

Blood from a Stone:  
An Autoethnographic History of the Land Surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains

Michelle Ohnona

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## ABSTRACT

### Blood from a Stone: An Autoethnographic History of the Land Surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains

Michelle Ohnona

The Mission of the Lake of Two Mountains consisted of a portion of land granted to the Sulpicians in 1717 to hold in trust for the Mohawks who were forced to relocate there from the Sault-au-Récollet Mission on the Island of Montreal. Over the course of the 270 years that followed, the land of the Mission of the Lake of Two Mountains, now known as Kanehsatake or Oka, was expropriated from the Mohawks. The conflict at Kanehsatake in 1990 showcased the competition of histories that struggle to define the land's future. This thesis proposes to examine the expropriation of the land from the Mohawks through an autoethnographic history of place. Using a plaque erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in commemoration of the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains as a point of departure, this thesis raises the question of how public memory functions as a barrier in the repatriation of First Nations land and in the larger project of the decolonization of Canada.

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## INTRODUCTION

*It's like getting blood from a stone, they say, when something is difficult to achieve. Stones, it is assumed, are not alive, do not bleed. Yet as I faced the plaque on that warm afternoon, I heard the sound of beating. "Something inside that stone", I thought, "is alive". Slowly, I realized that what stood before me was not a plaque, but a tombstone.*

I have lived in Montreal my whole life. In conversation, I invoke Montreal as the place that I am "from", exposing the connections, some real, most imagined, that I have to this place. Just east of where I lived with my mother as a child, the remains of a large Iroquois settlement have been buried and built upon, creating what is now the downtown core of the city. As a student of history or *sciences humaines* in Quebec, my knowledge of the fact of colonialism on this land was guided carefully towards a heavily doctored version of the establishment of the nation of Canada. I remember images in my grade school history book of Jacques Cartier receiving a cup of infused cedar leaves, a cure for scurvy, from a benevolent Iroquois chief. The settlement of North America was presented to me as an inert fact of history, benign and inevitable.

In the summer of 1990, an eruption occurred that intercepted the story of colonialism that I had learned. In the Mohawk territory of Kanehsatake, located 60 kilometres north of Montreal, plans were announced to extend a private golf course into Mohawk territory, destroying a historic pine forest that includes a Mohawk cemetery. After 270 years of having their land expropriated by the Sulpician priests of the Lake of Two Mountains mission, the Mohawks of Kanehsatake occupied the forest for nearly six months. The series of confrontations that occurred in Kanehsatake during that summer

exposed the brutal reality of colonial oppression that lingers under Canada's façade as a peaceable multicultural nation. The events that transpired that summer came to be known as the "Oka Crisis" – a name that both enables and inhibits specific understandings of the events. Although the word 'crisis' accurately captures the violent nature of the conflict, referring to the series of confrontations at Kanehsatake as a 'crisis' has made impossible the idea that the crisis has not ended; or rather, that the crisis is one that has been ongoing for more than 350 years. Likewise, using Oka as the defining location in naming the crisis effectively erases the legitimacy of Mohawk claims to the land.

As a child of eight, I sensed the seriousness of the conflict through the ways it affected many of the adults around me. Early in the summer, my best friend's mother brought us to the camp of supporters that was established outside the parameters of the municipality of Oka, known later as the Peace Camp. Although I had often heard the word "government" used in a critical context, my visit to the Peace Camp marked the first time in my life that I witnessed active protest. It moved me. While my memories of the camp consist largely of fragmented snapshots of cars parked on grass, people drumming, and a man giving a speech to the crowd, I remember clearly the electricity of the atmosphere. The sparks created from the friction of resistance against power imprinted their brightness on my heart and have stayed with me ever since. Like many children, I had a keen and intuitive understanding of how power functions, and the experience compelled me to believe, perhaps more strongly than I have ever since, in the possibility of freedom.

Sixteen years after the Kanehsatake conflict, I encountered, almost by accident, a plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains, the lake that lies just

west of Kanehsatake. The plaque, erected by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada in 1925, describes the events surrounding the battle, heralding the conflict as a French victory over the Iroquois of the area. The terms of the victory are clear: 18 Iroquois were killed, two were taken prisoner and only one managed to swim to safety. When reviewed by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board in 1972, the Board found that no changes to the original text were necessary. A new plaque was erected, with the original text unchanged and minted in bronze:

Following the Lachine massacre in August 1689, the Iroquois continued to terrorize the Montreal area. In October, Governor Denonville sent out a scouting party of 28 under the Sieurs Dulhut and d'Ailleboust de Manthet which came upon a party of 22 Iroquois in the lac des Deux Montagnes. In the mêlée that followed this surprise encounter 18 Iroquois were killed, three taken prisoner, while one swam to safety. This victory did much to restore the shaken confidence of the inhabitants.

I had never heard of the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains, and despite my awareness of the violent consequences of colonialism, had never inquired with much depth into the history of the land that I have lived on all my life. My discovery of this plaque marked the beginning of an investigation into the history of the colonization of Montreal, as well as into my own relationship to that history. This thesis is a combination of these two threads of inquiry.

There were a variety of political and cultural forces that militated towards the establishment of the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC), in 1919. The sense that Canada was a British dominion on the brink of national independence spurred the desire among Canada's elite to record and pay tribute to the nation-building efforts of the British and French colonial governments. At the same time, the Canadian government began to elaborate strategies of nation-building that could solidify the idea of



Canada as a unified nation. The establishment of a system of national parks became a project whose goal was to unite what was then a largely fractured conglomeration of provinces, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island having joined the confederation in 1870 and 1873 respectively. Looking for ways to push the national parks system further east, the Commissioner of Dominion Parks, James B. Harkin, established the HSMBC, forming an institution that would oversee the designation of places of historic importance around which national parks could be established ("History"). Since its inception, the HSMBC has designated a total of 1,928 sites, people and events deemed to be of historic importance to Canada ("History"), firmly entrenching it among the vast assortment of agencies and organizations whose work it is to protect and reproduce Canada's national mythologies.

Throughout this thesis, the term 'nation' is used to describe the Mohawk people. The use of the word nation, in the words of Linda Pertusati, implies "a sovereign people with the right to economic self-determination and self-government" (xi)<sup>1</sup>. Throughout the sources I have encountered, the term First Nations is preferred by many, but not all authors. While it is the term that is used in this thesis, I find it necessary to situate it as the term most often used in academic texts as an all-embracing name for the original inhabitants of what is now known as North America. The Mohawk word for Mohawk

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of nation is further complicated by the competing national identities of the French and English, in which English Canada's claim to belonging is dually threatened by First Nations and French claims to what Amelia Kalant calls "prior belonging" (5). Kalant describes the nation as "an imagined community" that is nonetheless deeply "constitutive of social and material realities", and insists on the fabricated nature of the nation in order to remove its status as an "object whose creation and perpetuation is owed to abstract forces, such as 'Nature' or 'natural elements' (race, blood, the 'natural' desire to coalesce with one's 'kind')" (13). Kalant provides an analysis of the role of Quebec nationalism during the events of 1990 in her chapter "Displacing the Native in Canadian Histories". For an in-depth discussion of Mohawk nationalism, see Taiaiake Gerald Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

people is Kanien'kehà:ka, meaning People of the Flint. The Mohawk word for First Nations is Onkwehon:we, whose literal translation is Original Peoples (David-Cree 3). I have chosen not to use these terms because of the carefulness with which I wish to borrow from Mohawk culture, aware as I am of the academic tradition of appropriation and consumption. I have, however, chosen to use the indigenous name for North America, Turtle Island, interchangeably with contemporary colonial names for the land. I hope that in exposing the thread of my analysis I have made clear the importance of names and naming, as well as my respect for the right of First Nations to self-identify. I will not suggest in this thesis that I have achieved a language detached of its history, only that a continued effort to elucidate the role and power of language is essential to my approach. That being said, my conclusions with regards to terminology are not definitive, and even as I write remain open to interrogation, scrutiny and contest.

In attempting to include a broad scope of stories in my work, the sources from which I draw hail from a variety of disciplines and take many different forms. The interdisciplinary nature of my project requires nourishment from historical documents (Biggar; Colby), government reports (Canada), personal narratives (Cooke; King), documentary films (Obomsawin) and scholarly works from areas such as geography (Boileau), historiography (David-Cree; Gordon; King; LaDuke; Massey), cartography (Monmonier; Turnbull) and film studies (Lewis; Pick; Steven; White). My investigation of autoethnographic methodology requires the consideration of autobiographical works that straddle the boundaries between non-fiction literature, historical narrative and fiction (King; Okri; Roy), in addition to works that explore the boundaries of social science research and writing (Clandinin and Conelly; Richardson; Krieger; Bodkey). The

chapters in this thesis reflect different approaches to history-making, in which the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains is described, historicized, laid claim to and struggled for. In addition to being methodologies, disciplines and media unto themselves, autoethnography, geography, public commemorations and film are also *ways of recounting the past*. The historiographic interventions offered by David-Cree, Gordon, King, LaDuke and Massey help to complicate the very notions of history and narrativization.

The undertaking of a project that is historical in nature is always complex, if only for the simple reason that history itself is a realm so entangled with politics, culture, memory and power. In investigating the history of a specific place, new complications arise, born of the thicket of socio-cultural, emotional and economic forces that bind places to narratives of their pasts. I have found this assertion of Doreen Massey's to be useful in weeding through the thicket:

The description, definition and identification of a place is thus always inevitably an intervention not only into geography but also, at least implicitly, into the (re)telling of the historical constitution of the present. It is another move in the continuing struggle over the delineation and characterisation of space-time. (190)

Massey's notion of "space-time" uncovers the ways in which history and place are vehicles by which accounts of a place's past are used in the struggle over its future. Massey suggests an alternative way through which the histories of places might be explored: "A way of understanding which, in the end, did not try to seal a place up into one neat and tidy 'envelope of space-time' but which recognised that what has come together, in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (191).

I have attempted to compose a history of the area surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains that effectively challenges the constricting tendencies of history-making and place-making. My task as a researcher has been to consistently interrogate the trajectories of the stories that I encounter, in order to allow for a multi-vocal account of the history of the place I am investigating. In Massey's words, a radical history would perhaps be "one which did not try to present either simple temporal continuity or only spatial simultaneity with no sense of historical depth" (191). It is this "historical depth" that I have strived to excavate through my research. Ultimately, this thesis is an intervention not only into a specific history of a specific location, but seeks also to disrupt dominant historiographic methods. My approach to historical analysis begins with the assertion that all moments in history are the result of the social relations, political struggles and power imbalances that both precede them and bring them into being. Similarly, Doreen Massey suggests that it may be more useful to think of places:

...not as areas on maps, but as constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time; and to think of particular attempts to characterise them as attempts to define, and claim coherence and a particular meaning for, specific envelopes of *space-time*. (188)

Massey goes on to use the example of contemporary nation-states to illustrate her concept of "space-time". In applying her analysis to the case of Canada, it becomes clear that the temporal fragility of the concept of the Canadian nation is in large part the origin of the urgency with which national mythologies are deployed. Canada, in the not-so-distant past, did not exist. During its relatively short existence, its borders have shifted and its sovereignty has been challenged. There could also feasibly be a time when Canada no longer exists as a nation-state. For Massey, this indicates that "the boundaries, and the naming of the space-time within them, are the reflections of power, and their existence

has effects. Within them there is an active attempt to ‘make places’” (189). Massey’s observation might be further extended to suggest that the places that are made through the processes of imagining and establishing the nation-state also require a coherent historical narrative – one that is able to effectively direct and shape public memory.

This thesis is not an autoethnography, but rather seeks to explore the value of autoethnographic methodologies in historical inquiry. As such, my narrated encounter with the plaque acts as the point of entry into the topics considered in the thesis. Additionally, the thesis draws in part on the work of authors whose work encompasses autoethnographic methodologies.

In the first chapter, I offer an account of how my encounter with the plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains motivated this work. In exploring the significance of autoethnography in historic inquiry, I address the methodology employed in this thesis, while introducing the precise site and the competing narratives at play in defining its history. The second chapter moves beyond the plaque itself, and provides a history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains, mapping the calculated expropriation of Kanehsatake by the Seigneurs de Saint Sulpice. It explores the land’s geographical past as a text which provides insight into the power dynamics that have shaped its history. The third chapter returns to the plaque by considering the role of state-sponsored commemoration in the forging of national identity. A textual analysis of the plaque follows, in which the particularities of the language and historical information are investigated. The fourth chapter again moves beyond the plaque to examine the events of the 1990 conflict at Kanehsatake. Drawing on various accounts of the conflict, I look at two films by Alanis Obomsawin, *Rocks at*

*Whiskey Trench* (2000) and *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and ask how they contribute to the development of counter-narratives that effectively de-centre state-sponsored narratives such as the one on the plaque.

My research begins at the very site of the plaque. I will start with the assumption that the terrain of public memory is a contested one; a realm in which a constant storm of tensions compete. My project is an investigation into the nation as an imagined community, and specifically, one whose existence relies on a heavily managed public memory. In his book *Making Public Pasts*, Alan Gordon explores the political tensions behind Montreal's public monuments, revealing them to be attempts by different communities at claiming pieces of Montreal history as their own. It is the work of modern states, maintains Gordon, to "establish themselves as guardians of the past and, through their monuments, their official customs and often legally sanctioned traditions, and their celebrations of anniversaries, try to order and delimit the individual memories of their many citizens" (3). One of the foundational elements to the theoretical framework that I will be using is a conception of public historic monuments as manifestations of a desire to manipulate and shape public memory in the interest of nation-building. A carefully managed public memory is therefore key in the creation and maintenance of the nation-state, and requires the establishment of government-sponsored institutions responsible for producing and propagating historical narratives capable of adequately shaping public memory. I will argue that the HSMBC is one such institution.

The array of mechanisms at work in containing and managing the history of Canada suggest to me the strength and power of the counter-narratives that are being repressed. In thinking about Foucault's assertion that "where there is power, there is

resistance” (*A History* 94), I began to think about how the presence of resistance is a catalyst for the deployment of repression. To study history is therefore to study the relationship between power and resistance. Foucault has argued that the centralising effects of hegemonic discourses of knowledge work to suppress, hide and constrain “subjugated knowledges”, which he maintains are primarily “concerned with a *historical knowledge of struggles*” (“Two Lectures” 83). Foucault’s conclusions help explain the suppression and distortion of information and knowledge surrounding First Nations resistance in Canada and worldwide. Knowing about struggle is therefore a dangerous thing. Knowing about struggle is itself an act of defiance against dominant historical conceptions which may present themselves as seamless, but are of course always subject to rupture.

As a nation whose establishment is inextricably linked to the process of European colonization, Canada provides a complex and layered field in which to explore questions of nationhood and identity. Canadian national myths must perform the tasks of justifying and naturalizing the process of colonization while producing and upholding a version of national identity that is both distinct and modern. As Amelia Kalant argues, these tensions are “...at the heart of postcolonial angst over cultural uniqueness, economic globalization and cultural imperialism, national integration and local difference” (5). In Quebec, this angst is coloured by the reality of the competing colonial histories of the French and English. The plaque that commemorates the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains is, by virtue of the confluence of histories and struggles that brought it into being, a heavily loaded point of entry into understanding the relationship between public memory, colonial repression and power.

