

Otiyaner: The "Women's Path" Through Colonialism

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) women in the context created by the challenges of colonization on the balance and maintenance of gender roles in traditional Haudenosaunee society. A distinctly female Haudenosaunee perspective provides a unique view of our history and gives voice to our resilience as Haudenosaunee women.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine les femmes haudenosaunées (Iroquois) dans le contexte créé par les défis de la colonisation sur l'équilibre et le maintien du rôle des hommes et des femmes dans la société haudenosaunee traditionnelle. Une perspective distinctivement de femme haudenosaunee donne un point de vue unique de notre histoire et donne une voix à notre résilience en tant que femmes haudenosaunées.

During the summer of 1990 there was a tense seventy-eight day standoff between the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) and Canadian armed forces at Kanehsatake (Oka), Quebec. During the initial confrontation, which took place in an area known as "the Pines," a group of women were approached by the *Sûreté du Québec Tactile Intervention Squad*, which was reinforced by riot police in full gear. They wanted to negotiate and end the confrontation. "Where's your leader?" said the officer with the megaphone. "We want to speak to your leader." A woman replied "There's no leader here. You are looking at the leaders. Everyone's the leader. The people are the leaders" (York & Pindera 1991, 23).¹

The traditional roles of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy) women were radically different from those of women in the settler society. The strength of the Confederacy lay in its use of complimentary sex roles. Males and females were in balance. Represented symbolically as the forest (external, male-oriented activities of hunting, trade and warfare) and the clearing (internal, female oriented activities of agriculture, child rearing and food processing), they co-existed, each with a spatially separate land base and leadership.² In accord with this binary schema, women played an integral part in the political and societal aspects of Haudenosaunee institutions. To the amazement of European observers, they exercised veto power over

warfare, land use, the selection of diplomatic representatives and other areas of public concern.

Eurocentric views of the roles of Indigenous women are often wildly incorrect. Even the feminist movement, which was initially inspired by Indigenous freedom, has failed to adequately recognize and record the crucial role that Haudenosaunee women played in its development.³ This is due partly to the male-oriented roots of the European literary industry and partly to the limited direct contact that settlers had with Haudenosaunee people in general and with traditional women in particular. As a result, historical records reflect certain beliefs about who the colonizers thought we were. As one scholar notes, "When the Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries of New France (Canada), as well as the stoney-faced Puritans of New England and the pragmatic Dutch of New York went to record their triumphs, they simply ignored the women who formed so vibrant a part of Iroquoia. In the penning process, they rendered the women as faceless as *S'hondow ěk'owa*, death's herald. When the later histories were written using these 'primary sources,' Iroquoian women were consequently nowhere to be found - their faces had been wiped clean from the record" (Mann 2000, 15). As such, we were not considered a relevant part of the telling of the history of Canada.

Inaccurate historical writing on Haudenosaunee women has helped perpetuate

misconceptions about us. Our voices are underrepresented and our actions misinterpreted throughout the historical record. The modern international order and the format of modern states were established at a time when it was an accepted truism among Europeans to say of North American Indians that "Their temper is passionate, resentful, revengeful, intriguing and treacherous. They make good soldiers, but poor leaders. They are avaricious, utterly selfish, shameless beggars, and have a great propensity to steal" (Macmillan 2003, 444). In light of such attitudes, it is not surprising that the pressures and policies of colonial society produced a long series of events similar to the Oka Crisis. We have been profoundly misunderstood. Yet, an examination of Haudenosaunee culture and history will demonstrate that the underlying sense of our power as Haudenosaunee women has managed to survive through time and is now re-emerging to assert itself in our relations with the settler society.

THE TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF THE HAUDENOSAUNEE PEOPLE

Considerable controversy exists regarding the position of Indigenous women in pre-contact societies. This confusion is largely derived from male-centered Eurocentric interpretations of the diverse cultures that existed prior to their arrival. Haudenosaunee women had well-defined and important economic, social, political and spiritual roles in traditional society. The central nature of women's roles is reflected in the record of the Kaienerekowa or Great Law of Peace, known to European scholars as the Constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy. For example, Wampum (law) forty-four of the Kaienerekowa states - "The lineal descent of the people of the Five Nations shall run in the female line. Women shall be considered the Progenitors of the Nation. They shall own the land and the soil. Men and women shall follow the status of their mothers" (Ohontsa Films 1993, 39).

