

Sky Woman's Great Granddaughters:  
A Narrative Inquiry Into Kanienkehaka Women's Identity

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## ABSTRACT

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughters: A Narrative Inquiry into Kanienkehaka Women's Identity

Kahente Horn-Miller, Ph.D.  
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This study features the self-described title “Sky Woman’s Great Granddaughters: A Narrative Inquiry into Kanienkehaka women’s Identity.” Examined are liberal, socialist, and feminist world views that address the external authentication of Kanienkehaka identity and its impact on the lives of eight women from the Mohawk community of Kahnawake, Quebec, Canada. The Canadian liberal nation-state’s philosophical tradition of individual liberty contrasts from what we observe in the lives of these eight women. Canada extends the right to its citizens to be self-authenticating and to pursue one’s projects. Deliberative individuals enter into a dialogue with like-minded individuals to achieve consensus about a conception of the good life. This philosophy is the basis for Canada’s criteria to authenticate who is fit to be a citizen of this country. However, authenticated Indians were accorded ‘special status’, translated using liberal philosophical criteria into legislation like the Indian Act. This Act governs every aspect of modern Indian life. This study focuses in particular on Kanienkehaka women who are victims of a process of authentication through intellectual colonization by feminism which poses as an authority to authenticate what is truly feminine. These eight women, through critical reflection, become self-authenticating as they describe the impact of these philosophical traditions on their lives and what they did to overcome the disorienting effects of the liberal and feminist traditions. This study finds that Indian Act Mohawk identity is a rigid construct, in contrast to the understanding of identity communicated by these women. When expressing one’s Kanienkehaka identity, primacy lies in the interdependencies found in a unity of self, family, and of community.

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## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my husband Michael Thohahoken Doxtater, our children, and to all great granddaughters of Sky Woman.

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# **Sky Woman's Great Granddaughters: A Narrative Inquiry Into Kanienkehaka Women's Identity**

## **Introduction**

In "Sky Woman's Great Granddaughters" I explore Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) women's lives through narrative inquiry. In general, I explore Iroquois women's identity and more specifically Kanienkehaka women's identity. These women are from the Kanienkehaka community of Kahnawake located near Montreal, Quebec, Canada. My research shows that there are factors that impacted Indigenous women through legislated identity in Canada's Indian Act, Bill C-31, and Bill C-44. I see that Kanienkehaka women's identity has been redefined in service to the colonial project resulting in Euro-formed Indigenous identity constructs. The ambiguity inherent in Kanienkehaka women's identity is also evident at the local and national levels where Indigenous identity is subject to the push and pull of national politics.

This study addresses questions arising from research on individual conceptions of Kanienkehaka identity. My basic research assumption suggests that an inquiry into the narratives of Kanienkehaka women draws from the collective memory of individuals and provides a strong foundation for statements of what constitute their identity.

Kanienkehaka women have been a constant presence in Iroquois social and historical development since contact.<sup>1</sup>

My study focuses on Kanienkehaka women in Kahnawake and their views on social and political roles and their place in governing their affairs. Kahnawake is part of the Iroquois Confederacy and one of eight communities comprising the Mohawk Nation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The use of the term "contact" refers to the period in history when Christopher Columbus landed on the shores of North America in 1492 and made first contact with Indigenous peoples.

<sup>2</sup> The Iroquois Confederacy refers to a unity of five nations – Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca. The Confederacy predates European contact and influence and was meant for mutual peace and

Kahnawake's name, meaning "at the rapids," was given in 1676 when the community was established near the Lachine Rapids (known as the *Sault St. Louis* by the French) along the St. Lawrence River, in southern Quebec. The land based from which Kahnawake originated included 60,000 acres of land from the *Seigneurie du Sault St. Louis*, and derived from two French Crown grants to the Society of Jesus (Devine, 1922). The land was granted on the condition that it would revert to the Crown only if the Iroquois abandoned it, and the purpose of the grants was to mission and minister to the Iroquois (Reid, 2004, 21). Kahnawake was originally populated by practicing Catholics who had migrated to Kahnawake from the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York. The community retains a definite Catholic character alongside traditional beliefs which are now practiced publicly. The Mohawks at Kahnawake neither replaced their beliefs with Catholic beliefs nor did the Jesuit teachings necessarily clash with Mohawk beliefs. Therefore, Mohawk traditional spiritual practices have persisted and even meshed in certain ways with Catholicism over time.<sup>3</sup> There are those who also who practice both faiths. Despite the stratification of the Kahnawake community by faith, the knowledge of clan affiliation continues to persist.<sup>4</sup> Today, Kahnawake remains a multicultural community inhabited by Mohawks of various backgrounds, religions and beliefs.

In the late seventeenth century, and throughout the eighteenth century the Kahnawake Mohawks were engaged in traditional subsistence activities, such as raising crops, fishing and hunting, as well as trading with surrounding French communities (Devine, 1922). These activities changed when Kahnawake's land base began to

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protection of the five founding nations. It was a network of relations that joined households to villages, villages to nations, and subsequently the five Confederacy nations together into a political alliance based on the foundational principle of consensus decision-making.

<sup>3</sup> Some Kahnawakeron:non say that Catholicism and Mohawk traditional beliefs did clash and as a result traditional beliefs went underground for some time for survival reasons.

<sup>4</sup> The three main clan families in Kahnawake are Bear, Wolf, and Turtle. There are also a few Snipe Clan members found in the community. One's clan is 'passed down' through the mother, making the Mohawk a matrilineal society. The clan family consists of the mother, her sons and daughters and the daughters' children. The sons play an important role as uncle to their sisters' children. The uncle's role is more crucial to the development of the children than the role of their biological father.

diminish, particularly after reserve status was made permanent upon the acceptance of the Indian Act by the community in 1890 (Simpson, 2003, 63). By the late nineteenth century the expropriation of Kahnawake lands had greatly impacted traditional food gathering practices, and Kahnawake gradually moved towards an economy based on wage labor (Reid, 2004, 17). At this time, Kahnawake men gradually became involved in the fur trade, and found work in logging, freighting and piloting on the St. Lawrence River. Farming was also an economic option and practiced mainly by women (Reid, 2004, 18). Many men also began to work in steel and construction, and today Kahnawake men, known as Ironworkers, continue to work in steel and construction, commuting between Kahnawake and other cities such as Toronto, Boston, and New York. Men and women also work in white-collar careers in Montreal and the community. In addition, over the past twenty years the cigarette industry in Kahnawake has been an economic boon to the community, and the financial impact has been so great as to be difficult to measure. Today with an estimated population of 9,000 people, the community is characteristically “white-collar” by employment and income standards.

The lifestyles of Kahnawake people have also shifted alongside changes in community governance. While clan and family ties still exist as important aspects of Mohawk identity and sense of belonging, the importance of these ties has changed and in some ways diminished over time, particularly since the adoption in 1890 of an Indian Act-chartered Band Council. The Mohawk Council of Kahnawake is composed of an elected Grand Chief and eleven Council members, and under federal purview is exclusively responsible for the administrative and financial dealings of the community.

External change agency and the cultivation of local change agents like the Grand Chief and eleven Councilors eroded the traditional culture of Kahnawake that was based on the role of women in governance. As a response to these changes, traditional mother culture shifted underground or changed completely. A colonially-imposed form of governance remains the sole form of federally recognized governance for Kahnawake.

However this study poses that women still play a part in the governance of the community, albeit in a much different form. In the last century, the oral and written culture of the Kanienkehaka reveals a slow and steady resurgence of women's identification with the traditional aspects of Kanienkehaka culture.

For example the path to cultural recovery is filled with Canadian government action followed by reactions from Kanienkehaka. The Iroquois had a relationship with the newcomers based on reciprocity, commerce, cooperation, military alliance, and economic benefit. The Iroquois are Signatory to international treaties like the 1784 Haldimand Treaty, the 1701 Treaty of Montreal for Kahnawake, the Two Row and Covenant Chain. Monumental changes occurred in the relationship between the Indigenous peoples and the Europeans. This changed relationship that became a clear strategy of assimilation by the colonizer on the colonized.

The chronology of events begins with the Royal Proclamation of 1763 issued by King George III to establish a basis of government administration in the North American territories formally ceded by France to Britain in the Treaty of Paris in 1763 following the Seven Years War. The Proclamation established the constitutional framework for the negotiation of Indian treaties with the aboriginal inhabitants of large sections of Canada.

King George's Proclamation became a key legal instrument for the paternalistic protection of Indigenous peoples through the establishment of colonial governments. The Proclamation was meant to regulate trade with the Indians and non-Indian settlement in native territories. As a result, the Proclamation defined the legal status of a large area in the North American interior as a vast Indian reserve. The eastern boundary of this territory, which explicitly excluded the colony of Quebec and the lands of the Hudson's Bay Company, was set along the heights of the Appalachian mountain range.

In 1857 the Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes built on the "Act for the Protection of the Indians in Upper Canada" passed in 1839, but required the mandatory "enfranchisement" of any recognized male Indian over the age of

21. An enfranchised Indian would no longer retain their legal rights and be deemed Indian but a regular British subject.

Further assimilation-based developments ensued from these foundational elements. There occurred the overthrow of treaty signatories, the extinguishment of land title, to the effect that vast areas of land were opened up to European settlement.

1867 heralded the enactment of the British North America Act by the Parliament of the United Kingdom and the Parliament of Canada which established Canada as a country. The British North America Act is made up of a series of acts which form the constitution of Canada. The relationship between Canada and the Indigenous populations went from being one of a protectionary role to coercive role where Indians became the exclusive responsibility of the Federal Government of Canada. The first Indian Act passed in Parliament in 1876 drew on earlier legislation which consolidated all laws relating to Indians and expanded over the years to promote assimilation policy where Indians became the exclusive responsibility of the federal government of Canada. Included in the legislation was voluntary enfranchisement which removed Indian status from an individual. The Act invited any Indian to relinquish collective ties to their community and any claims to Aboriginal rights. Proposed as a 'privilege', enfranchisement was enacted upon those who gained an education, served in the armed forces, or left the reserve for an extended time for employment. By 1880 the compulsory enfranchisement of Indians who were university educated or entered a profession stopped, although at this time entire bands gained the 'privilege' of enfranchisement.

The Indian Advancement Act passed in 1884 gave wider power to local government and the raising of money yet took away powers by the appointment of an Indian Agent as chairman of the Council.

From 1889 to 1911, lands and Indian rights to lands were further diminished by amendments made to the Indian Act which allowed the Federal Government to disregard the opposition by Indian bands to leases of their lands. 1920 amendments further

empowered the Superintendent General to enfranchise all 'suitable' candidates. In 1924 all other forms of traditional government were made illegal which included the overthrow of traditional chiefs and the Great Law of Peace<sup>5</sup> at the Ohsweken (Six Nations Reservation) Council House.<sup>6</sup> A democratically elected band council system was put in place.<sup>7</sup> Lands were no longer held in trust by the Department of Indian Affairs and individual parcels were allotted to individual band members.

The Interwar period from 1925 to 1951 witnessed Indians living with very little or no control of resources and over their children as they were taken away and placed in residential schools. The enforcement of the Residential School System effectively served to destroy mother-culture.<sup>8</sup> The Indian Agent was empowered by the Indian Act to enforce the Act on reserves. The on-reserve system was also implemented and was mandated to make Indian children obedient to authority. At this same time, Indians were not allowed to vote as they were included in a category with lunatics, alcoholics, and criminals.

In 1951 amendments were made to the Indian Act which included lifting the ban on the enactment of traditional ceremonies, Indians being allowed to legally enter drinking establishments, the establishment of the Indian Registry which clearly defined membership and included patriarchal policies<sup>9</sup> defining Indian identity. In 1982 The

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<sup>5</sup> The Potlatch and Sundance were outlawed in 1884. The Great Law of Peace is a form of governance developed and used by the Iroquois. This Law is based on idea of maintaining peace among the five original nations through the establishment of governance based on the idea of consensus.

<sup>6</sup> There are eight Mohawk communities located within Canada and the United States – Akwesasne, Kahnawake, Kanesatake, Wahta, Tyendenaga, Ohsweken, Ganienkeh, and Kanatsiohareke.

<sup>7</sup> The effect of the imposition of a democratically elected form of government brought about broad social changes in the community. To understand the impact of the new governance system on the Kahnawake community within the context of a theory on the adoption of innovations by individuals and organizations, see Everett Rogers, 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Mother-culture is the personification of Indigenous culture where primacy is placed in the knowledge held by the mother figure. In Iroquois society, mothers play a central role in society as they are the ones who teach rules, morals and ways of viewing the world. The centrality of the mother is played out in the Skywoman Story.

<sup>9</sup> Indian Act policies regarding Indian status and membership reflect patriarchal notions of heredity and belonging. For example, women who married non-Indians lost all rights as Indians, as did their children. Whereas, an Indian man who married a non-Indian woman retained his rights along with his children while his wife gained status and all rights belonging to an Indian.

Constitution Act gave Aboriginal rights constitutional protection. In 1985 the Indian Act was once again amended and those Indian women who lost status through marriage to non-Indians were reinstated as Indians and as band members under the Indian Act. Their children also gained Indian status, but would not gain band membership for two years. The effect of this amendment was to increase substantially the number of status Indians in Canada, placing pressure on band budgets and their limited land resources. While the total area of Indian reserves did not change appreciably, the status population nearly doubled in the 10 years after 1985. In this same year, Bands were given two years to develop their own custom code governing membership according to guidelines outlined under the Indian Act. If done within the two year time period, the custom codes would govern the membership of the communities and essentially gave certain decision making powers to the Bands. If the custom code was not complete, jurisdiction over membership would revert back to the Indian Act.

In 2006, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-44. Bill C-44 is an Act which provides for the immediate repeal of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA). Section 67 of the CHRA shielded both the Federal government and Band Councils from complaints with respect to the application of any provision of the Indian Act. This meant that the Indian Act was not exempt from the CHRA. Indian people were not adequately consulted in the drafting of Bill C-44 and opposed its passing in the House of Commons. To date, any action on Bill C-44 in the House of Commons has been suspended.

First Nations responded to the Canadian government measures using various strategies as an attempt to resist socialization to the dominant political hegemony. With the gradual implementation of assimilationist policies came gradual changes in Indian society. Resistance was not easy as change went often unnoticed. An apparent change in Iroquois society has been a shift from matrilineal government to governance based in patriarchal power structures where mainly men are elected into a top-down hierarchical

form of government. In response, there is movement in Kahnawake to grapple with the restoration of traditional governance which includes women.

Clearly, Kanienkehaka women's identity has been impacted by imposed policies of assimilation from 1763 to the present. The issue has been over access to lands and resources. Indigenous peoples were deemed unfit to govern illustrated by the fact that the Iroquois have gone from being allies to a situation of wardship under social welfare. Now the dominant political and hence cultural hegemony assumes authority to authenticate Indigenous cultural identity. Through current reforms in legislation like self government, Indigenous peoples have been handed back their cultural humanity as if it is a *thing* to be handed back (Freire 2003). However, as a social group Indigenous peoples actively affirm their cultural ideal that they insist was never surrendered in the first place. We are still 'we'.

The target of socialization among the Kanienkehaka was women. The root of traditional Kanienkehaka culture and society was woman—viewed in terms of matrilineal and matrilineal tradition and matriarchy. This is also referred to as mother culture. There is literature that documents and examines colonialism and its effects on Indigenous women. For example, there is research on the appeal of Iroquois women's tradition to feminist thinking since the 1800s and will be discussed further in Chapter Three (see Wagner 1996 and Landsman 1992). Ironically, while white feminists were gaining rights, colonial Canada was stripping Iroquois women of their power and rights. There is no research that engages directly with Kanienkehaka women's narratives in a way that elicits an understanding of the motivations of Kanienkehaka women. Thus, Kanienkehaka women's responses remain misunderstood. This doctoral inquiry undertakes to refine our understanding of the Kanienkehaka women's identity and which elements address the role of women in the Kahnawake community.

For example "The Kahnawà:ke Membership Law" and the Iroquois adoption tradition illustrate aspects of the identity question and its effects on Kanienkehaka

women. The community of Kahnawake declared its intentions of controlling its own membership from 1940 to 1981. In 1981 the Moratorium and 1984's Mohawk Law were the first steps towards asserting jurisdiction. In 1996 a task force was established to begin the process of community consultation on membership. The final Membership Law was enacted on October 28, 2003. The Law was intended to focus less on blood quantum and address the eligibility of those who could be members and or reside in the community through an increased emphasis on the rebuilding of their ancestry and family ties. It is seen as a way of thinking that will develop the community for the future and be adjusted to the changing needs of the community.

The Kahnawà:ke Membership Law does not allow for diverse membership as did the old adoption practices in which diversity and race were not at issue. According to its implied function, the Law protects the existing culture for the future, allowing it to resist the pressures of erosion and reach a stable condition. Put into play by the women of any Iroquois community, these same functions of preservation and protection were outcomes of the old adoption practices. The difference between adoption and membership lies in the distinction made between the rights of the individual and the collective. Membership in Kahnawake has become a right of the individual under criteria defined by a small group of men and women rather than an issue of what is best for the community based on the role of women as the eyes of the community. What the research demonstrates is that the community of Kahnawake has expanded its understanding of what citizenship means to incorporate notions from rights-based Eurocentric laws such as immigration and naturalization. No longer is it merely a question of what is good for the community but rather it has become a question of whether or not the individual fits the determined criteria for membership in Kahnawake encapsulated under the rhetoric of 'community needs'.

Thus, old adoption practices and the Kahnawà:ke Membership Law present an example of the conflict between Eurocentric ideas such as rights of the individual and the

importance of the preservation of traditions and culture encompassed in notions such as ‘for the good of the community’ that is at play in the identity question. Further, this is part of the larger issue of access to resources that involves a conflict between the rights of the individual and those of the collective. The difficulties of this rights-based challenge lies in developing community institutions that foster relationships rather than the individualism brought about by the Indian Act. The institutions should bring the community of Kahnawake back to understanding the role of the individual and their responsibilities to family, community, and nation. Once that is done, then we can look outward to larger communal and national issues of self-determination and governance. Thus, if rights are conceptualized in terms of the relationships they structure, then the problem of individualism engendered by federal policies like the Indian Act is radically transformed.

In order to understand what aspects of Kanienkehaka women’s identity appeal across Indigenous cultures, it is necessary to define Kanienkehaka women’s identity – a task which has baffled non-Indigenous researchers such as the feminists who are accustomed to Eurocentric concepts. For example, I examine the contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous research that presents the impact of the feminist man-woman binary in opposition to the unity in Iroquois society. Iroquois social structure and democracies illustrate the important role women had in traditional Iroquois society. However, misinterpretations in ethnography and anthropology have tainted subsequent research on Iroquois women. The Euro-formed data continues to misrepresent Indigenous women in service to the ongoing colonial project. Further trauma imposed by colonization continues to perpetuate inaccuracies and now results in demonstrations of culture that are misguided and often do not make sense. As a result the dominant society continues to authenticate Indigenous identity.

The suffragettes were also complicit in the distortion of the Iroquois women’s tradition through their admiration of Iroquois women both for the esteem they held in

society and also for their ability to change with colonization. The feminist movement continues to impose the gender precept on Iroquois women as it purports to represent the voices of all women world-wide. Feminists do not speak for many Indigenous women. In fact, Indigenous women are speaking back to feminism and Euro-formed historical data in a commitment to the survival of future generations. Indigenous women are telling their stories about the recovery of Indigenous women's traditions—individual identity derives from direct dialogue with individuals. Individual identity is understood relationally within the context of the fluid and continual interaction of many stories and fragments of stories created around the things which appear most important about a person's life over time.

The Kahnawà:ke Membership Law reflects a part of Kahnawake's community vision of what it means to be Kanienkehaka, which is consistent with self-determination efforts that are taking place throughout Indigenous North America. One cannot bypass the fact that with the state of Indigenous peoples' dispossession of land and resources, loss of culture and community, the Law is part of a strategy to regain a sense of Kanienkehaka identity. Unfortunately it has not been fully thought out as it incorporates alien notions of Kanienkehaka identity.

