9 – A “Stopover Place” at Best?
Recent Trends in Immigrant Attraction and Retention on Prince Edward Island

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Introduction

Many of those arriving under the [PEI PNP] program promptly decamped for elsewhere in Canada. (Curry and Moore 2011)

Recent immigrants have not been drawn to Atlantic Canada in significant numbers, especially in the more rural and remote regions. The Atlantic region suffers from a series of vicious cycles that contour the migration experience, with no end in sight. While Canada absorbs 250,000 or so newcomers every year, the four Atlantic Provinces attract less than three per cent of these, even though these four provinces—New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island—comprise some seven per cent of the national population. And so, while the 2006 Census reports that visible minorities now represent close to 75 per cent of immigrants to Canada as a whole, the proportion of visible minorities in the Atlantic Provinces remains abysmally low, with a mean of just 2.6 per cent of the total resident
A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?

population of the region in 2006, and Nova Scotia reporting the highest proportion of 4.2 per cent thanks to its long-time black population. Moreover, the retention rate of those immigrants who do come to the region is equally poor, when compared to the rest of the country. Indeed, along with Saskatchewan, the four Atlantic Provinces have systematically had the lowest retention rates of immigrants by province in the country, ranging from 36 per cent (NL) to 62 per cent (NB) for immigrants moving into the country between 1991 and 2001 (Gilroy 2005: 19).

Immigration inflows to this region have, however, changed substantially in recent years, thanks mainly to provincial nominee programs (PNPs). These federal-provincial agreements expedite immigration to Canada “for individuals and their families who meet provincial criteria in support of the following initiatives: (a) increased business and economic development; (b) increased supply of skilled workers; (c) increased population; and (d) the achievement of provincial demographic, social and cultural objectives” (PEI-PNP 2008). Largely as a consequence of the PNP, the annual immigrant inflow in the region rose from 3,025 registered landings in 2001, to 5,307 in 2006, and to 5,583 in 2007 (Tutton 2008). And yet, in spite of the influx, the evidence so far suggests that few of these newcomers choose to stay in the region, with the occasional exception of better retention rates achieved where PNP nominees belong to the skilled worker category. While “hyper-diversity” (Biles et al. 2008: 3) may be what brands Canada as a whole, mono-culturalism rules largely undisturbed in Atlantic Canada, still marked by a relative lack of diversity, in comparison.

Akbari (2008) provides some insights into this recent flow of (mainly PNP-facilitated) newcomers broken down by province in the Atlantic region. Prince Edward Island (PEI) was the province in the region with the largest percentage increase in the number of landed immigrants during the inter-census period (from 134 landings in 2001, to 585 landings in 2006, to 2,631 landings in 2010).1 And yet, ironically, it is the only province in Atlantic Canada that has seen its retention rate of landed immigrants actually fall by 7 per cent (from 60 per cent to 53 per cent) between 2001 and 2006;
meanwhile, in the same period, NB, NL and NS registered modest increases in their mean immigrant retention rates, of 8 per cent, 4 per cent and 15 per cent, respectively.

The four Atlantic provinces of Canada share major and abiding concerns with their (still low overall) immigrant retention rates, and their provincial governments in particular are likely to be well disposed to consider what mechanisms they may effectively deploy in order to improve these. Yet, as the data presented in this paper suggests, Prince Edward Island is behaving mainly as a temporary, transit station where immigrants deposit some of their funds before they proceed with their plans to settle more permanently elsewhere in the country; indeed, some PNP beneficiaries head straight to settle somewhere else circumventing PEI altogether.

This chapter, based also on material from a larger study (Baldacchino et al. 2009), explores and fleshes out these issues by focusing mainly on the opinions and experiences of a sample of twenty-four Korean immigrant respondents. Their views question the double assumption that immigrants have a desire to settle on PEI, and that the local host communities also desire or have as much interest in supporting such settlement.