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy united the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk), Seneca, Onondaga, Cayuga, Oneida and Tuscarora nations. These nations confederated in the pre-contact era according to the legal philosophy entrenched in the Kaienerekowa. According to our oral history, it was brought to the people by Deganawitha, the

"peacemaker" and by the woman Jigonsaseh, the leader of the cultivators, who discussed existing customs with the people in order to implement a substantial change in the way our society was organized.⁴ Much like the European League of Nations established several centuries later, the Kaienerekowa aimed at replacing conflict and disorder with diplomacy and peace. The procedures it uses are radically different. It is not a by-product of colonialism, reflecting instead the egalitarian philosophy of the Haudenosaunee. If human relations are egalitarian they must be based on consent. These principles - of equality and consent - are believed to have been learned by observing the natural world, especially the animals. We consider animals as "windows to creation" and feel that we must maintain a close, respectful relationship with the plant and animal world to ensure our survival. This profound respect for Mother Earth and her procreative abilities has manifested itself in many ceremonies which honour nature and all that it provides to ensure the survival of our peoples.

The principles underlying the philosophy of the Kaienerekowa indirectly define the roles of men and women. If looked at more closely, the separate but conjoined roles of men and women ensure peace through the balance of power and mutual respect for our particular responsibilities within the nation. Neither gender is considered "the weaker sex" and each is complementary to the other. Women are generally seen as the central anchor upon which the survival of Haudenosaunee society is dependent. If the women are weak, for example, not able to bear children, physically frail or otherwise unable to raise healthy strong-minded children, the power of the nation is compromised. This has been described by Gawanahs Tonya Gonella Frichner, Snipe Clan, Onondaga Nation using the traditional metaphor of the never-ending circle of life - "Our way of life is cyclical and the first circle is the family. The heart of the Confederacy, which we call ourselves, is the family. The heart of the family is the mother, because life comes from her. The children are our essence for the future. When our circle extends, it extends to the larger family, which is the clan. When we talk about the clan, it is an extended family. Your clan is determined by your mother. Ours is a matriarchal society" (Farley 1993, 44). It is commonly expressed that "if the women of the nation are

powerful, the nation is powerful." This conceptualization of a woman's procreative abilities as central is also celebrated and embedded in the economic, political, and spiritual aspects of our culture. It is, therefore, the duty of the men to protect the power of the nation: the women.

In the past, this centrality of women was also reflected in the important intermediary role of women in interactions between the Haudenosaunee and European fur traders and diplomats. The roles for Haudenosaunee women are radically different from those represented by the image of the "squaw." This is a vulgar expression for the vagina associated with domination by men following colonization when Indigenous women were treated as slaves, concubines or prostitutes.⁵ In our traditional society, women were considered invaluable and even the post-contact records demonstrate that we were crucial to the success of intercultural relations. Women helped establish contacts with other nations, acted as interpreters, diplomats and guides, contributed to the food supply of the forts, and maintained an agricultural surplus, which was necessary to nurture alliances based on the distribution of "gifts."⁶

The political roles of women are clearly outlined in the Kaienerekowa. They did not just influence the men. The *otiyaner* (also known as clanmother) "set the path" of the culture. They choose the *rotiyaner* - the male councilors commonly called "chiefs" or "sachems" by Europeans. Wampum number fifty-four of the Kaienerekowa states, "When a chieftainship title becomes vacant through death or other cause, the Otiyaner women of the clan in which the title is hereditary shall hold a council and shall choose one of their sons to fill the office made vacant...If the men and women agree to a candidate, then his name shall be referred to the sister clan for confirmation. If the sister clan confirms the choice, they shall refer their action to the chiefs of the League who shall ratify the choice and present it to their cousin chiefs, and if the cousin chiefs confirm the name, then the candidate shall be installed by the proper ceremony for the conferring of chieftainship titles" (Ohontsa Films 1993, 45). It is also the duty of our women to depose any *rotiyaner* who does not adhere to the principles of the Kaienerekowa.