Further, the Law does not reflect the inclusive spirit of the Iroquois philosophy and understanding of identity that was illustrated by the old practice of adoption. This can be seen in the new definition of adoption that is contained within the Law which states "Adoption means the act or acts of accepting the child of another person as one's own child (Onkwarihwa'shon:'a 2003:5)." If we look to the Law and attempt to understand the mindset of the people who drafted it and participated in its development, as done in relation to captivity and adoption practices, we see that in many ways the new Law reflects the mindset underlying current Canadian legislation found in the membership criteria contained in the Indian Act.

As such, this membership legislation appears to have been devised to protect a community faced with Canada's threat of once again imposing its own membership legislation and limiting the sovereignty of the people to decide their own fate. This aspect puts identity and membership issues at the forefront of the sovereignty and self-determination debate.

As previously stated, what is glaringly absent from the Law is the spirit of the people and their own conceptions of membership that are not written down or academically analyzed. This same idea is reflected in Audra Simpson's concept of feeling citizenships. The challenge to the community is to harden these possibilities into a membership policy that may accommodate the simultaneity of these experiences, these different transhistoric discourses (and people), so that these 'feeling citizenships' may then become lived citizenships (Simpson 2003:254)." The challenge that she outlines is a large one but not impossible. One has to look within the culture of the Kanienkehaka in order to find elements that are of use to this process. For example, the aspect of living in harmony with one another and with the natural world is encompassed in traditional philosophy like the *Kanonweratonsera* (Ohenton karihwatekwen) ceremony. A relationality of acknowledgement and thanks is enacted through the recitation of the words and the posture and respectful silence of the people. This first Iroquoian epistemology commemorates the arrival of Sky Woman and the dawn of human life on earth. That is a basic example but may serve as the starting point for reworking the Law so that it reflects foundational Kanienkehaka principles that can serve as a strong foundation for a culturally and communally appropriate membership law.

Further reflection on this issue shows that throughout the Law, Kanienkehaka identity has been essentialized through the incorporation of changed notions of identity that reflect a distorted understanding of what constitutes Kanienkehaka culture and values and the role of women in their promulgation and protection. This distortion incorporates notions imposed through foreign education and modern living experiences that have not

been recognized as such. In this regard, Alexandra Harmon states, “history contradicts the still prevalent notion that culture change destroys Indianness; it shows that Indianness cannot be calibrated to degrees of cultural continuity. Group after group has maintained a strong sense of Indian identity despite wholesale changes in structure, customs, beliefs, and personnel. While the characteristics that identified Indians in the past have altered radically, Indians have refused to disappear (Harmon 2002:260).” Kanienkehaka have had to revise their self-characterizations by elevating emblems of Kanienkehaka identity to a sacred level. These emblems are taken-for-granted activities such as speaking Kanienkeha or the Mohawk language, responsibility to the community, clan membership, and tracing descent to three ancestors. Modern Kanienkehaka significations of identity are different from those used by their forbears.

In the practice of adoption, and the subsequent illustration of the Kahnawà:ke Law on Membership, we see that there are problems inherent in the new Law. These are the conflict between individual and collective rights and the incorporation of aspects of a foreign classificatory process that differs from those facets of identity and membership that have been previously illustrated through the exploration of the practice of adoption. In essence, they work in conflict with each other and therefore the Law is in conflict with the feeling membership previously outlined by Audra Simpson. As a result, what we are left with is a Law that has no power and will not achieve the intended purpose of strengthening and building a strong Kanienkehaka community.

Until further changes are made, the Law currently outlines the procedures for the deliberation of each case where each is determined on an individual basis, giving no consideration to collective needs of the community, one of which is increasing the gene pool to ensure health and survival of the people. Essentially the Council of Elders, a deliberative body developed to oversee the implementation of the Law, has to decide whether the individual in question fits the model of Kanienkehaka identity put forth in the Law. In contrast, traditional adoption of captives was a process whereby the community

as a whole sought a missing piece that the captive fit in order that the community remained strong and viable. What is at the forefront is the understanding that the community comes first, but the person is still an individual within the collective, thus maintaining balance and strength in the community.

This same issue of the community 'needs' is articulated when discussions on the Law are undertaken. Yet, when we examine it in depth we see that it doesn't achieve this. The Law has created tension in the community as individuals find themselves having to apply for membership or, in the case of a woman who regained status under Bill C-31, having to reapply and undergo further trauma. As well, inconsistencies in the Law have already caused a member of the Elder's Committee to resign. In a letter made public in the Eastern Door Kahnawake elder Watiio Montour published his reasons for resigning from the Council of Elders. His decision relates to the determination of a person's lineage. Montour wrote, "Using the method of simply counting a person's great-grandparents that are listed on the lineage chart and then deciding that one great-grandparent is not Kanienkehaka, because a non-Native name appears on the lineage chart, is discriminatory and unfair. This happens because if one of the great-grandparents being looked at is a woman and this woman's father was non-Native, the non-Native name appears on the lineage chart, causing her to be discredited and is then not counted. On the other hand, if one of the great-grandparents being looked at is a man and this man's mother was non-Native, the non-Native name does not appear on the lineage chart, causing him to receive full credit, and then is counted (January 13, 2005, Vol. 13, Issue 50:3)." This illustrates the main point throughout this work that whether or not the community realizes it, remnants of the Indian Act discriminatory legislation are at play in the new Law. Therefore, Montour is accurate in stating that the Law is not achieving its stated purpose.

The Kanienkehaka or more specifically the Kahnawake community is an ongoing creation as Alexandra Harmon aptly summarizes. Harmon writes, "The lesson of

history...is that Indianness is an ongoing creation, and Indians are chief among its creators. They have taken active roles in shaping the identities we know as Indian. They have asserted their identities in strategic ways. And again and again, they have sought change as a means of maintaining their societies and their distinctiveness (Harmon 2006:261).” This strategy is what the community of Kahnawake has attempted to do by developing and implementing the Law on Membership. But, by using outmoded practices of ‘community consultation’ in which very few members actually participate instead of relying on the consensus required by custom, they have not been able to achieve their intended goal. Perhaps what can be taken from adoption practices of old is an understanding of the importance of the collective and how a society could and would incorporate other races for the social, spiritual, and political benefit of all.

The legacy of the Indian Act is its attempt to place all Indigenous groups in Canada under the same frame of reference. We now know that this doesn’t work, because there are many different conceptions of identity and membership amongst the various Indigenous peoples. Each one incorporates a unique world view and draws on differing cultural considerations. As a result, it is difficult to determine a tangible universal link between Indigenous peoples and unfair to place us all under one category, that of the ‘First Nations of Canada’. This diversity is described by Harmon who proposes that “If there is a universal reason for that determination to be counted as Indian, it is history. More precisely, it is a sense of having an Indian history or a historical link to undisputed Indians of the past. People have derived this sense from sources as diverse as family lore, a knowledge of genealogy, a multi-generational attachment to place, similar stories about their forbears’ treatment by non-Indians, or a common pattern of experiences while trying to live by shared norms (Harmon 2006:261).” The Kahnawà:ke Law on Membership serves the same function in its attempt to retain what is left of Kanienkehaka culture while inadvertently incorporating some of Canada’s worst racist policies. It is an

admirable attempt to strip these policies down in order to build a more culturally appropriate method of determining belonging in the Kahnawake community.

According to Bhabha, “the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures opens up a cultural space – this third space – where the negotiation of incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existences...Hybrid hyphenisations emphasize the incommensurable elements as the basis of cultural identities (Bhabha 2003).” Thus, there is no mirror in which to look for recognizable concrete forms. This ‘third space’ challenges the old notion of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by an ancient past, kept alive in the national traditions of the people. The Kanienkehaka experience seems to fit this description of the ‘third space’. The effects among the Kanienkehaka are an awakened consciousness and the resultant series of events such as the Paul K. Diabo case<sup>10</sup>, the 1984 Kahnawake Moratorium to Move to Traditional Government, and the Oka Crisis of 1990. The Kanienkehaka continue to mimic the colonizing society by attempting to use things like the concepts of sovereignty and nation to get back to what they believe is authentic. Kahnawake is decolonizing its own social structures by reenacting local governance and implementing such things as The Kahnawá:ke Law on Membership. Future research should look at what happens

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<sup>10</sup> In 1927 Paul K. Diabo, an ironworker from Kahnawake appeared before a federal court in Philadelphia to contest his deportation to Canada. According to the United States Department of Immigration, which had arrested him a year earlier, Diabo had violated the Immigration Act of 1924 and should be considered an illegal alien. Diabo contended that as a member of the Iroquois Confederacy, he had a right to cross the international border without interference and restriction. This right had been recognized by the Jay Treaty of 1794. The Case became an important test of Iroquois sovereignty and treaty rights. In the decision, the judge held that international treaties recognized the freedom of Indian people to cross the border between the United States and Canada and that there was nothing in the American immigration laws to deny that freedom. The original case and the appeal rested on the interpretation of two treaties, the Jay Treaty of 1794 and the Treaty of Ghent of 1814. The Jay Treaty fixed the boundary between the two nations in Canada. The border created by the Treaty did not exist and the Indians had a right to cross it without interference or limitation. In the decision after the appeal, the judge held that the right to freely cross the border was no abrogated by the War of 1812 and that because Indians were wards of the nation and occupied a different status than native-born citizens; Acts of Congress did not apply to them. The Paul K. Diabo Case helped to solidify the legal basis on which border-crossing and treaty rights claims are made by Iroquois (For a comprehensive view on the case and its implications for Kahnawake see Reid 2007).

after, when the Kanienkehaka move out of the third space and into what we might call a 'fourth space'.

This study rejects bicultural hybridity represented by the man-woman binary. We see that hybridity is actually a return to a man-woman unity. Thus, culturally Kanienkehaka vocally reject the notion that they are more "white" than "Indian". The assertion of a distinct Mohawk Indian identity can be heard in public dialogue, viewed in symbols displayed prominently on cars and clothing, and is a factor in what motivates the Mohawk language revitalization movement throughout the community of Kahnawake. Women cast hybridity in the light of national unity and man-woman power. Drawing on the work of Alfred, Bhabha, Kemper, Weber and many other relevant postcolonial theorists, this research proposes to discover the common elements of renewed Kanienkehaka women's identity (see Alfred 1995; 2003; Landow 2000; and Weber 1992). I focus on the early Twentieth Century and defining moments in Kanienkehaka history. An examination of visual arts, literature and oral history focusing on these events shows how socialization has manifested itself and how Kanienkehaka women's identity was shaped as people resisted the imposition of church and state in general. Broad themes in political theory have impacted Canadian government assimilation policies. Ironically liberalism and socialism pose themselves as emancipatory and enlightened while framing modern nation state Indian policy.

As I say in this study liberal individualism advances the right to choose one's projects, the right for individual growth and development facilitating the potential for progress. In turn, I also say that socialism describes the individual in terms of the power exerted for man's<sup>11</sup> alienation from his true essence. The false individual is defined as the bourgeois owner of property and the individual presents his true essence by working.

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<sup>11</sup> 'Man' is the generic male pronoun and means 'humanity' as a whole. The liberal and Marxist writers discussed in this work use the term 'man' almost exclusively. In order to highlight the impact of their work on Mohawk identity, the term 'man' will continue to be used throughout this work. For an understanding of the use of the word 'man' as it is used by liberal and Marxist theorists to reference all of humanity please see Spender 1980.

However, the deliberative aspect of the individual is removed and the self-aware individual becomes irrelevant. Lastly I pose that critical discourse teaches that each individual needs to be understood in terms of their personal narrative. Re-individualization is described as a process of emancipation through the individuals' active participation and dialogue with themselves others and their surroundings.

The liberal conception finds that the individual has the right to choose one's projects, has the right for individual growth and development, and has the potential for progress. In order to understand the individual in these terms, we need to ask the following questions: What does liberalism mean by liberty as the right to choose (Mill 1956; Marx and Engels 1959)? Why is it important for liberalism that enlightened reason is the basis of deliberative individuals? Why is it important to liberalism that a conception of the good can only occur by like-minded reasonable individuals (Rawls 1996)? Why is it important for liberalism that individuals who agree about a good achieve an overlapping consensus (Rawls 1996)? The socialist view of the individual focuses on the worker essence and views the individual in relation to society. In order to understand this view of the individual, we ask the following questions: How is man alienated from his true self? How does socialism regard the deliberative aspect of the individual? In socialism, how is individualism irrelevant? Why is it important for socialism that an individual worker express his true self through his worker essence? Marx and Engels illustrate how bourgeois society, rooted in political economy and greed, alienates the proletariat from the bourgeoisie creating a society composed of classes of people in a struggle with each other. The conflict arises over who has the right to access material and social capital. Marx and Engels put forward the universal conflict resolution strategy in establishing a rational society where man has no ego, where there is no conflict between the individual and social demands, and wants and enjoyments are human, universal and social. In this setting man becomes a truly human man. The actions, desires, and life of

the individual can be deduced only in terms of the outcome of establishing a 'rational society'.

My study responds to the questions listed above concerning liberal and social political theory. I respond to these questions later in this study in my discussion of critical discourse. However, I frame my critique of liberal and social theory by focusing on Mill and Marx. Clearly, Mill leaves the individual sovereign over his own actions and does not deny the existence of obligations or duty to others, whereas Marx antithetically promotes the ideals of communism and the personal development of man as an individual with a worker essence. Importance lies in the economic emancipation of man within the context of all human history. Marx and Engels' treatise is a way of talking about the individual as a response to liberalism. Their work is a response to the notion of the superiority of man over nature and superior races over inferior races, in other words a Hegelian dialectic where there is a thesis opposed by an antithesis, bringing about a higher synthesis. Ironically western theory assumes continuous authority by virtue of an extensive intellectual arsenal to authenticate the other.

The intellectual authority to authenticate others has been expanded upon by Western experts like the Iroquoianists and the feminists who authenticate Indigenous culture as a man-woman binary.<sup>12</sup> However, I pose that Indigenous women reject the binary and say that unity is at the root of Indigenous society. Contact narratives written by men distorted the male-female unity of Iroquois society in service to the colonial project. Ironically, the relationship between Iroquois women and the early suffragettes demonstrates how feminism took up the reins of destruction and continues to perpetuate the gender binary. Coincidentally, insider narratives of Indigenous women illustrate the efforts being made by Indigenous women to correct the binary back to the unity.

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<sup>12</sup> For examples of Iroquoianist work, see Colden (1964), Druke (1980), Fenton (1998), Hale (1883), Mohawk (2003), Parker (1916), Reid (2004), Richter (1992), and Spittal (1990).

Conflicting interests still exist though dialogue does not. The man-woman binary continues to be expressed as the authentic structure of Iroquois society.

Through narratives constructed around the lives of four women, we see how contact narratives established the gender binary—Sacagawea, Pocahontas, Molly, and Kateri lost their identities through the process of intellectual colonization. The invasion, subordination, socialization, and subjugation of Indigenous people created unnecessary conflict between men and women, but also shows how government pursues assimilation as a logical consequence of colonization. Through the examination of the work of Sally Roesch Wagner (1996) and Gail Landsman (1992), I see that the feminist gender precept continues to perpetuate conflict between the sexes. Finally, through a review of insider narratives, I pose that many Indigenous women refuse to be homogenized and marginalized.

I see that Indigenous women are victims of processes of authentication through intellectual colonization. This intellectual colonization distorts the Indigenous women's tradition affirmed by early contact narratives and the subsequent colonization of North America. The impact of these factors on Kanienkehaka women is surmised through the impact of the feminist-indigenist binary on the unity of Iroquois society. Iroquois social structure and democracies illustrate the important role women had in traditional Iroquois society in the first place. The misinterpretations in ethnography and anthropology have tainted subsequent research on Iroquois women.

I reject liberalism, socialism and the feminist frame to view Indigenous identity. Instead the closest frame to Indigenous knowledge is presented in critical theory. For example Tekanawite, the central figure in the Iroquois master narrative, encouraged critical reflection by asking people "Who are you? What are you doing? And Why are you doing that?" So with our critical method in mind, here is how I am approaching my doctoral research. Paulo Freire describes three stages of emancipatory development of the individual which point the way to discuss identity in relational terms. In Freire's view

humanity is a *thing* to be bestowed upon an individual by the dominant class. The achievement of obtaining humanity for the oppressed is outlined by Freire in the act of revolution, transformation, and the reformation of the education system. True humanity Freire posits, comes through an active rebirth or life-affirming humanization of the individual. As Freire writes:

The oppressed have been destroyed precisely because their situation has reduced them to things. In order to regain their humanity they must cease to be things and fight as men and women...They cannot enter the struggle as objects in order later to become human beings (2003:68).

Through the individual's active participation in critical self-reflection and dialogue *conscientization* of the individual occurs and then through this process individuals achieve emancipation from oppression. I see this same process of critical self-reflection as a major theme throughout the literature I have reviewed and thus points the way in a discussion of the key concepts, debates, differences and major themes in the literature.

Moving from a state of oppression through a process of emancipation where freedom is realized in a critically self-reflective aware individual brings to light three questions which shape this inquiry into identity in relational terms. The following three questions are answered by the literature.

1. What is the relationship of the colonizer to the colonized?
2. What characterizes the process of emancipation of the individual?
3. Once freed, how does the individual view the world they live in?

These general questions are implicit in the following framework.

My inquiry into Kanienkehaka women's identity in relational terms demonstrates the main thematic areas, concepts, debates, and differences that emerge from critical theories of identity. For the purpose of this inquiry I use a critical discourse frame to inventory, catalogue, and describe various literature on identity. In my inquiry I suggest

the following four themes frame this study of personal narratives: identity and space and place; ethnic absolutism/Indigenous identity; politics of recognition; and beyond race and color.

Identity, space and place refer to the reciprocal interactions between space, place, and the associated social relations in the creation of individual and collective identity. The eight women I interview, the borders they create through the expression of their identities are intimately connected to the history of the community, their families, and the life experiences they describe. Their identities as Kanienkehaka is comprised of these shifting relations articulated through their experiences in Kahnawake. Kanienkehaka identity is therefore always in the process of formation. Through their experiences with the effects of colonization, they have a particular consciousness of the wider world and thus integrate the local and the global into their conception of Kahnawake and being Kanienkehaka.

Ethnic absolutism references nationalism where individuals are socialized to a dominant cultural and political hegemony. In this regard, the eight women speak to the label 'indian' as which is an ethnically absolute conception of the First Nations, whereas Indigenous identity refers to people who are Indigenous to a place. As we shall see, the use of terms like Mohawk, Kanienkehaka and Onkwehonwe by the eight women speak to an emancipated Indigenous individual.

The politics of recognition is loosely defined as the process of formal recognition of cultural diversity. Emphasis on the sameness of all citizens, regardless of race, class, or gender, often comes into conflict with the desire to be recognized as unique. For the Mohawk of Kahnawake, the dominant liberal society's commitment to difference-blind politics negates Mohawk identity by forcing all Indigenous groups into a constructed homogenous mold that is untrue to them which challenges the notion of an essentialist identity. Often, the politics of recognition emerges in the context of armed conflict and/or legitimacy and governability crises, and evolves successfully when Indigenous actors get

access to the decision-making process and form alliances with key political actors. As we shall see later on, Mohawk identity came to forefront in the minds of the eight women of this study, during times of conflict.

Beyond race and color speaks to the movement beyond racial boundaries to a place where dialogical engagement privileges multi-narratives over master-narratives. In the case of Kanienkehaka identity, Mohawk Indian identity was constructed by the Indian Act out of the desire for the complete assimilation of Indigenous peoples by Canada. As awareness of the world by the community moved outward beyond the borders of Kahnawake, Kanienkehaka identity became freed from the bonds of racialology. Dialogue has engendered understanding about a common humanism but also a pride in aspects of identity that speak to a different understanding of race. You are Kanienkehaka because you live on a reserve, share a common history, and share in the pain of the effects of colonization, to name a few. As we shall see in the eight women's narratives, their stories tell us what forms the basis of their identity as Kanienkehaka women.