Public memory around the idea of land ownership has been of central importance in the land dispute at Kanehsatake. In *Le silence des messieurs*, geographer Gilles Boileau recounts the history of the pine forest that became the focal point of the 1990 conflict. Having been hand-planted by the Mohawks of Kanehsatake at the turn of the twentieth century, the pine forest, also known as the Commons, is the only forest in Canada to have been entirely planted by hand (229). Boileau's account of the geological history of the land at Kanehsatake underscores the importance of the relationship between land and history, a relationship which forms the kernel of the struggle for First Nations sovereignty in Canada and throughout the world. Furthermore, it highlights the connection of the Kanehsatake Mohawks to the land, recasting the debate around land ownership by emphasizing that it was the Mohawks who, from the very inception of the mission of the Lake of Two Mountains, were responsible for the care of the land, often to the benefit of the white settlers who purchased land already tilled.

The aim of my research is to understand and analyse the complex range of impact that historic narratives have in present-day communities. As Alan Gordon aptly observes: "public memory is a contest that pits competing pasts against one another in a struggle to define the present" (17). Massey echoes this assertion when she emphasizes the impact of rival histories on the present: "What are at issue", she says, "are competing histories of the present, wielded as arguments over what should be the future" (183). The 1990 conflict at Kanehsatake showcased this competition of histories in all its ferocity, and it raises the question of how public memory functions as a barrier in the repatriation of First Nations land, and in the broader project of the decolonization of Canada. This thesis is therefore only *partially* historical, or rather, seeks to expand the borders of historicity, to



include in its scope the power of the past in determining the material, political and cultural aspects of the present and future.

I often remember my encountering the plaque as accidental. If it had not been pointed out to me, I never would have noticed it, tucked away as it was amidst the overgrown roadside greenery. Of course, no matter how casual the circumstances, no matter how pleasant the afternoon spent on the shore of the Lake of Two Mountains, the plaque and my finding it were anything but an accident. The plaque, erected in 1925, had been making its way to me for 81 years. A long journey, even for something as timeless as stone. My reaction to the plaque was immediate and visceral: I would make phone calls, I would write letters, I would deface it. I began to search, almost desperately, for the author of the plaque's text. I read through minutes of meetings held nearly a century ago, attempting to understand the forces that brought the plaque into being and that made it possible for it to continue to exist, in 2006, so long after its dedication. A year later, I recognize in that desperation the desire that underlies this project: an urge to uncover the deliberateness of the histories I was told.

This encounter has led me to undertake the project of investigating the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains. Using an autoethnographic methodology to situate my encounter with the plaque as the point of departure for the research, I hope to inscribe my presence in the writing of the thesis as well as to reveal the angle of my approach to the material. My desire to investigate the value of autoethnographic methodology in historical inquiry is informed by my past, and specifically the fact that my own existence on this land, as a French Canadian and Moroccan, is itself the result of European colonialism. My entanglement in the very

history I am interrogating is constitutive of my point of view as a person who has been indirectly displaced by the history of colonialism in North Africa on the one hand, and given privileges by the French colonial history in Quebec on the other. My position as a citizen and as a student in Quebec has endowed me with the baggage of a state narrative that seeks to erase the violence of its colonial legacy while asserting the primacy of the French language and culture. The inescapable consequences of this baggage were with me in the moment I encountered the plaque, and I have carried them through the process of writing this thesis.

In her article “New Writing Practices in Qualitative Research”, Laurel Richardson carves out a space for forms of ethnographic knowledge production that fall outside of the realm of conventional academic practice. Her definition of autoethnography is central to my own understanding of the term: autoethnographies are “highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural” (11). She further observes that

In telling the story, the writer calls upon such fiction-writing techniques as dramatic recall, strong imagery, fleshed-out characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, allusions, the flashback, the flashforward, tone shift, synecdoche, dialogue, and interior monologue. (11)

Richardson argues that the value of what she calls “evocative forms of writing” lies in the wealth of possibilities that it offers both the reader and the writer. Put simply, evocative forms of writing allow us to know differently. In exploring the value of autoethnographic methodology in historical inquiry, the use of some of the writing techniques described by Richardson has allowed my voice to enter the text through the invoking of memories and the narrativization of my encounter with the plaque. The tone shifts most evident in the

introduction and conclusion present a mechanism through which my subjective experience acts as a grounding element within the arc of the thesis.

In her article “Some People Would Say I Tell Lies”, Anna Banks struggles with the questions raised by genre blurring in social science research. She notes that while a writer of fiction may easily incorporate “factual” material into their work, a social scientist risks having their work discredited if they choose to use fiction as a means to communicate their research findings (172-175). Yet, citing interviews with novelists and academics alike, Banks suggests that those who utilize both fact and fiction in their work do so because they consider the difference between the two to be no more than a construct. Banks concludes that the often unyielding nature of the academy, that “last bastion of the objectivist religion” keeps many academics from exploring the boundary between fact and fiction (167). Banks calls what might emerge from the blurring of these boundaries an “imperfect narrative”, suggesting that the acceptance on the part of the academy of such a notion involves rethinking the idea of purity as it pertains to knowledge, disciplinary boundaries and methodology:

To accept “imperfect narrative” as a new means of reporting and presenting research will require the academic world to open up its disciplinary and methodological boundaries, and to question fundamentally accepted notions about reality, truth, about lies and how we express them. (174).

These notions – so fervently protected – of reality, truth and lies, are precisely those that I wish to call into question through this thesis.

## CHAPTER 1

### Autoethnography as a Method for Historical Inquiry

As a methodology that both inscribes the researcher in the research process and carves a place for the expression of multiple narratives, autoethnography presents a means through which static historical narratives might be interrupted. At the onset, autoethnography suggests that the author is part of the landscape being researched. This speaks to a central conviction of mine: that each of us are, in however complicated ways, involved in the power relations that shape, compress and restrain the world. The disconnection with which many of us have been taught to view our positions in the world has had grave consequences. Where research, naming, and the production of knowledge are concerned, these consequences have enabled the expansion of the brutal roots of colonialism, war, slavery and theft of dignity of one kind and another. In 1978, Edward Said's foundational work *Orientalism* revealed the relatedness of knowledge production, culture and power. Said suggested that what is known, and indeed what *can* be known, are closely bounded by dynamics of power. This assertion has deeply affected my own view of the academy, as well as my work within it, leaving me to hold close to my heart the essence of Said's argument: that we must never allow knowledge to be thought of as existing outside the reach of power. As I will use it, autoethnography is an insistence on the connectedness of myself to my work, of the academy to the world, and of global politics to the reading you will give my words. As Trinh Minh-ha so aptly observes: "In the global village, what concerns me, concerns you" (52). In this sense, I am proposing autoethnography not only as a methodology, but as a strategy. The use of the word

strategy here may seem out of place and militaristic. This is intentional, for as Arundhati Roy has noted in her speech “Come September”, there is a violent, dangerous war being waged in a range of ways all around our world; a war that reaps its fodder in our hearts and minds, and in our words and stories. In this global climate of war, I consider the intent and direction with which we infuse our ideas to be of critical importance. The reasons behind my choice to employ autoethnography as a methodology are, as I will further explain, strategic.

The methodology employed in this thesis is an integral part of the thesis itself. I hope that through the explanations I will offer regarding the methodology, it will become clear that the methodology is also part of the research, and not merely a means by which the research is conducted. In considering the contributions of the work of Edward Said, Laurel Richardson, Trinh Minh-ha, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Linda Brodkey and Susan Krieger, four elements whose preliminary consideration seems vital to an exploration of autoethnographic methodology have emerged: the place of the author’s self in research, the role of language in communicating research, the usefulness and dangers associated with ethnography and finally, the use of narrative, stories and storytelling in ethnographic writing. In combining autobiography and ethnography, two seemingly disparate types of knowledge production, autoethnography raises questions about how disciplines are constructed to delineate and compartmentalize different ways of knowing. Furthermore, the merging of autoethnography and history in this thesis challenges typical assumptions regarding the authority of both the social scientist as well as the historian. These appear to me to be characteristics that make autoethnography a methodology well suited to an inquiry into Canada’s colonial past.

As Edward Said has argued, the academy is deeply invested in the myth of genius as being able to transcend the boundaries of location and history, when in reality, one's work is always circumscribed by these and numerous other factors that bear tremendously on what and how we are able to know. In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the production of all knowledge is consistently hemmed in by a variety of factors:

My principle operating assumptions were – and continue to be – that fields of learning, as much as the works of even the most eccentric artist, are constrained and acted upon by society, by cultural traditions, by worldly circumstance, and by stabilizing influences like schools, libraries, and governments; moreover, that both learned and imaginative writing are never free, but are limited in their imagery, assumptions, and intentions. (201-202)

This assertion remains at the core of my research approach. Inscribing my presence in the research is a way to elucidate the limitations of my work, and to expose those elements that circumscribe my interpretation of the research material.

As Susan Krieger notes in *Social Science and the Self*, subjectivity and authorship are increasingly contested concepts within the academy, as many researchers are insisting on breaking down long-held beliefs about authority and scientific truth (29). Furthermore, research methods, and ways of analysing and presenting data are themselves being examined in a new light, revealing themselves to be “more than techniques for presenting findings, for they affect what we know” (29). Krieger points out that although “the self – the unique inner life of an observer – is a variable we are taught to minimize in our studies, to counter, to balance, or to neutralize”, this can never be successfully achieved (29). When taking into account my own location, childhood, education, interpersonal relationships and political convictions, it is evident to me that autoethnography offers greater possibilities for honest research and writing. While autoethnography does not

allow me to exceed those restraints imposed on me by my location, it does allow me to more overtly describe them, as well as share my experience of them with the reader.

With regards to this thesis, I have had to ask what the importance of my identity is in my telling of the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains, and specifically, what compelled me to investigate it through this thesis. As psychoanalyst and poet Clarissa Pinkola Estés has remarked, the tradition of academic research within which most of us learn to write encourages us to “clean up the wildish environs of the psyche, extinguishing the instinctual, and leaving no trace of it behind” (4). Yet these “wildish environs” hold information that bears tremendously on the knowledge we produce as researchers; information that in turn determines the outcome of our work. Autoethnography involves not only the exposure of the determining influences of the researcher’s self, but also suggests that inviting the self into the research is a valuable research method. National histories are both produced and productive, for as Michel Foucault reminds us, the individual “is not the *vis-à-vis* of power”, but rather is “one of its prime effects” (“Two Lectures” 98).

In their book *Narrative Inquiry*, Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly discuss some of the prominent challenges faced by researchers engaging in narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly suggest that ‘the research field’ is a specific yet changing point of convergence where the narratives being studied meet the storied lives of the researchers. Moreover, the authors point out that the institutions and organizations that affect and shape the lives of both researchers and participants are also in the midst of their own stories (63). As such, Clandinin and Connelly assert that in all cases, the ‘field’ is one that is pre-narrated, structured by already existing stories, the retelling of which comes

“via the inquiry” (63). This analysis positions the researcher as an active participant in the creation of the research, rather than as an objective outsider whose role is merely to gather information. Autoethnography, in situating the researcher as a variable within the research, allows for the exposure of the storied lives that motivate and form the research.

In attempting to explore the significance of autoethnographic methodology in historical inquiry, I have found two strong examples of writing that effectively combines both genres. Thomas King’s *The Truth About Stories* and Winona LaDuke’s *Recovering the Sacred* stand out as works whose subjects are historical, but whose point of departure lies in the author’s experiences. Their work both draws on the past and reaches into the future. Notably, it is the subjectivity of the authors themselves that serves as a junction as their writing travels through time. The authors position themselves in the midst of a historical continuum in which their writing follows a cycle that moves from self to past, from past to present, and from present into possible future. This cycle also recurs in the films of Alanis Obomsawin, whose powerful documentation of the 1990 conflict at Kanehsatake renders the histories of Mohawk struggle that preceded the conflict, disarming dominant narratives whose representations of the conflict relied heavily on state-sponsored national mythologies in explaining the events.

In *The Truth About Stories*, Thomas King considers the broad significance of stories. For King, the stories we tell and those that are told to us are intimately tied to the material realities of our lives. The tension between private memories and public memory emerges as a theme in the book, as King contrasts the strength of stories in shaping his inner life with their effect on the shaping of national and colonial histories. In describing the ways in which personal stories are formative of our subjectivity, King tells of his



relationship to his father, who left when King was a young child: “I tell these stories not to play on your sympathies”, writes King, “but to suggest how stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that has never been able to move past these stories, a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live” (9). This assertion has led me to ask what stories I carry with me as I encounter the stories of others, as well as how my stories affect my hearing of those narratives that have been told to me.

Throughout his book, King asserts that the truth about stories “is that’s all we are”(122). This statement is an insistence on the power of stories to shape reality, a fact which King underscores in his retelling of novelist Leslie Silko’s account of how evil came into the world. It began with a competition among witch people, who gathered from all over the world to see who could create the most frightening thing. King continues:

Some of them brewed up potions in pots. Some of them jumped in and out of animal skins. Some of them thought up charms and spells.... Finally there was only one witch left who hadn’t done anything.... And all this witch had was a story. (9)

The witch with the story wins the competition, yet the story the witch tells is so frightening that the witch people ask that it be taken back; erased. Of course, this cannot be done. King suggests that this story underlines the danger that stories pose, precisely because they cannot be undone, but must instead be contended with. Extending his analysis of stories to encompass the knowledge produced about indigenous peoples, King asserts that Columbus’s arrival marked the “beginning of the stories that Europeans would tell about Native peoples” (70). *The Truth About Stories* suggests that while stories represent a means through which public memory can be handled and controlled, they also hold the promise of being able to undo dominant historical narratives through the production of counter-narratives. This assertion speaks to the central questions raised

by this thesis, namely what possibilities historical counter-narratives hold for the repatriation of First Nations land.

In *Recovering the Sacred*, Winona LaDuke recounts the historic and contemporary struggles of First Nations people, whose communities she visits through both physical travel and writing. Her book details her search for the answer to the question: “How does a community heal itself from the ravages of the past?” (11). LaDuke’s answer, that healing lies in the recovery of that which is “sacred”, leads her through the stories of First Nations communities around Turtle Island. The accounts she provides stand out as examples of autoethnographic historical writing, in that they draw on the author’s experiences and convictions as a point of departure for the research. Beginning with her private wonderings, LaDuke then moves into the past, drawing on the long histories of struggle that precede the contemporary conflicts of which she writes. Enriched by the historical context she provides, LaDuke’s analysis of present-day conflicts in which First Nations people are engaged opens up a space in which struggles for self-determination and sovereignty are effectively legitimized. Finally, LaDuke’s writing points subtly towards the future, at once underlining her belief in the resilience of First Nations people, while motioning towards the possibilities encompassed in what is yet to come.