The importance of women in keeping a clear head by not letting emotions overwhelm us was crucial in times of war, especially in light of the fact that women had the final say in sending the nation's men to war. In the past our women have withheld approval when they felt military action was not right. This was, and still is, allegorically represented by the women's responsibility for making moccasins and providing travel provisions for the men. If they didn't provide them, then the men could not go to war.⁷

As a bearer of Haudenosaunee culture my experience has not given me any reason to doubt that the philosophy of the Kaienerekowa is reflected in the traditions of my people. Through experience I know that ours is a culture of peace. We have attempted to maintain this peace through extreme adversity.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TRADITIONAL ROLES OF HAUDENOSAUNEE WOMEN

Because women are the foundation of Haudenosaunee society, the strength and centrality of our role had to be destroyed to facilitate colonial efforts to assimilate us. Throughout North America the Onkwehonwe (original people) were subjected to an onslaught of similar pressures, policies and confrontations. I will focus on three interrelated areas of concern: the physical health of our women, the influences of the church and the administrative policies of settler governments.

Regarding health, many Indigenous societies felt the arrival of Europeans before direct contact occurred. The introduction of iron tools, textiles, and guns were accompanied by the spread of devastating new diseases. Some regions were suddenly struck by the deaths of well over 95% of the population.⁸ The worst waves of epidemics occurred in tandem with European settlement which occurred as early as 1609 in Massachusetts. It was the European children - not the traders or missionaries - who carried active forms of the viruses since most adults had developed immunity to the diseases that would have such a detrimental impact on Haudenosaunee populations. The smallpox epidemics were the most notorious, as illustrated by historian Daniel Richter - "The first documented epidemics in Iroquoia were massive

smallpox outbreaks among the Mohawks and probably other nations in 1633. By the early 1640s these plagues had more than halved the population of the Five Nations, to approximately ten thousand: Mohawk population alone may have plunged by as much as 75 percent" (1992, 58). Such a large and sudden reduction in the overall Haudenosaunee population necessarily resulted in a loss of cultural knowledge, weakening the traditional structure of our societies and caused widespread demoralization. Our institutions and traditions were left in a vulnerable state. When direct contact finally occurred it was often unfriendly and its effects were strongly felt.

The Haudenosaunee attempted to establish diplomatic relations with all colonists, but Europeans were not familiar with Indigenous models of egalitarian diplomacy. In order to gain control over extensive Haudenosaunee lands and resources, colonial agents attempted to pit the individual nations of the Confederacy against one another, aggravating differences and forcing the nations to "cover over" the Confederacy central fire in times of war.⁹ In essence, as a matter of survival during the Anglo-French and Anglo-American wars, the Confederacy's formal structure was put aside and the member nations chose which side they would support. We became divided through multiple allegiances. This, coupled with the cumulative effects of disease, settlement-induced migration, economic change, and recurrent conflict, caused a physical, mental and spiritual breakdown in our traditional societies. It was in this compromised state that European ideals slowly began to infiltrate the Haudenosaunee social fabric.

The cumulative detrimental impact of the epidemics on the original communities paved the way for the replacement of traditional Haudenosaunee land management practices with European agricultural customs organized by missionaries and colonial governments. Three main European rivals - England, France and the Netherlands - competed to exploit the land that traditionally sustained my Haudenosaunee ancestors. The missionaries who were first sent to Haudenosaunee communities were followed by the development of trading centers, which eventually attracted long-term European settlement. The imported customs of settlement directly impacted land-use patterns compromising the viability of the

land for growing of the "three sisters" - the crops of corn, beans and squash traditionally raised by Haudenosaunee women.

Each of the symbiotic European institutions of church and state contributed to the weakening of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, ultimately affecting the roles of the women. When the colonizers noted that Haudenosaunee social structure was egalitarian they interpreted this as something that prevented us from becoming "civilized." Yet their initial attempts to impose their system of social and cultural beliefs were rejected. This led them to view the Haudenosaunee as "obstacles" to colonization.¹⁰ Yet from our perspective, the ideal of male superiority does not make sense. Both sexes have necessary roles to play and hierarchy does not exist among animals in nature where all functions are interdependent.