These categories provide a post-modernist context for an examination of the individual and their experience which is central to understanding Kanienkehaka women's identity. My inquiry is set within the context of self actualization in one's individual reality and relationships. I situate myself as a researcher within the critical theoretical frame. For example I pose my personal narrative as a statement of my own critical reflections and I also use this theoretical frame as the basis of narrative inquiry that is the focus of this study.

My perspective on these questions has been informed by my own personal experiences as a Kanienkehaka woman who is a daughter, mother and of the Bear Clan family. As a participant in the broader Kahnawake community, I have been a teaching assistant at the Kahnawake Survival School (the community high school); I have worked at the Mohawk Nation Office and I have been invited to make presentations on various topics at local schools and on the local radio station. I have had to navigate the cultural

landscape in all aspects of my formal education, including secondary school in Ottawa and course work at the undergraduate and graduate levels at the University of British Columbia and Concordia. I have gained further valuable insights through my work as a researcher on clan based decision making, workshops, and presentations.

My research on Kaniienkehaka identity and Kaniienkehaka women's identity led me to draw on various disciplines including anthropology, sociology, political science, history, first peoples studies and international law. These academic approaches have been used to discover and elucidate the insights of informants at the grass-roots level. The starting point begins with my critical reflection on my own life experience as a Kaniienkehaka woman. Out of this critical reflection I have written my own personal narrative which focuses at the heart of coping with change. My narrative includes self-awareness, identity recovery, emancipation from a myopic world view taught to me by my mother, marriage to a Kaniienkehaka man, childbirth and the adoption of my husband's children. I see that there are a lot of other women in the same situation as myself. This study examines eight Kaniienkehaka women's personal narratives. These women are not world famous, they are women of the Kahnawake community. The sample of women will be stratified in the following way: women who are "stay at home mothers"<sup>13</sup> and women who are working mothers. Through these women's narratives we will learn about women's power at the basis of clan based decision making—how self determination precedes self government.

Based on the comprehensive review of literature that frames a conception of Kaniienkehaka women's identity, the basic manifestations of Kaniienkehaka women's identity have three characteristics. Firstly, Kaniienkehaka women's traditions are related to the Iroquois women's tradition in general; Secondly, there is a trend for the non-

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<sup>13</sup> I use the term "stay at home mother" because this is the term widely used in the Kahnawake community to reference women who don't work outside the home.

recognition of authenticated identity from the 'other'; Thirdly, there is also a different understanding of the true self in relation to community and nation.

These three characteristics form the following research assumptions:

- there is a Kaniienkehaka women's concept of the self
- since 1992, a new consciousness of the self in Kaniienkehaka women has had an emancipatory effect on women and their role in governance
- my comparison of who Kaniienkehaka women are in theory and also who they are in practice will reveal that women are still the same—women still govern the Kahnawake community.

An examination of personal narratives among Kaniienkehaka women includes Alma Green, Pauline Johnson, Donna Goodleaf, Shelley Niro and shows the development of Kaniienkehaka women's identity over the past century. This part of the investigation will seek to identify a pattern of evolution and distinguish the factors that have played a major role in the formation of the modern conception of Kaniienkehaka women's identity in the minds of Kahnawake women. My research contribution will influence local governance. By providing the Kaniienkehaka example, others may begin to find similarities among other Indigenous nations, thus allowing for a better understanding of what binds all Indigenous peoples together.

The perspective I use in my work might be considered 'postcolonial' in that I am concerned with Kaniienkehaka women and presenting our history from our perspective. Critique of this concept concerns the fact that the term post-colonial is an idea that leaves no room for Indigenous perspectives and methodologies. So, I step outside of this debate and into an area that I find more familiar - decolonization. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, who examines this as part of her work *Decolonizing Methodologies*, decolonization is "a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power (1999:98)." Smith describes the process as the reclamation of Indigenous history and culture so it can be spelled out to the world in

Indigenous ways. In her work, Smith describes cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as ‘factors’ integral to Indigenous methodologies. These factors, Smith writes, should be built into the research, thought about reflexively, declared as part of the research design, discussed as part of the final results and be disseminated back to the people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood (1999:15). This is further characterized as ‘an Amerindian autohistory’ by Georges Sioui who describes two premises to an ethical approach to history. The first describes the larger influence of Indigenous cultural values on Euro-American character rather than the Euro-forming of the Indigenous code. Essential Indigenous values elicited from the voices of the people are more important than the analysis of cultural transformations which have negligible social impact (Sioui 1992:21). It is within this developing dialogue that the active decolonization of Iroquois culture is taking place. I intend to present my work in a manner that is consistent with this theoretical perspective.

The research I present here requires a re-visitation of the academic literature on Kanienkehaka women with a view to distinguishing the foundations of traditional identity as they relate to each particular Kanienkehaka woman I interview. Added to this are case studies designed to identify moments in the lives of Kanienkehaka women from 1930 to the present. These serve to illustrate the continued relevance of Kanienkehaka identity in the social and political lives of Kanienkehaka women. I developed a personal narrative which I shared with the women. I asked the women to tell me their personal narratives which they shared with me in a series of interviews which were recorded and transcribed completely.

This research is situated at the intersection of three major disciplines in the humanities and social sciences – political science, sociology, and history. In order to explore the formations of Kanienkehaka women’s identity it will be necessary to draw upon the relevant fields of Indigenous identity, narrative inquiry, and post-colonial studies found within these disciplines. The relevance of these fields has been illustrated

using the ideas of Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Stephen Kemper and Max Weber to outline the research topic. Added to this, women's studies, fine arts studies, and literature studies will serve to illustrate the development of Kanienkehaka women's identity from 1930 to the present.

The question of Indigenous identity in Canada may seem to some to be an issue that has already been sufficiently explored. However, from my perspective, rooted in my own work and personal experiences as a member of the Kanienkehaka, I see that the outsiders understand very little of Kanienkehaka reality. This study is framed by the following questions:

- 1. How is the Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women different from the feminist view of Iroquois women as the *other*?**
- 2. How is the legislated definition of Mohawk Indian identity different from Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or *real human beings*?**
- 3. What is the Kanienkehaka woman's understanding of themselves in relation to the community of Kahnawake and the Mohawk nation?**

It appears from reading the limited writings and hearing discussions centering on Mohawk women that the understanding of our women is limited to adherence to established cultural presuppositions. Many of these presuppositions have been imposed and become so ingrained that they are believed to be the source of an authentic Iroquois culture. We know this because we know ourselves. We have a good understanding of what is authentic and what is imposed. Who better to tell us about Kanienkehaka women than the women themselves? This narrative inquiry into what shapes Kanienkehaka women's identity an understanding that informs the colonizer and the newly decolonized.

In order to answer the various questions I pose in this "Introduction" I frame my arguments with the intent to decolonize the view of Iroquois culture and women. I outline

my arguments in a way that enables the reader to understand the use of Kanienkehaka women's narratives later on:

**Chapter 1** “Sky Woman's Master Narrative: understanding how things came to be for women” takes us back to the origin of Iroquois life in the Sky World. The mother of the Iroquois nations is a figure named Sky Woman who brought sacred medicines—tobacco and strawberries—to the earth. Her baby faced Lynx, as Sky Woman called her daughter, gave the Iroquois fruits and vegetables and birthed the twins Teharonhia:wakon and Sawiskera. These foundational principles of the Iroquois women’s tradition are a theory translated in practice to the governance of the Iroquois people under the direction of the mothers. This frame is used to view how good governance and the maintenance of peace through the power of reason is enacted in the modern times. I use this Iroquois women’s frame to elicit, analyze and present personal narratives of Sky Woman’s great granddaughters that live in Kahnawake in the twenty-first century.

**Chapter 2** “Reconstructing the Individual: conceptions of the individual in liberal and Social political theory” poses how exemplars of liberal and social theories translate into a practice of authentication and colonization in contradiction to the Iroquois master narrative. In practice, liberalism and socialism presume the authority to authenticate who is fit to be a member of the liberal nation state or the socialist society. This authority conflicts with the theory of liberal and social conceptions of the individual especially where it concerns in practice a minority population such as North American Indians. These political philosophies are at the basis of Canadian government policies such as assimilation, termination, and self government and their effects on the lives of individual Kanienkehaka women can be clearly seen in the eight women's narratives.

**Chapter 3** “The Feminist-Indigenist Binary: arming the feminist canon with Iroquois womanism” examines how processes inherent in interactions between the Iroquois and Europeans illustrate that the conception of 'woman' was used in service to the European colonial project. The distinctiveness of Iroquois women’s place in social

structure and democracies has been examined at length and interest and writing about the Iroquois continues to this day. The Iroquoianists authenticate Iroquois cultural development within the Western master narrative frame, disregarding the way Iroquois people understand how things came to be. Feminist theorists carry on the tradition of authentication of the other under the rubric of social and liberal theory. Early Suffragettes found inspiration in the esteem Iroquois society had for its women. Examination of the subsequent influence on and by the feminist movement elicits an understanding of the changed Iroquois male-female unity.

**Chapter 4** “All My Relations: critical theories of relationality” expands the dialogue in critical discourse writing on the relationality of identity. The discussion of this narrative inquiry into Mohawk women's stories hinges liberal and social theories, connotative of critical discourse. Critical self-reflection is a major theme throughout the discourse literature on Indigenous identity and thus points the way in a discussion of the relationality of identity. Moving from a state of oppression through a process of emancipation where freedom is realized in critically self-reflective self aware individuals. Once freed, the individual views a larger world they live in. Self awareness brings about a realization that there is relationality between the identities of oppressors and oppressed. The relationality for emancipating individuals is located in post-modern multiculturalism where the individuality and uniqueness of all groups and communities is recognized.

**Chapter 5** “Kahente’s Master Narrative” communicates my perception of the world in which I live. I am the great granddaughter of Skywoman, but so is every Iroquois woman alive today a direct descendant of that Iroquois noble woman’s tradition. Iroquois women tell stories of happiness and sadness that communicate their perception of the world. This aspect of the story-telling tradition of the Iroquois is carried over into the research methodologies; this is called narrative inquiry. This chapter includes my own story that describes my own process of emancipation and self-discovery. My own journey, my vision quest, my path to recovering my Iroquois woman’s tradition is also

filled with sadness, mystery, and joy and will be used to initiate a process of critical reflection by the eight Kanienkehaka women I interview.

**Chapters 6 through 13** “Sky Woman’s Great Granddaughters” are eight individual chapters which describe the lives of eight women in narrative form. The eight stories are kept separate as a way to point to the individuality of their voices. The Iroquoian word for democracy is said to be “owennasohna” which means ‘many voices’. This particular conception of democracy is in line with Iroquoian tradition where true democracy listens to many voices. At the base of the Iroquois women’s traditions was the woman’s role in hearing the voices of all their children and recognizing the collective knowledge held by their community. This aspect of Iroquoian woman’s tradition relates to esteem held for women by Iroquoian society in all social and political aspects. This is called mother culture. The profiles and narratives of the lives of eight Kanienkehaka women come out of interviews conducted with the women over a four month period. Their stories focus in the areas of an overview of their life, their view on family, influences, crisis, and healing through their explanation of events in their lives that have meaning for them. This is not a biography of their lives. Rather it is a small representation of the broad vista of their memories and experiences. Carrying on with the tradition of dialogic engagement, the women’s narratives elicit an understanding of mother culture in modern Kahnawake society.

**Chapter 14** “An Enduring Legacy: Sky Woman speaks back” synthesizes the research with the narratives in order to find meaning in the Kanienkehaka women’s stories. In chapter four I situated myself in the broader field of discourse writing but in this chapter I situate myself within the discourse of my Indigenous peers such as Alfred, Corntassel, Simpson, Weaver, and Mihesuah. Using the eight women’s stories, we see how they tell us what is mother culture, who are they in the larger context of Canada and what it means to be a woman in Kahnawake today. From there, we can see how Kanienkehaka women in Kahnawake understand their identity and their roles in the social

and political aspects of the community. Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women differs from the feminist view of Iroquois women. Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or *real human beings* that stands in sharp contrast to legislated identity. In terms of relationality these women understand themselves as Kahnawakeron:non and Kanienkehaka.

**Chapter 15** "Denouement" analyzes liberal, social and feminist theory demonstrating a requirement that decolonizing identity means de-authenticating the authenticators. I pursued an analysis that demonstrates the importance of getting past the western knowledge experts in order to uncover the nature of Kanienkehaka women's perspectives and roles in the community of Kahnawake. I began this process by sharing my own narrative of awareness, discovery, healing, and recovery. Once passed the western knowledge experts I also talked to Kanienkehaka women about their practices. I answered the three questions of this study by analyzing my narrative and the narratives of the women. From that analysis, I see that even though formal participation in government structures is limited, informally mothers exert tremendous authority and impact on their children's lives. In so doing, Kanienkehaka women still remain the foundation of Kanienkehaka society. What remains is to find a way to shape and organize women's power in a more formal way to invent the future for Kahnawake.

The chapters focus on dialogical engagement by a colonized with the colonizer. Also I conduct a decolonizing methodology based on the foundational principle of Owennasohna—the more voices the better.

### **Summary**

To begin I present the master narrative of the Iroquois and Kanienkehaka women by retelling the story of the Sky Woman. Through the retelling of her story, women and girls learn about mother culture. Sky World is a representation of the ideal life in theory but when Sky Woman came to earth reality had different outcomes because everything was subject to corruption. It was out of that corruption that Sky Woman learned and

therefore taught humanity to continually strive to create Sky World on earth. It is in this transaction between the theory and practice of life for Sky Woman that gave her special insights. As Sky Woman strives to create a heaven on earth, the theme of corruption and healing found in the story moves her and her world continuously forward. As we find out her story from her words, we see her as she sees herself. As women of the twenty-first century, the theme of corruption and healing motivates us and moves our worlds forward. As we read their stories, we also see them as they see themselves. But we also learn from their stories much like we learned from Sky Woman's master narrative.

This study suggests that Iroquois women inherently represent Iroquois culture in ways that are not visible to the naked eye. Modern Kanienkehaka women don't carry cradle boards or walk in corn fields all day. In the governance of the Kahnawake community, men rarely listen to women. Yet the on-reserve workforce is dominated by women. So there is something to be said about the enactment of cultural presuppositions by women that has its roots in Iroquois peoples' master narrative. Sky Woman's life is our life as we live it to this day. We are her great granddaughters, but our story is no different. We became corrupted and are now in the process of healing. This version has all these elements but more importantly it contains teachings from the everyday lives of the women of this study. What was learned from the women's narratives was that their stories offer a clear connection, a path to the Sky Road where our Grandmother lives and watches over us.

**Chapter One**  
**Sky Woman's Master Narrative:**  
**Understanding how things came to be for women**

**Introduction**

I am Sky Woman's great granddaughter. So are my mother, my aunts, my sisters, and all my daughters. I learned a certain way of being from my mother, of what it means to her to be a strong and independent woman, how to raise children, and what it means to be Mohawk. Now, my mother and I live within 100 meters of each other, yet we have become disconnected. I have come to understand that my mother has suffered her own traumas during her lifetime and this is what shapes her and ultimately shapes our relationship.

The disconnection was never more evident than when she suffered health problems stemming from a June 14, 2008 incident at the Cornwall Island Customs. At first I felt unsure of how to respond to her. We hadn't spoken to each other in some time. I also didn't trust her because I have witnessed her tendency to overreact in crisis situations. I struggled with the question of her health and whether she had brought it upon herself. When I saw her lying in the hospital bed, helpless and scared, I knew that I had to put aside everything else and be there for her; after all, she is my mother. Throughout the ordeal I felt a sense of awakened compassion for her and I let her know by hugging her, kissing her, and telling her that I loved her and would look after her. Putting aside all the old hurts and animosity felt freeing.

There was a time when, like most children, I only saw the world through my mother's eyes. As a result I was immature, irresponsible, unsettled, misguided and deeply troubled. Yet, as I grew older and began to critically reflect on my life and upbringing, I came to see that what she taught me is a sadly distorted version of the teachings of our

people, of the story of Sky Woman. Through my own experience, I see that fundamental Iroquois principles have become corrupted.

Corruption is a major theme of her story. And much like in Sky Woman's story, the corruption of Iroquois mother culture has taken place over centuries. Outsiders have influenced Indian women's identity and self perception. As Indian women's identity has been negated, disregarded, re-visioned, and reconstituted according to the ideals of another people, we have come to believe what someone else says of us and taken it on as our own truth. Therefore, as this study shows our families and communities have suffered.

Corruption of the role of Indian women began in earliest narratives written about our people. Euro-American historical thought consciously programmed the story of Iroquois women out of the story of Iroquois acculturation. Our history is viewed in terms of two loci of European patriarchy, religion and politics. Thus women became invisible in external political maneuvering. This comes from the European's discomfort in dealing with women leaders and the private nature of women's councils, a discomfort that served to deny the true extent of their political influence. And when colonists were confronted with examples of Iroquois women's influence, they ignored or belittled our role. And thus the women's un-place in the written history is starkly apparent as modern scholars look back on their documents.<sup>14</sup> As a result we are forced to mine these male-focused documents for what they really say about women. And therefore we are limited in our understanding of what role women played in the social and political development of North America. All we can do is guess.

As the world has awakened to a white western feminist consciousness, its influence puts a negative view on more recent views of Iroquois women where women are bounded by home responsibilities rather than empowered by them. This goes back to

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<sup>14</sup> For a comprehensive examination of this aspect of Iroquois written history, see Harroun Foster (1995).

the focus on politics and religion that earlier scribes documented. One could say that a new form of female empowerment is at hand. This can be seen in the fact that modern Iroquois women encourage their daughters to practice birth control, be independent, look after their children, and work, among others. This would be in contrast to the patriarchal form of marriage brought about through Handsome Lake's male-dominated religion and colonization influenced by Christian concepts and practices.<sup>15</sup> This is progress.

A re-awakened Iroquois womanhood leads to a second major theme of Sky Woman's story—healing. All the major characters find themselves corrupted but in the end we see how this serves to teach us a lesson about ourselves as they achieve healing. It is through their journey from corruption to healing that foundational principles of the master narrative are communicated.

The interpretations that exist in the oral and written culture of the Iroquois creation story are all written from the third person perspective and correct many misnomers and misrepresentations of the Iroquois woman's roles in her society. The differences of the writers handling of the position of Iroquois women becomes apparent in what was emphasized and in the omissions, men are the focus of the story rather than the women.

There is a definite view of the *other* in the Sky Woman story. In this case it's the spirits who view Sky Woman as *the other*. As Sky Woman takes us through her life, we gain understanding of the fundamental roles and responsibilities of Kanienkehaka women. Her story encapsulates the essence of what a Kanienkehaka woman is supposed to be. Her story is evidence for a contrast in world views and values and is only affected

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<sup>15</sup> Handsome Lake (1735-1815) was a leader of the Seneca and a half-brother to Cornplanter. He played a major role in the spiritual reawakening of the Iroquois Confederacy. He preached a message that combined traditional beliefs with a revised code meant to bring consciousness to the Iroquois after a long period of cultural disintegration following colonization. This message was eventually published as the Code of Handsome Lake and is still practiced today.

by who interprets her story, as we shall see in Chapter three “The Feminist-Indigenist Binary.”

When Sky Woman came to earth, she was the first human woman. And it is by circumstance that she becomes the first human mother and then grandmother. Sky world is a representation of the ideal life in theory but when Sky Woman came to earth reality had different outcomes because everything was subject to corruption. It was out of that corruption that Sky Woman learned what was good and therefore taught humanity to continually strive to create Sky World on earth.

It is in this transaction between life as a theory of being and life in actual practice that Sky Woman gained special insights. As Sky Woman strives to create a heaven on earth, the corruption and healing that she experiences moves her and her world forward. To others, her identity was one of mother, grandmother, peacemaker, mediator, elder, and finally grandmother moon who watches over all women for time eternal. These titles represent Sky Woman’s identity outside of herself. And as we find out her story from her words, we see her as she sees herself.