**Barriers to Migration to Prince Edward Island**

Two sets of important characteristics are borne out by the observable trends in immigration to Atlantic Canada. First, that no large cities, no immigrant clusters, no perceived economic opportunities, lower wages and a shortage of health-related human resources and services all conspire to make Prince Edward Island—and the Atlantic region generally—less attractive to immigrants. According to Census data, the proportion of visible minorities in PEI’s population has gone up marginally from 0.9 per cent in 2001, to 1.3 per cent in 2006. Second, a tightly-webbed “WACS” (White, Anglophone, Christian and Straight/Heterosexual) monoculture acts as a rather understated but nevertheless powerful socio-cul-

Policy analysts have identified two main barriers to successful immigrant integration: the inability of migrants to adapt to the host society and systematic discrimination in the host society (Wang and Lo 2007). Both barriers are at work on PEI. The island’s singular cultural mould—what has been described as “a strong cultural norm of sameness” (PEI Population Panel 1999: 56)—is a powerful source of bonding social capital and resourcefulness from which this small island community (population as of 2011 around 146,000) has benefited handsomely in the face of rampant globalization. Growing up in an ascribed network of relatives and friends, most Islanders walk through life in regular company of the same social cohort, with whom they inevitably connect and thus reinforce relationships. It is this same intensive social interaction—a “communal togetherness” which doubles as a “strait-jacket of community surveillance” (Weale 1992: 9-10)—that can induce Islanders to seek escape and solace via self-imposed exile. For better or for worse, any immigrants to Prince Edward Island automatically do not belong to this intricate web of strong and durable social networks. Nor can they ever fully belong, though their children might, if they persevere: one has to be born on PEI to be an “Islander”; otherwise, immigrants will forever remain “CFAs”: (“come from aways”) (e.g., Wright 2009a). Thus, what is a source of identity and community for self-professed Islanders acts to thwart diversity, and can even be perceived as a subtle (but unintentional) form of racism:

This is what different immigrants have explained as finding bewildering, exasperating, cliquist, small-minded, petty, racist ... and invariably difficult to plug into. No wonder immigrants find themselves befriending other immigrants. The Islander versus “come from away” category is an important contemporary social divide on PEI (just like the red-blue partisan one) and contributes to a reservoir of mutual misunderstanding. (Baldacchino 2006: 74)
Islanders are badly equipped in the skills that would enable them to reach out to newcomers and help the latter integrate better in the host society: they lack “bridging social capital” (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). The condition becomes effectively—though not necessarily intentionally—exclusionary and discriminatory. *Globe and Mail* columnist John Ibbitson fails to appreciate the value of social solidarity; he is thus harsh and outspoken in his commentary on the outcome of this vicious cycle:

The racial homogeneity is pronounced.... Immigrants shun these communities.... These communities, in turn, display little zeal to attract immigrants, reveling instead in their so-called cultural heritage, which is really a desiccated remnant of Canada’s colonial past. (Ibbitson 2005: 34)

**A 28 Per Cent Retention Rate**

It is no wonder, then, that so many immigrants landing in Charlottetown are no longer living on PEI within a few years of their arrival. (The size of the island, and the significant role of the PEI Association for Newcomers to Canada [PEIANC], the single settlement agency, makes tracing immigrants relatively easier than elsewhere in the country.) The rate of immigrant retention is still impacted by the type of immigrant—the rate of retention for PNP beneficiaries is lower than that for refugees (more about which below), and consistent with findings elsewhere in the region (see the chapter by Ramos and Yoshida in this volume). Nevertheless, the challenges of integration cut across country of origin, social class, education, income, gender and race.

For Provincial Nominees, now the largest group of immigrants to PEI, a total of 143 individuals from forty-four different families were registered with the PEIANC as having landed on PEI between September 1 and December 31, 2006. By May 2009, only eleven of these families, comprising thirty-seven net individuals, were registered as still living on PEI (Wright 2009b).
A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?