The Eurocentric perceptions of the "high status" of women in our communities conflicted with European conceptualizations of gender roles. Opposition to this has been described with reference to the Montagnais in New France - "It is you women," charged the [Montagnais] men, "...who are the cause of all our misfortunes, it is you who keep the demons among us. You do not urge to be baptized; you must not be satisfied to ask this favor only once from the fathers, you must importune them. You are lazy about going to prayers; when you pass before the cross, you never salute it; you wish to be independent. Now know that you will obey your husbands." With this angry accusation the Christian men of a Montagnais Indian band in New France, frustrated by the persistence of traditional religion in their community, identified women as the major obstacle to the group's conversion (Devens 1986, 461). Missionaries of various orders soon realized that our way of thinking had to be broken in order to take control of us and teach us "civilized" ways.

The depopulation and demoralization that occurred after the epidemics gave the missionaries an opportunity to succeed where they might otherwise have failed. We had no cure for the foreign diseases and so the missionaries capitalized on our inadvertent misfortunes, discrediting our traditional spiritual beliefs and promising survival if conversion occurred. This opened the door to the imposition of further Eurocentric ideals that promoted the concept of "women as property." By

introducing this way of thinking, they created conflict between Haudenosaunee men and women who no longer saw the complementary nature of their roles. The detrimental influence of the church can thus be found, not so much in the impact on women's health and physical status, but rather in the way it changed the *thinking* of all concerned. This was described in 1893 by Haudenosaunee-inspired Matilda Joslyn Gage with reference to the Women's Suffrage Movement, but her words ring true to the situation of Indigenous women in general: "As I look backward through history I see the church everywhere stepping upon advancing civilization, hurling woman from the plane of 'natural rights' where the fact of her humanity had placed her...teaching an inferiority of sex; a created subordination of woman to man; making her very existence a sin...thus crushing her personal, intellectual and spiritual freedom" (Spittal 1990, 224). The glaring applicability of the previous statement lies in a personal account of my Mother, who, as a young child in the 1950s was told by the nuns in charge of education in our community of Kahnawake that she belonged to a "dying race."

The sedentary settlements of the missionaries eventually evolved into the reservation system constructed by colonial administrators who sought a means of physically constraining Indigenous movement in order to assert exclusive control over all of the land and resources. My ancestors, the Haudenosaunee, were agriculturalists who used methods designed to maintain the fertility of the land. Every twelve years or so, when firewood became scarce and the fields became exhausted of their nutritive value, they changed the location of their villages as part of a regenerative cycle for both fields and forest that would lead them to return in about a hundred years. Restricting the Haudenosaunee to single plots of land severely limited our agricultural potential and changed the roles and responsibilities of both men and women. The reservation system had a profound impact on the status of our women because the cultivation of food had been one of our primary roles in "the clearing." Our tradition of living communally in the longhouses of our clan mothers was further disrupted by the stress the missionaries placed on the ideal of male-dominated nuclear families living in separate housing units. The demise of the longhouse facilitated the demise of related

traditions: "The cultural significance of these dwellings for the peoples of the Longhouse rested on their interior special geography and the experiential legacy of countless hours spent confined within them. The organization of physical space thus embodied an ethic of sharing and reciprocity between kin groups who, although separated, 'boile in one kettle, eat out of one dish, and with one spoon, and so be one'" (Richter 1992, 19). The longhouse is a political symbol as well as a way of life. It represents the means by which we women express ourselves and partake in our traditional roles. With no longhouse we had no means of expressing ourselves and the respect formerly given to us through traditional ceremonies in the longhouse was neglected. As the Haudenosaunee economy diversified to accommodate the colonial dynamic, our focus on agriculture deteriorated. The role of women was progressively re-oriented in the European mould to focus exclusively on the home and the raising of children. This was clearly an imported influence. It undermined our traditional customs by which children had always been raised by a number of women of the grandmother's generation while the younger women worked in the fields. When women began caring exclusively for their own children, the roles of the grandmothers were affected. Because of the integrated nature of our society, these changes in functions of an entire gender had far-reaching consequences which affected the men as well.