Perhaps most representative of the cycle of LaDuke’s writing that moves from self, to past, to present, and on into the future, is her chapter “Quilled Cradleboard Covers, Cultural Patrimony, and Wounded Knee”. LaDuke tells of the starvation endured by the Lakota at the hands of the American government that was desperate to divest them of large portions of their gold-bearing lands. Hoping to receive supplies that would allow

them to survive the winter, the Lakota agreed to assemble into an American military encampment at Wounded Knee in December of 1890 (99-100). The next day, the Lakota were stripped of their weapons. After a struggle broke out between a soldier and a Lakota warrior who refused to give up his weapon, the Lakota were ruthlessly fired upon by the waiting cavalrymen. Only about 50 Lakota survived (101). The ensuing theft of sacred objects, jewellery, clothing and body parts from the dead Lakota forms the central subject of LaDuke's chapter. In the days following the Massacre, LaDuke describes how soldiers posed for photos among the carnage as they perused the bodies for objects of value. Among the items plucked from the dead were cradleboard covers, children's clothing, and a baby's foot, still tucked in its moccasin (106-107). The U.S. Army awarded a total of 23 medals to soldiers having participated in the Massacre, the revocation of which is of central concern to the Lakota who continue to demand an official apology for the Massacre (102).

LaDuke's investigation into the posthumous theft of objects belonging to the Lakota leads her to a variety of museums and private collections of First Nations "art" and "artefacts". Through her search for objects taken at the site of the Massacre, LaDuke explores the importance of repatriation in the process of healing. Similarly to LaDuke's practice of understanding Lakota healing through the significance of the objects taken at the site of the Wounded Knee Massacre, my experience in encountering the plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains is the point of departure into a larger investigation into the restraining effect of public memory on the process of First Nations land repatriation.

The “auto” of autoethnography has not allowed me to escape the responsibilities that are attached to ethnographic research. Although autoethnography renders my position as researcher more obvious, the accountability that ethnography requires remains equally critical in autoethnography. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith notes, language has been one of the main vehicles through which ethnographic research has done violence (36-39). The ideas put forth by social scientists continue to have influence in the establishment of government policies and social programs, further embedding the relationship between language and the material realities of people’s lives. Henrietta Dahan-Kalev’s ethnography of the Moroccan Jewish community in Israel documents the relationship of sociological research to the policies of the Israeli government *vis à vis* minority Jewish populations. Her work suggests that the racist eye with which the Moroccan community was described by researchers heavily influenced the policies of the Israeli government with regards to education, housing, and health care, further entrenching the poor living conditions of the Moroccan community. Her work underscores the reality that ideas, together with the language through which we construct them, manifest themselves in very real ways.

In her book *Woman, Native, Other*, Trinh T. Minh-ha investigates the relationship of language to power in ethnographic research and writing. Minh-ha argues that the production of research can never exist independently of power relations: “Power, as unveiled by numerous contemporary writings, has always inscribed itself in language. Speaking, writing, and discoursing are not mere acts of communication; they are above all acts of compulsion” (52). The history of colonialism about which I write is one in which I am intimately entangled, yet the intricate means through which this history

wields power have positioned me, as it has many others, as someone who may enjoy privileges in some sites, while losing them in others. Speaking and writing about this history, particularly in an academic context, are ways of exercising the privileges that I have been granted. The academy has bestowed upon me a thorny language with which to write this thesis; a language rife with violence, negligence and the ugliness of power. Minh-ha argues that ethnographic and anthropological writing have traditionally been deeply invested in asserting the detachment of language from history and location: “One of the conceits of anthropology lies in its positivist dream of a neutralized language that strips off all its singularity to become nature’s exact, unmisted reflection” (53). What may appear in this thesis to be the mere mixing of genres and writing styles is in reality an attempt to explore the range of possibilities that language offers. This involves unfastening my attachment to academic conformity as a source of comfort and *point de repère*. Fear of loss of control, as Minh-ha suggests, is largely what inhibits our use of language: “We fear heights, we fear the headless, the bottomless, and the boundless, that is why we keep on doing violence to words: to tame and cook the wild raw, to adopt the vertiginous infinite” (132). Language, as something that so firmly delimits how we can know the world, seems to me to be well worth exploding.

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith points out in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, stories and personal narratives have generally had a difficult affiliation with the academic discipline of history (33). Tuhiwai Smith argues that conventional historiography has largely devalued indigenous historical accounts by describing them as ‘stories’, and that as such, indigenous systems of knowledge are often “reclassified as oral *traditions* rather than histories” (33). Indigenous historical accounts that contradict dominant narratives told

from a European perspective are thus dismissed as inaccurate and biased. Doreen Massey argues that as a field that is often invested in the creation of seamless accounts of the past, history has tended to minimize or overlook the significance of historical counter-narratives. Massey argues that in this type of historical climate, “a singular sense of the past, and its relation to the present, become assumed, closed down areas of contestation or debate” (184). My insistence on combining the concepts of story and narrative with that of history stems from a desire to uncover the tangle of divergent accounts that are at play in the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains, as well as to challenge the rigidity with which the discipline of history has dealt with questions of subjectivity and truth.

In considering the place of history in the lives of indigenous people, Tuhiwai Smith examines the tenuous and troubled relationship between “stories” and “histories”. Tuhiwai Smith argues that while history as a general socio-political and academic sphere remains as crucial as ever to the lives of indigenous people, the project of “*rewriting and rerighting*” the indigenous position in history encompasses approaches that depart from conventional historiography and aim to accomplish something new:

It is not simply about giving an oral account or a genealogical naming of the land and the events which raged over it, but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying. The sense of history conveyed by these approaches is not the same thing as the discipline of history, and so our accounts collide, crash into each other. (28)

Offering a brilliant synopsis of the main components of Western historiography, Tuhiwai Smith exposes the underlying assumptions that contribute to the use of Western history as a tool of imperialism. Significantly, she observes that the idea of history as a totalizing discourse, capable of amalgamating “absolutely all knowledge into a coherent whole” has

required the establishment of strict criteria for the selection of what types of knowledge are considered historically accurate and which are not (30). This has enabled the erasure of counter-narratives that threaten the legitimacy of colonial endeavours. As she further observes, “the negation of indigenous views of history was a critical part of asserting colonial ideology, partly because such views were regarded as clearly ‘primitive’ and ‘incorrect’ and mostly because they challenged and resisted the mission of colonization” (29). Similarly to the field of Orientalism that grew up around the colonization of Africa and the Middle East, the manufacturing of imperial knowledge about indigenous peoples supplanted indigenous historical accounts, effectively erasing evidence of indigenous resistance to colonialism. The belief that history reflects the natural progression and development of human societies also functions to establish a hierarchy of human races, in which “the earliest phase of human development is regarded as primitive, simple and emotional”, evolving slowly, in much the same way as an infant matures to adulthood, towards a society having more developed social structures (30). Related to this last aspect is the idea that history constitutes a logical narrative, suggesting that facts and events can be organized in such a way as to produce a single coherent account, neatly bounded by a compelling beginning and a satiating dénouement. Finally, the belief that “history as a discipline is innocent” continues to mask the political and socio-economic motives that direct many of the predominant historical accounts in circulation today (30). This assumption implies also that the academic discipline of history is a “pure” one, a field uncontaminated and unrelated to others.

The disconnection with which we have come to view traditional academic disciplines has been highlighted also by Linda Brodkey, who suggests that divisions

within the disciplines place serious limitations on the exploration of experiences of otherness. Brodkey echoes this claim, arguing that “recent academic history has been one of social, economic, and political isolation from the rest of the world, as well as a chronicle of intellectual separation of discipline from discipline” which has had the effect of minimizing the effect of critical voices within the academy (101). This heavily enforced disconnection facilitates the upholding of history as a benign reflection of the past, encouraging the passive reception of master-narratives of nationhood and imperialism.

Both ethnography and history, in ways that I believe are not so different, call upon the imaginary as a source of knowledge. As Brodkey says, “...the study of narratives is the study of how people imagine life to be, for themselves and for others” (106). Because of its reliance on narrative, ethnography poses a real danger to the much-mythologized academic convention of objectivity. Brodkey explains the precariousness of the relationship between narrative and the academy in terms of a threat:

I doubt that one could overestimate the extent to which narration threatens not only the assumptions that warrant social science research methods, but also a scholarly tradition in which principles of objectivity authorize, in the sense of underwrite, knowledge claims. (83-84)

There is no easy way out of this dilemma. As Brodkey suggests, we must learn to live and work alongside the contradictory concepts of knowing, knowledge, the imaginary and narrative. Although this thesis takes as its subject the history of a particular parcel of land, it is also a foray into the study of writing and authorship as they relate to social science research.

The combination of ethnography and historical inquiry proposed in this thesis involves making use of narrative in composing a history. “Ethnography”, says Linda



Brodkey, “is the study of lived experience”, and as the study of lived experience, ethnography cannot do away with narrative. As a research method that is often excluded from conventional historiography, narrative forms a crucial component of ethnography, namely for its ability to accurately describe and communicate lived experience. The use of narrative in the interpretation of ethnographic data is both integral and problematic. As Brodkey asserts “...the single most important lesson ethnographers learn from their field notes is that experience cannot be reproduced in speech or in writing, but must be narrated” (83).

Although “fieldwork invariably proceeds as if reality itself were located in the scene of observation”, Brodkey argues that the array of empirically-based research methods frequently employed by ethnographers is often unable to accurately communicate experience (83). As such, in addition to drawing on my own narrated experiences of having encountered the plaque, this thesis privileges the narratives of the Mohawks of Kanehsatake and Kahnawake as they have been recorded through the work of David-Cree, Obomsawin, Pertusati and York and Pindera. Specifically, I will focus on the significance of two documentary films by Alanis Obomsawin, *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000) in bringing to the fore the lived experiences of the Mohawks during the conflict in 1990. Finally, the less recent narratives of Kanehsatake Mohawks collected in the report *Materials Relating to the History of the Land Dispute at Kanesatake* form the basis of my historical investigation into the expropriation of the land at Kanehsatake.

## CHAPTER 2

### Revisiting a Colonial Legacy: The History of the Expropriation of Kanehsatake Land

What is now known as Kanehsatake consists of the remaining parcels of Mohawk territory that have survived over three centuries of expropriation, mostly at the hands of the Sulpician priests once responsible for its administration. With a population of just over 2000, Kanehsatake is one of the smallest of seven territories throughout Canada and the United States that are part of the Mohawk Nation (Pertusati 27, “Fact Sheet”). Kanehsatake is unlike the vast majority of First Nations territories in Canada in that there is no unified land-base, and it does not have official “reserve” status. Instead, Kanehsatake is made up of small parcels of land which belong officially to the Canadian government and that are interspersed among land owned and held privately by non-Mohawks (Boileau 9-10). While the issues of land expropriation and paternalistic interference in First Nations territory is in no way unique to Kanehsatake, I mention these particularities because it has greatly impacted the political culture of Kanehsatake, as well as its fate at the hands of state and religious authorities.

The present-day division and allotment of the plots in Kanehsatake and the municipality of Oka reflect the plans drawn up by the Sulpician priests over two centuries ago. Believing that the process of evangelization and assimilation would occur more easily if the Mohawk families were isolated from one another, the Sulpicians adopted the practice of interspersing Mohawk land with plots sold or leased to European settlers (Boileau 43-44). The dishonesty with which the Sulpicians conducted business is revealed through the voluminous correspondence they have left behind. From the time

they were appointed Seigneurs of Montreal in 1877, their strategy involved securing trusteeship of Mohawk lands on the one hand, while on the other continually working at expropriating the land to the profit of the Sulpician order (Boileau 44).

The expropriation of the land of the Seigneury of the Lake of Two Mountains at the hands of the Sulpicians marked a definitive moment in the history of Kanehsatake, yet to begin the story in the seventeenth century would be to truncate a past whose roots are much deeper. At the core of the land dispute at Kanehsatake lies the conflict over the historic significance of the land before European colonization. As Katsitsenhawe Linda David-Cree notes in her thesis, the presence of Iroquois on the shore of the Lake of Two Mountains pre-dates colonization in most Mohawk oral accounts. The significance of the extensive archaeological evidence found around the area surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains is hotly contested. Some historians and archaeologists suggest that the artefacts belong to an indigenous group they have called the “St. Lawrence Iroquoians” (David-Cree 5). These “St. Lawrence Iroquoians” are purported to have been an ethnic group separate from the Mohawk communities displaced from the Montreal area in the seventeenth century, thus negating the essential requirement for mounting a successful comprehensive land claim against the Canadian government: proof of a Nation’s presence on the land “since time immemorial” (Pertusati 35). Mohawk elders say that Kanehsatake was once a palisade village known as Kahnehtake, meaning the place of the pine gum (4-5). David-Cree suggests that Kanehtake was so significant a Mohawk settlement that it may possibly have been the site where Tekanawita the Peacemaker first visited the Mohawks to tell them of the Great Law upon which the Iroquois Confederacy was founded in the twelfth century (6). Many historians and archaeologists, as David-

Cree notes, believe that the St. Lawrence Iroquois literally disappeared somewhere between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (5). David-Cree argues that the hypothesis that the Mohawks are not the descendents of the “St. Lawrence Iroquois” is “meant to disinherit Original Peoples” of their title to the land. She concludes by stating that “This Euro-perspective is disputed” (5). The importance of the pre-colonial history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains, though perhaps considered irrelevant in the court room, is of great significance to the land dispute, with some oral accounts suggesting that the village of Kahnehtake was attacked by the French as early as the seventeenth century (5). As David-Cree notes, the conflict that took place in 1990 constitutes only the “most recent battle for the lands” (7).

The history of the first colonial encounters between the French and the Mohawks, though it occurs recently in relation to the centuries of indigenous sovereignty that preceded it, has in many ways shaped the relations between the Canadian state and the First Nations. As such, the early travel notes of those explorers under whose command European ships first penetrated into the bays of Turtle Island can be a useful resource. A report titled *Materials Relating to the Land Dispute at Kanesatake* prepared in 1991 by John Thompson for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs takes as its point of departure the writings of Jacques Cartier. Having never read Cartier’s notes before, Thompson’s report prompted me to refer to them. Jacques Cartier undertook his first voyage to Turtle Island in 1534. An entry dated July 24, 1534 reveals the beginnings of the land expropriation that would characterize the French and English colonial regimes. A few days earlier, Jacques Cartier’s ships had anchored in present-day Gaspé Bay, a region commonly used for fishing during the summer by the Iroquois of the area. Shortly

after their arrival, Cartier instructed his crew to erect a cross at the entrance of the bay (“Canada” 1). Upon their return to the ships, Cartier and his crew saw a canoe approaching their vessels, carrying the Iroquois chief, three of the chief’s sons and the chief’s brother. Cartier remarked that the men “did not come so close to the ships as they had usually done” (Biggar 65). Once within earshot of the ships, the chief, clad in a black bear skin, stood up and made “a long harangue, making the sign of the cross with his fingers; and then he pointed to the land all around about, as if he wished to say that all this region belonged to him and that we ought not to have set up this cross without his permission” (Biggar 65). Thompson refers to this event as the “first recorded native land claim” in Canada (1).

I have turned to descriptions of early colonial encounters between the First Peoples of Turtle Island and the French firstly because my research is historical, and these encounters are a vital part of the story I wish to tell, but more importantly because these accounts are rarely disseminated among the general public. Vital though they are in developing a broad understanding of Canada’s colonial legacy, direct citations from first-hand accounts of early European explorers are surprisingly uncommon, even (or perhaps especially) in high school textbooks. Having never read Jacques Cartier’s travel notes before, I was struck by their casual and unabashed rendering of acts of terrible violence. These unsavoury, gnarly histories have been carded by those institutions responsible for producing public memory, leaving behind smooth, clean strands of wool, ready to succumb to the push and pull of the spinning wheel, and later made into tightly woven blankets of national myth. We need only continue reading Cartier’s July 24th entry to conclude that the racism and Eurocentrism that pervaded early colonial encounters have

persisted in influencing contemporary historical, institutional and political discourses around the colonization of North America. Cartier's deceptiveness in his dealing with the Iroquois foreshadows the paternalism with which Canada has attempted to regulate and manage the First Nations.