For Refugee Class Immigrants, a total of twenty-eight families with ninety-three family members were registered as having landed on PEI between January 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007. Of this total, just nine of these families, with twenty-nine family members in all, were known to be still residing in PEI in May 2009 (ibid.).

These 236 arrivals represent just more than one-third of all immigrant arrivals to PEI between September 2006 and June 2007: as interpolated from annual figures available from official provincial statistics, around 684 immigrants landed on PEI within that nine-month time window. This makes the study population a 35 per cent sample of the whole immigrant population within that period.

The retention rate for PNP beneficiaries is marginally lower than that pertaining to refugee immigrants (25 per cent versus 32 per cent, if calculated per family; 26 per cent against 31 per cent if calculated per individual).

The mean gross retention rate for immigrants from these two immigration classes combined is 28 per cent (whether calculated by family or by net individuals): much lower than the 52.5 per cent quoted by Akbari (2008) for 2001-2006. Former PEI Minister responsible for Immigration, Richard Brown, was much closer to the facts when he declared that the immigrant retention rate in the province was “just 30 per cent” (CBC News 2008a).

Migration to the province is also a decidedly urban phenomenon—just like in the rest of the country. Of the twenty families in the targeted PNP and refugee population still living in the province in May 2009, all except three (85 per cent) were living in Charlottetown, the provincial capital and largest city.

Korean Immigrants to PEI

Between late May and early July 2009, forty-three recent immigrants to PEI (twenty-four males; nineteen females) accepted an invitation to take part in a face-to-face interview where a semi-structured questionnaire was used to elicit comments, particularly about their settlement experience. Among these were
twenty-four recent immigrants from South Korea (eighteen males; six females) who came to PEI as Provincial Nominees, under the investor class. The rest of this chapter focuses on the responses of these Korean respondents. While the subsequent findings could have been different had recent immigrants of diverse ethnic backgrounds been targeted, these observations nevertheless constitute a rare example of a focussed and systematic study of a nationally profiled immigrant group on PEI in recent decades.

Immigrants from South Korea now represent the second largest national category of PNP beneficiaries in Canada, and have become the second largest national category of immigrants to PEI in recent years (in both cases placing second, trailing only after the People’s Republic of China). They have already been the targets of focused inquiry and research in other contexts.

According to the 2001 Canadian Census, 101,715 respondents identified themselves as being of Korean heritage, a significant 56 per cent increase from the 1996 Census count. Like other immigrant groups, Koreans are heavily concentrated in a few select provinces. Again, according to the 2001 Canadian Census, 1.8 million new Korean immigrants entered Canada during the 1990s and nearly 90 per cent of these resided in Ontario and British Columbia. Korean immigrants comprised 2.8 per cent of the Canadian population, according to the 2006 Census.

Despite their typically advanced education and middle-class backgrounds (as noted below), most Korean immigrants to Canada are still at an early stage of economic adaptation, and they have generally not been able to fully utilize their human capital in Canada, largely because they experience difficulties in finding an occupation in the Canadian labour market commensurate with their education and training (Yoon 2006: 17-19).

While their educational credentials are very strong—most have graduate and even postgraduate degrees—their English language competency is relatively poor. One indirect indication of the extent of English language literacy amongst this group is provided by their language of choice in responding to the survey questionnaire, which was available in either English Korean. Only
one of the twenty-four Korean respondents chose to utilize the English version of the questionnaire and to answer its questions by using the English language. The twenty-three other responses to the survey were made in Korean, and then translated, for the sake of analysis, by the project research assistant from the Korean original into English.

The twenty-four Korean immigrants had various comments to make; these comments can be grouped under four distinct yet inter-related headings. These are: the management of the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) on PEI; educational opportunities, mainly for their children, on the Island; securing suitable employment or self-employment; and the intention to leave PEI and settle elsewhere in Canada.