The changes in our social roles as women impacted our physical health, which contributed to the further degeneration of our status. The consequences of the sedentary lifestyle of the reserve were compounded by dietary change from traditional foods to those containing more sugar, flour, and salt. One result has been the disproportionate number of diabetics not only among the Haudenosaunee but also among all Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, by increasing our reliance on trade products rather than continuing with the arduous labor of agriculture, the activity levels of women decreased. For these reasons, overall health declined over the generations.

The economic and political situation of the Indigenous peoples had not improved by the late nineteenth century despite all of the ministering of the missionaries and "civilizing" administrators. Our male representatives were left with no choice.

They were forced to accept foreign policies as a means for survival as expressed in treaties and alien legislation such as the *Indian Act*: - "We were going through a period of genocide of our people. We were once a large number, numbering about a million and we were down to several thousand. So, we were concerned about survival and the men were told 'you do things our way we'll give you food, we'll give you a place to live, and we'll help you to survive. We'll even educate your children.' So the men, who were vulnerable, fell for it" (Horn, 1995).

The residential schooling system was instituted in concert with the *Indian Act* in the late nineteenth century. It was meant to accelerate the assimilation process. Yet the attempt to entrench Eurocentric ideas about family and community by taking children from their parents to be raised in an alien culture fits the 1948 definition of "genocide" now established under international law.¹¹ The devastating effects of this ill-conceived policy are still running rampant and, like other Indigenous nations, the strength of Haudenosaunee peoples was greatly compromised. Fifty percent of the residential school children died (Annett 2001, 5). The families and communities that were shattered in the process are still trying to cope with the devastation as its effects ripple down the generations.¹² Our traditional roles as women, as mothers, as nurturers and educators were diminished by this system as parental contact with children was minimized or eliminated altogether. The school programs were culturally destructive, violent, and lonely. The system has had many well-known physical and psychological implications for its students: sexual abuse, alcoholism, breakdown of traditional cultures, and loss of identity. These effects are only now being discussed openly in our communities. The legacy of the residential school system has been a major contributing factor to the almost complete breakdown of the traditional role of women in First Nations communities.

Haudenosaunee women in particular suffered through their involvement in an imposed education within the various schools established in or around our communities by the religious orders who took our "civilizing" to hand in conjunction with the larger effort by the colonial government to do the same.

The main body of legislation employed by the Canadian government to discredit many aspects of traditional culture was consolidated into the *Indian Act*, implemented in 1876 by a parliament in which there was no Indigenous representation. Though we had been able to hold our own in trade for centuries, the *Indian Act* was promoted as a means of administering the affairs of "Indians" until we demonstrated that we were sufficiently "civilized" to look after ourselves by becoming assimilated. As the primary tool used by the colonial government to attack Indigenous self-determination, it actively seeks to implement a hierarchical and patriarchal ideology, which is in opposition to Haudenosaunee culture.

The *Indian Act* was passed at a time when the Dominion of Canada was still legally considered to be a British colony.¹³ As an arm of the British Empire, Canada's federal parliament was charged with administering "Indians and lands reserved for the Indians."¹⁴ However, the *Indian Act* was not readily accepted nor easily enforced. Several Indigenous nations argued that this piece of British legislation could not grant Canada more legal authority than Britain itself possessed.¹⁵ In the Kanienkehaka community of Akwesasne, the *Indian Act* was forcibly implemented in 1904 after the public murder of one clan chief who resisted his deposition by Canadian government agents and Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The resistance of the Haudenosaunee living on the Six Nations reserve went further. First they attempted to get a reference from the Supreme Court of Canada.¹⁶ Reasoning that they were "allies, not subjects of Britain," they claimed Canadian officials had no legal authority to legislate *for* the peoples they saw as "Indians." They were denied access to the court and when the RCMP raided their reserve they carried their complaint to the newly founded League of Nations. The Netherlands, Persia, Estonia, Panama and Ireland all supported their request for formal consideration of their claim, yet their case was never heard. Acting on advice from Canada's Department of Indian Affairs, Britain pressured the international community to exclude the Haudenosaunee. Then, with the support of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Canada deposed the traditional Haudenosaunee government and took control of the Six Nations financial assets.¹⁷ Canada's actions at this time contradict modern

pretensions that all people are governed equally. Indigenous peoples were denied access to the legal and diplomatic institutions that were available to others and this had a devastating effect on the rights of women in Haudenosaunee society.