Cartier, like many Europeans before and after him, was enticed by the prospect of bringing indigenous people to Europe. On this same July afternoon in 1534, Cartier captured two of the Iroquois that approached his ship in their canoe. After the chief had expressed his anger at the cross, he writes: "...we held up an axe to him, pretending we would barter it for his fur-skin. To this he nodded assent and little by little drew near the side of our vessel, thinking he would have the axe" (Biggar 65). Once close enough to the ship, one of Cartier's crew grabbed hold of the canoe and jumped in, followed by two or three more crew members. They forced the Iroquois aboard their ship. During their time aboard Cartier's ship, Cartier writes that he explained to the Iroquois that the cross was to serve as merely a "land-mark and a guide-post" for future travellers, also suggesting that ships might return bearing gifts of "iron-wares and other goods" (Biggar 66). In his report, Thompson remarks that "Cartier, however, never again termed the cross a "land-mark" in his journals" ("Canada" 1). Cartier's notes reveal that the cross bore three *fleurs-de-lys* and had the words "Long Live the King of France" engraved upon it. Though it may have served to indicate to future travellers that the bay had been visited by the French, the cross, together with its inscription hailing the King, was much more than a landmark.

Only three of the five Iroquois left Cartier's ship that day, the chief's two sons having been "detained" for the purposes of taking them back to Europe (Biggar 66). That

chief, of course, was the infamous Donnacona, and his sons were Domagaya and Taignoagny. Historians do not agree on whether Domagaya and Taignoagny were taken by force by Cartier's crew. It is unclear to me how Cartier's own word – "detained" – could be interpreted in any other way.

The story of the establishment of Kanehsatake revolves around the relocation of Mohawk families by the Sulpicians first from the foot of Mount Royal (the de la Montagne mission) to the mission of Sault-au-Récollet on the shores of the rivière des Prairies, and finally, from Sault-au-Récollet to Kanehsatake near the Lake of Two Mountains. As the seigneurs of Montreal, the Sulpicians owned all of the land granted to them by the King of France through the Governor of New France, and were free to sell, give away, or lease any portion of their property. The Sulpicians were also responsible for the moral and religious instruction of the First Nations that lived within their seigneurie, and as such, the three missions of de la Montagne, Sault-au-Récollet and Two Mountains were both missions *and* seigneuries. The Sulpicians, convinced as they were of their right to exploit the land and labour of the Mohawks, have left us an extensive collection of written correspondence, maps and contracts that unashamedly detail their carefully planned expropriation of Mohawk territory. As Gilles Boileau points out in *Le silence des messieurs*, the Sulpician priests that arrived in Montreal in the late 1600s were mostly sons of low-ranking French aristocrats, well accustomed to managing vast estates and large sums of money (39). They approached the project of "evangelizing" the First Nations with the eye of businessmen whose primary goals were to secure land and capital for themselves and the order they served.

The Seminary of Saint Sulpice received Royal Approval of its status as Seigneur of the Island of Montreal in 1677, although it had been exercising its authority there since the earthquake of 1663 that caused the withdrawal of the Société Notre-Dame from Montreal (“Canada” 5; Boileau 15-16). A Mohawk mission had been established at the foot of Mount Royal near present-day Sherbrooke and du Fort streets by the Société Notre-Dame before their replacement by the Sulpicians (“Canada” 5). As early as 1681, the Sulpicians began working at displacing the Mohawks from the mission de la Montagne to a new mission at Sault-au-Récollet (Boileau 36). While official correspondence between the Sulpicians and the colonial authorities in Montreal and Paris suggest that the motives for the move stemmed from a desire to distance the Iroquois from the liquor sellers of Ville Marie, Gilles Boileau’s reading of the written correspondence between the Sulpicians and their superiors reveals motives of an entirely different nature. When writing to their superiors in Paris and New France, the Sulpicians were careful to couch their requests for new land in arguments that would appear honourable and that would reflect the values of their order (Boileau 45). Relating stories of drunken Mohawks who caused “*des scènes de barbarie dont le récit fait frémir*”, the Sulpicians succeeded in convincing colonial authorities of the necessity to distance the Mohawks from the liquor vendors of Montreal (Boileau 46). In letters circulated amongst themselves, however, the Sulpicians reveal that economic incentives were at the root of their desire to relocate the Mohawks from one mission to the next. As Boileau notes, not only was the land surrounding Mount Royal becoming increasingly sought after, but the value of the land on which the Mohawks lived was particularly high, having already been cleared of trees and tilled by the Mohawks. Because the land on which the Mohawks



lived had been claimed as part of the de la Montagne mission, the Sulpicians, as Seigneurs of the mission, would become its automatic owners upon the departure of the Mohawks. This, as Boileau asserts, was a fact of which the Sulpicians were well aware:

*...les seigneurs pourraient éventuellement entrer en possession des terres de la mission de la Montagne et les céder avec profit. Mais il fallait absolument que les Indiens partent. Saint Sulpice de Paris, sensible au gain, ne devait pas résister longtemps à une telle perspective. (37)*

As Boileau recounts, the relocation from one mission to another benefited everyone except the Mohawks, and considerable energy was spent persuading them to move (38). The strategy of displacing the Mohawks after having them deforest and till the land proved to be lucrative indeed. No sooner had the Mohawks been relocated to the Sault-au-Récollet mission in 1714, than they were again displaced in 1721 to the mission of the Lake of Two Mountains. This time, the Mohawks who were reluctant to leave the lands which they had barely finished tilling, were given the promise of full ownership of their lands by the Sulpicians ("Canada" 7-10).

The land that was initially granted by the King for the purposes of establishing a mission on the shores of the Lake of Two Mountains was subdivided into two portions: a larger portion for the Mohawks and an adjoining tract about a third of the size of the first for the Sulpician priests (Boileau 76). The initial allocation also stipulated that the Mohawks would hold the title to their lands. The Sulpicians, whose intentions had been to increase the land holdings of their order, were unsatisfied with this arrangement. They immediately began to petition the colonial authorities of New France for the title to the entirety of the land allotted for the Lake of Two Mountains mission. Thus, in 1717, four years before the mission was established, the Sulpicians had already succeeded in expropriating the land originally given to the Mohawks (Boileau 77). The Mohawks

however, continued to be assured of their full ownership of the lands at the Lake of Two Mountains. Chief Aghneetha recalled the promise made to the Mohawks before they left Sault-au-Récollet:

Again our Priest, in conjunction with the clergy of the Seminary of Montreal, told us we should remove once more with our families, for it was no longer proper that any Indians should live on the Island [of Montreal]. If we would consent to go and settle at the Lake of Two Mountains we should have a large tract of land for which we should have a Deed from the King of France as our property, to be vested in us and our heirs forever, and that we should not be molested again in our habitations. ("Canada" 8)

As Thompson reveals in his report, the conditions initially established by the King of France for the concession of the Seigneurie of the Lake of Two Mountains did not please the Sulpicians: they would be required to build a stone fort within two years of occupancy ("Canada" 10). As evidenced in their lengthy and candid correspondence, the Sulpicians did not want to incur the expense of building a fort on the land. The Sulpicians ultimately managed to avoid almost all of their financial obligations, to divest the Mohawks of any title to the land, and this, all while increasing their overall holdings. Thompson concludes:

Thus, without having to build a stone fort which they had used to augment their original concession – .5 league by three leagues – the Gentlemen of Seigneurie of St. Sulpice, gained, over a period of 20 years, title to 15 times that amount of land. This included the three square league tract conceded by the King to the Mohawks of the mission by letter in 1716 and called "their lands". ("Canada" 12)

The relocation of the Mohawks from de la Montagne and Sault-au-Récollet maps the European settlement of Montreal: wherever the Mohawks increased the value of the land through clearing and tilling, white settlers living under the authority of the Seigneurie of Saint Sulpice soon followed. After the relocation of the Mohawks to Sault-au-Récollet,

Boileau reveals that it became the policy of the Sulpicians that agreements with the Mohawks concerning land use and ownership be made only verbally, in order to avoid legal complications should the Sulpicians wish to repossess the land ("Canada" 41). The Mohawks who established Kanehsatake on the shores of the Lake of Two Mountains did so believing that the land would belong to their nation forever. Not long after they relocated to Kanehsatake, the Sulpicians began expropriating the land of the mission at will, routinely assigning plots of Mohawk land to white settlers, while overriding Mohawk claims to the land. Evidence of the bad faith of the Sulpicians is not hard to find. Nor is it difficult, when reading these letters, to sense the bitter racism that motivated their actions.

The portion of land set aside for common grazing in the original plans for the Seigneurie, known as the Commons, was land regularly used by the Mohawks of Kanehsatake since their arrival in 1721. The Sulpicians, of course, never recognized Mohawk title to any of the seigneurie lands, and in particular did not acknowledge the longstanding use of the Commons by the Mohawks, expropriating it through sales to third parties throughout the twentieth century. Mohawk accounts assert that the Commons, the once vast tract of land of which only the Pine forest remains, were used by the Mohawks for grazing, obtaining firewood, social and spiritual gatherings, and of course, for the burial of their dead in the cemetery among the pines. Correspondence between Sulpician priests indicates that they too were well aware of the importance of the Commons for the Mohawks (Boileau 226). In 1815, the Sulpicians went so far as to grant the Mohawks the right to collect a grazing tax for non-Mohawk users of the Commons, in exchange for maintaining the fences that delineated the area, clearly recognizing their privileged use of

the land (Boileau 226). Yet when they began to sell portions of the seigneurial lands to corporate and individual land owners, the Sulpicians categorically ignored the historic use of the Commons by the Mohawks.

In 1869, a mass conversion to Protestantism took place among the Mohawks of Kanehsatake, an action which, as Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera write in *People of the Pines*, was “intended to prove that the Sulpicians were no longer needed or wanted....” (83). Tension mounted between French-Catholics and English-Protestants when in 1877, after years of asserting their right to use the wood of the seignury, eight Mohawks were arrested for cutting down trees to repair the fence surrounding the Commons (83). Chief Joseph Onasakenrat, a Kanehsatake Mohawk who had been educated at the Sulpician seminary in Montreal along with Louis Riel, urged the Mohawks to resist further arrests. That night, the town’s Catholic church burnt to the ground (83). Because of their long-standing conflict with the Sulpicians, the Mohawks were immediately suspected of having started the fire. Fifteen Mohawks were arrested and stood trial, yet all but one of the trials resulted in hung juries, the jurists being divided along religious and linguistic lines. The final trial, before an entirely English jury, decided unanimously in favour of acquitting the Mohawks (“Canada” 31, York and Pindera 83). Though there were no convictions that resulted from the trials, the publicity surrounding the events galvanized the positions of the French and English on what was called “The Oka Question”. York and Pindera note that the editorial sections of rival Montreal newspapers stoked the fires of the already smoldering language debate, entrenching the factionalism that continues to influence First Nations struggles in Quebec today ( York and Pindera 83).

In 1881, in an attempt to quell the conflict between the Kanehsatake Mohawks and the Sulpicians, the Federal Government proposed to relocate the Mohawks to new lands in the Township of Gibson near Muskoka ("Canada" 32). Approximately 175 Mohawks left Kanehsatake for Gibson in October of 1881, where they at last took possession of land that was recognized as theirs ("Canada" 32). Yet the departure was not a joyous one. In the words of Charles Cooke, a Mohawk who was seven years old at the time of his family's departure from Kanehsatake, "Hard feelings bubbled up between those who decided to move [...] and those who would not leave" (Cooke). As the boat left Kanehsatake, Cooke remembers that "The singers [...] gathered on the foredeck of the steamer and started to sing their farewell song in Indian. Some of the choir could not sing, the sadness of their words choked their voices" (Cooke). For the Sulpicians however, the departure of the Mohawks was highly profitable. As stipulated in the original land concession, the Sulpicians became the legal proprietors of all the lands left behind, and over the next decade, they proceeded to sell the former Mohawk land to non-Mohawk settlers ("Canada" 33). Thompson notes that during this period, the Trappist Monks and the Christian Brothers, religious orders located near the seigneurie, also received "generous grants of land" from the Sulpicians ("Canada" 33).

In 1907, the municipal government of Oka began erecting fences along the roads that ran through the Commons, signaling yet another encroachment onto the already diminished territory of Kanehsatake ("Canada" 35). In 1909, former chief Joseph Gabriel opted to bypass the apparently ineffective Canadian courts and deliver a petition in person to King Edward VII of England. Gabriel asked that the King reinstate the Mohawks as the rightful owners of their land:

Now we Iroquois Indians have no land left at all, neither fuel for our own use. We now lay to the Government of the throne our complaints to have justice be done, to place us in the employment and full possession of our land.... ("Canada" 35).

The King, as Thompson remarks, never read the petition ("Canada" 35). A final appeal was heard by the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London in 1912. Ultimately, all previous Quebec Court rulings were upheld, further confirming that the Seminary of St. Sulpice possessed full title to the seigneurial lands ("Canada" 36).

In the 1930s, the Sulpicians sold a large portion of the lands of the Seigneurie of the Lake of Two Mountains to a wealthy Belgian investor (York and Pindera 102, "Canada" 38). A portion of the Commons was included in the sale ("Canada" 38). The Sulpicians did not consult or inform the Mohawks about the sale and its implications ("Canada" 38). The Mohawks, who had used the land and trees of the Commons for over two centuries, continued to make use of the land as they had previously done. In 1937, the Belgian entrepreneur filed charges against several Kanehsatake Mohawks for "illegally" cutting down trees on the Commons ("Canada" 38). In a letter to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs for Canada, counsel for the Mohawks argued that "The people now found themselves in the position of committing crimes when they do what their forefathers have done for the last two hundred and fifty years" (qtd. in "Canada" 38). This was merely a continuation of the numerous legal battles concerning land ownership that had taken place since the arrival of the Mohawks.

The Sulpicians, in a final attempt to suck profit from their missionary enterprise, offered to sell 1, 830 acres of land on which the Mohawks lived to the Canadian Government at \$30 per acre ("Canada" 38). As per their obligations established in 1721, the Sulpicians could not sell the remaining parcels of land privately because they

continued to be occupied by Mohawk families. The Canadian Government was well aware of this fact. When, in 1945, the government finally purchased the lands on which the Mohawks lived, it did so for \$1.00 ("Canada" 39). As Thompson's report indicates, "Title to these newly-acquired lands was vested in the Crown, not the Indian people", and the purchase of the lots by the Federal Government was seen as paternalistic and insulting by most Mohawks ("Canada" 39). On the whole, the transfer of title to the Government did nothing to solve the territorial conflict. As York and Pindera note:

The government did not consult the Mohawks about the transaction, and it made no attempt to secure the Commons, the land most important to the Mohawks, despite the fact that the government had previously recognized the Commons as traditional Mohawk land and the Mohawks had not given up their claim to it. (103)

For the next fifteen years, Mohawk chiefs would attempt to obtain clarification from the Canadian Government as to the official status of their lands. Despite the purchase of the lots by the government, Kanehsatake was never given official reserve status, and the legal proprietor of the land remains, to this day, the Canadian Government ("Canada" 40). The remaining Crown-owned lots represent less than one percent of the original territory allotted to the Mohawks in 1721 (York and Pindera 105). The land "allotted" was, of course, theirs to begin with.

