spoke to Crowfoot in his language? Or Father Émile Petitot? Or the improbable Oblates, the Catholic missionaries who had a passion for the West and the Northwest? We owe Petitot a debt for his unique ethnographic observations on the original Dene culture, still flourishing in the 19th century. His notes and works are here in Yellowknife, at the Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. In the 1970s, anthropologist Donat Savoie compiled and edited them, then turned the entire package over to the Northwest Territories, in the hope it would be used in the future.

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In 1839, the celebrated Lord Durham, wishing to properly define the French-Canadian situation in history, tackled the issue of language head-on. He saw the disappearance of French in favour of English as a sine qua non condition, one that was in the interest of French-Canadians themselves. Lord Durham based his idea on what appeared to him to be two obvious facts: North America speaks English, and English is a superior language spoken by a "superior race." In these circumstances, it would be a very good thing for the "inferior" French-Canadian to accede to superiority by forgetting his language and culture in favour of English. Lord Durham was not an idiot. Far from it. London had dispatched him to Canada to report on the real causes of the 1837-38 troubles in Upper and Lower Canada. He correctly identified the problem at the root of the uprisings and wrote a very severe report to London, in which he blamed and condemned the abuses by the British colonial authorities in Quebec City in the years preceding the *Patriotes*' Rebellion. He was even quite an informed humanist, in the light of his times.

However, if Lord Durham was politically perspicacious, it must be said that on the matter of language, he was very poorly informed. In 1839, English did not totally dominate North America's linguistic landscape. West of the Mississippi, French and Spanish were still the common languages used, with Sioux in all its variations, and Algonquin, which we know was long the language of travel and trade in the great history of America.

Thirty years earlier, in 1810, American soldiers were already complaining to the authorities in Washington that English was of no use in the city of St. Louis because very few people spoke the language. In Durham's time, in the HBC's Columbia District, which is to say the entire region west of the Rockies, from northern California on up to Alaska, the working language was French. The Chief Factor was none other than John McLoughlin, a Francophone Scot born in Rivière-du-Loup, Quebec. He is recognized today as the "Father of Oregon." His wife was a Franco-Ojibwa Métis from the Great Lakes region, and she never spoke English in her life. Columbia District employees were mostly Francophones, including many Iroquois from the Montreal area. Consequently, HBC representatives who came to the district, very often Scots, had to learn French in order to work in Oregon and in what would become British Columbia.

The first Oregon settlers were therefore Catholic French-Canadians, retired from the HBC fur trade, who gathered together in the Willamette Valley, the "French Prairie." Today, many Americans in this area wonder about their family names: Lussier, Primeau, Jetté, and so on. And some authors are surprised to see Amerindian peoples go down in history with French names: Nez-Percé, Sans Poil, Cœur d'Alène, Cailloux (Cayuses). All of this is what explains all that.

Moreover, if someone had probed further, asking Lord Durham frankly what he thought of the Amerindian languages in America, he would have replied, as an enlightened man of his time, in these terms: Their languages are not true languages, they have no future and no value, and like the "inferior" French-Canadians, the Savages must "become civilized" posthaste, forget their mother tongue, and learn English.

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When I was a young man aboard a DC-3 flying to the land of the Labrador Innu, my seatmate asked me: "What brings you to the back of beyond?" It was April 1969, and the plane bore the colours of the *Northern Wings* company. I answered that I was coming for a good long while to learn the Innu language. My fellow passenger considered me something of an oddity. "You won't stay with them for long," he said. "Because when it comes to language, there's not much to learn. They don't speak a real language. Those Indians always say the same words and make the same sounds. You'll learn those few sounds fast, and you'll be on your way even faster. No one wants to stay among them for very long."

That's the paradox of the story: Francophones who are unaware of their links to the Amerindians. In 1969, the First Nations did not carry much weight in the Canadian consciousness. And if today we can judge my fellow passenger's comment and find it excessive and contemptuous, it is important to bear in mind that it represents quite faithfully what Canadian policy has always demonstrated with regard to Amerindian cultures. For over a century, Indian Affairs administrators never considered the fact that being Iroquois, Innu, Eeyou (Cree), Anishinabe, Siksika, Haida, or Dene had any value in and of itself. No, those cultures were not cultures, those languages were not languages, and those Indians were simply "administered" Indians, a clientele with individual numbers who belonged to a band defined by the *Indian Act*. The peoples have no names, they must not be named. The cultures have no languages, so there is no use in learning to speak them.

Between 1870 and 1970, through the federal government's policy of residential schools and education programs, attempts were made to destroy the Amerindian cultures and languages. This is indeed what the Indian schools and residential schools of all kinds were used for. Around 1910, in the new province known as British Columbia, efforts were stepped up to eradicate as quickly as possible what was nevertheless one of the greatest treasures of this part of the country, the tremendous Aboriginal cultural diversity. What is remarkable here is that, at the dawn of the 20th century on the Pacific Coast, the authorities were undertaking what had been attempted three centuries earlier in New France. The lesson had not been learned, the mentalities had not changed, and no progress had been made with respect to cultural disdain. In modern Canada, there seemed to be no place for Amerindian cultures and no place for their original languages. It was in their interest to forget everything, and fast. In British Columbia, it bears repeating, the governments were attacking the most spectacular linguistic diversity imaginable, intensely and over a short and very recent period of our history. But no matter, sensitivity to the scope of the tragedy was lacking. In one way or another, this eradication movement was officially pursued almost to the present day.