The overall opposition to the *Indian Act* by the Haudenosaunee underlies our realization that this act is an attack on our sovereignty. The *Act* ignored the traditional rights of women to create a system of elections, alien to the Haudenosaunee tradition, which it imposed onto the confederated nations. This way of thinking is not new. It is reflected in the speeches, media work, and writing that have come out of our communities since Canada first started legislating for "Indians."¹⁸ The "Enfranchisement Act" of 1869 [a precursor to the *Indian Act*] was a law which attempted to forcibly impose "elective band councils" on Haudenosaunee communities. To carry out its intended goals of assimilation it declared that "the Governor may order that the Chiefs of any tribe, band or body of Indians shall be elected by the *male* [emphasis my own] members of each Indian settlement of the full age of twenty-one years at such time and place, and in such manner as the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs may direct" (S.C. 1869, c.6, f. 10).

The establishment of such colonial institutions served to undermine the powerful role of women within Haudenosaunee society and "to dispossess and expropriate Haudenosaunee lands, the colonizers had to eradicate the political power of the women" (Goodleaf 1995, 21). Self-determination, meaning an end to colonialism, is continually fought for and jealously guarded by all nations of the world. Why should we Haudenosaunee people be expected to be any different?

More specifically, the *Indian Act* is particularly offensive to us as women. It perpetuates patriarchal ideals both through the procedures it imposes and through its appropriation of the right to define Indian status and band membership. Some battles have already been fought for and won by Kanienkehaka women. In the case of the *Indian Act*, if an Indigenous woman married a non-"Indian," she and her children automatically lost their status as "Indians" along with any related benefits such as post-secondary education, health care, housing and tax free status. On the other hand, if a man married a non-"Indian" woman, the woman and her children

automatically gained full status as "Indians" as well as any benefits that entailed. Mary Two-Axe of Kahnawake, along with other Indigenous women, lobbied intensely at the international level. Eventually, in 1985, an amendment was made to section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act*. Bill C-31 reinstated those women and their children who had lost their rights under the original section to the *Indian Act*. Yet the unilaterally imposed solution left the patriarchal organization intact and created a whole new set of problems.

Band membership was traditionally determined on the basis of a variety of patrilineal or matrilineal social customs that vary substantially from one Indigenous people to another. My people, the Haudenosaunee, are matrilineal. According to our tradition, the men would leave their communities to live among the family of their partners and the children belong to their mother's group or village. However, the *Indian Act* automatically places both the mother and her children under the Band membership of the husband, assuming he is legally considered an "Indian." Moreover, the children of anyone with one parent who does not have Indian status under Canadian law lose their rights, no matter how well integrated they are with their Indigenous linguistic and cultural community. In effect, Bill C-31 did not let go of the ultimate objective of assimilation into the dominant Canadian society. It represents another attack on the reproductive freedom and cultural integrity of Haudenosaunee women and its effects will be pernicious in the long run.

REAWAKENING KNOWLEDGE OF THE POWER OF OUR WOMEN

The Feminist Movement of the last eight decades has generally been a Euro-American movement. As such it has focused on equality between the sexes, and it is generally fought on an individual basis, often framing success in terms defined by this male-dominated culture. There is no parallel movement among Indigenous women. We have no need for a specifically Indigenous Women's Movement. Although some women choose to find parallels in the Women's Movement, for the most part we are working with our men to try to survive. Our focus is on achieving a better standard of living for all, as well as serving as role models to help

reduce the negative impact of the pre-conceived images that continue to confront us. As Indigenous peoples, we are tired of having to endure the evolving manifestations of old stereotypes like the noble savage, the blood-thirsty warrior, the noble princess, and the alcohol ravaged squaw (Tsosie 1988, 2). As individuals and as communities, we are directly fighting the misconceptions that continue to be perpetuated in the mainstream media, literature, film, and politics.