My version is written from the first perspective, through the eyes of Sky Woman herself who tells us of what she saw and felt in the earliest times of Turtle Island. Importance lies in the fact that her story is our story. Her life is our life as we live it to this day. We are her great granddaughters, but our story is no different. We became corrupted and are now in the process of healing. This version has all these elements but more importantly it contains teachings from the everyday lives of the women of this study. What was learned from the women was that their stories offer a clear connection, a path to the Sky Road where our Grandmother lives and watches over us. It is through this story that we reconnect with our ancestors of the Sky World above.

## Sky Woman's Story

I am the daughter of the Great Spirit. I am Sky Woman. I was born in the Sky World far above the earth at the beginning of time many centuries ago. As a child I was known as Mature Flowers. I was born with the caul covering my face, which made me very special to my people, the Sky Dwellers. I was expected to do great things. My people believed that I had been born by the way of the spirits and not through a physical act. After my birth I was put into protective seclusion by my mother so that I would grow strong and focused. They call this *being hidden under the husk*, referring to the protective husk surrounding a cob of corn. My uncle, my mother's brother was given the duty to advise me and prepare me for adulthood. When he died his body was put at the top of the Great White Pine tree, where he continued to keep a protective watch over me. When I needed his guidance I would call his name three times and climb to the top of the tree and we would talk.

My life in the Sky World was happy. I remember that there was always enough food to eat and no one ever got sick. There was no jealousy or hatred. Every person I knew had special talents and gifts that were nurtured and used for the good existence of everyone. When I and my brothers and sisters were young my mother would carry her babies on her back in a cradle board and hang it in a tree as she and my father worked along side the men and women of the Sky World cultivating the corn, beans and squash. When I was strong enough, I began to work in the gardens with everyone else. I learned from all the women, and whom I called 'mother'. I would also help my mothers and sisters in the preparation of the foods. I never wanted for anything. Everything was provided for us to survive.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> It is said that all the plants and animals that exist on the earth are the same as the ones that exist in the Skyworld.

One day, everyone in the Sky World was summoned by *The Keeper of the Celestial Tree* or *Tree of Light* by a messenger who came to the people. When the people went to see him, they were told that a dream needed to be deciphered before the flowers on the tree stopped blooming forever. If this were to happen, there would be darkness that would disrupt creation in the Sky World. After this event great calamity and hardship would come and things would change forever. The meaning of the dream, it was told, would have an effect on everyone in the Sky World. Many people tried to interpret the dream but failed. *The Keeper* tossed them into a hole near his tree that led to the world below where they were transformed into new beings. My mother went to the council but didn't bring me as I had asked. As a young adult, I was too distraught at having to be involved in such a great responsibility as dream interpretation. I wanted so desperately to be a child for much longer. I went instead to see Uncle at the top of the Great White Pine.

I walked through the forest, watching the light and shadows through the trees as I thought about the dream and the council. When I arrived, I slowly climbed the Great White Pine. To reach the top took all my strength. I pulled myself up onto one of the topmost branches and I saw Uncle lying there.

"Uncle," I asked. "What should I do? A very important meeting has been called. The Keeper has asked the People to help him interpret an important dream. I don't want to be burdened by such seriousness. I am just a child."

"It is almost time for you to fulfill your destiny," he told me. "You are almost old enough, you are almost strong enough and you are certainly wise beyond your years. Soon, you will be asked to go to the Keeper of the Tree of Light. When you go, tell him who you are and that you have come to help him. Tell him you have the power to bring new life to the blossoms that light up the Sky World."

Uncle instructed me that the Keeper and I would look over the things that had been thrown out of the Sky World and were coming to life in the world below. Uncle cautioned me closely.

“Do not sleep on any mat he offers you.”

I looked at Uncle with questioning eyes, but I nodded my head in agreement. Little did I know that once the creative process began, things would change in the Sky World and the world below—Light would dim in the Sky World as light grew below. Only when light began to dim below, then the light would renew itself in the Sky World, which I couldn't understand. Uncle told me of many other things that would occur when I went to see The Keeper. I listened closely because I trusted and loved Uncle.

This story I am telling you is one that comes from my long memory, the memories of my children, and the collective memories of my many great granddaughters. I can look back on my life and see it with such clarity, as if it happened yesterday. The memories are vivid and still very much alive, kept in the minds and hearts of my descendants. Through them, I pass on my knowledge.

As I climbed down the Great White Pine and walked away back to my lodge, I felt calm for the first time. Shortly after I arrived home, Mother came back from the council.

“We were not able to help The Keeper,” she told me. “So those of us who were left, we talked amongst ourselves. Daughter, we all know you are meant to do something special. People of the Sky World have counseled and we agree that when you are old enough, you are to go to *The Keeper of the Tree of Light* to help him interpret his dream so that balance and light will remain in the Sky World.”

I looked at her with wondering eyes but I didn't question her. Uncle had prepared me for this.

When I was old enough a messenger came from The Keeper, a feast was to be given and I was invited. I went to see the Keeper of the Tree of Light as instructed.

“Who are you?” he asked. “What are you doing? Why are you doing that?”

“I am the girl they call Mature Flowers. I have come to help you as Uncle instructed me.”

I continued.

“I heard you were giving a feast.”

The Keeper seemed to know me as though he had been expecting me. I was surprised when he told me that I was the reason for the feast. He said looked at me and smiled.

“You were born with a great gift. You are the Sky World’s only hope of keeping the Tree of Light lit.”

As he said these words, he pointed to the blossoms on the Tree of Light. I looked at them closely, cradling one in my palm. I saw that their beauty and light was dimming. The Tree was beginning to die. I felt saddened by their dimming beauty. I had tears in my eyes.

“How is it that I can help you?”

The Keeper told me to prepare for the feast some mush made from chestnuts that we would eat together. As I was cooking the mush it sputtered and stuck to my body, burning me. I didn't cry out but whimpered under my breath in pain. My breath came in small short gasps as the white hot searing pain of the burning mush brought tears to my eyes. I held back my tears and continued to push the air through my teeth as I worked to prepare the mush. When it was finished I called out that the mush was ready. When The Keeper saw me, he was shocked to see my burned body.

“The mush sputtered and burned me. I am in pain.”

The Keeper immediately called out two white dogs that came forward and licked the mush from my body. As the dogs’ tongues cleansed my body I remained motionless and didn’t wince. With the dogs’ saliva coating my burned flesh, I began to feel less pain and my skin began to heal quickly. Their work brought me peace.

When I was well enough, I brought the mush into The Keeper’s lodge and we sat to eat. We ate. As we ate, The Keeper spoke:

“Many people are on their way to play a game called The Little Brother of War.”<sup>17</sup>

“The game will divert my mind from the problems at hand. I will ask that you not speak to anyone who comes to play or to watch the game. If you do this then you can stay.”

I agreed to his request. We finished our food and walked to a clearing a short distance away. As we walked I could hear the voices of the men calling to each other over the field. As the game went on, many of my people came up to speak to me but I remained silent as requested. It was hard for me to do.

After a while, The Keeper asked me to go to the stream and get him some water. I found the stream and crouched at the shore as I filled a wooden bowl. I stood up and as I turned a player came up to me and asked me for a drink. Naturally, I replied that he could have some. Suddenly a cold feeling came over me. I realized that I had broken The Keeper’s request that I not to speak to anyone. I refilled the bowl and headed back to The Keeper. He was angry with me for disobeying his request and he sent me back to my mother with instructions.

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<sup>17</sup> This game is known as lacrosse and is played throughout the United States and Canada. Lacrosse is also known as a medicine game.

“Tell your Mother that you have broken the only request I made of you. I am hurt. But I also want to speak with her about confirming our marriage. Tell her to come and see me.”

I walked back to my Mother's lodge with a heavy heart that was in some way also elated. I was to be married! I said to myself, this doesn't feel good, to have betrayed someone. I was determined not to do that again.

Mother and I talked for some time. I told her of my broken promise. I told her how ashamed I felt. She counseled me and made me feel better. I also told her that The Keeper wondered when she would go to him and confirm the marriage. She prepared a basket of marriage bread<sup>18</sup> and carried it to The Keeper's lodge.

“I have come to confirm your marriage to my daughter.”

The Keeper took the bread.

“Now things are right. We have done things in a proper manner.”

The Keeper gave my Mother a basket of prepared meat in return to confirm the marriage agreement. Mother returned home and we celebrated. After the celebration she turned to me.

“Go back to The Keeper. Do not take any detours along the way.”

With tears of sadness and joy I walked away from my family for a second and final time. I turned back to take one last look at those I loved. I lifted my hand in a small farewell. I knew I would never see them again.

As I walked along through the forest I thought about what my life was to be like, what kind of wife I would be, and the children we would have. I remember feeling the hard earth beneath my feet as I walked, hearing the breeze rustling through the tree branches, and the many birds singing. I felt alive and happy to be a woman.

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<sup>18</sup> Cornbread made from ground corn mixed with beans and boiled in water is an ancient food still eaten today.

I had not gone very far when a man who looked a bit like my husband appeared before me in the path.

The man said: "I have come to meet you on your way."

I stopped and thought for a minute. I remembered what my mother had told me to do. I didn't answer him and went on. When I looked back he had transformed himself into a fox and I could just see his bushy tail disappearing into the brush.

I went a little further down the trail and came upon another man who looked a little bit like my husband. He too said he had come to meet me on my journey. I didn't answer him and continued to walk down the trail. When I looked back he had transformed himself into a wolf, and I could see the flash of grey and black fur as he disappeared into the forest. I continued on, feeling secure in the knowledge that I would not betray my husband's trust again.

Still little further along, I met up with a third man coming toward me. He looked exactly like my husband.

He said: "I am concerned for your wellbeing and I've come to meet you and escort you on the rest of your journey."

I thought quickly and trusted my instinct not to talk to him or stop. I walked on. When I looked back he had transformed himself into a bear and I could see the swaying branches where he had lumbered off into the forest. I knew my purpose was to help bring light back to the world and I felt happy that I had not been diverted from my path.

I arrived at my husband's lodge and he greeted me with a smile and warm hug. My husband said, "I am happy you have not been hurt on the journey. You were not diverted from the path." I was so tired by this point. All I could think about was taking a rest.

He led me into the lodge where a warm soft bed of furs was a welcoming sight. I took my moccasins off and lay down. He joined me and we made love for the first time. We slept. When I awoke I gasped. I knew I was pregnant as my belly swelled quickly. I knew that I would be okay. Being pregnant is the most natural thing between a husband and a wife.

Things in the Sky World happen differently than on earth. In a short matter of time I could feel the baby kicking inside me. I felt happy and content. As we lay there feeling the baby growing and moving inside me, my husband told me about his dream that needed to be interpreted. Interpreting this dream he said, would bring balance to the Sky World and light back to the flowers of the Tree of Light. He got up and called the Sky Dwellers to a second feast of mush and bread where he said the contest was on once again to see who could interpret his dream.

As people tried to interpret the dream a bright light appeared, known as the Meteor Fire Dragon. Many people also know him as the Northern Lights. We were all temporarily blinded by his white body and sparkling tail. He asked for a chance to interpret the dream. The Keeper gave him permission to try. As the Being told my husband the meaning of his dream, we all gasped. The Being spoke at length about the dream and its meaning. At the end, he said that the Tree of Light had to be uprooted in order for the dream to be fulfilled.

The Sky Dwellers around us moved towards the Tree of Light and uprooted it as instructed. My husband called me over the chasm to sit and eat. I realized that we were enacting what my husband had seen in his dream.

We were the dream!

We were the answer!

Before I could think anymore on this he grabbed me and pushed me into the chasm created by the uprooted tree. As I struggled to hang on to anything, the dirt loosened in my grip and all kinds of seeds and roots caught in my hair and

clothing. I captured tobacco and strawberry plants in both hands, pulling the medicines from the soil. As I struggled to not fall into the abyss below, I looked into the face of my husband. I saw his distress. He had tears in his eyes.

“I now know why the being was able to interpret my dream, you told him. You talked to another and betrayed my trust. Only you knew the meaning of my dream. I have to banish you.”

As he said these words he cried out large heaving sobs. I felt helpless to answer him. I could only say “No! That is not true! I would never betray you!” As I think back now I realize that I didn't feel anger or hurt as I spoke these final words to my husband. I now know that what happened was meant to be and he had been misguided and corrupted by his own thoughts.

All I remember is suddenly the roots I hung onto in both my hands uprooted and I began to fall. As I looked up to the hole above me I could see my husband's face peering over the edge looking down at me and behind him the light was dimming in the Sky World above. As I fell into the darkness, the light began to get brighter below. I could see the light's refraction on my palms and feet.

I closed my eyes as I fell and I could see the lights behind my eyelids. The orange and red of the blood in my eyelids grew brighter as I fell faster and faster. I could feel the wind whistling by my ears and billowing in my dress. My long hair whipped around my neck and face. I felt like I was swimming in air.

### **The World Below Welcomes Me**

There are those who say I fell, was pushed, or jumped through a hole under the great tree and began my fall to the earth world below. Only I know the truth. This is the story as I lived it and I am telling you what I remember.

It seemed like I fell a long time before anything happened. I opened my eyes and I could see the water birds from the world below coming up to meet me.

The Heron and the Loon were the leaders with their wide wings expanded in full flight. All their wings combined to create a large soft cushion for me to land on. I could feel the softness of their feathers and the strength of their wings under my feet. I felt safe but I was also shocked at my circumstances and how my life had suddenly changed. I wondered what was to become of me. I was let loose like a baby lynx in a briar patch, a world I didn't know. I felt no fear, only concern for the safety of my baby mixed with sadness. I rubbed my belly and spoke to her

“Little one,” I said. “I love you very much and I will protect you. We are now in a different world. You will never meet your grandmother or grandfather. You will never meet your father, but I am here and I will always love you and look after you.”

I kissed my fingertips and touched my belly softly as tears gently rolled down my cheeks and fell on her.

I went to the edge of the platform created by the bird's wings and peered over the edge. Far below my eyes were met with brilliant blue. The blue was from a great expanse of water reflecting the sunlight and it was both beautiful and almost too much to bear. There appeared to be no land. I wondered to myself where I would land.

Far below, I could see water animals grouped together looking up and talking to one another. They wondered where I would plant the tobacco and strawberry plants in my hands. I knew that they were talking about me and wondering what to do. Suddenly Otter being gasped for air and dove under the surface of the water. A long time later his body slowly rose. He was dead.

I gasped and cried out, “Oh, Otter has died trying to save me!”

I wanted to hold his soft head in my arms and tell him I was grateful he had given his life to try to save me. I felt helpless watching from above. Then I saw Beaver being take a gasp of air and go below the surface. A long time later,

his body slowly surfaced. I cried out again, tears came fresh on my cheeks as I cried for Beaver. I wanted to hold him and thank him for giving his life to try to save me.

Next I saw Muskrat gasp for air and dive below. A long time later his body slowly came to the surface. I closed my eyes and let the tears fall down my face into the folds of my dress. I felt so sad that these water beings had died trying to save me. I wondered again what was to become of me.

Suddenly far below I heard a cheer erupt from the assembled animals. Muskrat had succeeded! In his lifeless paws were specks of dirt from the ocean floor. One of the animals pried the dirt from Muskrat's clenched paws and gently placed the dirt on Turtle being's back. Immediately Turtle's shell began to grow bigger. Soon the shell became big enough for me to stand on. I was gently lowered to stand on the first earth.

"Thank you water beings for saving me and my baby," I said. "I am grateful to you all for what you have done and brought to this world."

"I am going to sing you a song and dance for you. To show you how thankful I am for all that you have done."

I readied myself, hummed a few bits of the first song in preparation. The animals gathered around me, their eyes wide and their ears open. The air was alive.

### **The Formation of Turtle Island**

I began to dance the women's shuffle dance and sing the planting songs I had learned from the women of the Sky World. I was heavy with child, but I still shuffled counter clockwise, making the earth on the Turtle being's back spread out. I placed the tobacco and strawberry plants in the soil.

“Hey ya, hey ya” I sang in a loud clear voice. I wanted all the animals to know how grateful I was for what they had done for me and for the earth to be patted down, firm and smooth.

My baby kicked, keeping the beat of the song inside me. I held my belly as I continued to dance. With each part of the song my voice grew louder and clearer. I turned my face up to elder brother sun and let his loving smile warm my face. I looked up to the Sky World and sang for my mother and father. I sang for my husband, who had been so misguided. It was jealousy and fate which made him send me down here. But we had arrived safely. As I sang and danced I felt stronger and stronger. I began to heal. I understood my husband and I was grateful for what he had given to me, my unborn baby.

The Turtle being's shell continued to grow and the earth spread out in all directions with my songs and dances. As I danced the roots and seeds from the Sky World that were caught in my hair fell to the newly formed earth and my dancing feet covered them over with good black earth. Immediately tiny green shoots began to appear. New life was beginning on earth! It was as though my relatives in the Sky World were with me planting in my garden, ensuring that my baby and I wouldn't starve.

I looked down and around me in wonder at the new life growing. Corn stalks began to appear, growing taller and forming silken hair that peered from their crowns. As the minutes went by, beans and squash also appeared. I could see all kinds of herbs, fruits, medicines in the ground around me. The air started to smell of the fragrant aromas of rich black soil and lush plant growth. I could see bright red strawberries and large flat tobacco leaves as well. I knew as long as I had the sacred medicines and the corn, beans, and squash to eat my baby and I would be fine.

The animals appeared and sniffed delicately at the new growth. I stood still and spread my arms out welcoming the animals to taste what had come from the Sky World.

“Come and eat!” I said. “I have planted all the things we will need on this earth to survive. My relatives from the Sky World made sure we would not starve. I have planted them as we did together in the Sky World and I want to share them with you.”

Fox came forward and sniffed at the green leaves a plant. He tasted them and then began to eat. “Mmmm. These are good,” he said. Rabbit, bear, wolf, and deer all came forward and began to eat. For a time there was silence punctuated by sounds of smacking lips and grunts of happy feasting. I was exhausted. I lay down to take a nap and prepare for the birth of my daughter.

### **My Baby Faced Lynx**

I woke up to strong labor pains coursing through my back and belly. I was scared for the first time. The labor pains felt like a rope was tied tightly around my waist. I cried out for my mother.

“Mother,” I said. “I miss you! I wish you were here with me to help me and to see your new grandchild come into this new world!”

After the shock of the first labor pains, my sensibilities kicked in. I had seen women give birth in the Sky World, so I knew what I had to do. I squatted over a pile of soft grasses. I made it through each contraction as it came to me, breathing with the pain, counting my breaths. I called out to my mother every once in a while so that she would hear me.

“Mother! Mother! She is coming!”

Then came the final pushes and I could feel the head of my baby come through. There was a loud gushing noise and then she fell into the softness

beneath me. I bit the umbilical cord loose, birthed the placenta and buried it beneath the spot where she had been born so that she would know where she came from, our mother the earth. As I did this I sang again the song of creation.

“Hey ya, hey ya,” I sang in a loud clear voice. I wanted my relatives above to hear me and know of the birth of their granddaughter.

My little Baby Faced Lynx as I called her was beautiful. She took to the breast right away and nursed for a long time as she lay on my belly. I touched her hair; her soft head was so tiny in my palm. She had a nice little round soft bum and tiny toes which she flexed in pleasure as she drank my warm milk. I spoke to her.

“I love you my little one. I will always look after you and give you food to eat. I will always try to make you happy. I will always do everything I can to heal you.”

I closed my eyes and we drifted off to sleep, I could feel her little quick heartbeat and her shallow breaths. We slept. When I awoke my daughter had grown. She grew fast and as time passed she became a young woman.

### **Life with My Daughter**

My Baby Faced Lynx loved to walk and explore the earth. As a child she had many playmates and her life was full of happiness. The animals would take on human form and play games with her. As she grew and became too old for child's play, she began to explore the earth more widely. Sometimes I would not see her for a whole day. But she always came home.