The Management of the PNP

In terms of volume, the first and most strident criticism and concern was that levelled at the overall management of the PNP by the PEI authorities. This study came in the wake of some controversial statements concerning the manner in which this Program—and especially its investor class stream, as regulated until September 2008—has been managed by the PEI Government, and how the immigrants’ investments were being allocated (e.g., CBC News 2008b; Huffington Post 2012).

The investor stream of the PNP program was terminated in September 2008—but not before PEI had processed almost 2,000 immigrant applications in the previous four months. There have been political charges of corruption and calls for investigations (e.g., CBC News 2008c). Elected members of the legislative assembly and government officials allegedly applied and received program money. There were questions about the quality of the “companies” approved for investment. According to the Hon. Jason Kenney, Federal Minister responsible for Immigration:

We had a situation where a lot of promoters, who were profiting from the program, were making promises they couldn’t keep, promises to the newcomers about processing
times and what the requirements of the program are. (CBC News 2010)

While it is not the scope of this study to discuss the PNP in any detail, the interviewed Korean immigrants voiced considerable disappointment with regards to the PNP, and they expressed reservations and suspicions of the PEI government and those who may have been associated with the management of the PNP. This issue perhaps affected any readiness they may have had initially about settling on the island province. It may also have affected those PNP beneficiaries who have yet to make it to the Island. These are some of the Korean respondents’ comments on this subject:

[There is a need for] (a) sharing information about job/business as well as offering a training program; and (b) making PNP better and showing everything clear, especially deposit-related issue (Respondent #27).

I don’t understand why there is no deposit back from the PEI government to those immigrants who have been staying here for at least three years ... everyone knows it’s hard to get a job here; that’s why my husband decided to stay in Korea to keep his business. If my husband were here with us for the last few years without any job, how would we support ourselves? [...] Considering the [PNP] issue, I really mistrust the PEI government, and I think many immigrants have the same idea as me. (R#24)

I have a deposit that I need to get back from the PEI government (R #23).

The PEI government has to use the investment from immigrants for immigrants, by offering [them] a better job or business opportunity. I think that’s the best way that may convince immigrants of considering settling down on PEI. (R#43)
A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?

The immigration policy has [been] changed every year here by the PEI Government, which is ridiculous. The PEI Government should integrate all the revised immigration policy to make it a trustworthy policy. (R#20)

Clearly, Korean immigrants who arrived in Canada via the PEI PNP have concerns about the administration of the program, and especially about those aspects which concern them directly: the refund of their good faith deposit, and the missed opportunities for training, employment and induction into the PEI and Canadian world of business. Theirs is also an overall appeal for trust and transparency.

Educational Opportunities

The second most commonly expressed concern by the respondents dealt with educational opportunities, especially with regards to the interviewees’ children. Extraordinary educational achievement for Korean immigrants has often been credited to the common cultural influence of Confucianism that emphasizes education, family honour, discipline and respect for authority (Zhou and Kim 2008). Korean society is driven strongly by achievement status; and so much of this is seen as dependent on excellent, quality university-level education. According to the 2001 Census, more than 47 per cent of Korean immigrants to Canada were graduates (Kim 2008).

The Korean respondents to this study are themselves gifted with considerable tertiary-level education: Almost all respondents (twenty-two out of twenty-four) claimed to have an undergraduate or graduate university degree. Three respondents (three out of twenty-four) stated that they moved to Canada for a better education for their children:

[I moved to Canada because of] better job opportunity and educational atmosphere for my children (R#28).

[I moved to Canada] for a better life and my children’s education (R#25).
[I came here] for a better education for my children. I like PEI, but I think the educational system here is not great (R#39).

Key educational challenges faced by Korean immigrants to PEI may relate to both choice and quality. Given its small scale, there is an absence of choice in the provision of higher education in the province, restricted as it is to one vocational college (Holland College) and one university (the University of Prince Edward Island). The latter, meanwhile, does not offer degrees leading to most professional qualifications (such as architecture, medicine, engineering, law or pharmacy).

