Case Study XXV

Reunification of the Wendat/Wyandotte Nation at a Time of Globalization

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In the 17th century, an important period of contact with Europeans, the Wendat nation (Iroquoian linguistic family) lived in the Georgian Bay area, close to Lake Simcoe, in Ontario, Canada. Its territory is located at the northern limit of southern Ontario’s agricultural lands. Data vary regarding the total population at the beginning of the seventeenth century (the contact period), but it may be assessed to have been 29,000 souls on average (Trigger, 1976, p. 30). To start with, the Wendat nation comprised four nations distributed among several villages. A fifth nation joined later. The French called this semi-sedentary people “Hurons,” thus referring to the tuft of hair on a wild boar’s head the nation’s warriors’ hairstyle reminded them of.
According to the Wendat cosmovision, the first woman (Aataentsic) fell from the sky and landed on the back of a giant turtle, on which marine animals hastened to lay soil retrieved from the bottom of the sea. Once this “island” was created, Aataentsic gave birth to a girl who in turn brought forth two sons, Tawiskaron and Iouskeha, ancestors of good and evil. The Wendat called themselves “dwellers of the island, or peninsula.” We have to locate them on the North American continent in the light of their cosmovision as this, to them, is the original natural and global ecological order (Hall, 2003, pp. 100-101).

Contact Period and Dispersal

Prior to contact, the Wendat had long been involved in a regional economic network with numerous neighbouring aboriginal nations, with whom they maintained good diplomatic relations. This accounts for the first significant influence of globalization because all the conditions were already in place for the extension of this commercial network to Europe: Therefore, the existing fur trade underwent an unprecedented increase (demand for beaver pelts especially). The introduction of Christianity to Huronia (namely by the Recollets and the Jesuits) laid the foundations for another globalization influence. These influences overcame the Wendat confederation’s unity. Moreover, imported illnesses such as smallpox, against which the Wendat had no immunity, killed over half of the population (Heidenreich, 1978, p. 368). In 1649, the Wendat confederation segmented in several groups, found today in Oklahoma, Kansas and Michigan (USA) under the name Wyandotte (or Wyandot), and in Wendake (formerly known as Huron Village) outside of Quebec City (Quebec, Canada). Descendants are also found near Amherstburg, Ontario and in Ohio (USA).

Upon the destruction of the original homeland, the ancestors of the Quebec Wendat found refuge at “Gahoendoe” (Christian Island) and in the spring of 1650 they arrived in Quebec City under the guidance of Jesuit Father Joseph-Marie Chaumonot. They settled in various places such as Île d’Orléans, Sainte-Foy, Ancienne-Lorette, Beauport, and they finally established themselves at the present location of Wendake (formerly known as “Lorette” and later on as “Village-des-Hurons”) in 1697. Slowly, they adapted to their environment and later intermarried with the French.

After 1649, the Wyandottes (or Wyandots) migrated around the Great Lakes and were later found in Detroit (Michigan, USA) as well as Amherstburg (Ontario, Canada). Some settled in Ohio where they had hunting territories. The signing of treaties as well as land cessions, and various American government policies
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