More specifically, as Haudenosaunee women we have a crucial role to play in shaping the political response to the many challenges that confront our peoples. In keeping with the values and assumptions of Euro-American culture, the Canadian government acts at all levels, according to policies that ignore our traditional Indigenous political structures like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the importance of women in them. The social order Canada has imposed through the *Indian Act* is structured to destroy our traditions and inhibit the re-birth of institutions that reflect our cultural preferences. Yet many people, old and young alike, are asserting and reaffirming our right to our cultures. Indigenous grassroots movements such as the lobster conflict at Esgehoopetitj¹⁹ (Burnt Church) and the Skwelkwek'welt Sun Peaks protests reflect our ties to each other and to our land that we have maintained throughout history despite all odds.²⁰ Perhaps someday, circumstances will allow for a real League of Nations that establishes a governmental structure that stabilizes Indigenous self-determination through the national and international recognition of symbols such as the Warrior Flag.²¹ This symbol speaks not only to the Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous peoples but also to the excluded and the voiceless all over the world. It speaks to all the men and women who believe in true equality.

The participation of women in the 1990 Kanienkehaka resistance to the extension of a golf course on our sacred land at Kanehsatake is just one small part of the work that Indigenous women everywhere have been doing to help clean up the residue of the colonial past by healing wounds and creating new paths for strengthening the unity of all of the Onkwehonwe, the original people. The success of the Kanienkehaka during this crisis was due to the assertion of our historic role. It was by working side by side with our men that all managed

to get out alive. We succeeded, despite the death of Corporal Lemay of the S.Q. by "friendly fire" and the bayoneting in the chest of my sister who was fourteen years old at the time. She was one of many "heading home," as she characterizes it, after a long summer behind the barricades at Oka. She was holding my youngest sister, who was just four years old at the time, in her arms. Why was the Canadian army attacking young girls? The whole incident was recorded on film yet the Canadian government continues to ignore its responsibility. It is by upholding our traditional roles as Haudenosaunee women and men that we have managed to survive and protect each other in this distinctly hostile environment.

To us, it is obvious that the reaffirmation of our identity and our empowerment must include our women. In our culture we are all equal. There is no distinction between the responsibilities of men and women. This is what we showed the Quebec negotiators at Oka. We approached the negotiating table with the knowledge that each must work together for the good of all the people. Many other events and circumstances after Oka have also motivated Indigenous peoples to rekindle pride in our identities and traditions. This can be seen in the rising numbers of our people who are obtaining post-secondary education, in our participation in various social movements, in increasing interest by the public in pan-Indigenous awareness, in the assertion of land issues, in the development and diversification of our economies, in our rising populations, and in the overall increase in the visibility of Indigenous issues around the world.

In North America pockets of traditionalists have kept our cultures and practices alive. When our traditions were outlawed, they held secret underground ceremonies for fear of being arrested. In these families our culture has remained alive, and they have recently begun to emerge giving our people the benefit of this suppressed cultural knowledge. Our culture is not static but a blend of the past, the present and the future combined to create Haudenosaunee writers, athletes, scholars, and musicians. We are changing and adapting in the modern world, while remaining faithful to our Indigenous principles and perspectives.²² We believe that our traditional customs based on equality and mutual respect have a lot to offer to others. For many of my Haudenosaunee sisters,

defining a contemporary identity based on fundamental truths about our past is the basis of developing cultural resilience. I think that Jigonsaseh would agree with me when I propose that first, we need to be strong in our knowledge of our history and traditions. Power comes from knowing and realizing our true past. If you are connected to your identity then you are whole and strong. The process of connecting was characterized by Blackfoot scholar Leroy Little Bear as "coming home" when he recently spoke about land as a source of Indian identity.²³ The next step is to achieve a higher degree of well-informed and analytical education so we can work with our communities and help our people to survive in the twenty-first century. This engenders a sense of cultural identity. It is the means by which modern Haudenosaunee women find "the balance between modern life and the older traditions, between the mechanistic forces of technology and the life-forces of tradition" (Tsosie 1988, 32). It is from there that we move into the 21st century as strong Haudenosaunee peoples.