So Canada has not always loved its languages or all its cultures. Dominant cultures sometimes act in bad faith when they become the standard-bearer for hegemony. Cultural imperialism is and has always been a historical reality. Canada's history from 1800 to 1960 is directly bound up with British Empire prejudices, as expressed in Lord Durham's position. In 1860, no one doubted the superiority of the English language, of the Englishman's culture, manners, and knowledge. The geographic power and extent of the Empire implacably demonstrated that superiority. Hence, questions regarding spoken languages and living cultures were not asked in any context other than that of inclusion or exclusion. Canada would be English or it would be a marginal player.

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How can history be retold? The greatest practitioners of cross-culturalism in America have been Amerindians and Francophones. How can we find a way today to marvel at what was once scorned: intermarriage, Amerindian languages, the illiteracy of the *coureurs de bois,* and the original cultures of those who were "Americans", body and soul?

The encounter of thousands of French-Canadians with dozens and dozens of Amerindian cultures has been relegated to the shadows of history, which we all know is written by (who else?) "those who hang the heroes". The Americans were able to distinguish themselves culturally from the British; however, they did not open themselves up to Amerindian cultures. Nor did the British-Canadians, who had been dreaming for too long of quite simply reproducing England in America. Loyalists, Royalists, and Orangemen, none of them were the type of people to be open to others. The French elitists of New France were also intolerant and contemptuous; the next generation, educated, Catholic, and under British domination, was sectarian, closed, and very nostalgic for France *à la française.*

That left the common people, the ordinary human beings. The *Canadiens*, who detested France at least as much as England, were the mavericks of History. They joined the Algonquian; that is, the Mi'kmaq, Innu, Anishinabe, Ojibwa, Cree, Ottawa, Illinois, and Saulteaux. They joined the Sioux and the Athapascan-Dene. Three immense cultural galaxies, Algonquian, Siouan, and Athapascan. They turned their backs on European worldviews and embraced *terra Americana*, the land of the First Nations. This meant language and everything else. And they became cultural Métis. In this, they were like the Mexicans who had pulled away from Spain, the Mestizos. Furthermore, in Taos and Santa Fe, French-Canadians and Franco-Amerindian Métis joined the Mestizos and intermarried. Jean Baptiste, the very same Jean Baptiste who spoke the Siouan and Algonquian languages fluently, became Juan Batista.

English became established late, very late, in the rich day-to-day life of the North American expanse. The existing cultures were Iroquoian, Algonquian, Siouan, Athapascan, and from dozens of other linguistic families. Then came the *Canadiens,* with their colloquial language, the French of the illiterate, of storytellers and spoken-word poets, actors who did not write their roles but played them. French was spoken in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Kansas, the Dakotas, Wyoming, Oregon, Colorado, New Mexico, California, Idaho, Montana, Illinois, and Indiana, long before English. The same was true in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Assiniboia, Athabasca, and all the way to British Columbia.

In Missouri, it is said that the Osage never agreed to deal with the American government in English. They insisted that political ceremonies be conducted in French. In the past, the French language was familiar to the Dene, as it was to the Saulteaux Ojibwa, the Ottawa, the old Mi'kmaq, and the Anishinabe Algonquin; for a long time, it was the second language of the Mohawk Iroquois in the Montreal area, and this is still the case for the Innu and the Attikamek. But just what French are we talking about? Not the French of *l'Académie,* the standard French of the Revolution, not the oh-so-*Français* French that killed off all the languages in France, including the regional dialects. It was the French of the *Canadiens,* the supposed "creole," considered a useless and futile language, which was mocked so much in the back rooms of the well-to-do and aristocrats.

When we look at the past bravely and proudly, we realize that anything is possible. In Nunavik today, there are more and more multilingual Inuit, young Canadian Inuit who speak three languages naturally. The Innu are also increasingly trilingual, as are the young Cree. Conversely, it is good to see Canadians speaking Inuktitut, and for Francophones, it is crucial to remember with pride that many of our ancestors spoke not only Cree, Innu, and Ojibwa, but also Lakota and Dene.

For the future, I dream of a territory in Canada that would be named Denendeh, where the modern culture of the Dene would flourish, and where the Francophone inhabitants would be *Dénendois*. A territory crossed by the Deh Cho River. I dream of reading a thick book or seeing a beautiful film on the life of François Beaulieu. Or watching a television series on the Dene people's long walk for survival, from Hudson's Bay to Alaska, and on their children's bright future. I dream because it is imperative to dream. A Canada where French would be at home, valuable and appreciated throughout the country, and our impressive diversity held in general esteem. Not a piece of folklore, not a ready-made image, not a legal condition or a polite obligation, but an authentic, profound impression of richness and beauty.