The first nine holes of the Oka Golf Course, the attempted expansion of which prompted the barricades in the Pines in 1990, was built on municipal lot 69. The Municipality of Oka obtained lot 69 when it was transferred to them by the Sulpician priests in 1959 ("Canada" 40). Although it was part of the Commons, lot 69 had not been purchased by the Federal Government in 1945 because no one lived on it, and once again, the Mohawks were not consulted or informed of the transfer ("Canada" 40). In 1960, the

town of Oka leased lot 69 to a private golf club, and work on the first nine holes of the course at the Oka Golf Club began (“Canada” 41).

In March of 1961, Chief James Montour spoke before the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Indian Affairs, urging them to give the Mohawks title to the lands of Kanehsatake (“Canada” 42). Montour asserted that the Mohawks should receive title to the original land allotment of three square leagues, referred to by the King as “their lands” in 1716 (“Canada” 42). The Committee did not intervene in the construction of the golf course, and although it recommended prioritizing the Kanehsatake land claim, the Indian Claims Commission did not act on the advice (“Canada” 42, York and Pindera 106).

In 1977, the Mohawks of Kanehsatake filed a ‘specific’ land claim; one in which a First Nation must demonstrate that there has been a violation of existing treaty provisions (Pertusati 35). In 1986, after deliberating for nearly ten years, the Indian Claims Commission ruled that the Kanehsatake land claim did not meet the criteria for a ‘specific land claim’. A ‘comprehensive’ land claim, which, as noted above, must include proof of occupation of the land since “time immemorial” was rejected in 1975, a mere four months after it was submitted (Pertusati 35).

As filmmaker Alanis Obomsawain insists in her film *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance*, the Mohawks of Kanehsatake never agreed to the terms imposed upon them by the Sulpicians, struggling tirelessly for the recognition of their rights since their displacement in 1721. York and Pindera note that “Over the next 270 years, the Indians delivered a steady stream of petitions – in 1781, 1788, 1794, 1802, 1818, 1828, 1839, 1848, 1869, and on into modern times – to successive colonial administrators and



Canadian politicians, demanding recognition of their claim to the seigneurial lands” (84).

Although often portrayed in the media as being a unique instance of Mohawk lawlessness, the “crisis” at Kanehsatake truly has, as the title of Obomsawain’s film highlights, lasted upwards of 270 years.

## CHAPTER 3

### Public Memory, Nationalism and the Repatriation of First Nations Land

The commemoration of events, places and people by a nation-state corresponds to an attempt to shape public memory through the representation of a historical narrative that presents itself as authoritative. Though commemoration is not always focused on a past event, it generally calls upon national mythologies in creating a historically coherent continuum in which to situate the commemoration, and thus is closely linked to nationalism. Rather than approach the subject of nationalism from the perspective of intellectual history, Alan Gordon argues that public memory reveals “nationalism’s underlying popular formations” (172). Nationalism, in turn, requires memory in order to take root. “The constitutive political myth of the community”, argues Gordon, “turns to memory’s ability to internalize ideologies in order to aid the ongoing negotiation of hegemonic control” (168). Considering the importance of the role played by public memory as a barrier to the repatriation of First Nations land therefore requires an analysis of nationalism as an “expression of an imagined community” (Gordon 172).

As a phenomenon that many assert manifested itself in the last half of the eighteenth century, nationalism can give the appearance of representing a departure from previously held notions about collective identity and ethnicity. Gordon, however, argues that nations are “more than artificial modern constructs”, as they embody “prior social formations” related to identity, tradition, economic and social structures, and religious institutions (9). As such, it is important to remember that nationalism, though

often motivated by institutions who wield considerable power, signifies more than a “simple tool for the maintenance of hegemony”, for, as Gordon states: “Popular classes not only experience national consciousness, but also participate in its formation” (9). By harnessing what Gordon refers to as the “human quest for belonging”, nationalism promises identity and meaning to the citizens of the nation it purports to define (9). This “human quest for belonging” might also take the form of the unending competition for resources and autonomy that, for so many, characterizes life under global capitalism. It is this nuance that I suggest might shed light on the ways in which nationalism has been and continues to be mobilized in arguments against the repatriation of First Nations land.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of cultural reception, Gordon argues that state-sponsored public memory is not unidirectional in its flow, but rather is co-produced through its reception by society (173). Because cultural production and cultural reception cannot be separated from one another, Gordon argues that the production of public memory cannot be disassociated from its reception and use by different individuals and groups (173). Gordon concludes that Bourdieu’s ideas help elucidate the role of power in historic cultural production by emphasizing the importance of cultural production in the maintenance of hegemonic social relations:

Historic sites and monuments are thus equally subject to Bourdieu’s cultural production and cultural reception, taking on different meanings according to the needs and abilities of the public that routinely passes them. (173)

The commemoration by the Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada (HSMBC) of events, people and places deemed to be of national historic importance therefore represents the range of influences at play in the production of public memory.

Specifically because commemorations seek to naturalize the social order that they preserve, Gordon insists that: “Events and people chosen for commemoration reveal much about the sense of history of the men and women who select them, and in this respect, commemoration is closely related to power” (xv). The plaque erected in commemoration of the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains showcases the exertion of colonial power in its attempt to situate indigenous peoples as obstacles to national formation who must be overcome, and in this respect, mirrors the militarized response of the Canadian Government during the 1990 uprising.

In conducting a closer analysis of the text of the plaque, it became clear that several of the plaques erected by the HSMBC are in fact self-referential, indicating a certain geographical and chronological pattern in which the sites were chosen. These patterns are largely the result of the individual influences of members of the HSMBC, whose particular interests are represented through the plaques they proposed to erect. The plaque in commemoration of the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains was proposed by Aegidius Fauteux, a Montreal librarian and journalist who sat on the board for one year only, from 1925-1926 (Gordon 60). Believing that he was destined for the priesthood, Fauteux had enrolled in the Grand Séminaire de Montréal, a seminary founded by the Sulpicians in 1840 (“Biography”, “Histoire”). At the time of his appointment to the HSMBC, Fauteux was working as the librarian for the Bibliothèque de Saint-Sulpice, a fact which points to the origins of his interest in the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains (“Biography”). Without knowing what truly motivated Aegidius Fauteux in proposing sites for commemoration by the HSMBC, it is only logical to

assume that his affiliation with the Sulpicians affected his approach to the colonial history he studied.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued that portrayals of indigenous peoples as warlike and bloodthirsty have served to uphold the idea that “conquest and then migration were integral to indigenous patterns of settlement” which further suggested that “these were natural and universal processes”, thereby legitimating the brutality of colonialism (87). In keeping with the tendency of colonial literature to depict indigenous populations as uniquely violent, the text on the plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains begins with a justification: “Following the Lachine massacre in August 1689, the Iroquois continued to terrorize the Montreal area.” We need only to recall the frequency with which the word terror is deployed in our current political context to see that fear has long since been used to rally support for national mythologies. In the 1669 Treaty of Whitehall, the British and the French had agreed that Continental conflicts would not affect peaceful relations in the colonies. In 1689 however, the British and French declared war against each other and effectively terminated their overseas ceasefire. British settlers were quick to harness the rancour of the Iroquois who saw French settlement as the primary threat to their sovereignty and authority. Armed with British weapons, they attacked the settlement at Lachine on August 5, 1689 (Colby 111). French accounts of the attack initially reported that 200 French settlers were killed. Parish baptismal records have since confirmed that a total of 24 settlers were killed during the attack (Colby 111). Yet even today, the plaque erected in 1935 by the HSMBC still declares the number of French victims of the attack to be 200 (“Lachine”). Conversely, the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains did not merit a stone commemorating its

victims, making clear that the choice of when and where to use words like “terror” and “massacre” are rarely related to the nature of the events they describe, but rather reflect the heartless practice of weighing the value of human lives.

The chronology of the events detailed on the plaque raises important questions about the myth of land vacancy in the Canadian historical narrative. The belief that the land on which the first permanent European settlements were built was vacant has figured prominently in Canadian historical accounts, contributing to the notion that the French were less violent in their colonization than were the English or the Spanish (Kalant 94-95). During his second voyage to Turtle Island in 1535, Cartier described the walled village of Hochelaga, located in the present-day downtown core of Montreal (“Canada” 2). He reported that the village consisted of approximately 50 longhouses, flanked by vast cornfields on all sides (“Canada” 2). Yet when Samuel de Champlain returned to Turtle Island in 1603, he reported that the village of Hochelaga was no longer there (“Canada” 3). The “disappearance” of Hochelaga was taken by many historians to signify that the “entire St. Lawrence valley was unoccupied” (Kalant 95). Although there are numerous historical accounts that assert the emptiness of the land encountered by early settlers, Amelia Kalant argues that the “Detailed explanations of how the vacancy occurred are tacit admission that land in North America was *normally inhabited*” (95). The myth of the vacancy of the land continues to shape public memory concerning the nature of colonial conquest in Canada, and serves to supplant indigenous claims to the land by negating, in some instances, that conquest ever occurred.

In the text on the plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains, the battle is cited as having taken place in the middle of October in 1689 (“The Battle”).

The Sulpicians established the mission at the Lake of Two Mountains forty years later, in 1721, on land that was supposedly unoccupied. The plaque itself, albeit unintentionally, draws attention to the fact that the Lake of Two Mountains and the surrounding land was indeed occupied by Iroquois before the establishment of the Sulpician seigneurie. As Katsitsenhawe Linda David-Cree notes, the Mohawks were noted travellers who, despite their agricultural practices, made use of various seasonal hunting and fishing grounds (6). She further argues that “to presuppose that Indigenous Peoples did not travel and trade extensively [...] is extremely biased and assumes that Indigenous Peoples in the Americas were stagnant” (6).

As evidenced in the opening phrase of Canada’s national anthem “Oh Canada, our home and native land”, Canadian national mythology has had to contend with the fact that, as a settler nation, non-indigenous Canadians are not “native” to the land. The label “native” thus had to be displaced in historical narratives to refer not to the original peoples of the land, but to its settlers. The transfer of the status of “native” was accompanied also by a shift in the meaning of the word. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha notes, when describing “them” the term native signifies non-European inferiority, yet when describing “us” it asserts “belonging to a particular place by birth” (qtd. in Kalant 87). The plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains makes use of language that affirms this distinction, clearly describing the Iroquois as impostors who are unrightfully tormenting the French settlers whose right it is to occupy the land (“The Battle”). Thus, the retort “Oh, Canada, our home *on* Native land”, common among activists working to promote First Nations sovereignty, strikes at the core of one of the central components of Canadian national mythology.

At the time of its inception in 1919, the HSMBC was responding to a growing interest in Canadian identity fostered by Canada's involvement in World War I (Gordon 60). Gordon reports that the Historic Landmarks Association claimed "unprecedented membership levels in 1919" (60). In this climate of nascent Canadian identity, the HSMBC saw its role as being that of "guardian" of Canadian history, in which it would both preserve and interpret history for Canadians and tourists alike. Upon its founding, Commissioner of Dominion Parks James B. Harkin articulated his ambitions for the board: "It is believed that eventually, this board will be looked to by all the public and especially the tourists, for historic data regarding all Canada" (qtd. in Gordon 61). The state's relationship to public memory was therefore clearly made at the time of the founding of the HSMBC. As Gordon emphasizes, citizens and non-citizens alike "were expected to look to the federal government for a national history" (61). The HSMBC was motivated by a clear conception of what Canada's historical narrative should resemble, going so far as to argue against the erection of a plaque commemorating the Battle of Repentigny on the grounds that the event failed to convey a clear sense of "steady European victory" (qtd. in Gordon 63). That Canada's historical narrative should reflect the desirability of colonial conquest was a given for the HSMBC. In Gordon's words, the narrative constructed by the HSMBC through its choice of commemorations represented a linear and logical account of colonial succession in which "Native peoples were gradually overcome by the settlers and soldiers of French absolutism, who themselves eventually succumbed to Great Britain's superior civilization" (63). The text on the plaque erected in commemoration of the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains indeed reflects a chapter in this account.



Maps, as methods of establishing boundaries and asserting ownership over land, have been integral to the construction of a Canadian national mythology. The Canadian landscape, still imagined as a wild and inhospitable terrain, was tamed and made tangible through the use of maps. As a means through which colonies could be visually conquered, maps were a vital in the execution of the colonial project, in Canada and around the world. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said describes the importance that the field of geography came to hold in Europe during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Geography allowed the Orient, and indeed all colonized territories, to be imagined, described and claimed:

Geography was essentially the material underpinning for knowledge about the Orient. All the latent and unchanging characteristics of the Orient stood upon, were rooted in, its geography. [...] The important thing was to dignify simple conquest with an idea, to turn the appetite for more geographical space into a theory about the special relationship between geography on the one hand and civilized or uncivilized people on the other. (216)

Said notes how in 1912, during an address to the Geographical Society, Lord Curzon described geography as the “handmaid of history” (215). Curzon, himself the president of the Geographical Society, served as British Viceroy of India from 1899 to 1905, during one of the most devastating periods of famine in India. The famine was precipitated by India’s growing involvement in a London-centred economy, and even during the most crushing years of the famine, grain exports to Britain never ceased (Davis 142). His term as Viceroy had indeed proven that geography and history were destined to be counterparts.

Contrary to how they are often presented, geography and cartography do not provide benign representations of physical realities, but rather reflect that with which they have been inscribed. In his book *Maps are Territories, Science is an Atlas*, David

Turnbull describes the degree to which ideology effectively circumscribes geographical knowledge. A 1482 map based on Ptolemy's *Geographia* depicts a large portion of southerly land labelled "terra incognita". Greek sensibilities dictated that although none had yet been discovered by Europeans, there should be a southern body of land corresponding to the northern one, leading Turnbull to conclude that "Australia was thus invented through the power of the map before it was 'discovered'" (41).

In *Masons, Tricksters and Cartographers*, David Turnbull argues that maps have effectively penetrated Western culture to such a degree as to render their constructed nature invisible. He writes: "We are largely unconscious of the centrality of maps in contemporary Western life precisely because they are so ubiquitous, so profoundly constitutive of our thinking and our culture" (92-93). I need only to recall my primary school classrooms, each of which contained a map of Canada, neatly rolled up like a blind against the blackboard, to sense how central maps are to our development and conditioning as "citizens". Beyond the omni-presence of the map in my classrooms, I remember also that I never questioned their authority. Somehow, even as a young child, I accepted maps as trustworthy representations of the world in which I lived. Turnbull suggests that we ask ourselves "what is it that we are disposed not to question about maps?" (97).