When my daughter reached puberty, she was given the name Budding Flowers. One night as I was sleeping I had a dream where Uncle appeared to me. He told me that I was to watch over Budding Flowers carefully. Three beings in human form would appear to her and want to marry her. I was to tell her that she

was not to be tempted but to wait for the fourth young man who would appear. This man was to be her husband. I asked Uncle,

“How will she know that this fourth man is the right one?” I asked.

“She will know because she waited and took her time.”

When I woke up the next morning I talked with my daughter.

“My daughter, I love you. You are going to be a woman soon. I have to tell you that when you are out in the world wandering the earth, men will appear to you. They will want to be with you. You must come to me and ask my permission first.”

Budding Flowers said: “Yes mother. I will do that.” She’s a good girl.

One day my daughter came back from her wanderings and told me of a man she had met. He had asked her if she wanted him for a companion. She had told him that she had to ask me first. Upon hearing of this, I said no. This same thing happened two more times. I said no again and again.

One day the West Wind came to visit. He appeared in human male form. I watched as his eyes admired the beauty of my daughter. That night he appeared in my daughter's dream and continued to do the same for two more nights. Each morning when she awoke she told me about her dream and the handsome young man that appeared to her. She told me she was in love with him and that they had agreed that they wanted to be life partners. I thought about this and about what Uncle had told me. I agreed to the marriage.

That night the West Wind came to Budding Flowers and lay beside her. In the morning I found two crossed arrows on her belly. I knew that my daughter was pregnant with twins. Budding Flowers awoke and gasped. Her belly began to swell as the babies grew rapidly inside her. I was so happy I was going to be a grandmother. I rubbed my daughter's belly.

“My grandchildren I love you. You are going to be arriving soon in this world. There is a lot to see. I will make sure you are happy and well fed. You will never need for anything at all. I will make sure you stay healthy and strong.”

My daughter rubbed her belly and smiled at me. The babies caused my daughter a lot of discomfort. It seemed like they were always in conflict. We could hear the two babies arguing and fighting inside her womb. I did all I could to help my Budding Flowers through her pregnancy and get ready for the birth.

One day I heard my daughter cry out in pain. I felt a feeling in my gut that I had never felt before - apprehension. I ran to my daughter and helped her to lie down. Her belly had dropped and I could see her struggling through contractions. Suddenly she pushed and one baby came out the normal way, from between her legs and fell to the soft pile of leaves below. She groaned loudly as this happened. Then she opened her eyes wide, grabbed my hand, and fell over as the other baby came out her side.

I helplessly watched her as she bled to death before me. The light faded from her eyes. I cried as I could do nothing to save her. I called out to my relatives in the Sky World for their help.

“Why have you done this? Why is my daughter dead? I have lost what I loved the most! Help us.”

I cried as I picked up the twin boys, washed them and wrapped them. They looked at me with their soft brown eyes, and I remembered my beautiful Baby Faced Lynx and how she suckled in those first few minutes of her new life. Tears rolled down my face and fell into the folds of their coverings. I lay the babies down and then went to prepare my daughter for burial as I had seen my relatives do in the Sky World.

I lovingly washed my Budding Flowers and dressed her. I sang songs as I did this and spoke words of love.

“My Daughter,” I said as tears fell down my face. “I loved you greatly. Many loved you greatly. You are going to be missed by me and all others who had a chance to know you in your short time on this new Earth. We watched you as you were born and grew into a beautiful young woman. We watched you as you played on this earth and worked in the gardens tending to the plants with loving and care.”

I stopped for a minute to think about my pretty little Baby Faced Lynx daughter. The way she looked up to me as I taught her about the plants and medicines that grew around us. The memory of her innocent face brought tears to my eyes.

“Your presence on the earth will be missed. But you are going to a place where you will be loved. You will have warmth and life again in ten days time. Your ancestors in the Sky World will watch over you and care for you as I did. Your life there will be rich with happiness.”

With my words and songs I sent her on her way back to the Sky World. I buried her in a grave and prepared to look after my grandsons.

### **My Twin Grandsons Do Their Work**

My boys as I called them looked alike but were very different in their temperament. Many know them today as the right handed and left handed twins. One was kind and thoughtful, the right hand, the other was selfish and scheming, the left hand. Teharonhia:wakon, “He who grasps the sky with both hands” was the kind one and Sawiskera, “Flint crystal ice” was the scheming one.

As I came to see later, the differing minds of the two boys came to characterize the two types of beings on the earth. There are those whose minds are solely turned towards the earth and bring disruptive influences to it and try to take control over it like Sawiskera. There are those who always know where they

come from and try to protect things on earth and always think of others first, like Teharonhia:wakon.

I misunderstood this aspect of my grandson, Teharonhia:wakon. His belief in letting one think for their “self” and come to a conclusion on their own, I mistook for a kind of apathy and uncaring. It made me angry and I began to favor my other grandson, Sawiskera. I did not think of the boys equally, which I realized much later was a misguided understanding. I had this fault, much like my husband in the Sky World.

Throughout their lives the two boys were in constant disagreement about many things. I told the boys, “Look, you two are frustrating me. Why don’t you work it out? Play a game to resolve things or find another solution.” I shook my head and sighed, “Sometimes you boys remind me of your grandfather who was full of spite and pushed me down that hole.”

In those times I would think of my Budding Flowers and peace would come back to me. I was reminded of my purpose, to be diligent and look after my grandsons. So I look to days with the twins. Life with my twins was also filled with happiness and laughter. We would go for long walks.

“What’s this, Tohta<sup>19</sup>?” they would ask.

I spent long periods explaining about the plants and animals on the earth and how they came to be there. I was filled with joy to see their young minds at work. The boys played with the little animals and made games for themselves. I encouraged them along as I could see their hunting and gathering skills developing. The boys also learned how to cultivate corn, beans, and squash as they helped in the garden. These earliest times with the boys were good ones.

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<sup>19</sup> The term “Tohta” is a shortened version of the Mohawk word Aksota which means grandmother and used as a term of endearment.

Some time had passed and the boys were approaching adulthood. I was weeding my garden one-day when Sawiskera came by.

“Tohta, can you show me how to make a bow and arrow?” he asked with a mischievous grin.

So, I made him a set just like the ones I had witnessed my relatives making in the Sky World.

“Now look grandson, you are supposed to use this only for hunting food,”

I told him. But, a short time later Teharonhia:wakon came to me and told me of what his brother had done with the bow and arrow. Teharonhia:wakon said, “My brother Sawiskera has been impatient with our mother. He has taken the sharp arrow you made him and cut off our mother's head. He laid her head to the side of her body and she is not whole and not prepared for her travel back to the Sky World.”

He shook his head and looked at me with troubled eyes as he spoke. “Sawiskera was not thinking of her but of his own frustration at her death. I buried her in the ground again and new life has sprung up from her grave.” I sighed and closed my eyes for a minute. I had an image of my daughter before me. “Your brother is still troubled by your mother’s death,” I said opening my eyes. “What he has done has caused you to do the right thing in return and because of this, your mother will always be remembered as *She Who Always Leads.*”

As I spoke Teharonhia:wakon leaned in to listen.

I went on, “Your mother, even though she didn’t live long, was the first being to be born on this earth. She visited this world only for a short time and now is on her return journey to where she came from. Before leaving, her body will bring forth new life, much like she did when she gave birth to you. In this way she shows us by example how the cycle of life is renewed. This is good.”

The troubled look on Teharonhia:wakon's face disappeared and he looked at peace again. Teharonhia:wakon then asked me to make him a bow and arrow just like his brother's. I did so. I tried to treat the two boys equally. Although, I knew how different they were and I tried to keep them apart so that they could both develop their own gifts. It went on this way for some time. I grew older, and the twins grew into men.

One day after wandering the earth, my grandson Teharonhia:wakon came home with seeds. He spoke to me.

"It is time for me to do the work I have been destined to do. I will make sure that we always have food to eat."

"I see that you have much work to do. I think you should be alone and away from me and your brother. This way we will not be in your way."

I think Teharonhia:wakon took that to be my blessing and he left and built a lodge on the other side of the Turtle Island. I watched him go with pride and sadness because he was a connection to my Budding Flowers. I still had one grandson nearby. Sawiskera I could see was troubled and needed my constant guidance.

### **Earth is created**

Teharonhia:wakon spent time creating many beautiful things on the earth. From a distance I could see many changes in the world. New plants began to appear where there had been none before. Birds that sang beautiful songs could be heard in the trees. New animals named deer, moose and buffalo began to wander through the forest. Other animals like the porcupine, bear, and raccoon began to appear. I looked out from my shelter and wondered what my grandson was doing. I decided to go and visit Teharonhia:wakon to see for myself.

When I arrived with my other grandson Sawiskera, Teharonhia:wakon offered us something to eat. When we were done he took us outside his lodge and showed us what he had created.

“All that you see here is for us to share in,” he said. “We have enough to survive, but we have to look after it.” I was impressed with the good work my grandson had done.

“You have created many great things,” I said, “wonderful sweet berries, healing herbs, and wonderful animals to eat. Your work is good.”

I could see that my other grandson was jealous. Sawiskera was deceitful and worked to take control of creation from his brother and undermine Teharonhia:wakon’s good work. Sawiskera hid the animals that his brother had created. He put all the four-legged animals in a cavern where they went in for hibernation. Now he had his own steady supply of food. One Teharonhia:wakon came to me.

“Grandmother, have you seen all the animals that I created? I am hungry and would like to eat.”

“Your brother has been bringing me delicious meats to eat, perhaps you should follow him to find out where he gets them from.”

Teharonhia:wakon did so and found out what his brother had done with the animals. He set them free but before doing so, he made them wild so they wouldn’t be as easy to catch.

I continued to keep my distance to see if the twins could continue to sort out their differences. As they matured I saw that the twins begin to share in each other’s gifts. Teharonhia:wakon gave Sawiskera food in exchange for half of his

freezing power, this diminished his power by half, and he could no longer disrupt the work of his brother.<sup>20</sup>

After a time Teharonhia:wakon created the men-kind and of course the women-kind out of the red clay and gave them a portion of his life, of his mind, and of his blood. Teharonhia:wakon showed these First People or Onkwehonwe all that he created. He instructed them to continue the work of creation, make it beautiful, and to cultivate mother earth—a mission given to my granddaughters. Teharonhia:wakon also instructed Onkwehonwe not to take it for granted but to be thankful.

Sawiskera continued to make his own animals and plants which were opposites of those created by his brother. Many were found to be harmful and poisonous and the Onkwehonwe had to take care in their use. I took the time to teach the women-kind which plants were useful to women's work. I also taught them the planting cycles so their families would never go hungry.

In time Sawiskera created his own race of beings out of the red clay and the white foam of the sea which gave his beings lighter skin. Sawiskera did not have the same skills as his brother Teharonhia:wakon and he was unable to give them life. It was Teharonhia:wakon who gave these beings a bit of his life, his blood and his mind. These beings Teharonhia:wakon said were not Onkwehonwe but would be called human beings and would be of two minds, two opposites, like the twins.<sup>21</sup>

One day Teharonhia:wakon had had enough of the deceitful actions of his brother Sawiskera.

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<sup>20</sup> In the various versions of the Creation Story, it is said that this is when night and day are created.

<sup>21</sup> Iroquois people say that the white master race experience a duality in their minds where deceit overcomes good. As a result, because of the white master race, massive numbers of humans are slaughtered, the earth is polluted, and people are starving, to name a few. The Iroquois have a ceremony which is used to combat the effects of war and violence on the mind. The ceremony called "At the woods edge" is used to clear the corrupted minds of travelers or warriors who come back to the community after witnessing or participating in conflict.

“Sawiskera, I am tired of your constantly undermining my work. Let’s have a game of dice to decide this once and for all.”<sup>22</sup>

By this time I was too old and didn’t have much energy to get involved. I thought that this was a good way to resolve their differences. As I understood it, the dice game would decide who would take care of the night and who would take care of the day and keep each other out of each others’ way. The two brothers met on a mountain top. Teharonhia:wakon was victorious.

Teharonhia:wakon took pity on his brother and built him a hut on the Sky Road.<sup>23</sup> As the loser of the game of dice, Sawiskera was no longer allowed to come to earth during the daytime and disrupt the work of Teharonhia:wakon. With this, time was now split into day and night. It was now Sawiskera who controlled the night.

He had to watch all those who were spirits on their way to the Sky World pass before his door. When Sawiskera came out at night, he couldn’t see very well. And so he was not able to cause as much trouble. With this new arrangement Teharonhia:wakon happily continued his work of creation.

### **My Journey To The Sky Road**

Day by day I could feel myself aging and weakening. I knew I would soon go back to my relatives in the Sky World. I looked forward to seeing my mother and father again, and my daughter Baby Faced Lynx. One day I tried to get up but I was too weak. I lay for a long time listening to sounds of the animals and the winds rustling through the grasses outside my lodge. I felt at peace. I knew I had done all I could on this beautiful earth—I had brought the beginnings of life and planted them in the soil. I had birthed my daughter and looked after her babies

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<sup>22</sup> The dice game is also known as the Peach Pit Game and is played during the Midwinter ceremonies to commemorate the division of night and day, an important point in the Creation Story.

<sup>23</sup> The Sky Road is also known as the Milky Way.

after she was gone. I had tried to be a good grandmother to Teharonhia:wakon and Sawiskera. I closed my eyes for the last time, took a deep breath and fell asleep forever with a smile on my face.

My spirit remained on earth for ten days. In that time my grandson Teharonhia:wakon found my body and decided to honor me by putting me up in the night sky across the road from his brother Sawiskera. That way I could continue the good work that I had done during my lifetime and watch over Sawiskera to keep him from making too much trouble. This way I became grandmother moon. I gave Sawiskera a little light to work by at night. In this new lofty position I also let women-kind know when to plant, when to do ceremonies, and when to birth. And most importantly I keep women focused on their monthly cycles.

I don't have to worry about Sawiskera anymore. In the daytime the Onkwehonwe have their councils and ceremonies which only go from daybreak to sunset. They are pretty strict about doing that work during daylight hours. So Teharonhia:wakon takes care of that business very well. It is those things that one does at night that need to be balanced. In these hours things can go bad. As well, it is at night that our children are conceived. I know this because I watch over the women. And I keep an eye on the mischievous one, Sawiskera.

From my place on the Sky Road, I look over the earth where my daughter is buried, and her granddaughters and their daughters and their daughters. My connection to my great grand daughters continues. I made a promise to these women that they would see me every 28 days 13 times a year. And so it is through their cycles that we have stayed in touch, all the way through time. This is what reminds them of their gifts and place on this earth.

## **Conclusion**

Iroquois women's traditions derive from the Iroquois master narrative that begins in the Sky World. There are many different stories about how the earth was created. Creation stories reflect divergent world-views and varied elements come out of a people's relationship with the unique and diverse environments that exist on the earth. Built upon the basic need for survival where everyone gets to be fed, to be happy, and to be healed, these stories tell how people created their own heaven on earth.

The mother of the Iroquois nations is a figure named Sky Woman who brought sacred medicines—tobacco and strawberries—to the earth. Her daughter Baby Face Lynx gave the Iroquois fruits and vegetables. Sky Woman's other great grand-daughters, Kahentehsohn and Kahontokton who were the grandmother and mother of Tekanawite, the Peacemaker, were challenged to raise the Iroquois "holder of ultimate truth" through women's teachings. In fact, Tekanawite returned that women's tradition to the first clan mother of the Iroquois people—Jigonsaseh—when the Iroquois people accepted the good message of peace and the power of reason. These foundational principles for the Iroquois women's tradition are a theory translated in practice to the governance of the Iroquois people under the direction of the mothers. This frame is used to view how good governance and the maintenance of peace through the power of reason is enacted in the modern times. I use this Iroquois women's frame to elicit, analyze and present personal narratives of Sky Woman's great granddaughters that live in Kahnawake in the twenty-first century.

At the root of what it means to be a good Indian woman is that they are expected to be good mothers, to have a connection to the land, to be titleholders of the lands of their ancestors, and to be good teachers, to name a few. Where does the idea of what constitutes a good Indian woman come from? I described how the foundational principles contained in the Iroquois master narrative point to an understanding of what it means to be a good Indian woman. In today's world, being a good Indian woman goes without

saying, passed down inter-generationally. We don't talk about what it means to be an Iroquois woman. We try to live it.

As I have described Sky Woman, the narrative provides many good examples of the good life and how corruption can be healed. We saw corruption when Sky Woman was pushed from the Sky World and healing when she was rescued by the water birds. We saw corruption when Muskrat died trying to get mud from the bottom of the ocean and healing when Sky Woman performed the first dance on Turtle's back. We saw corruption when Baby Faced Lynx died in childbirth and healing when Sky Woman took over the raising of her grandsons. By these examples and many others we learn from Sky Woman how to look after the plants and animals, the children, and our future generations. We learn how to be decent to one another. We learn that everyone gets to eat, to be happy, and to be healed. From her story we learn to be rational and deliberative human beings.

The retelling of the Sky Woman story reminds us of our connection to our ancient mother who governs over us. As Sky Woman watches out for the cycles of birth, life, death, and rebirth, she ensures that we remain true to our feminine essence and don't get corrupted. And we only have to look to nature to see what that means. So we learn from all these things. But, if we do get corrupted the path is laid out before us and she lights our way so that it is easy to see. Sky Woman's continued role is as mother to all.

Sky Woman's experience and the three different things that she went through helped me to identify three questions about me and her other great granddaughters. For example:

1. How is the Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women different from the feminist view of Iroquois women as the *other*?
2. How is the legislated definition of Mohawk Indian identity different from Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or *real human beings*?

3. What is the Kanienkehaka woman's understanding of themselves in relation to the community of Kahnawake and the Mohawk nation?

Sky Woman made the transformation by critically reflecting on her reality. I focus on the three questions using the lens of the eight narratives as a way for contemporary Kanienkehaka women to communicate our reality.

But where did that communication get distorted? It is apparent that our women no longer remember fully what goes without saying, that the Iroquois woman is a daughter, a sister, a mother, and a grandmother and what that means in the larger scope of things. In the next chapter I look at the influences that attack our identity. Our identity as Kanienkehaka women became clouded by theories of individuality that worked to distort our self perception and corrupted us to the point of no return. The path that Sky Woman maintains has been obscured and lost from sight.

The dominant liberal society privileges choice in choosing one's projects. Liberal theory is not what it is in practice. Social theorists say a utopia can be achieved by freeing individuals to express their worker essence. In Chapter 2 "Reconstructing the Individual" I demonstrate liberal and socialist political philosophy in theory that has the practical effect of limiting individuality in the end.

As we look to understanding behind these influences, it will help us strip the thinking that says somebody has authority to decide someone else's identity. Over time, people have omitted women from the historical record and said all kinds of things about us. Little of it has to do with us, as women, yet their work has served to structure the lives of Iroquois women in such a way as to continue the destruction of mother culture. As we shall see, the writers I review construct a version of our lives that is different from the one described in story of Sky Woman. And in actuality those writers are writing about themselves and not about Sky Woman's great granddaughters.

**Chapter Two**  
**Reconstructing the Individual: Conceptions**  
**of the individual in Liberal and Social political theory**

**Introduction**

Consider the herds that are feeding yonder: they know not the meaning of yesterday or today; they graze and ruminate, move or rest, from morning to night, from day to day, taken up with their little loves and hates and the mercy of the moment, feeling neither melancholy nor satiety. Man cannot see them without regret, for even in the pride of his humanity he looks enviously on the beast's happiness. He wishes simply to live without satiety or pain, like the beast; yet it is all in vain, for he will not change places with it. He may ask the beast—"why do you look at me and not speak to me of your happiness?" The beast wants to answer—"Because I always forget what I wished to say"; but he forgets this answer, too, and is silent; and the man is left to wonder (Nietzsche, 1981: 5).