ENDNOTES

1. The women's role during the Oka Crisis of 1990 has not been looked at critically. Women and the Oka Crisis are briefly discussed in Goodleaf 1995; Horn-Miller 2002; and Martin-Hill 2003.
2. See Deborah Doxtator (1996) for a full explanation and discussion of the metaphor of "the clearing" and "the forest."
3. For commentary on the impact that the women of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy had on early feminists see eg. Gunn Allen (1986), Mann (2000), and Wagner (2001).
4. Little is written in the historical record about the role of Jigonsaseh "leader of the cultivators" in the development of the Confederacy. Barbara Alice Mann (2000), demonstrates that she had a very important part to play in the success of the peace process. Her story has been neglected but resurrected and retold in the work of Mann.
5. Mann (2000) takes an extensive look at the definition and use of this term to subjugate the physical body and social role of not only Haudenosaunee women but all Indigenous women.
6. See eg. Jennings (1975) Jennings et al. (1985), O'Meara (1968), Thomas (1996), Van Kirk (1980), and Wright (1981), for references that illustrate the direct and indirect roles of women in the fur trade, settler survival, and diplomacy.
7. Historical references to the role of women in determining male participation in warfare are scarce. Most only briefly touch on the role of women in this process (See Champion Randle 1990 and Rothenberg 1980) and look at the role in terms of the secondary role of women. If we look deeper, we see that the participation of men ultimately was determined by the women: if they had no provisions or even proper footwear, they logically could not go to war. In an Internet statement released in 2001 before the United States declaration of war on Iraq, *Peace Moccasins: Moccasin Makers and War Breakers, a call to action by the women of the world. We have the power to stop the war!* (Horn & Horn-Miller, 2001) attempted to highlight the central role that women can play in stopping unnecessary war.
8. This has been documented in Mann (2002).

9. To "cover over" the central fire of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is a metaphor for disbanding the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. The central fire of the Confederacy is in Onondaga territory and it is where all the representatives of the six nations meet for Grand Council meetings. References to it can be found in Jennings (1984).
10. Extensive documentation about early relations between the Indigenous people of North America and the Jesuits are contained in the *Jesuit Relations*. In it, there are numerous references to the unstable and often violent relationship between the "Iroquois" and the settler populations. Reading it from a Kanienkehaka perspective, one can see how efforts to maintain a sovereign position were constantly thwarted by the colonial administrators and religious orders. As a strong and powerful organization with much influence among the Indigenous populations, it was a constant struggle on the part of the Haudenosaunee not to be colonized. Therefore my ancestors were viewed as "obstacles" to successful colonization.
11. With reference to the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.
12. This is discussed extensively in Neu & Therrien (2003).
13. See Woo (2000) for further discussion on this topic.
14. This is in reference to the *British North America Act, 1867*, s.91 (24) now called the *Constitution Act, 1867*.
15. For further discussion, see Woo (2000).
16. For an in-depth look at this, see Woo (2000).
17. This is examined extensively in Woo (2000).
18. For an in-depth discussion on the work of Tuscarora and Seneca writers who attempted to counter widespread misrepresentations about Native peoples, see Konkle (2004).
19. The Mik'maq word meaning "we wait in a small place of gathering" is used by the people more often than the term Burnt Church to describe their community.
20. Audra Simpson takes the beginning steps at looking at the tie between contemporary culture and "Mohawk" nationhood at Kahnawake in her work *Paths Towards a Mohawk Nation: Narratives of Citizenship and Nationhood in Kahnawake* (2000) and carries this query into her PhD Dissertation titled *To The Reserve and Back Again: Kahnawake Mohawk Narratives of Self, Home and Nation* (2003).
21. For extensive discussion on the Warrior Flag, see Horn-Miller (2003).
22. Adaptation is discussed with reference to use of the War Dance as an empowerment strategy to combat modern forms of warfare and with reference to the places and contexts where the Warrior Flag is used in Horn-Miller (2002) and Horn-Miller (2003) respectively.
23. Leroy Little Bear is a well-known Blackfoot scholar. He recently gave a talk with this very same title in which he discussed Indigenous identity and the relationship to land. His Opening Keynote Address "Land as a Source of Indian Identity" became a launching point for a series of discussions on the issues surrounding Indigenous identity at a conference titled *Indigeneity in the 21st Century* held at the University of California in Berkeley from October 28th to 30th, 2004. Little Bear discussed land as a repository of sorts for the stories and culture of Indigenous peoples. Therefore the notion of "coming home" refers to one's participation in the ceremonies that take place on that land which ultimately serve as a way to reconnect you with and strengthen your Indigenous identity.

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