Further investigating the ways in which knowledge 'spaces' are created, Turnbull argues that the belief that cartography exists uniquely in the realm of the scientific functions to obscure its social, political and economic roles (*Masons* 89). He suggests that cartography is the discipline which is perhaps most confused by the distinction between science and politics, arguing that the seemingly simple question 'what is a map?'

is in reality quite difficult to answer without making reference to political structures of some kind (*Masons* 89). Turnbull points out the degree to which cartography has been developed alongside modern ideas concerning the nation-state, making an inquiry into the political significance of maps extremely challenging:

Unpacking such a transparent, lived-in, dual spatiality necessitates a fairly difficult reflexive exploration since it involves the attempt to understand the spatiality of knowledge from within the knowledge space that has been coproduced with that knowledge. (*Masons* 89)

As evidence of the relationship between ideologies and cartography, Turnbull points to the 17th century cartographic revolution; a period of colonial expansion wherein “the state, science and cartography became so strongly intermeshed that in effect they coproduced one another” (92). Geography as a discipline is one that relies heavily on mythologies of nationhood. Turnbull concludes that despite how we are taught to read them “European maps are not autonomous. They can only be read through the myths that Europeans tell themselves about their relationship to the land” (51).

Mark Monmonier echoes this claim in his book *How to Lie with Maps*. Beginning in the late 16th century, the monarchs of both France and England commissioned large-scale national atlases which served to emphasize national unity and establish the concept of the “map-as-symbol-of-the-state” (88). Monmonier argues that their apparently objective, scientific appearance make maps a favourite tool of nation-building, perhaps explaining the wide-scale use of maps by the governments of former European colonies throughout the 20th century:

Perhaps the haste of new nations to assert their independence cartographically reflects the colonial powers’ use of the map as an intellectual tool for legitimizing territorial conquest, economic exploitation, and cultural imperialism. (90)

Maps were, in a sense, certificates of colonial triumph, producing as they did the appearance of conquest, even while bitter colonial wars raged on. The cartographic revolution can perhaps be best understood not as a consequence of imperial expansion, but rather as a necessary precursor to conquest. As Monmonier writes, “That maps drawn up by diplomats and generals became a political reality lends an unintentional irony to the aphorism that the pen is mightier than the sword” (90).

Not surprisingly, the Sulpician priests of the Mission of the Lake of Two Mountains held cartography in great esteem. They commissioned a map of the seigneurie from a local land surveyor to assist them in the management of their estate (Boileau 224). Published in 1789 as *Plan de la Seigneurie du Lac des Deux-Montagnes*, the map allowed the Sulpicians to parcel up land in a the most profitable manner (225). Seventy years earlier, while the Sulpicians were still negotiating the “cession” of the Mission of the Lake of Two Mountains with French authorities, it was the Sulpicians themselves who were charged with the task of producing the maps and measurements of the area to be ceded (83). As Boileau writes, as long as they respected rough guidelines, the Sulpicians were free to delineate their territory as they saw fit (83).

The contests over territories and their inhabitants that have characterized the past five centuries of our world’s history have implicated each of us in its effects on the present. As Edward Said argues in *Culture and Imperialism*, “Just as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography” (7). Challenging the national cartographic representations with which we are presented is, as Ward Churchill has argued, vital in achieving an understanding of the scale of the expropriation of First Nations land in North America, and throughout the world.

Cartography and geography are intimately related to the project of decolonization, since, as Churchill points out, land repatriation remains at the centre of First Nations struggles. Public memory, shaped as it is by state-sponsored national myths, seems destined to be unable to contend with indigenous land claims. As Churchill points out: “no form of decolonization has ever been realistic when viewed within the construct of a colonialist paradigm” (174). Churchill describes the land repatriation efforts of the First Peoples of Turtle Island in terms of an “abandon of orthodox realism”, claiming that they have “accepted as their agenda a redefinition of reality in terms deemed quite impossible within the conventional wisdom of their oppressors” (174). Indeed, the very notion of returning land to First Nations clashes so violently with the logic of private property and sovereign nation-states that it is generally characterized as “unrealistic or romantic” by politicians (Churchill 174).

As Alan Gordon asserts, public memory “is a discourse, not a unified text”, and as such is subject to the forces exerted upon it by a “multiplicity of meanings, audiences, and memories” (173). Churchill echoes this assertion when he suggests that public memory, as a flow of competing tensions, could one day sway in favour of the liberation of indigenous people:

The federal domination of Native America is utterly contingent upon the maintenance of a perceived confluence of interest between prevailing governmental/corporate elites and common non-Indian citizens. Herein lies the prospect of long-term success. It is entirely possible that the consensus of opinion concerning non-Indian “rights” to exploit the land and resources of indigenous nations can be eroded, and that large numbers of non-Indians will join in the struggle to decolonize Native North America (174).

In attempting to articulate a strategy of decolonization, Churchill offers a detailed review of the concerns that are often at the heart of non-indigenous resistance to land repatriation

efforts. The loss of non-indigenous private property, along with concerns regarding the rights of non-Natives living in First Nations territory frequently figure among the most prominent concerns (174-175). Through his discussion of each of the much-publicized fears concerning the return of lands to First Nations, Churchill succeeds in making real, in textual terms at least, the decolonization of North America. Because, as noted above, stories cannot be called back once they have been released into the world, strategies focused on contending with the effects of national mythologies are perhaps the most promising means through which to achieve social change.

The title of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* suggests the importance of research and knowledge production to the process of decolonization. The relationship between research and decolonization is of course mirrored by that between research and colonization, and Tuhiwai Smith asserts that "The ways in which scientific research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples" (1). The production of knowledge about indigenous people continues as a pervasive manifestation of colonialism, and according to Tuhiwai Smith, inhibits the ability of indigenous communities to resist colonialism and heal from its violence (87).

Yet 'decolonization' is not a straightforward process, and is described by Tuhiwai Smith as encapsulating ideas relating both to liberation from colonization, and a reconnection with "pre-colonized time" (24). Public memory and knowledge production have much to do with both of the spheres outlined by Tuhiwai Smith. It is precisely this fact that makes the production of counter-narratives so compelling in the dismantling of public memory and in the production of counter knowledges. A decolonizing

methodology might therefore be articulated as one that would enable the production of repositories of collective memory that challenge the knowledge produced about indigenous people, and that foster the development of strategies aimed at achieving goals related to decolonization, as articulated by indigenous communities themselves.

## CHAPTER 4

### Competing Narratives: The Mohawk Uprising of 1990

The plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains typifies the strategy of erasure on which colonialism depends: the Mohawks are effectively stripped of their status as 'native' by the plaque's insistence on their wrongful "terrorization" of the French "inhabitants". The 1990 conflict over land at Kanehsatake exhibited the tensions contained in the plaque's text. Though the pine forest was at the heart of the struggle, the 1990 conflict was what Linda Pertusati has described as a "microcosm" of the deeper conflicts between indigenous people and the Canadian state (27). In particular, the 1990 uprising saw the re-articulation of the long-standing historical dispute concerning the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains.

I have chosen to refer to the events of 1990 as an 'uprising' firstly because of the reference it suggests to the struggles of other colonized groups, and secondly because it re-contextualizes the struggles of such groups as movements towards the reclamation of rights and resources that have wrongfully been denied them. The term 'crisis' became the one most commonly associated with the events of 1990, yet it failed to account for the long history of injustice that preceded them. Instead, the term 'crisis' allowed the events to be thought of as unexpected and unexplainable. The use of the term 'crisis' is emblematic of the continued denial of the colonial violence upon which Canada is predicated. Yet the Mohawk uprising of 1990 produced effects throughout the Canadian ideological fabric that did indeed constitute a crisis. The crisis, in this case, was one of Canadian national mythology, in which the legitimacy of the Canadian state was pitted against the indigeneity of the Mohawk Nation. The account of the 1990 Mohawk uprising



offered here is not intended to be all-encompassing in its scope. Rather, the exploration of the events through two films by Alanis Obomsawin serves to highlight the disjunction between state and Mohawk narratives of the conflict. The analyses of Obomsawin's films *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000) and *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993) further investigate the importance of Obomsawin's work in contributing to a collection of indigenous counter-narratives that serve to de-centre state-sponsored narratives such as the one on the plaque.

That the 1990 uprising involved the use of armed violence situates it alongside numerous other First Nations uprisings against the Canadian government that have occurred over the past 200 years. As Linda Pertusati points out:

In cases where aboriginal land claims have been recognized, such land transfers have taken place only after violent struggles, which in many instances erupted into violent confrontations, forcing the federal and provincial governments to return tracts of traditional land to First Nations people. (3)

The armed resistance of the Mohawks in 1990 therefore reflects the inefficacy of the Canadian legal system in dealing with the grievances of the First Nations. By 1990, the Mohawks of Kanehsatake had explored every legal avenue to its fullest extent, and the armed occupation of the Pines represented the exhaustion of all other possible methods to achieve the repatriation of their land. The Mohawks succeeded in stopping the expansion of the Oka golf course into the pine forest. In this, their uprising signified a victory not only for their nation, but for indigenous peoples throughout the world. By the end of the occupation of the Pines, the Canadian government had agreed to purchase the 100 acres of traditional Mohawk land that was at the centre of the dispute.

The events of 1990, however, are not uniquely remembered as having constituted a victory for the Mohawks. Eighteen years after the uprising, the struggle of the Kanehsatake Mohawks continues. The land, although purchased by the Canadian government on behalf of the Mohawks, has yet to be legally transferred to them. As with all the other parcels of land on which the Mohawks of Kanehsatake live, title to the pine forest is vested in the government, not the Mohawks. In the words of Mavis Etienne, a woman involved in the Kanehsatake Mohawk Negotiating Team: “This is just a polite way of saying you can sit there if you want, but I own that chair” (Pertusati 138). Following the end of the occupation of the Pines, the government did very little to engage in meaningful negotiations with the Mohawks of Kanehsatake (Pertusati 138). The issues that were at the very core of the uprising – ownership of the Pines, self-government and sovereignty – remain unsettled to this day.

The occupation of the Pines began in early March of 1990. A camp was established in the pine forest, and a fishing shack that had been brought in with a tractor was used for shelter during the cold spring days and nights. The first barricade on the road leading through the Pines was erected after the fishing shack was vandalized on April 22 (York and Pindera 62). The barricade was intended to prevent further intrusions into the camp and to protect the Mohawks who were taking turns keeping watch over the Pines. The erection of the roadblock immediately prompted a response from the municipality of Oka, who sought and obtained two injunctions that they hoped would force the dismantling of the barricades. The first injunction was granted on April 26, and as York and Pindera report, “The people in the Pines decided to ignore it” (62). Curtis Nelson, a Kanehsatake Mohawk who would participate in negotiations with the

government later that summer affirmed the sovereignty of the Mohawks in the face of the injunction: “I don’t recognize the authority of the province over this land. You can have ten or twelve injunctions – it doesn’t matter to me” (62). The occupation of the Pines in 1990 indeed represented a crisis in colonial ideology in which the national narrative embodied by the Canadian government clashed with that of the Mohawk Nation. Emblematic of the paradigmatic chasm between colonizer and colonized described by Ward Churchill, there was an ideological conflict between those fighting for a paycheque and those fighting for their land.

The occupation of the Pines continued into the summer. Oka mayor Jean Ouellette, increasingly frustrated by the inefficacy of the injunctions in bringing down the barricades, ordered a police raid on the Pines that took place on July 11 (York and Pindera 79). The Mohawks in the Pines had received tips from various sources about the impending raid, and they had worked hard to fortify their camp and improve security measures around the Pines (York and Pindera 80-81). The attempted raid ended in crossfire between the Mohawks and the provincial police, the Sûreté du Québec. A police officer was fatally wounded during the shooting, and the police immediately retreated, leaving behind police vehicles that were later dismantled by the Mohawks and used to reinforce the roadblock that would remain in place for the duration of the conflict. In response to the police raid on the Pines, the Mohawks of Kahnawake seized the Mercier Bridge and blocked all highways leading through their territory. Filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin arrived in Kanehsatake just after the attempted police raid, and began documenting the occupation of the pine forest that would last 78 days.

Alanis Obomsawin, a staff filmmaker at the National Film Board of Canada (NFB) and member of the Abenaki Nation had been making films for eleven years when the Mohawk uprising took place. She was in the midst of working on another film at the time of the police raid on the Pines on the morning of July 11, and immediately sensed the importance of the events that were taking place in Kanehsatake. Randolph Lewis, in his 2006 book on Obomsawin, provides an account of her decision to remain behind the barricades at the Pines for the entire duration of the occupation. Obomsawin's experiences with the filming of *Incident at Restigouche* (1984) greatly impacted her decision to remain on location in Kanehsatake. The filming of *Incident at Restigouche*, an account of the events surrounding two police raids of the Mi'kmaq territory of Restigouche in 1981, was seriously delayed due to bureaucratic barriers at the National Film Board that made rapid mobilization of film crews impossible. The second police raid had already been mounted on Restigouche by the time of Obomsawin's arrival there, forcing her to rely on interviews and television footage in making the film (48). The film would have been entirely different, maintained Obomsawin, had she been able to begin shooting earlier (48).

In the nine years between the shooting of *Incident at Restigouche* and the Mohawk uprising, Obomsawin's position at the National Film Board had become firmly entrenched, her films having won several awards in the interim. Wanting to avoid the delays she experienced in filming *Incident at Restigouche*, she was firm in her request for equipment and a crew: "I'm changing production", she told the Film Board, "and I've got to get there right now" (qtd. in Lewis 92). She immediately went to Kanehsatake with a film crew, determined to use her camera for the purposes of both surveillance and

documentation. Obomsawin recalls being told by several people involved in the occupation of the Pines that her presence had a restraining effect on the police and the army: “I was told many times that the fact that I was there, especially as a Native person, meant that the police and army wouldn’t do certain things there with the camera” (qtd. in Lewis 93). Even when, in an unprecedented decision, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa asked international observers who were monitoring the situation to leave, Obomsawin remained and continued to ‘observe’ the events. When fears of gun violence mounted, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) removed their reporters from the barricades. As Obomsawin recalls, this meant that “there was quite a bit of stuff that the CBC didn’t have [on film] because they weren’t there to film it” (qtd. in Lewis 94). Obomsawin’s presence behind the barricades at Kanehsatake has provided us with invaluable footage of the uprising and of the police and military force used to repress it.

Among her twenty-one films, Obomsawin made a series of four films about the events surrounding the conflict over land at Kanehsatake in 1990: *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* (1993), *My Name is Kahenttiosta* (1995), *Spudwrench – Kahnawake Man* (1997) and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (2000). The films were carved from the extensive footage gathered by Obomsawin and her crew during the occupation of the Pines, footage which amounted to over 250 hours of sixteen-millimeter film (Lewis 95). The four films about the conflict were groundbreaking. As Randolph Lewis points out: “Never before had an indigenous person been armed with the tools of the electronic mass media when this sort of crisis was unfolding; never before had it been possible to create a well-funded portrait of state violence against Native people” (92). *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* depict the occupation of the Pines in

Kanehsatake, along with the correlated occupation of the Mercier Bridge by the Kahnawake Warriors. *My Name is Kahentiiosta* and *Spudwrench – Kahnawake Man* on the other hand, represent the individual stories of two Kahnawake Mohawks who were involved in the occupation of the Pines in Kanehsatake. I have chosen to examine *Kanehsatake* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* as examples of broad counter-narratives of the events of 1990, and to consider how the accounts rendered by the films have collided with those provided by the mainstream information media. As Lewis points out, much of the coverage by the mainstream media seemed to “regurgitate the official line provided in army briefings and ministerial press conferences” (93). *Kanehsatake* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* are two of the most candid representations of the events of 1990, and among the very few whose point of view lies inside the barricades.

*Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* depicts the occupation of the Pines during the summer of 1990. After the first attempted raid on the Pines on July 11, the Sûreté du Québec called in hundreds of reinforcements to Kanehsatake, and police checkpoints were established on every road leading to the territory (York and Pindera 191). Obomsawin’s strategic use of news footage in *Kanehsatake* depicts the federal Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, John Ciaccia, confirming to news reporters that withholding food and medical supplies “has never been the policy of this government” and that the safe passage of provisions was guaranteed. This statement is contrasted with Obomsawin’s footage from inside the barricades that exposes the long searches of trucks carrying food, searches which sometimes ended in the trucks being turned away. In one instance, the film reveals that provisions that were allowed to pass the barricades were ruined by soldiers who had torn open bags of flour, punctured jugs of oil and stabbed

pieces of fruit. As York and Pindera note, the Quebec Human Rights Commission later confirmed that the Sûreté du Québec had indeed withheld food and medical supplies from the Mohawks. They note also that in blatant defiance of the Quebec Charter of Rights and Freedoms, The Sûreté du Québec refused the Human Rights Commission's representative access to Kanehsatake and Kahnawake (198).

Negotiations between Mohawk representatives and the government continued throughout July, however the willingness of the government to negotiate on the core issues of the conflict was questionable. Although tentative agreements between John Ciacchia and the Kanehsatake Mohawk Negotiating Team were reached as early as mid-July, it soon became clear that the federal government did not support the agreements (York and Pindera 203-204). On August 8, after the expiry of a government-imposed forty-eight hour deadline to reach an agreement and lift the barricades, Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa invoked the National Defense Act, calling on the Canadian Army to replace the Quebec provincial police at the barricades around Kanehsatake and Kahnawake (York and Pindera 223-224). Obomsawin's footage of tanks rolling into the serene rural setting of Kanehsatake underscores the rift between the placid Canada of stereotype, and the deployment of military force in quelling social unrest. This rift is repeatedly explored in *Kanehsatake*, as Obomsawin shows the incomprehension and rage expressed by people who come face to face with this contradiction. The question "how can this be happening in Canada?" is asked again and again by First Nations and non-First Nations people alike.

Obomsawin showcases a second competition of narratives in *Kanehsatake*, in which the assertion of First Nations sovereignty collides with the portrayal of the

Warriors as lawless thugs whose actions required the intervention of the police and army. In a scene filmed during a meeting in the Pines between the Mohawks and government officials, the sovereignty of the Mohawk Nation and the Iroquois Confederacy is made explicit through the words of Ellen Gabriel, a Mohawk woman who played a key role in the negotiations. The camera then pans towards the government officials as they purse their lips in feigned smiles and applaud daintily after Gabriel's speech. Lewis suggests that the scene re-imagines the portraits of treaty signings between colonial powers and First Nations people:

The scene evokes the European paintings of treaty signings from the eighteenth century, except now the Natives are talking back, speaking for themselves, putting the federal officials on the spot rather than posing mute on a canvas. (100)

In another scene, a First Nations man arriving at the Peace Camp near Kanehsatake is denied entry to the camp by a police officer because the man is "from another country". The man's response to the police officer encompasses the clash of ideologies explored by Obomsawin: "if there's anyone here who's from another country", replies the man to the officer, "it's you". Obomsawin's *Kanehsatake* not only represents a counter-narrative in and of itself, but depicts the various confrontations of narratives that coloured portrayals of and reactions to the Mohawk uprising of 1990.

In *Rocks at Whiskey Trench*, Obomsawin offers a close-up of the events surrounding the evacuation of women, children and elderly people from Kahnawake during the 1990 conflict at Kanehsatake. The seizure of the Mercier Bridge by the Kahnawake Warriors was a tremendous act of solidarity with the Mohawks of Kanehsatake. The bridge, along with the network of roads leading to it, run directly through Kahnawake, a Mohawk territory whose land has also been whittled away by



Jesuit priests and the Canadian government. At the barricades in Kahnawake, mobs of Châteauguay residents, angry at the occupation of the Mercier Bridge, gathered to participate in mounting displays of aggression, racism and violence directed towards the Mohawks. The Sûreté du Québec became a permanent presence at the barricades, forbidding the exit or entry of people to and from Kahnawake. With a limited number of grocery stores located in Kahnawake itself, provisions were soon depleted, and obtaining supplies from Châteauguay became necessary. In their book *People of the Pines*, Loreen Pindera and Geoffrey York describe the violence of the mobs in Châteauguay:

Châteauguay residents had gathered at the front entrance of the IGA grocery store, and they were screaming and hissing at a frightened Mohawk woman who was trapped inside. To prevent the Mohawk woman from escaping, cars were parked in front of the entrance....The crowd had gathered at the Châteauguay shopping centre when they learned that the police were planning to allow some of the Mohawks, whose families were running short of food, to leave Kahnawake to buy groceries. (225)

Perhaps most emblematic of the racist aggression exhibited at the barricades of Kahnawake was the burning of Mohawk effigies. On the evening of July 14th, the first effigy was strung by its neck from a lamppost and burned. For several nights after that, people brought effigies and burned them as people jeered and shouted, often egged on by mob organizers who brought loudspeakers with which to address the crowd (230). The gatherings at the barricades became increasingly violent, and took on the aspect of organized rallies. Many journalists were intimidated, as certain participants in the mobs felt that their actions were being wrongfully portrayed as racist (230-231). As Pindera and York argue, “screams of “*maudits sauvages!*” and the burning of effigies could not be interpreted as anything but blatant racism” (231).

On August 28, fearing an army invasion into Kahnawake, plans were made for the evacuation of the women, children and elderly people from the territory. Exit from Kahnawake was extremely difficult, due to the hoards of protesters crowded around the barricades. The road over the Mercier Bridge was chosen as an evacuation route due to the relatively few protesters located at the bridge's exit point. Yet by the time of the evacuation a few hours later, over four hundred angry protesters stood waiting on the other side of the bridge, having been alerted to the evacuation plans by broadcasters on the popular radio station CJMS (York and Pindera 319). The title of Obomsawin's film *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* refers to the attack of the convoy of Mohawk vehicles by the waiting protesters, many of whom hurled huge rocks that shattered windows and injured passengers. Piles of rocks gathered in advance indicate that the attack was premeditated by some. Allison Jacobs, a Mohawk woman who left Kahnawake that day, recalls the experience in an interview with Obomsawin: "I couldn't believe how many people had gathered there, how many people hated us so much that they weren't there just to throw rocks to scare us, those were rocks to kill us". Whiskey trench, which gets its name from the Seagram's distilleries located on either side of it, is a narrow, one-lane exit from the Mercier Bridge. Once the cars had begun to cross, there was nowhere to go but forward. The film's footage reveals how the police officers who were present made no attempt to stop protesters from throwing rocks. Despite the harrowing scenes of the cars being pelted by large rocks, bricks, and other debris, Obomsawin focuses also on the resilience of the Mohawks. A return to Allison Jacobs' testimony reveals her faith in the strength of her community: "I would never leave again", she says. "I feel safe in Kahnawake, and I feel safe nowhere else but here".

Although Obomsawin's films may appear at first glance to make use mostly of conventional documentary film techniques, many have argued that her practice represents a departure from conventional documentary film. With their reliance on narration and visual explanatory elements such as maps and drawings, Obomsawin's films indeed appear to "fit into the style institutionalized by the NFB, which emphasizes information and education" (Pick 77). Yet the subtle subjectivity that permeates her work, characterized by the omni-presence of her own voice in the narration, places her films outside the boundaries of conventional documentary practice. Zuzana Pick argues that Obomsawin's films effectively "sidestep" the "prescriptive imperatives of the NFB didactic documentary" and instead place the mechanism of documentary film "at the service of a Native political and aesthetic agenda" (77).

Obomsawin has always been overt about her deep connection to First Nations rights, revealing the relationship between her films and her experiences as an Abenaki woman. At the age of nine, after having spent part of her childhood on the Abenaki reservation of Odanak, she moved with her family to Trois Rivières (Pick 76). The cultural isolation and racism that she experienced growing up as part of the only Abenaki family in Trois Rivières are what motivates her activism to this day: "*Toute mon enfance, je me suis fait battre, insulter, cracher dessus. Après je n'ai eu qu'une envie: de combattre l'injustice*" (90). Wielding the power of documentary films has represented one method used by Obomsawin in her fight against injustice. Although it is rarely made explicit in her films, the close relationship between Obomsawin and the struggles she documents is palpable. The tenderness and intimacy with which Obomsawin tells the stories of the people she films is another characteristic that sets her work apart from that

of other documentary filmmakers. Pick describes how this intimacy in turn transmits itself to the viewer:

Her work subverts the objectifying tendencies of the social documentary by revealing a heartfelt respect for the past and present of the people she has filmed. Obomsawin's approach to human emotion is premised on creating a place for empathy that promotes the circulation of affect between protagonist and viewer. (77)

The emotional impact of Obomsawin's films on her viewers is significant, and as Peter Steven suggests, her films "live beyond their original context.... largely because of the strong emotions she generates on the screen" (177). It is precisely these "strong emotions" that give Obomsawin's work such currency.

The role of the interview, important as it is in many documentary films, is fundamental in Obomsawin's work. The interviews in Obomsawin's films move beyond the conventional use of interviews in documentary film in the complex spectrum of subjective positions that they capture. As Pick argues:

the interview – as a testimonial narrative – ceases being simply a statement, an interpretation or an account. It shapes point of view and becomes an explanatory template for self-representation. The interview is characterized by a tension between first- and third-person address, between individual agency and group identity, to enable the circulation of subjectivity across a range of narrative registers. (78)

The careful weaving of interviews in *Kanehsatake* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* both shapes the narratives and thoroughly engages the viewer. The full identity of interviewees as parents, politicians and warriors is often withheld until the precise moment that such a revelation will be most meaningful for the viewer. Similarly, people who are interviewed as adults are sometimes later revealed to have been children at the time the events of the film took place, invoking a deeper register of emotional resonance with the viewer. Finally, words that may have been offered in the context of an individual recollection

often become representative of a collective memory through the juxtaposition of interviews with each other, and the use of archival materials such as maps, news footage and paintings. Obomsawin's skillful use of interview footage both pushes forward the film's plot and provides information that is integral to her representation of the events.

The length of interviews in Obomsawin's films is another marker of her subjectivity. Interviews not only make up the bulk of the footage in both *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* and *Kanehsatake*, but they are shaped to accommodate the full testimony of those interviewed. Obomsawin has asserted that her intention in privileging the testimony of the people whose struggles she documents, is to create a space for people whose voices are usually confined to carefully managed scenes on news programs. The slow feel of the interviews in Obomawin's films represents a departure from conventional documentary style. Indeed, as Jerry White notes, Obomsawin's use of extended interviews is "a testament to how little conventional documentary really does this" (White 28). Zuzana Pick suggests that Obomsawin's use of personal testimonies reflects her desire to promote the "self-representation" of First Nations people, and although her presence as filmmaker is firmly established in her films, space is created for interviewees to offer their own accounts of the events being documented (78).

The opening sequences of both *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* and *Kanehsatake* are deeply revelatory of Obomsawin's point of view. Each film begins with the identification of the geographical locations in which the conflicts take place, with Obomsawin's voice narrating a summary of the conflict. The camera moves over maps of the Mohawk territories in question. Notably, only the names of the Mohawk territories figure on the maps shown. The proximity of Kanehsatake and Kahnawake to Montreal and Oka is

mentioned only briefly, and both are established as secondary to the Mohawk territories depicted on the maps. The opening sequences serve not only to provide certain factual elements pertaining to the conflicts, but also to establish the dominant point of view of the films. The long history of the expropriation of the land at Kanehsatake is presented as indisputable, and the spectator becomes “complicit” in the project of the film, through an identification with the narrator’s voice (Pick 79). Finally, the opening sequences are immediately followed by interviews with Mohawk women, emphasizing Obomsawin’s desire to privilege the voices of First Nations people – and women in particular – in recounting the events. The testimony offered in each opening interview segment is highly affective, and at once compels the spectator to identify with the interviewee. Thus, within the first three minutes of each film, Obomsawin has both revealed her own subjective position in relation to the conflict, and called upon the viewer to join her.

The use of historical images and images from the mainstream information media in both *Kanehsatake* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* highlight another significant feature of Obomsawin’s work. Using animation cameras that create the illusion of movement, Obomsawin slowly scans portraits of French colonial authorities and collages of newspaper headlines, narrating as the camera moves, giving the viewer the sense that the account offered in the film contradicts the information contained in the images. The actual movement of the camera, an uninvolved passing over of the documents, suggests also that they are not part of the account provided by the film. Inherent in this technique is the suggestion that dominant accounts of the conflict should be subject to inquisition and that interpretations of the mainstream media’s images should be challenged. Obomsawin’s portrayal of the 1990 uprising therefore encompasses a critique of

dominant accounts of the events, as much as it privileges a Mohawk-centered narrative.

Pick describes the effect of combining a range of materials in one documentary space:

In Obomsawin's films, the combination of images from diverse sources creates a space to visualize cultural knowledge and social experience, retrieve traditional and contemporary stories and question colonial representations (85).

Yet the variety of sources included in Obomsawin's *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* never de-centre Obomsawin's own convictions about First Nations sovereignty, but rather "signify the historical conflict between the knowledge that First Nations people hold about themselves and the knowledge that others have constructed about Natives" (83). As Pick argues, the array of images and sources used in Obomsawin's films interrogate the representation of the First Nations in Canadian colonial discourse, enabling the opening up of "a space from which Mohawk historical narratives can be rearticulated and Native struggles for self-determination can be legitimized" (89).

The concluding moments of *Kanehsatake* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* are particularly significant elements of the films. Rather than end the films with depictions of the horrible violence endured by the Mohawks during the summer of 1990, Obomsawin instead offers images of resilience and determination. In *Kanehsatake*, the Mohawks are shown joyfully parading through the streets of their territory a year after the conflict. In *Rocks at Whiskey Trench*, a community-wide sports day shows Mohawk families rollerblading on a sunny day. In each film, Obomsawin has succeeded in linking the historic struggles of the Mohawk people with the events of 1990, and further relating the events of 1990 to a present reality in which the Mohawk Nation is depicted standing strong and sovereign in the face of repression by the Canadian state.

The historical contextualization that Obomsawin gives her accounts is perhaps the most powerful characteristic of her films, and what sets them apart from many of the mainstream depictions of the events of 1990. In looking to the past in order to explain the present, many depictions of the uprising clung to the Canadian mythologies explored in Chapter 3 in order to avoid the ideological crisis that negating such mythologies would entail. The methods used by the government, the mainstream information media and many individuals in explaining the 1990 uprising were largely derivative of the colonial ideology that enabled imperial expansion. Obomsawin's rendering of a history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains, denies the supremacy of colonial ideology and opens a space for the telling of histories of struggle.