Economic Opportunities

The third most expressed concern by respondents, and closely aligned to the above, is their keen desire to secure satisfying employment or self-employment that is commensurate with their skills, experience and credentials. Some respondents (four out of twenty-four) expressed disappointment at the absence or quality of opportunities for appropriate employment on PEI:

Not enough job opportunity on PEI (R#21).

I am trying to get a job here (R#23).

[We] need more job opportunity and related information and training (R#31).

The PEI economy is seeking to lure immigrants to work in a few targeted, knowledge-intensive areas: these include aerospace, bioscience and video game development. This is clearly displayed, for example, in a professional eight-minute promotional video on the provincial government’s immigration website (It’s About Time 2007). Yet, many job opportunities in the private sector are related to agriculture, fisheries, food processing, forestry and tourism, all of which are seasonal industries and do not provide full-time employment. A 2006 study amongst recent immigrants to PEI had similarly identified the “absence of good, challenging,
A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?

careerist, specialized, well-paying and preferably all-year-round jobs, or any job at all” as a key obstacle to immigrant attraction and retention (Baldacchino 2006: 49).

Secondary Migration

The fourth and final key trend that emerged from the interviews was that most of the Korean immigrants to PEI (nineteen out of twenty-four) involved in this study were not planning to stay for long in the island province. Various sour experiences connected to their status as PNP beneficiaries may have exacerbated this decision (as already explained above); but most appeared to have planned to come to PEI for the short term anyway:

I’m not sure about my future plans. I am still trying to figure out what I should do in the future. I guess I’ll be here for about two years (R#40).

I have been here for around 1 year, and I’m leaving next month (R#36).

I haven’t decided yet. I’m trying to dig more information now, but it will be to a bigger city in Canada (R#39).

I want to get a job, or run my own business here to settle down, but it seems to be very hard. I will decide whether I leave or not after I try [harder] to stay here (R#37).

[I plan to go to] Vancouver. I think there are many Korean connections [there] so it seems to have more job or business opportunities (R#38).

There’s not enough Korean connections here [on PEI], such as lack of Korean food or lack of Korean culture. Therefore, I’m planning to move to western Canada, probably Vancouver, which has more Korean connections. I have been on PEI almost 2 years so far, and probably I am leaving after 1 more year of staying. (R#31)
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Vancouver: My husband will run his business there (R#25).

Toronto: My children used to study [there], so they’re familiar with that city ... understanding and accepting diverse cultures would be the key to living in Toronto, as it’s a big city with a lot of different people from many countries. (R#24)

Not enough job opportunity on PEI. Planning to leave [to Toronto] in one or two years (R#21).

I am planning to leave in a year (R#32).

Toronto: I think there will be better opportunities for my job and my children’s education [there] (R#33).

Those few Korean immigrants who did not express any intention to leave were those waiting for their children to complete their current educational program on PEI—typically at high school—before they made longer-term plans (five out of twenty-four). Not a single one of the twenty-four Korean immigrants interviewed in this study expressed a clear intention or desire to remain settled on Prince Edward Island.

The educational progress of their children was a paramount consideration for the Korean immigrants in this study in determining where they choose to resettle. One said, “What we decide to do will depend on my children’s further education plan. If my children go to a university in another city, we’re moving there together” (R#22). Perhaps what follows below is the most elaborate and articulate comment provided on this subject:

I think many immigrants on PEI ... don’t consider PEI a place to settle down. Many immigrants, including my family, are more likely to be considering PEI like an entrance, or just a stop-over place before they settle down in other cities in Canada.... Many Chinese people usually leave in a year, regardless of anything ... they even don’t spend a lot of money for housing or any house wares ... I think Korean people stay here for at least two to three years. (R#24)
Discussion: The Challenge of Belonging