Let us imagine a woman in an Indian community. She's angry. She is a middle-aged woman, a high school teacher in a challenging school on an Indian reserve. She wanted to have a professional career in another field but instead goes to work day in and day out teaching a subject that Indian kids don't feel the need to learn. She lives in a large house with her common-law husband and child born late in life. She is out of shape, drinks alcohol regularly, and eats rich foods. She grew up with an ambiguous identity, an Indian father and a French mother and as a result she has no clan. She lives with the material needs indicative of the dominant liberal society—three cars, swimming pool, time-share on a vacation condominium, a daughter who goes to a private school. She buys the best for herself and her family. This is the purpose of her life.

She, like many individuals, is faced with varying definitions of their individualism. Firstly, like her, many individuals on the reserve are members of the Kahnawake Band of Indians according definite criteria. The liberal nation-state of Canada says to be recognized as such and receive benefits one must have a registry number. Eligibility for band membership is determined by the band membership criteria of a 'band of Indians'. There is a distinction between this form of membership and that defined by the community at large. Secondly, there are also the unofficial spoken criteria of the Kahnawake community—a clan-based membership based on your totemic essence, which makes you a member of a class, clan, or some form of social political organization. This is similar to the socialist concept of the worker who is part of the working class or the proletariat. Thirdly, to be Kahnawakeron:non (of Kahnawake), to have *feeling membership* (Simpson, 2003), is to identify yourself as part of the community—to identify with the common needs and aspirations of an Indian reserve that is situated close to a large urban center. The criteria are as follows: one has to have lived their whole life in the community, one has to maintain the status quo, one has to live like everyone else and not stand out. This criterion comes from perceived personal authority to critically reflect on one's own identity and transform one's understanding so that you can become actively engaged in the life of the community without fear of ostracism.

To receive federally funded benefits you have to belong to this collective body identified as 'Indians'. What happens to individuality? What does it mean to be a Kahnawakeron:non beyond the state-defined benefits of reserve living? In order to understand how our teacher fits into this we can ask if she critically reflects on her place in time and space. We have only to think of Nietzsche's cow in his essay "The Use and Abuse of History (1981)" grazing in the field with no thought of today or tomorrow, no sense of its death, of necessity, of the limits of life, or of its own located personality.

Yet, the dominant society has also given her an identity—one that allows her to live where she lives, to work where she works, to have all the benefits of the liberal

society, tax-free. She has a band number, she is part of the worker clan as a teacher or the teacher clan and she is a member of the Kahnawake community as a commodity by which the community is eligible to receive a certain amount of annual funding. She is in Nietzschean tones, like that uncritically reflective cow, oblivious and numb to the world at large—dehumanized. Her identity is as mother, teacher, house owner, and wife.

There are theoretical lenses that provide fascinating insights into a view of individuality. For example, liberal political conceptions of the individual influenced definitions for individuals in society such as the Kahnawakeron:non experience. If we look to this woman's story and experience as a part of the community, we see that her life can be defined by these three conceptions of the individual as they interplay throughout her life and living in Kahnawake. Of her life, we can ask the following questions to elucidate an understanding of her individuality.

What does she think of the acquisition of property to define her individuality? What of her loss of individuality by joining a class, social, or political organization? Is she an active participant in her own life's projects? She authenticates her life based on a conception of the good life that someone else created. The value of comfortable self-preservation then requires that she participate in a consensus of what is considered good—working at one's projects to prosper and acquire goods. However, she does not consider that these measurements do not take into account what she thinks of herself. What the liberal society requires is that she pursues her projects and not go beyond her own view. Thus she has achieved what is also considered good—self-preservation. She minds her own business. To paraphrase the liberal sense of the Golden Rule her liberty is limited to not making a nuisance of herself to other people. She also should not interfere with what does not concern her. She acts on her own at her own cost to enact some project (see Mill 1956: 68). These ideas derive from liberal theory.

In this chapter I look through the theoretical male, liberal lenses that distort views of the individual and even assumes an authority to authenticate who are truly fit

individuals. For many years women were not admitted to the discourse. In the case of Mohawks in particular and Mohawk women in general, we were lumped in with alcoholics, criminals, and lunatics as examples of those deemed unfit to possess the vote. That has been admitted. But the authentication of who was fit began with theorists in the 1800s, all of whom were white men.

In this chapter I review three central political conceptions of the individual from exemplars of liberal theory: John Stuart Mill, Will Kymlicka, and John Rawls. As we examine an individual's experience as a part of a community, we see that their life can be defined by these three liberal conceptions of the individual as they interplay throughout their life and living. Yet, one might ask: What do liberal philosophical theories have to do with Mohawk women? How do ideas mostly by dead white philosophers about their own life and times have anything to do with me?

Liberal political philosophy provides the foundation for the authority to authenticate who is fit and who is unfit. The fit will be admitted. The unfit shall perish. For example the Government of Canada maintained a policy to completely assimilate Indigenous peoples for the sole purpose of terminating international treaty rights beginning in 1857. In the 1920s Indian termination was created. The central architects of this policy were collaborators Arthur J. Luddington for the US government and the Canadian Indian Affairs superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott. Describing an "object" of Canadian government's Indian policy, Scott wrote that:

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian that has not been absorbed into the body politic of Canada and there is no more Indian question. That is the whole purpose of our legislation (PAC, R.G. 10, 1920).

This statement has been quoted time and again by many Indigenous peoples and scholars as a primary example of the federal government's desire to destroy Indians peoples in

Canada. The termination policies originated in 1857 and continue to the present as illustrated in the overview of the development of the Indian Act in the Introduction.

The trends over that time include the overthrow of the traditional clanships by attacking the role of women, the installation of the elective system, and the devolution of governance to local control called self-government. The municipalization of reserves was planned through the proposed First Nations Governance Act (FNGA) in 2003 under Canadian law. However, the federal Canadian government withdrew the legislation because of widespread opposition to the FNGA. Coincidentally, resistance in the Kahnawake community to termination marks the contemporary era from 1988 to the present that includes reassertion of the women's place in the last 100 years by women leaders in protest movements that would include Ellen Gabriel, Minnie Garrow, Selma Delisle, and Kahntineta Horn, and the election of women band council chiefs like Peggy Mayo and Rhonda Kirby. The reaffirmation of local customs like traditional governance systems is also part of that resistance and the focus of this study. However in this chapter the purpose is to describe how Mohawk women's role in Mohawk society was amended, legislated, or dismissed. The philosophical roots cannot be ignored.

The conception of the good life according to Iroquois philosophy is one where everyone gets the right to be fed, the right to be happy and the right to be healed. This was illustrated in the Sky Woman Master Narrative as her life took place in the Sky World above, where everyone had food, happiness and healing. This same philosophy was carried down to earth by Sky Woman and recreated for all living things on the Turtle's Back and challenged by the work of the twin Sawiskera. Total disregard of these highly human conceptions eluded people who crafted Indian termination and took our kids away to be raised by other people. These preposterous white men assumed authority to authenticate other people and their knowledge. And, in the case of Indigenous women, our voices are even disregarded.

## **The Liberal Conception – to be like-minded**

My examination of John Stuart Mill's theory of the individual focuses on a specific view of the individual in society to illustrate the basis from which other liberal conceptions of the individual stem. The themes expressed by Mill that appear in other liberal theorists have a basis in early liberal thought. Mill conceives liberty as: the right to choose one's projects; the right for individual growth and development; and the potential for progress. This discussion includes modern liberal scholars such as Will Kymlicka who attempts to mediate between the individual and collective rights. Also John Rawls through his conception of individuals in a just society, elucidates how the liberal view changes and evolves to consider the notion of progress and personal development. In the end, I examine what modern liberal theorists say about the individual in order to understand the theory of the individual but also the practice of liberal nation-states with regard to individuals.

This discussion of liberal conceptions of the individual originates from questions that explore three areas of liberal philosophy. What do liberals mean by the individual? Who is the individual in relation to the greater society in which she lives? How is the individual an unencumbered sovereign individual or a deliberative citizen? To answer these questions I do not attempt to examine all the conceptions of the individual found in variations of the liberal tradition. I pose that modern liberal discourse on the individual and society continues an intellectual based on Mill's work *On Liberty*. In fact contemporary liberal writing consistently refers back to Mill's work. Therefore in order to understand the role of the individual in a modern liberal society such as Canada's I focus my examination on Mill's conception of the individual followed by Rawls' and Kymlicka's discussions.

## **From Doctrine to Reason**

The underlying basis for many theories of the individual in liberal tradition pays homage to Mill's important work. Mill's conception of the individual, society, and the

relationship of the individual to society elucidate the basis for the conception of the individual in the modern liberal democracies. The basis of the liberal theory of the individual derives from Mill's examination of the principles of power of the individual, liberty, freedom, and society. Thus, if we examine Mill's understanding of the individual with regard to these principles, we provide the groundwork for understanding the individual in liberal democratic society.

The context for liberal discussions of the individual derives from Enlightenment era discourse between religio-political Church doctrine and reason. With this in mind I begin with Mill's work *On Liberty*. In this work Mill directly advocates liberating the individual from Church doctrine in order that individuals may deliberatively engage with others about the society they want that helps all community members achieve the good life. Mill illustrates the struggle to gain liberty in terms of the individual gaining liberty by limiting oligarchic and theocratic power. Mill questions the limits of the collective authority of society over the individual (1956: xvi). Danger arises when the majority denies liberty to individuals whether through established laws, public authority, or what Mill calls "public opinion (1956: 21)." Society may limit the liberty of the individual using physical force or moral coercion only for self-preservation of society's view of the good life.

Mill advocates Utilitarianism in ethics to ensure that actions provide the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In championing individual rights, Mill argues that monarchs and the church held power at the expense of the common masses. The struggle to gain liberty was by limiting oligarchic power. Mill writes that power can be exercised against a person only to prevent harm to others and the only conduct that one is required to account for conduct that concerns others (1956: 13).

*On Liberty* justifies the freedom of the individual to oppose the claims of state unlimited control and to defend the rights of the individual against the state. Mill writes that only self-protection justifies the state's tampering with the liberty of the individual or

its interference with another's freedom—particularly with respect to freedom of thought and discussion. The individual has complete control over himself. “In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is...absolute.” Mill writes, “Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign (1956: 13).” The individual in this regard is a rational, thinking person, with morals, feelings, opinions and sentiments. In the context of the state the individual expresses himself, acts, and does no harm to anyone else. This is accomplished through reason and not because the Church said so.

### **On Individuality**

Three themes emerge in Mill’s conception of liberty:

- The right to choose one’s projects
- The right for individual growth and development
- The potential for progress

In this regard, contemporary theorists such as Rawls and Kymlicka are considered because their writing on liberty and the individual responds to and advance Mill’s conception that begins with the valorization of choice.

In Mill’s view an individual uses their faculties to their fullest, enabling them to interpret experience in their own way to choose their projects. An individual should have full opportunity to make choices. In this regard Mill writes “it is the privilege and proper condition of a human being, arrived at the maturity of his faculties, to use and interpret experience in his own way (1956: 70).” Worth as an individual comes with self-decision and self-action that Mill denotes “is of importance, not only what men do, but also what manner of men they are that do it (1956: 72).” Consequently, the moral composition of individuals and how they enact their beliefs are important in liberal theory. These aspects of individual choice and liberty have carried through to modern liberal theory clearly seen in the work of Rawls and Kymlicka.

Rawls considers the value of autonomy, originality and self-authentication of the individual in relation to his conception of liberal moral and philosophical doctrine in which a conception of the good and a theory of justice are key. The political liberalism Rawls poses “assumes that, for political purposes, a plurality of reasonable yet incompatible comprehensive doctrines is the normal result of the exercise of human reason within the framework of the free institutions of a constitutional democratic regime (Rawls, 1996: xviii).” Key to Rawls’ conception of the individual is a distinct notion of autonomy of the individual in which personal moral power is important and a conception of the good in which free persons have agency for change. Thus, Rawls adds that “...as citizens, they are seen as capable of revising and changing this conception on reasonable and rational grounds, and they may do this if they so desire.” Furthermore Rawls claims that free persons are citizens who “claim the right to view their persons as independent from and not identified with any particular such conception with its scheme of final ends (1996: 30).” The free individuals “regard themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims.” Individuals are entitled to make their institutions advance their conception of the good (1996: 32). However their claims must fall within the public conception of justice, which will be discussed later.

With reference to citizen’s deeper aims and commitments, self-authentication of the individual comes from their political and nonpolitical attachments. These attachments Rawls suggests “specify moral identity and give shape to a person’s way of life, what one sees oneself as doing and trying to accomplish in the social world (1996: 31).” Rawls’s view comprises criteria for choosing one’s projects.

Kymlicka advances freedom of choice similar to Rawls in which an individual has the freedom to determine their ‘projects’, which gives them the power to shape their life. However Kymlicka expands the criteria to include the right to be an *active* participant in one’s own life by designing one’s choices and projects:

The best liberal defence of individual freedoms is not necessarily the most direct one. The best defence is the one which best accords with the way that people on reflection understand the value of their own lives. And if we look at the value of freedom in this way, then it seems that freedom of choice, while central to a valuable life, is not the value which is centrally pursued in such a life (Kymlicka, 1991: 50).

Choice is not the central value, but also includes self-reflection and the right to decide which choices one wants to make that will get one the best possible life.

The self and self-reflection are key to Kymlicka's conception of the individual. "The self *is* prior to its ends," Kymlicka writes "since we reserve the right to question and reappraise even our most deeply held convictions about the nature of the good life [emphasis added] (1991: 51)." Value lies in self-reflection and making choices, which enable the individual to participate fully in the projects and outcomes.

The individual's direct involvement in judging the value of the good life is key to the liberal view. Kymlicka writes "The liberal view operates through people's rationality—i.e. It generates confidence in the value of one's projects by removing any impediments or distortions in the reasoning process involved in making judgments of value (1991: 62)." Autonomy, originality, self-authentication, self-reflection, and full participation in one's choices facilitate the growth of the individual and society.

### **The Right to Grow**

Mill describes the growth potential of the individual and society in terms of the fullness of human nature achieved through the individual's freedom to learn, choose, and find power in their choices. Human social growth is compared to the image of a tree. Mill writes that "Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing (1956:

72).” For Mill trees epitomize diversity and originality. These same notions he advocates for expressing the importance of the ‘inward forces’ of dialogue and original thinking. “It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves,” Mill concludes, “but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation (1956: 76).” Value lies in the development of the individual and originality in this project is the goal (1956: 79). The effort for the individual lies in not getting lost in the crowd while public opinion still rules the world. To make his point Mill illustrates how powerful ideas that generate freedom come from individuals. To stifle freedom is to stop progress. Mill adopts the empirical pursuit of good. All wise or noble things started with an idea brought forward by an individual. “The honor and glory of the average man” Mill writes, “is that he is capable of following that initiative; that he can respond internally to wise and noble things, and be led to them with his eyes...All he can claim is freedom to point out the way (1956: 81).”

Echoing Mill, Rawls also points out this aspect of intellectual freedom, that citizens view themselves as free. Accordingly, “they [citizens] regard themselves as self-authenticating sources of valid claims...they regard themselves as being entitled to make claims on their institutions so as to advance their conceptions of the good (1996: 32).” This is what Rawls characterizes as individual growth.

Out of freedom and liberty, the individual then is able to define their own conception of the good and affirm it in their own life. “Claims that citizens regard as founded on duties and obligations,” writes Rawls, “based on their conception of the good and moral doctrine they affirm in their own life are also...to be counted as self-authenticating (1996: 32).” Out of this self-authentication comes the power and the right to revise and change one’s projects. Freedom comes from a conception of the good and having the ability to revise and change this conception on ‘reasonable and rational’ grounds. “As free persons” Rawls writes, “citizens claim the right to view their persons

as independent from and not identified with any particular such conception with its scheme of final ends (1996: 30).” Thus, for Rawls, a liberal conception of the individual includes the ability to grow which results from the freedom to revise and change one’s projects.

Kymlicka, on the other hand, disagrees with Rawls discussion of the individual. Kymlicka writes that the self *is* prior to its ends but the question remains for Rawls just where, within the person, to draw the boundaries of the ‘self’. The legal freedom of individuals to dissent, concert and question, and revise their ends is not adequately defended and even confusing. The notion of toleration and overlapping consensus put forward by Rawls, Kymlicka writes, is confused by the separation of Rawls’ notions of plurality and revisability:

There seems no reason why the freedom to publicly debate the merits of competing conceptions of the good life would have any special role in a society of people with competing but constitutive attachments. Plurality, divorced from revisability, may require that current adherents of different faiths be allowed to practice their creed. But I don’t yet see why it would require, or even support, either the right to publicly defend your creed to non-believers, or the right to hear what the members of other groups can say in their defence (1991: 60).

Kymlicka’s concern lies in the abstract individualism that concerns theorist such as Rawls. Kymlicka writes that abstract individualism “will result not in the confident affirmation and pursuit of worthy courses of action but rather in existential uncertainty and anomie, in doubt about the very value of one’s life and its purpose (1991: 61).” The abstractness Kymlicka fears leads one to doubt the value of ones’ life and its purpose thus limiting individual action.

If individuals do not grow then society does not grow. Society, then, cannot be seen as an undisturbed transparent community in which the rules and norms of society are

paramount (Kymlicka, 1991: 63). In contrast Kymlicka writes that the liberal view “operates through people’s rationality—i.e. It generates confidence in the value of one’s projects by removing any impediments or distortions in the reasoning process involved in making judgments of value (1991: 62).” The liberal view desires a transparent society where individuals consider their actions as “recognition and affirmation” as reasons for action (1991: 63). The ambiguity of individualism described by Kymlicka as abstract individualism interrupts individual and social progress. Transparency allows for people to make decisions, which allows for people to grow and progress—protesting war, environmental activism, and ending slavery.

### **The Potential for Progress**

Mill warns that society tries to control one when individuals take the initiative to break free of the tyranny of social norms. In Mill’s view to break free of tyranny is to be considered *eccentric*. Eccentricity comes from pure individualism. Out of eccentric individualism comes progress, as progress is the result of free individuals. To clarify Mill I pose as an exemplar of the eccentric individual, socialist writer Antonio Gramsci who interestingly enough also clarifies the concept of an eccentric individual in his postulate on the *organic intellectual*.

Gramsci in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (1971) views in a socialist sense the role of the intellectual as a crucial one in the context of creating a counter hegemony (Burke, 1999). The organic intellectual is a freethinking individual, originally meant to promote the ideals of the dominant class. Taking this one step further Gramsci sees the need for the development of an organic intellectual for the working class. A working class organic intellectual would modify the world and bring about a new mode of thinking. Gramsci sees the fundamental importance of the ideological struggle to social change that is not limited to consciousness-raising but aims at consciousness transformation or the growth of society. In this case Gramsci means the creation of a

socialist consciousness that is not something that could be imposed on people but (to anticipate Kymlicka) arises from their actual working lives. The intellectual realm of the individual is not to be seen as something confined to the elite but as something grounded in everyday life. Gramsci wrote that "the mode of being of the new intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence ... but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator... (1971: 10)." If we look to Gramsci then, the organic intellectual is like the eccentric individual of Mill.

According to Mill, eccentricity is viewed negatively and all attempts are made by society to control it. "The general average of mankind are not only moderate in intellect, but also moderate in inclinations" Mill writes. Soporific individuals reject eccentric individuals, who are looked down upon as temperamental and even wildly mannered (1956: 84). However, both Mill and Rawls see that soporific value judgments devalue individuals.

In Rawls's view progress is hindered by a sparse conception of the person. The rational conception of the individual as contrasted to the political construction of the person requires little more than moral values for the perceptive and intuitive progress of the individual and thus society. "Rational intuitionism," writes Rawls, "does not require a fuller conception of the person and needs little more than the idea of the self as knower (1996: 92)." Judgment and thus progress based on an independent order of moral values available to perception and intuition breeds originality, originality of the individual and of their progress. True individuals pay less heed to those value judgments made by others but to their own self-perceptions.