In the torrent of competing narratives that gush and swell around the issues of First Nations land repatriation, Canadian and Quebec nationalism, and the imagined democracy of the Canadian state, the narratives considered through this thesis represent only a portion of those that compete to lay claim to pieces of the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains. The plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains, its text immersed in colonial cruelty and nationalist aspirations, collides violently with the historical accounts offered by Obomsawin. Similarly, the descriptions of the history offered by John Thompson for the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, by Gilles Boileau in his reading of the geological landscape of the land, and by Jacques Cartier in his travel notes, are each representative of the compulsion to define and delimit public memory surrounding belonging and entitlement to the land and resources of Turtle Island. These competing narratives emphasize the extent to which



memory, despite its inaccuracy, is intensely revealing of our needs, wants and aspirations, both public and private.

## CONCLUSION

*I have seen blood come from a stone; have felt the pulse of the hot, beating organs within it. That stone that bears the mark of murder, twenty-two people live there inside it. As I approached the plaque and touched its roughness, the sound of twenty-two people's hearts, endlessly drumming, rose to meet me.*

As the introductory paragraph of the thesis suggests, this work was motivated by a desire to learn about the place I imagine myself to be 'from'. Faced with a history such as the one described on the plaque, the questions regarding historiography, land repatriation and colonialism explored through this thesis forced themselves upon me. The plaque prompted my realization that my assumptions and unanswered questions regarding belonging and place, land and power, required tending to. My encounter with the plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains marked the beginning of a process of interior unravelling, some of the threads of which run through this thesis. The use of autoethnographic writing and research methods enabled me to further explore my own relationship to the histories investigated here, and have added, I believe, depth and honesty to the work itself. Even where the use of autoethnographic methodology is not textually evident, the writing and research processes that underlie this thesis were heavily informed by the work of authors such as Richardson, King, Brodkey, Clandinin and Connelly, Banks and LaDuke.

In addition to exploring the very local history of the colonization of Montreal and its spread into the lands surrounding the island, I try to establish the connections that this history has to other locations and histories. I wish to provide a history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains that moves beyond an examination of its 'local

uniqueness', as Doreen Massey describes it, to include an account of the historical and geographical forces that have shaped its history. In constructing the history of a specific place, Doreen Massey writes of the importance of looking beyond the immediacy of a location, suggesting that

... 'local uniqueness' is always a product of wider contacts; the local is always already a product in part of 'global' forces, where global in this context refers not necessarily to the planetary scale, but to the geographical beyond, the world beyond the place itself. (183)

The history of European colonialism described in this thesis is an example of one such 'global' force. Insofar as they involve moving through space and time, the inclusion of the history of Canada's first colonial encounters, together with a consideration of the pre-colonial significance of Kanehsatake have also contributed to exploring the "world beyond" the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains. Finally, the exploration of the "geographical beyond" described by Massey, in this case involved the reading of the actual geographical past of the land as a historical text. The richness of the land's geographic past in its ability to unearth histories of struggle coincided with my argument that an approach grounded in the land is of central importance in the consideration of issues of First Nations land repatriation. This thesis is therefore historical, but also seeks to question the ways in which histories are manufactured and communicated, as well as the ways in which historical information is gathered.

I argue the value, and indeed the importance, of autoethnographic methods in historical inquiry. In situating the researcher and creating a space for the expression of their experience of the research process, autoethnography provides a transparency that conventional historiography cannot allow. Furthermore, the range of literary expression made available by what Laurel Richardson calls "evocative forms of writing" offers

possibilities for a closer communication between the reader and writer (11). In this, I suggest that autoethnography is particularly well suited to historical inquiry in its ability to invoke even the most obscure of memories, drawing them into the fabric of the text. I suggest that the work of Thomas King, Winona LaDuke and Alanis Obomsawin constitute examples of historical investigation that make use of autoethnographic methods, and as such, represent a blurring of the boundaries that circumscribe conventional historical writing and documentary film practice.

State-sponsored historical commemorations, tied as they are to the turbulent forces of nationalism, are generous in the information they provide about the forces that brought them into being. In their production of feelings of entitlement to the land and its resources, such commemorations of events deemed to be of 'national importance' showcase the reproduction of a public memory that disallows the very idea of First Nations land repatriation. The plaque commemorating the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains, as an example of state-sponsored commemoration and narration, was both a catalytic force and a theoretical springboard in the writing of this thesis. Because the very beginning of the thesis can be traced back to that afternoon in August of 2006 when I first stood at the foot of the plaque, the plaque's recurring presence throughout the thesis has been meant to emphasize the subjective nature of history-making. The textual analysis of the plaque and the highlighting of the informational contradictions contained within it are also meant to suggest that much like my own experiences vis-à-vis the plaque, the plaque's makers were themselves involved in a history-making process that invoked their subjective wants and needs.

The materiality of the plaque as a piece of stone, sealed on one side by metal, becomes a medium through which to explore the larger implications of the relationship between stone, death, commemoration and violence. The physicality of the plaque itself becomes a site of inquiry, as I consider the metaphorical significance of stone as a screen on which historical narratives are projected. The porous nature of stone plaques and monuments immediately stood out as a way to imagine and describe the commuting of time through an object that seeks to immobilize it. The adage “it’s like getting blood from a stone” articulated the incongruity of the extensive use of stone in the commemoration of battles and wars, and in the form of tombstones, crypts and burial vaults for remembering deceased individuals. Imagining the plaque as a burial vault that unsuccessfully tried to contain the 18 Iroquois killed in the Battle of the Lake of Two Mountains is therefore an insistence on the fact that blood does indeed come from stone.

The account of the uprising of 1990 that I offer is meant to reveal how the early colonial history of Kanehsatake was replayed during that summer, and to warn against the practice of erecting staunch boundaries between the past and present, leaving each to their individual compartments. The image that I invoke of the permeable stone of the plaque, through which blood and histories may seep, suggests the tendency of histories to leak through to the present, and the propensity of the present to stain our accounts of the past. Blood, of all things, is not an easy substance to remove, and the repeated deployment of narratives of violence and attack such as the one on the plaque have largely contributed to further justifying the use of violence in repressing First Nations resistance.

Finally, my analysis of Obomsawin's films *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance* and *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* provides valuable examples of counter-narratives, yet at the same time has raised important methodological questions for me. Although I initially set out to investigate the narrativization of histories in a broad sense, my own political convictions sideswiped this intention, as I felt increasingly compelled to signal my support for the accounts offered by Obomsawin in her films. This issue is central to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's analysis of history in *Decolonizing Methodologies*. Tuhiwai Smith suggests that we turn to counter histories in the struggle towards decolonization because "We believe that history is also about justice" and that "when 'the truth comes out' it will prove that what happened was wrong or illegal and that therefore the system (tribunals, the courts, the government) will set things right" (34). Of course, this rarely occurs. The wielding of historical counter-narratives described by Tuhiwai Smith was at the root of my desire to align myself with the analysis of the events of 1990 contained in Obomsawin's films, even as I sought to complicate the very notion of historical narrativization. Yet as Tuhiwai Smith points out, "a thousand accounts of the 'truth' will not alter the 'fact' that indigenous peoples are still marginal and do not possess the power to transform history into practice" (34). The significance of historical counter-narratives, for Tuhiwai Smith, lies primarily in their potential to inform *action*, and as such relate more to the present than to the past (34-35). An extensive exploration of this methodological slippage might provide a starting point for further research into the usefulness of historical counter-narratives in the struggle towards decolonization.

As is the case with all projects, there are boundaries to what could be explored through this thesis. Certain recent developments stand out as being worthy of mention in

this regard. In March of 2008, Obomsawin was selected to receive the Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award as part of the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards. In light of this recent honour, exploring the larger reception of her work seems all the more relevant. An extensive analysis of Obomsawin's work, particularly the other two films in her series about the 1990 conflict *My Name is Kahentiiosta* (1995) and *Spudwrench: Kahnawake Man* (1997) fell outside of the scope of what this thesis could accommodate. Additionally, Obomsawin's latest film, *Waban-Aki: People from Where the Sun Rises* (2006), offers a portrayal of the village where Obomsawin spent her childhood, and is of particular note in relation to exploring the use of autoethnographic methods in documentary filmmaking.

Important changes to the processing of Specific Land Claims against the Canadian government were announced in 2007. The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has suggested that the series of changes are designed to speed up the resolution of outstanding land claims. This new plan whose stated aim is to "provide justice for First Nation claimants and certainty for government, industry and all Canadians" includes the creation of a Specific Claims Tribunal to adjudicate where negotiations "fail" ("Justice"). As explained in chapter 2 of this thesis, the specificities of Kanehsatake have excluded it from the narrow definition of what is considered to be 'traditional' land by the Canadian government, resulting in the rejection of both of the Kanehsatake land claims filed. The changes will undoubtedly have consequences for the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, and may also provide an additional inroad to the Mohawks of Kanehsatake. Further investigation into the implications of the changes to the processing of Specific Land Claims fell beyond the range of material that could be included in my research.

The writing of this thesis has taken place in the wake of the Australian government's apology to the Indigenous peoples of Australia. On February 13, 2008, the newly elected Australian Prime Minister moved a motion of *Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples*, describing the occasion as an opportunity for "the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past" ("The National Apology"). The apology made particular mention of members of the Stolen Generations, the name given to the many thousands of Indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their families and subsequently institutionalized as part of Australia's policy of assimilation. Although the recently announced monetary compensation package for survivors of Canadian residential schools has been described as a symbolic apology, the Canadian government has yet to offer an official and explicit apology to the First Nations.

In describing her experiences visiting the village of Wounded Knee on the Pine Ridge Lakota Reservation, Winona LaDuke writes of the longing to heal that she perceived there: "I look out on the village from the hillside from whence the ancestors must look also. This place, if any, is where a people must be allowed to heal" (89). LaDuke proceeds to articulate the question that continues to throb in the stomach of North American history: "*How can people recover or heal themselves without reconciliation, without apology, and without addressing the crime?*" (90). In light of the Australian national apology to Indigenous Australians, further research into the possibility of such an apology issued by the Canadian government is highly relevant. In reporting on the Australian apology of February 13, a Montreal newspaper cited a poll in which 39 percent of Canadians were said to believe that the Canadian government has no



reason to apologize to First Nations people (Marchal). The absence of a Canadian apology raises critical questions about the evasion of colonial histories that characterizes state relations with the First Nations. In particular, the poll suggests the importance of additional research into the role of public memory in influencing government relations with the First Nations. Finally, while state apologies do represent an acceptance, however limited, of the counter-narratives of those who have been colonized, they do not guarantee active government participation in returning stolen land and providing compensation for victims of state abuse. Further exploration of the social and political significance of state apologies may also shed light on their limitations.

The inclusion of autoethnographic elements in the writing of this thesis have allowed me to reveal, to a certain extent, my location vis à vis the research. I suggested at the beginning of this thesis that through my research, I was seeking to uncover the deliberateness of the histories I was told. Indeed, my investigation into the history of the land surrounding the Lake of Two Mountains has elucidated many of the forces that militate to delimit and order our identities, our memories and our histories. Yet another question, one whose presence has been palpable if not haunting throughout this process, still lingers, unanswered. It is a private question; an old one. Although the events of 1990 marked a turning point in my understanding of national identity and belonging, there was of course a collection of prior experiences that left me searching for the righteous defiance I saw in the protesters at the Peace Camp. The biting awareness I had of belonging and difference, those concepts that form the basis of the myth of the Canadian nation, had impressed itself on me long before that summer.

There is always a private question that ushers forth those that we explore in the more public spheres provided by papers, theses and books. The appeal of autoethnographic methodology, for me, is the place it creates for the exposure of such questions. Privately, I have been asking about belonging, about finding a place on land that is stolen, not one's own, and yet all that one may have. The inclusion of autoethnographic elements has allowed me to share this question, which might otherwise have gone unarticulated. That this question has accompanied me thus far underlines, I believe, that the methodology employed in this thesis truly has been an integral part of the research process. The writing of this thesis has suggested to me that that which still lingers may not in fact be a question, so much as the lack of a definitive answer. This conclusion, which of course is no conclusion at all, marks a development that I do not believe would have come about without the inclusion of autoethnographic elements in the writing of this thesis.

In addition to being a thesis concerned with the intertwined phenomena of commemoration, nationalism and colonial repression, this thesis is also an investigation into the power of memory. Of great personal significance has been the recalling of experiences surrounding the 1990 uprising that I had long since forgotten. In thinking about the power of memory, one experience in particular comes to mind, one which, I believe, encompasses many of the themes I have tried to explore through this thesis.

In 1996, I attended the annual Kanehsatake powwow, held in the large clearing in the pine forest that was at the heart of the 1990 conflict. I remember seeing, amidst a display of dream-catchers for sale, one very large dream catcher, striking in its size. Beaded into its centre were the words "Oka 1990: Lest We Forget". At fourteen, I could

scarcely remember the particularities of the event to which the dream catcher referred. Still, a part of me sensed the power of its message. Twelve years after that experience, my memory of that dream catcher, and its ominous warning hanging above the powwow, is clear and crisp.

The phrase “lest we forget”, generally associated with remembrance activities related to the First and Second World Wars, was the motto of the 2007 Veterans’ Week sponsored by Veterans Affairs Canada (“Veterans”). As a phrase used to commemorate the bravery of those who go to war on behalf of their nation, it is remarkably apt when used in reference to the Mohawk uprising of 1990. That the wars to which the phrase usually refers are remembered as “World Wars” is also fitting. The reverberations of the Mohawk uprising have been felt throughout the world, and the event continues to be a source of inspiration and outrage for many indigenous peoples as they struggle to protect their land and rights. The dream catcher’s words were a reminder that the colonial war that rages on in Canada, is indeed a World War.

Looking back on that moment, I realize that the dream catcher’s size was not coincidental: it was intended to catch the most encompassing of nightmares. In her novel *The God of Small Things*, Arundhati Roy refers to the violence of colonialism as a “war of dreams” (52). The description of the nature of colonization rendered by Chacko, one of the novel’s main characters, suggests that it is the infiltration of colonial ideology into the imaginations of the colonized that is the ultimate weapon of colonization: “...our minds have been invaded by a war.... The very worst sort of war. A war that captures dreams and re-dreams them” (52). Perhaps the dream catcher was meant also to protect the ambitions of self-government, sovereignty and freedom from the attack of colonial

ideology. Although it was a catcher of dreams, the nightmare for which it was made lives on in the waking reality of the Canadian state's violent repression of the First Nations of Turtle Island.

The challenge to state-sponsored historical narrative represented by that dream catcher constitutes, I believe, what can be considered a counter-commemoration. In using the phrase "lest we forget" to refer to the Mohawk uprising of 1990, that dream catcher, monumental in its size, was a symbolic commemoration of a Mohawk counter-narrative of the events of 1990 that effectively challenged the ones circulated by the state.

I too have wanted to contribute to the counter-narratives of the 1990 Mohawk uprising and the history that preceded it. Underlying the writing of this thesis is my desire to extend the reach of academic work into the very histories I have been exploring. Ben Okri's words concerning the reach of literary work adequately expresses this desire:

In the struggle to extend our song, we are all of us extending and participating in the ever unfolding story of humanity and literary tradition – but extending it, I hope, not only on to musty shelves.... But extending it, I pray, into the raw world, into the dreams of the living, into their struggles, their suffering, their joys (69-70).

This is what I hope this thesis has achieved. I hope also that like my experience as an eight year old child at the Peace Camp in 1990, this thesis encourages others to believe in the possibility of freedom.

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