PNP beneficiaries are now the vast majority of immigrants to PEI and are likely to remain so until 2013 at the very least. Many have—certainly until September 2008—opted to migrate to Canada via PEI mainly for strategic reasons relating to ease, speed and level of required financial investment. They reported less benefit in taking any initiatives to integrate with the host PEI society, when their long-term plan is to leave for larger cities where they can connect with their relatives and friends in their own ethnic or national diaspora, partake in ethnic food, speak their native language, share in ethnic feasts and events and place their children in what they consider to be better schools. PEI is just a convenient stepping stone; a transit zone; a “stop-over place”; a destination of intent, and not of circumstance (Hirsch 2011). The controversy surrounding the handling of the PNP by the PEI Government may have also sullied PEI’s attraction to immigrants, even for stepping-stone purposes. Most attempts to connect with the host island society by these PNP beneficiaries seem to be driven primarily by instrumental purposes, foremost among which is the desire to exploit all avenues for gaining important information.

The Korean PNPs are strategic, selective and pragmatic in how they connect, if at all, with the services of the PEI settlement agency. They engage with the PEIANC mainly through its “English as an Additional Language” program. The immigrants’ key driver here is understandable: achieving a level of language proficiency that would allow them to get back a $20,000 language deposit, part of the conditions attached to securing immigration into Canada as a provincial nominee. There is also a deposit of $100,000 that would be repaid to the applicant only if s/he is still residing in the province of entry twelve months after having landed in Canada: a policy explicitly meant to encourage retention in the province of landing. And yet, indicative of the affluence and net worth of these PNP nominees, some of them do not even bother to come and spend any time at all in PEI (their province of landing) but go straightaway to settle in (mainly) Toronto or Vancouver, volun-
tarily forfeiting their language deposit. For these, far from being a home away from home, PEI is not even a “stop-over place.”

Meanwhile, the PEIANC’s programs of assistance—such as the Host Program—appear to be premised on an understanding that it is the immigrant participant who is expected to assimilate and learn the host culture. There is no expectation of a frank cultural exchange on equal power terms between host volunteer and immigrant. It is worth asking whether such a principle needs to be interrogated. While Canada professes to be a tolerant multi-ethnic society, Host Program praxis appears more driven by integration and assimilation. It may also be worth asking here what motivates Host Program volunteers to offer their time, interest and friendship to immigrants. Are they interested in and open to a frank cultural exchange on equal, peer-to-peer terms where, for example, they can “trade” language acquisition or business acumen? Or do the volunteers rather see themselves in an inevitably unequal relationship, where they serve as surrogate parents or patronising benefactors to the immigrants, rather than their “friends”? Are the immigrants themselves interested in moving away from such skewed power interactions and dependencies?

These characteristics of recent settlers to Prince Edward Island are readily borne out of, and corroborated by, the responses to a larger and different survey of them. In late 2005, a qualitative survey of recent settlers to PEI was undertaken with 320 respondents (Baldacchino 2006). According to these respondents, the most common challenge to attracting and retaining new immigrants on PEI—identified by 55 per cent (N=172)—relates to the difficulty of landing an appropriate job (or any job at all) and the associated challenge of foreign credential recognition. The second most commonly identified set of challenges—with 18 per cent of respondents (N=59) commenting—deals variously with the Island society as being racist, bigoted, discriminatory, conservative, exclusivist and/or cliquist with regards to those branded for life as “CFAs.” Some respondent comments about this are barbed and even cruel in their concern: they manifest sadness, disappointment and frustration. Other comments are more
guarded, clinical and even reflexive, attributing this phenomenon to a cultural condition of which Islanders—especially those who have never lived away—are as much victims as perpetrators. It seems that a close society cannot help being a closed society:

The “come from away” problem is one that probably results in settlers not staying settled for very long. This should not be seen as a “fault” of native Islanders; it’s a condition. They’ve grown from childhood with friends and family around them and therefore have had no need to develop whatever skills are required to seek out and make welcome new people with a view to forming friendships. That simply hasn’t been necessary. It’s also true that those settlers who have traveled the world a little have experiences and knowledge to which the majority of Islanders can’t relate. Again, it’s not a criticism, but it is a condition. (Respondent #040 2006 study)

Conservative social attitudes and what seems to be a “closed” society to newcomers may make it difficult for settlers to feel that they fit in. If there were not some existing family ties to PEI, I think it would be quite challenging to make social contacts. Most people want to know how you may be related to them, or their neighbour, or someone they know, to figure out how you fit into the overall picture of PEI society—your place or role or “standing” somehow. (Respondent #217 2006 study).