For Kymlicka the liberty for self-perception (*self is*) fuels the freedom necessary to find out which life project is more valuable than another. "Liberty is needed" Kymlicka writes, "to find out what is valuable in life—to question, re-examine, and revise our beliefs about value... This is one of the main reasons why we desire liberty—we hope to learn about the good (1991: 18)." We need liberty then to devise our own life

projects, to learn about the good, and ultimately to progress. Individuality and progress are interdependent.

Mill contends that eccentricity and originality produced the idea of liberty. The root of progress can be found in individuality. “A people,” Mill writes, “may be progressive for a certain length of time, and then stop: when does it stop?” Mill answers, “When it ceases to possess individuality (1956: 86).” This leads us back to Mill’s questions on limits for sovereignty, the authority of society, and how to mediate individual power and the power of society (1956: 91). The individual takes on the responsibility of questioning and challenging the customs and virtues of society while engaging in dialogue with others. No man is an island or as Mill writes, “an entirely isolated being (1956: 97).” If no man is an island, then, who is the individual as conceptualized by Mill, Rawls and Kymlicka in relation to society? In order to answer the question it is necessary to describe the liberal view of society.

### **On Society**

Society has rights and duties in the liberal view. Society provides a social and political context that includes themes that identify clear aspects of the relationship between individuals and their expectations, but without specific reference to that relationship. A liberal society has these features:

- Agreement on how things came to be.
- A place for disagreement.
- Protection of disputants by society.

This analysis demonstrates the liberal view of society as a political environment for individuals to pursue society’s goods.

In his examination of society and the individual Mill illustrates how the Catholic Church created the stigma of a mental superiority held by those that follow religious doctrine. Mill writes that the Church “recognizes a knowledge of the enemy’s case as

beneficial to the teachers, but finds means, consistent with this, of denying the rest of the world, thus giving the elite more mental culture, though not more mental freedom, than it allows to the mass (1956: 47).” In this instance doctrine of the church does not make a liberal mind. The church creates advocates of moral and religious doctrines. One cannot dissent from these doctrines. This power Mill interprets as the underlying basis of the notion of custom that permeates the greater society.

Customs, or cultural presuppositions, are the unspoken rules that are followed zealously because of a belief in their rightness. These rules should be challenged using reason to find out how things truly came to be. Mill argues agreement on newly reasoned truths when he demonstrates that general observations on life that facilitate how to conduct oneself are found in languages and literatures. These ‘observations’ are received as truisms and only questioned by individuals when they are painfully revealed as untrue (1956: 52).

Over time, knowledge gained empirically through natural deduction becomes the formal reality by which daily life is guided. These deductions are built into a set of customs to guide society. The individual enacts these cultural presuppositions in their conduct and moral life and is guided by these new rules.

Rawls calls this enactment an ‘agreement’ of the individual, in relation to customs and cooperation.

In this way Rawlsian society is a fair system of cooperation. Rawls clarifies cooperation as the basis of a just society:

...we start with the basic idea of society as a fair system of cooperation...When this idea is developed into a conception of political justice, it implies that, viewing citizens as persons who can engage in social cooperation over a complete life, they can also take responsibility for their ends...they can adjust their ends so that those ends can be

pursued by the means they can reasonably expect to acquire in return for what they can reasonably expect to contribute (1996: 34).

This association between customs and cooperation facilitates the notion of what Rawls calls 'justice as fairness' which provides a forum for public responsibility for ends (1996: xxxii). This concept put forward by Rawls provides for liberty and equality that encompasses a political conception of the person and fits them into the idea of a just society as a fair system of cooperation.

Rawls describes a just society of free and equal individuals by virtue of possessing the two powers of moral personality—the capacity for a *sense of justice* and the capacity for a *conception of the good*. In turn these powers are associated with the idea of cooperation and the idea of each participant's rational advantage or good (1996: 34). Society in Rawls' view provides the rules of conduct for cooperative agreement (1996: 108). To further elaborate on this idea of political society, Rawls adds that cooperative activities suffice for the main purposes of life and its members inhabit a certain well-defined territory over generations. This involves the idea of proper, appropriate, or right conduct.

Kymlicka expresses a similar view in his use of the term liberal justice. Liberal justice as agreement begins with recognition of dependence by individuals on a cultural community for self-development and context of choice. Firstly, individual independence as self-directed beings is separate from roles and relationships in existence in the community. Secondly, equal standing of members of the community is never gained at the expense of others (1991: 127). "The individualism that underlies liberalism," Kymlicka adds, "isn't valued at the expense of our social nature, or of our shared community." Instead each person's life is recognized in the community in a way that the person involved can agree individualism accepts the importance of individuals in our social world (1991: 127). The social world is seen in Kymlicka's liberal view as

comprised of individuals. Yet, Kymlicka requires that pluralist societies recognize diverse cultural communities.

Liberal individualism Kymlicka muses, in culturally plural societies is difficult to negotiate and is highlighted in the situation of Canada and Indigenous peoples. Kymlicka asks:

What does it mean for people to ‘belong’ to a cultural community—to what extent are individuals’ interests tied to, or their very sense of identity dependent on, a particular culture? And what follows from the fact that people belong to different cultures—do people have a legitimate interest in ensuring the continuation of their own culture, even if other cultures are available in the political community (1991: 135-136)?

These questions shed light on the difficult situation facing Indigenous individuals in Canada. “Aboriginal rights,” as Kymlicka suggests, “will only be secure when they are viewed, not as competing with liberalism, but as an essential component of liberal political practice (1991: 154).” What does he mean by ‘essential component of liberal political practice’? What happens to the diversity of cultural communities that he writes of?

Though these questions are not the subject of this study, clearly one answer includes recognition of the diversity of Indigenous communities across Canada that should not be lost to liberal policies that emerge out of modern conceptions of pluralism. However, another part of the answer relevant to this discussion is found in Kymlicka’s notion of the place of individuals in cultural structures. Kymlicka writes that liberals are concerned with the moral (hence philosophical) basis of cultural structures. However, Kymlicka describes these cultural structures as a rich and secure (and hence practical) basis for individuals to examine the value of their options (1991: 165).

Kymlicka's view of the Indigenous individual in liberal political practice in the modern era contrasts with Mill's theoretical liberation from merely philosophical conceptions that lead to potential social tyranny facing Indigenous individuals. This discussion demonstrates Kymlicka's view of liberal individualism in practice that differs from Mill's view in theory. Mill argues that the formal rules that govern the greater society and are enforced through law can lead to social tyranny. "As mankind improve" Mill writes, "the number of doctrines which are no longer disputed or doubted will be constantly on the increase; and the well-being of mankind may almost be measured by the number and gravity of the truths which have reached the point of being uncontested (1956: 53)." These 'truths' gain strength when they are not contested and become entrenched as benchmarks for the further development of society thus leading to the development of social tyranny.

Society then is the social-tyrant and enacts tyranny not only through political process. But as Mill writes "a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression...enslaving the soul itself (1956: 7)." Social tyranny practiced by society concerns limitations placed on personal liberty by society. Accordingly, Mill questions where the line is drawn between individual independence and social control. Social control in society, Mill posits, is important because "all that makes existence valuable to anyone depends on the enforcement of restraints upon the actions of other people (1956: 8)." Therefore, an individual's value to the greater society lies in their ability to be restrained by the controls of society. How then is life to be navigated through these social doctrines in a way that ensures the liberty, freedom and full development of the individual? Mill suggests an answer can be found in the power that can be exerted over others when it prevents harm to others (1956: 13). Accordingly, Mill describes how doctrines become unquestioned as the power of society becomes paramount. Mill suggests this power becomes coercive when society dictates individual likes or dislikes (1956: 10).

Clearly in Mill's view the ability to question and engage with the 'truths' put forward by the greater society has been lost. One's opinion is only regarded in terms of how it serves the greater society. Thus, Mill advocates for the freedom of the individual to live in a truly democratic society comprised of deliberative individuals. Mill describes the right for dialogue to oppose the Church's stance against free speech (1956: 21). Free expression of opinion provides a richness and diversity of voice needed for a democratic society and is part of the determinant for outlining the boundary between the individual and society. The real 'truth' then is achieved through dialogue, which brings about a diversity of opinions.

These aspects of truth and dialogue put forward by Mill lead us to question how, in the era of ethnic diversity, does one question unjust inequalities where Mill privileges free debate? An answer to this question can be found in Kymlicka's response to the potential for socialization in the post World War II era of one culture for one nation in which he lived. Kymlicka writes "differences which arise from people's circumstances...are clearly not their own responsibility." Individuals do not choose their social status or race (1991: 186). Consequently a person should not be disadvantaged by their origins. Kymlicka highlights the importance of community to protect individual diversity through his critique of Rawls' and Mill's views on liberty. Kymlicka writes:

Rawls isn't an atomist...Rawls talks about how we decide our life-plans not de novo, but rather by examining the models and ways of life of those who have preceded us. And he endorses Mill's argument for liberty, which relies heavily on the fact that we are dependent on the cultural structure around us for our personal development (1991: 177).

Though Rawls does not ignore the importance of the culture context of choice, Kymlicka questions why Rawls does not also recognize cultural membership as a primary good or as grounds for legitimate claims. The answer, Kymlicka writes, lies in the fact that as a

post-war political theorist, Rawls is working with a simplified model of the nation state where political community is co-terminus with one cultural community such as America's 'melting pot'. So, Rawls's view is limited. Yet, is cultural context also a limiting notion? Is there one culture for one political community? As it is protected, is it manufactured, thus leaving no room for growth and change? Kymlicka writes of the assumption of cultural homogeneity made by Rawls where "...the basic structure shapes the way the social system produces and reproduces over time a certain form of culture (Rawls in Kymlicka 1991: 178)." This notion of cultural structure for one political community Kymlicka finds problematic in Rawls's work.

Where Kymlicka offers cultural community Rawls invokes the notion of a cultural structure (the context of people's choices). Rawls describes the structure as distinguishable from the character of the culture at any moment (the product of people's choices). Rawls also recognizes the importance of protecting a cultural structure since it provides people's context of choice and recognizes the primary good of cultural membership but does not provide status as a ground for legitimate claims because he assumes there is only one cultural structure in each political community. Kymlicka writes that if we drop the assumption of protecting cultural structures because they provide a people's context of choice then primary good as cultural membership must be recognized as a possible source of unjust inequalities (1991: 178). Kymlicka writes that Rawls does not reasonably leave room for multiculturalism in a pluralist society where differences arise from people's circumstances over which they have no control (1991: 186).

In a country where there is only one culture Kymlicka points out that unjust inequalities are not likely to be a source of disagreement since cultural membership is a favorable and positive thing. "[cultural membership] is a kind of public good, equally available to all, not the source of differential rights-claims." Kymlicka writes, "It isn't likely to be a source of unjust inequalities in such a country, since there is only one cultural structure for all citizens." Individual liberty's importance for cultural

membership can be taken for granted to remedy unjust inequalities (1991: 177-178). However, in a diverse culture, where there are many cultural communities, the large potential for disagreement exists, as in the case of Canada.

A culturally diverse society makes room for dissenting voices. Mill poses free debate as the liberal protection for dissenting voices “Truth gains more even by the errors of one who, with due study and preparation, thinks for himself than by the true opinions of those who only hold them because they do not suffer themselves to think (1956: 41).” The freedom to dialogically engage brings about mental freedom, and with this the yoke of authority of the greater society is broken. Understanding comes with learning one’s opinions and engaging in learning the opinions of others. On this, Mill insists that “the cultivation of the understanding consists in one thing more than another, it is surely in learning the grounds of one’s own opinions (1956: 44).” Freedom of the individual is not paramount within the power of the state when it limits the freedom of the individual to those acts and deeds that affect the majority. Mill poses that actions should be as free as opinions (1956: 67).

Agreeing with Mill, Rawls views the power of society in its right to govern rules and procedures. Concomitantly the free and equal citizen is the regulative agency for right and good where “society takes into account the good” for the greatest number. “Rules and procedures,” writes Rawls, “joined with shared religious, philosophical, and other public beliefs, do not exclude this possibility (1996: 109).” Consistently advanced toleration works for the abstract individual. According to Rawls, society does not tell people what to do, it only oversees the rules. Members of society cooperate with others to recognize principles of conduct separate from a regulated central authority (1996: 108). To further elaborate on the idea of political society, Rawls adds that cooperative activities suffice for the main purposes of life and its members inhabit a certain well-defined territory over generations. This terrain involves the idea of proper, appropriate, or right conduct as a guiding path. In this way, Rawls does not contradict Mill.

The definition of good government according to Mill is one that has the ability to find a balance between the liberty and freedom of the individual, supports dialogical engagement, and maintains a stable and prosperous society. Mill makes overtures to conservatives when he suggests that “a party of order or stability and a party of progress or reform are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life.” Mutual respect and recognition presupposes cooperation (1956: 58). Therefore, good government maintains stability and preserves what is necessary to maintain good order while getting rid of what is deemed unnecessary or harmful to society. And according to Mill, finding this balance is a struggle.

### **On Individuals and Society**

Addressing the individual’s and society’s liberty, freedom and sovereignty, we are led to the greater question that concerns the individual in society and how sovereign he or she is. Where is the fine line drawn between the individual and society? What we see is that the liberal dialogue on individuals and society attempts to interplay and mediate issues of respect, toleration, justice, and the potential for a good life. In these views a liberal society has these features:

- Mutual respect between individuals
- Mutual respect between society and the individual

Thus, liberal philosophy encompasses notions of toleration and respect, a toleration of the rights of the individual, and the individual’s respect for the safety and freedom of society.

The idea of doing-unto-others has been synthesized into the slogan “The Golden Rule.” Mill postulates ‘the Golden Rule’ in a lengthier description of mutual obligations of like-minded deliberative citizens:

The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people. But if he refrains from molesting others in what concerns them, and merely acts according to his own

inclination and judgment in things which concern himself, the same reasons which show that opinion should be free prove also that he should be allowed, without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own cost (1956: 68).

Although despite the Golden Rule's place in maintaining peace and security for all, society limits the power of the individual through laws. Also power extends to established social custom taught in schools and enforced by the populous at large. On this Mill suggests empathetic respect by each individual regulates human conduct(1956:8). Society governs the actions of individuals. Social custom taught in larger state institutions put forward guiding principles of society that are assimilated and form the basis of daily life. If these institutions put forward contradictory truths and promulgate confusion and unrest, the changes in these institutions are warranted (1956: 115).

Mill describes a 'bad' social institution as one that promulgates the desires of the state. However, Rawls describes the relationship between the individual and society engendered by this system, 'social cooperation'. A third feature of political constructivism is use of a more complex conception of person and society to give form to its construction. "Political constructivism" Rawls writes, "views the person as belonging to political society understood as a fair system of social cooperation from one generation to the next (1996: 93)." To Rawls the person possesses two moral powers, a sense of justice and a conception of the good, both paired with the idea of social cooperation.

Rawls' rational view of the person and society as complementary tends to make a conception of the individual abstract and ambiguous according to Kymlicka. For instance Rawls writes "the principles of practical reason—both reasonable principles and rational principles—and the conceptions of society and person are complementary (1996: 107)." Therefore, according to Kymlicka individuals who have a clear identity and personality are able to think, infer, and judge the state. Therefore, we need to ask what must persons be like to engage in practical reason? In Kymlicka's view, they must be persons that have

the two moral powers of a sense of justice as well as a determinate conception of the good. To be reasonable and rational means that they can understand, apply and act from the two kinds of practical principles. Persons' conceptions of the good are assumed to be determinate. And in Kymlicka's view, unambiguously individuals express a scheme of final ends and attachments with a comprehensive doctrine or society's view of the good.

Rawls, in his turn, describes how society balances the rights of the individual and the rights of society. Individuals have their own understanding of justice as fairness, and according to Rawls this conception is constructed "using the principles of practical reason in union with political conceptions of society and person (1996: 109)." In this, the moral agent here is the free and equal citizen as a member of society. The free and equal citizen is then the regulative agency for right and good (1996: 109). As I see it, for Rawls toleration works only if an abstract individualism prevails.

According to Rawls the full participation of individuals in society is facilitated as a system of overlapping consensus. The relationship between the individual and society comes from the depth of this process (1996: 149). It is seen as a complementary relationship of dialogic engagement to find ends and a means of achieving the good life.

Kymlicka critiques Rawls' abstract individualism and skepticism about the good of his conception (1991: 13). In this, Kymlicka posits, abstract individualism takes human nature as a presocial system (1991: 14). Where does this abstract individualism come from? Social research challenges abstract individualism and says that essential human characteristics are dependent on social context and we have seen Kymlicka views this context as a cultural community. Kymlicka, citing Jaggard, states that social science research invalidates the liberal justification of the state that presupposes that individuals have certain fixed interests:

If we accept that individual's goals and interests are the products of various social processes and interactions like education and socialization,

rather than being given presocially, then the liberal concern for individual's freedom to opt in or out of these social interactions becomes misconceived. A concern for the freedom to opt in or out of these interactions only makes sense on the now disproved thesis that people's interests and goals exist prior to their life in society (1991: 14).

Kymlicka views individual self-examination as transcending any moral right to question our projects through interactions like 'education and socialization'. "We all question...the projects we have adopted," Kymlicka writes, "but we don't go outside society to do this, nor do we suppose we transcend any social conditioning in so doing. Nor do we need to exist outside of, or prior to, society for it to be morally important that we have the ability to question our chosen ends (1991: 15)." Therefore Kymlicka views abstract individualism as having nothing to offer for the moral argument for liberal politics. If liberals did have such a view of the self, then it would hinder the liberal programme. Kymlicka, in reference to Mill, says that the sort of political theory that separates the individual from society is of no help to the people in the formation of their own character and thus hinders progress and development of the individual and society.

An individual freely opts in or out of chosen ends as part of self-examination. To go from Kymlicka back to Mill, we see that socialization using education is viewed as contrary to the good in a liberal society. For example, in Mill's view, liberalism leaves a great deal of room for disagreement between all members of a society. National education should encourage the use of reason as Mill writes,

...the practical part of the political education of a free people, taking them out of the narrow circle of personal and family selfishness, and accustoming them to the comprehension of joint interests, the management of joint concerns—habituating them to act from public or semi-public

motives, and guide their conduct by aims which unite instead of isolating them from one another (1956: 134).

Mill's statement is important for the fact that he illustrates how society draws upon aspects within the individual in order to facilitate their indoctrination.

Kymlicka, on the other hand, seeks a fuller liberal view of the individual. This broad view is achieved by Kymlicka through an examination of Rawls' and Mill's concern for the social formation of our interests and its relevance to the defense of individual choice and civil liberties. Kymlicka writes that liberals need to expand the content of their concept of the individual. "Our concern is not only with promoting our current 'worldly interests'," Kymlicka claims, "but also with the way our 'affections and desires' are formed, with the way our character develops through social interaction (1991: 16)." Without considering the interaction between the individual and social interaction in Mill's view, one can only defend the rights of person and property, not the traditional liberal concern for civic freedoms, for a public sphere of free expression, and for a liberal education. "The same strong susceptibilities" claims Mill, "which make the personal impulses vivid and powerful are also the source from whence are generated the most passionate love of virtue and the sternest self-control." Society cultivates rather than regulates these interests (1956: 73).

Despite the contradictions in practices in theory Mill still presents a coherent and relevant argument for the conception of the individual perhaps to counteract the mind control exerted by the Church. Mill values the dialogical engagement of individuals. This aspect outlined in Mill's theory of social rights requires "the absolute social right of every individual that every other individual shall act in every respect exactly as he ought; that whosoever fails thereof in the smallest particular violates my social right and entitles me to demand from the legislature the removal of the grievance (1956: 109)." In this we see that society trumps individuality (1956: 74).