The “CFA descriptor” is applied widely and casually. It may appear endearing: but it can be bitterly resented and, in some circumstances, portrays what could be an implicit racist naïveté, arguably more prevalent in the rural areas of the province. The Island simply takes care of its own; and, by extension, no one else. Being “from here” versus being “from away” seems to be fundamental criteria for social division, in both Island-based organizations as well as Island-wide generally—perhaps as important as social class, political party affiliation or ideology. Some
respondents claimed that being a CFA was equivalent to being a member of a visible minority on PEI:

It became fairly obvious that who you were (family name), who you knew, etc., are factors as to how successfully you can conduct life in general on PEI. This has not affected me to date (that I’m aware of) but I’ve seen it in operation. It is hard to miss since it is prevalent and blatant. The funny thing is, it’s much the same everywhere since people are people wherever they are, but in a “PEItri” dish, it’s more noticeable. (Respondent #031 2006 study, emphasis in original).

Partly as a reaction to these exclusivist tactics, a group of newcomers to PEI has set up the Islander by Choice Alliance, whose mandate includes “To create an Island-wide community of individuals interested in bridging the gap between those moving to Prince Edward Island from other places and those born and raised on Prince Edward Island” (Islander By Choice Alliance 2011). In a society of tightly networked members, it can be great when you fit in; but not so great when you do not (Baldacchino 2011).

Conclusion

The PEI Provincial Government recognizes the pivotal role that newcomers bring to our Island; their Island.—Hon. Minister Richard Brown (2008a: 1, emphasis in original).

There are valuable social and cultural benefits associated with diversification including improved quality and access to leisure, cuisine, arts, knowledge of global trends and issues and lifelong learning through the introduction of new cultural practices and norms.—Hon. Minister Richard Brown (2008b: 6).

Such and similar statements speak to a healthy dose of politically-correct rhetoric, forthcoming from government, business organizations and civil society groups; they champion diversity, the need to grow the local population, the need to boost the labour force
A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?

in order to maintain public services at a sustainable level, and the importance of attracting skill and talent. And yet, in spite of and in contrast to the tenet of such utterances, it would appear that most Prince Edward Islanders have no real appetite for immigration. At best, they are willing to extend their generosity and hospitality to support refugee class immigrants settle down. They are willing to welcome tourists, as long as they come with the intention to leave (Baldacchino 2012). But, they remain largely suspicious of newcomers, especially if they do not have the Irish-Scottish background that most Islanders—other than the First Nations Mi’kmaq and the descendants of French Acadians—claim as their own. Immigrants end up as curiosa, objects of voyeurism, exotic specimens that one encounters formally and rarely in international tea houses or cultural extravaganza, divvying the four “Ds” of multiculturalism—dance, diet, dialect and dress—that continue to emphasize difference, rather than integration (e.g., Zachariah 1999). When the PEI Provincial Government set up a Population Secretariat in 2003, its mandate seemed predicated more on local Islander retention and repatriation than on immigration proper.

When Stephen Stewart, a PEI mussel grower, hired eleven workers from Sri Lanka in 2006, only to see them disappear to Ottawa after two weeks on the Island, he commented wryly to the press: “People in the community criticized us for bringing in foreign workers and said we got what we deserved” (Duplain 2006).

Canada may earn high marks as a country that looks kindly on immigration, but not all parts of Canada would qualify equally. One should thus not be surprised by the outcome of a national poll on attitudes to immigration commissioned for Policy Options Journal (Nanos 2008). Atlantic Canadians appear to be the least convinced that immigration is important to the future of the country, and the most important response to the country’s workforce skill requirements; but, at the same time, they are the most convinced that immigration is important for family reunification. Immigration strikes a chord with Atlantic Canadians if it means bringing back home one’s own. These tendencies may be exacerbated on the Island province most of all.
Notes

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1. There were 992 landings reported for 2007, 1,483 for 2008, and 1,725 for 2009. Statistics Canada reported that the 2,631 international migrants who came to PEI in 2010 “represent the highest level on the current record keeping system (since 1971). At a rate of 18.2 per thousand, the province [i.e., PEI] posted the highest immigration rate in the country,” significantly above the national mean of 7.5 per thousand (PEI Department of Finance and Municipal Affairs 2011).


3. For example, parallel research in all Atlantic Provinces has been undertaken to explore key challenges faced by internationally educated health professionals (Baldacchino and Saunders 2010). The PEI Provincial Government has also developed and published a Newcomer Guide (PEIANC 2010) and a Population Strategy to support the development of a “culturally diverse and prosperous province” (PEI Provincial Government 2010).

4. A full 1 per cent of these 1.3 per cent constitute First Nations peoples (Statistics Canada 2006). This statistic captures the sheer dearth of non-indigenous visible minorities on the island province at that time.

5. Out of 992 immigrants to PEI registered in 2007, 690 were Provincial Nominees; out of 1,483 immigrants to PEI in 2008, 813 were provincial nominees (Baldacchino 2010, Table 3). Some 5,000 PNP beneficiaries are expected to arrive on PEI between 2010 and 2012.

6. The rest were nine refugee class immigrants and ten additional PNP (but not Korean) beneficiaries.
7. There are only two other known examples of such studies: an older review of Lebanese immigrants (Weale 1981) and a more recent study of Chinese immigrants to PEI (Chiang 2008).

8. A session examining the recent influx of Korean immigrants in Moncton NB was organized at the 2008 Atlantic Metropolis Annual Spring Retreat: http://www.atlantic.metropolis.net/events/AMC_Symposium_2008_Agenda_ENG.pdf.

9. One of these concerned the obligation to prove continuous residence on PEI of at least 183 days in order to claim back a “good faith” deposit of $25,000 (Wright 2009c). Another concerned a change in the rules regarding the refund of a language proficiency deposit of $20,000 (CBC News 2009).

10. As one website proudly declares, “Successful applicants will receive a Prince Edward Island Provincial Nomination Certificate, which will speed up the Canada Immigration (Permanent Resident) Visa application process.” (Canadavisa.com 2011, emphasis added.)

11. See CBC News (2009) for evidence of some of the frustration that can result when this language deposit is not recovered.


13. First introduced in 1985, the Host Program is designed to assist newcomers with integration into Canadian life. It seeks to help immigrants overcome the stress of moving to a new country by matching them with trained Canadian volunteer hosts, who become their “new Canadian friends.” These volunteers help newcomers by being there for moral support, facilitating information about and access to social events, directing them to available services, practising English or French, or assisting to obtain contacts in their field of work. At the same time, the Host volunteer will learn about other cultures and other countries, thereby providing an important knowledge link concerning the benefits of immigration: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/newcomers/host-newcomer.asp.

14. Such an attitude may be inspired by Christian charity. Given the importance of church-driven immigrant support on PEI, this point may call for further research.

15. “The Population Secretariat’s mandate is to retain youth, repatriate former Islanders and attract and retain immigrants” (Government of Prince Edward Island 2008).
16. These differences are significant at 95 per cent confidence level. National Sample Size=1,002. Poll was conducted in May 2008. Margin of error is ±3.1 per cent. Atlantic Canadians in sample=ninety seven.

References


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A “STOPOVER PLACE” AT BEST?


THE WARMTH OF THE WELCOME


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