This discussion of the liberal political imagination focusing on Mill, Rawls, and Kymlicka that I have undertaken in this chapter brings forward a conception of the individual in liberal thought in a way that highlights the complex arguments concerning the individual, society, and the relationship between the two. This relationship contains complexities of the liberal imagination, which still permeates modern dialogue in political theory. Realistically this situation presents certain differences between theory and practice characterized by the nation-state requirement that comprehensive claims can only be made by Indigenous cultural communities rather than individuals. The liberal society of Canada says Indigenous people can make a claim as a collective but liberal theory, as we have seen, values individual choice. Until Indigenous people learn to pursue their choices, become tolerant, and mind their own business, they remain in the realm of “special status.” The liberal nation state then assumes authority to authenticate who is truly an individual.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed three liberal political conceptions of the individual to provide an inventory of perspectives of the individual in relation to the liberal nation state. I also reviewed social theory. The discussion of the theoretical perspectives encompassed in social theory evolved through the socialist critique of liberalism into *Critical Discourse*. However, this study seeks to illustrate the progression of the individual from individualization to de-individualization and back to re-individualization. In order to accomplish this examination of that progression, it was necessary to examine the role of the individual in society through seminal works of liberalism and the presumptive right to authenticate which individuals are fit for citizenship. My analytical framework focused on Mill, Rawls and Kymlicka. In doing so, their relevance to the modern perspective on individualism is illustrated and revealed further by modern socialist writers like Wallerstein and Hobsbawm--and later in this study as we shall see in

critical discourse writers like Bhabha, Mbembe and Parekh—who refer back to the liberals. Later on in Chapter 4 I assess the synthesis of various ideas that are the basis of Critical theory.

The examination of the liberal view sees like-minded individuals as the basis of society. The liberal view of the individual pursued three main themes. The individual has the right to choose their projects, the individual has the right for individual growth and development, and thus the individual and hence society has the potential for progress. The philosophical basis for individual rights within the liberal nation state extends to a right to be self-authenticating to pursue one's projects. But also deliberative individuals enter into a dialogue with like minded individuals to achieve a consensus about a conception of the good life. Ironically, this consensus suggests a criteria for authenticating fitness for citizenship. Deemed unfit under this criteria, individuals or entire communities achieve a "special status" while pursuing their fitness for citizenship, as an expression of liberal toleration.

This "special status" translates into nation state legislation like the Canadian "Indian Act" or even the United States' idea of the "domestic dependent nation." Thus, such things as membership, land rights, property rights, social development, and enfranchisement were decided by external agents. At the start of this chapter I suggested that there is a presumption by the nation state of the authority to authenticate identity. The authority derives from a consensus about what comprises a good. However, as it pertains to Indian people, a good Indian would be one who does not reside in the "special status" valley, but rises to fitness by casting aside the illiberal notions of basing a conception of the good life on master narratives like Sky Woman's story.

Let us go back to our teacher one last time and examine her life in terms of the illustrated findings. She faces varying definitions of her individualism. She is 'who she is as a Mohawk' under the criteria defined by Canada. If she stays within those guidelines she is an 'Indian'. She also has a band number and is part of the worker clan as a teacher

and she is a member of the Kahnawake community as a thing. Accordingly, she is a liberal individual in that she works and therefore receives all the benefits of a liberal society, tax-free.

Is she like that cow in the field who forgets what it wished to say and forgets its answer too? Is she dialogically engaged with herself? With others? With her reality? Is she participating in her present and future reality?

Though our conception of the good life is based on a parable there is no need to enter into long obfuscating intellectual exercises to describe what could be considered a good. The Sky World is a model. Everyone gets to eat. They are happy. It's an ideal life. How does one do that on earth? Most people spend their whole lives attempting to achieve some sort of ideal life. The ideal comes in many different forms. People have different ideas of what that means. For some, an ideal life means being economically rich, for others it means richness in love and happiness, and still others it might mean having fought for different causes and made a difference in the world. One could go on and on with the many different interpretations of what constitutes a good life based on the examples we see around us. The important point is that the choice remains ours as to how we want to envision this life we live and where we want to take it. It is up to each and every one of us to decide our own fate in life. If you want to be rich, work hard at it. If you want to be an environmentalist, work hard at it. If you want to be a great mother, work hard at it.

As the figurative bridge to the Sky World, Sky Woman brought many examples of teaching and learning about patience and understanding. She teaches us how to succeed and that failure is not the end but rather a point from which to learn. Her story tells us how to live in the world. How to be good and kind to one another.

As for "cow woman" based on the findings, she remains a bi-political individual hybrid with special status in the liberal nation state. In the next chapter I demonstrate the white-western-feminist framework that is used to seeing her as merely another oppressed

woman because she is native. Her life is authenticated by another. The destruction of her ancestor's matrilineal society was based on male Eurocentric perceptions of what constitutes a good life. Yet, her life is not one of oppression, as she has a beautiful home, two cars, and a dual income. Life is certainly not hard for this woman. There are many others in her community who live below the poverty level. Yet, external authenticators see her differently because the community that she lives in is mainly governed at the political level by men. Bluntly said, feminist words to her could go like this: "Doesn't she know she's descended from the famous Matrilineal Iroquois and has the right to demand her rights just like we do from our chauvinist men?" Feminists then carry the same authority to authenticate, in this sense, what is essentially feminine and therefore good.

## Chapter Three

### The Feminist-Indigenist Binary:

#### Arming the feminist canon with Iroquois womanism

##### Introduction

In *Cultivating Humanity* (1997), Martha Nussbaum goes to the very core of the liberal question of individuality espoused by liberal male philosophers. What is the liberal conception of the individual as it relates to their education in a modern liberal society? Nussbaum writes:

When we ask about the relationship of a liberal education to citizenship, we are asking a question with a long history in the Western philosophical tradition. We are drawing on Socrates' concept of the examined life,' on Aristotle's notions of reflective citizenship, and above all on Greek and Roman Stoic notions of an education that is 'liberal' in that it liberates the mind from the bondage of habit and custom, producing people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world (1997: 8).

In this sense then, an individual in the liberal philosophic and political tradition has the ability to question and participate in dialogue that engenders a liberated mind and enables them to function as a 'citizen of the world'. With this view in mind the discussion takes place.

Nussbaum sees three capacities essential to the cultivation of humanity she poses as criteria to become authentically individual. Firstly, there is a required capacity for critical self-examination of oneself and of one's traditions to live "the examined life (Nussbaum, 1997: 9)" in order that democracy can be enacted in a more reasonable and reflective way. Secondly, there is value in the capacity to see oneself as a citizen of the

world, have concern for others, and consider the reality of distant lives. Nussbaum suggests “Cultivating our humanity in a complex and interlocking world involves understanding the ways in which common needs and aims are differently realized in different circumstances (1997: 10).” Thirdly, a prerequisite is the ability to think what it is like to be in another’s shoes with full understanding of their situation through having a narrative imagination.

According to Nussbaum’s then, an individual in the liberal philosophic and political tradition has the ability to question and participate in dialogue that engenders a liberated mind and enables them to function as a ‘citizen of the world’. But even here world citizenship falls under the gaze of the authenticators like Nussbaum who list criteria for authentically ‘real cultures’ (1997: 127). With this view of authentication<sup>24</sup> in mind the discussion in this chapter takes place.

I outlined in Chapter 2 Mill’s theory of the individual with particular focus on the individual, society, and the individual in society to illustrate the basis from which other liberal conceptions of the individual stem. Similarly Nussbaum describes concepts that recur in liberal theory. The themes expressed by Mill that appear in Nussbaum also appear in other notable feminist works, as we shall see. However, throughout this discussion there is a consistent return to defining the individual. For instance, a modern liberal scholar such as Kymlicka mediates between individual and collective rights. Also Rawls’ conception of individuals in a just society elucidates how the liberal view changes and evolves to consider the notion of progress and personal development. The constant in this process is the assumption of authority to authenticate. In the end, I examined what modern liberal theorists say about the individual in order to understand the theory of the individual but also the practice of liberal nation-states with regard to individuals. In this

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<sup>24</sup> I use the term “authentication” with reference to the endorsement of an external conception of Indian identity that is found in the Indian Act and lacks legitimacy for the different Indigenous cultures and communities which have their own conception of what it means to be Indigenous.

chapter I shift the focus to what Kymlicka calls a cultural community—feminists and their views about Indigenous women.

Nussbaum provides a philosophical framework for the individual, and hence assumes an authority to authenticate the individual. This assumed authority seems at odds with her assertion that feminist argumentation “has depended on the ability to distinguish between a judgment that is truly objective and truly rational, and one that is tainted by bias and prejudice (1997: 197).” However, feminist writers examined in this chapter also use the process of authentication employed by Nussbaum. In the case of feminists this means authenticating what is genuinely feminine. Yet the dialogue is not to discover from Indigenous women the authentic Indigenous feminine, but to appropriate ‘truly objective and truly rational’ arguments to make their own value claims for a place in the non-Indigenous political economies. This chapter examines feminist writing on Indigenous women that demonstrates the assumed power to authenticate using the Iroquois feminine as ammunition to arm the feminist canon.

This chapter focuses on feminist views of Indigenous women and Iroquois women more specifically. I claim that misinterpretations in ethnography and anthropology remain in the historical record and taint subsequent research on Iroquois women (Mullin 1993). This misrepresentation is called by historian Barbara Mann, “euro-forming the data (2000: 62)” and hence is biased. Since the Iroquois are an aural-based culture, much of the accurate history has also been lost through the generations. Further, the trauma of colonization has led to incorrect and misleading representations ironically often taken as truth by the Iroquois themselves. Iroquois appropriation of largely inaccurate historical facts has resulted in an understanding and demonstration of culture by the people that is misguided and does not make sense at times. Clearly these irregularities have extended their roots throughout culture and language practices. As a result, ultimately the dominant society gets to authenticate identity knowledge. The dominant society’s historical facts and academic research dictate what Iroquois society is

to be about. Through anthropology the same process of authentication happened with other cultures in the world—one tool of colonization.

Iroquois peoples are one of the most studied Indigenous peoples in the world. Specifically, the distinctiveness of Iroquois women's place in social structure and democracy has been examined at length. As a result, an extensive literature exists in academic and religious institutions around the world on the Iroquois. Although now a recognized and contested field of study, interest and writing about the Iroquois was begun much earlier in the colonial record and continues to this day. Lewis Henry Morgan's writing on the Iroquois in the early 1800s was precursor to the science of Anthropology. A more modern example of this tradition can be seen in the Iroquoianist School that expanded Morgan's work through ethnographers like William Fenton in the 1950s.

The Iroquois people originally were a confederacy of five nations united in peace, mutual accountability, and protection. Comprised of the Kaniienkehaka (Mohawk), Oneida, Onondaga, Seneca, and Cayuga, the ancient Iroquois Confederacy was based on unity. The foundational principle of unity was reflected in societal structures and a democratic form of government. An extensive matrilineal clan and kinship system were the roots of a unified society where everyone had a voice in the affairs of the Confederacy. Through their involvement at the clan level, the individual woman had a voice in proceedings through the male chief and clan mother who voiced the united wishes of their people. As a result of this system of democracies, the Iroquois became one of the most powerful confederacies in North America with a territorial base that stretched from Highway 401, Ontario (west) to the Hudson River (east) and from Montreal, Quebec (north) to Corning, New York (south).

In order to understand the female Kaniienkehaka tradition as it was originally and how it came to be distorted, it is necessary to look at how the Iroquois male-female unity as described in Sky Woman's narrative was changed to an Iroquois male-female binary. I use binary to mean two separate elements in conflict whereas unity means the combining

or joining of separate things or entities to form one whole. These changes in the male-female unity began with the earliest records on international relations. Processes inherent in these interactions illustrate a conception of 'woman' that changed in service to the European colonial project. Further, aspects of traditional Iroquois society were still in evidence in the time when the women's suffragette movement was beginning. The Suffragette Movement found inspiration in the esteem Iroquois society had for its women (Landsmen, 1992). The subsequent influence on and by the feminist movement will also be explored to elicit an understanding of a changed Indigenous women's power movement. In this changed world, Iroquois women are writing back. There are many examples of poetry, fiction, narrative, storytelling that show strength of voice and commitment to the survival of Indigenous peoples. These women are taking the time to explore, rediscover, and explain their roots. If we look to what Indigenous women, and Kanienkehaka women more specifically are talking about, I illustrate that the subjects that Indigenous women speak of tell the story about the recovery of Indigenous women's traditions.

My central research assumption is that Indigenous women are victims of a process which authenticates what is Indigenous womanhood. Through meta-narratives about Iroquois society and culture, modern Kanienkehaka talk about misrepresentation, abuse, and destruction of their families and communities. This chapter examines the intellectual colonization of the female Indigenous (and more specifically Iroquois) tradition through the written exploration of contact narratives, links between Iroquois women and feminism, and insider knowledge.

### **From Unity to Binary**

I propose that the roots to change in Iroquois society into a man-woman gender binary began with the very first writings about Iroquois council proceedings which captured what Euro-American society understood about the role of women in Iroquois

diplomacy—which was very little. The male observers were not allowed into the women’s domain. As a result, their early writings contain biased understanding about Iroquois culture and practices. In addition, I suggest that colonization purposefully erased much of the original understanding of diplomatic practices from the memory of the Iroquois people because of the large role women played in this aspect of Iroquois culture. What has survived has been the written or drawn documentation of the events which we have to reinterpret from our own world view. In doing so, we see clearly, these writings and drawings tell a different history about the roles of women in Iroquois society.

The historical records of these events are written by men who had access only to men’s political and social spheres. What are missing are accounts of the women’s political and social spheres. Barbara Mann provides the clearest representation of the spheres of women in her illustration of gendered councils that existed at the time of contact. The root of women’s and men’s unity in the league had at its root a twinned identification with clan and nation. The league clan mothers met in gendered counterpart of the men’s grand council, which is widely described in the historical literature. The women’s council operated as the local level of government, balancing and replicating the federal level of government operated by the men. There was a gendered balance and complementarity that existed with the clan mothers’ council at Gaustauyea mirroring the men’s grand council at Onondaga, and vice versa (Mann 2000: 161).

Historian J.N.B Hewitt explored a reciprocal interaction between men and women that ordered the functioning of the Iroquois Confederacy and described sisterhoods whose lineages represented what he called ‘mother’ and ‘father’ sides of the League (Mann 2000: 161). The twinness of this process of identification has been obscured so much that now people only identify with their nation. In ancient times one identified with their clan first—their female identification. Mann suggests that women worked at the grassroots level to ensure the enactment of the people’s will, one of the founding principles of the league. The will of the united people welled up first from the villages and was known

first to the women sitting in their clan mothers' councils. They had the responsibility of passing the people's will along to the men's grand council. Broken down into their natural halves, both councils kept the principles of health and righteousness. Health indicated physical and mental well-being on the one hand and domestic peace on the other, whereas righteousness was the ethical behavior of counselors and also the social justice in carrying out the policies of the league. The clan mothers' councils comprised half of the league government (2000). This fact has been ignored in every secondary source produced on studies of the League.

The representation of Iroquois women is further eroded by writings about men's council proceedings. This fact can be seen through an exploration of the use of the term 'woman' as a metaphor to describe a relationship between two Indigenous nations. Contact narratives represent Iroquois women in a way that defines spheres of being that are destructive to the male-female unity of traditional and modern Iroquois society. The changed female tradition can also be seen in non-fiction contact narratives and fiction literature about exemplary Indigenous women like Pocahontas and Sacagawea and two Kanienkehaka women in particular, Molly Brant and Kateri Tekakwitha. Fictional accounts of these women exemplify how Indigenous women's identity is usurped by the colonial project to become feminized bodies of European male occupation and dominance (Bell 1994).

For example, historian Nancy Shoemaker in much of her work criticizes inaccurate gendered metaphors reported in early contact narratives on Eastern tribes involved in international diplomacy. Shoemaker points to the unique relationship established between the Iroquois and the Delaware to provide a clear example of the use of a gender metaphor in a way that assists in our understanding of views of Kanienkehaka women. The term 'woman' was used by the Iroquois to describe the position taken by the Delaware nation who had been decimated by war and disease (Shoemaker 1999, Mann 2000). The Delaware were given a protectorate status by the Confederacy in much the

same way that Iroquois women are physically placed in a protected position by their men during war time. However the term 'woman' was viewed an insult on the Delaware by European observers because the term 'woman' denoted a subservient and subordinate status to men. As a result, the written history around this event promotes a view of the Iroquois as a domineering and powerful people that oppressed the weaker nations they came into contact with.

Shoemaker along with other scholars also acknowledges the scholarly confusion around the use and interpretation of the label 'woman'.<sup>25</sup> There are a few contributing factors in this confusion. The first is that Iroquois speakers' words appear in the historical record only after being translated into English leaving a lot of room for misinterpretation of the term 'woman'. Second, 'woman' is understood in the context of the European understanding of women in European society. As a result, the term 'woman' is weighted with male domination and oppression characteristic of European society of the day. These factors are found throughout the historical record and subsequently their effects are imprinted onto Iroquois women. Iroquois women were perceived to be at the margins of the public sphere and had no voice in council. As in the case of the Delaware, their history has been misrepresented.

In this case the Delaware and Iroquois made creative use of gender complexity, acknowledging the multiple attributes of both men and women. Thus, women were to be respected for growing corn, minding private business, and advocating peace. On the other hand, Eurocentric ideas about women's sexuality—that men could dominate women sexually and that women's sexual behavior could be classified as lewd and improper—enabled the term to be used as leverage. Shoemaker supports the idea that the term 'woman' was used by the Iroquois in a derogatory way towards the Delaware but more importantly highlights the fact that speakers broke the category 'women' into its multiple

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<sup>25</sup> See also Jennings 1985 and Mann 2000.

parts to fit the situation (1999: 244). Thus the terms used to describe women in a particular activity reflect the complexity of their role. Shoemaker in her own right also acknowledges the fact that the academic debate over the Delaware-as-women debate suffers from the mistaken assumption that 'women' is a coherent group and that they have a limited role in Iroquois society. Shoemaker discusses the Iroquois scorn for the Delaware in their use of the term 'women' is in contradiction to the respected position women held in Iroquois society (1999: 244). The Delaware-as-women and gendered insults polarized men's and women's sexual and social differences into a binary. Men were warriors and 'women' was shorthand for military incapacity or fear.

Shoemaker also articulates the starting point for the boundaries being set around women's behavior. As stated earlier, the first historical documentation of Iroquois society is the starting point for the construction of the male-female binary. Shoemaker's argument supports this to a certain degree. The male speakers' words articulate the place of men and women in their society. The misrepresentation through translation caused new boundaries to be set between men and women and new meaning given to the role of 'women'. Shoemaker explores this issue in her discussion on women's involvement in land sales. Shoemaker writes that speeches of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century indicate that women had a voice in the selling of land. Shoemaker describes land sales sometimes were seen as fraudulent because women had not given consent. In turn, the defence of women's role in land sales has been documented as well. In the case of the Delaware leader Canassatego, he is said to have claimed that women could not sell land. Shoemaker surmises that in this instance perhaps the male speaker's wife or sisters took him aside to express their objections to adding new meaning to the category 'women'. As there is no documentation of women speaking in any council, there is no way of knowing the true female interpretation of the gender metaphors.

### **Further Distortions of Women's Identity**

As this review of gender metaphors shows there are many distortions of feminine identity. As well, the misuse of the kin metaphors such as 'elder brother' and 'younger brother' served in the plan for English imperialism. 'Elder brother' was redefined to describe the role of colonists as Indian agents between the Indians and the British Empire. Another factor is that census data, as a modern western knowledge phenomenon, contains biases in the results. One group's cultural and linguistic schema for organizing relationships might not translate accurately into accurate census data. Iroquois conceptions of 'mother', 'aunt', 'daughter', 'sister', 'niece', and 'cousin' do not translate into equivalent Euro-American concepts. Fictive kin relationships were also either not recognized or not recorded accurately. Blood or marriage relationships were more familiar and recognizable to census recorders. Men were also expected to be heads of households. Seasonal variation in household composition was not easily detectable to census takers since they took census at one point in time. All these factors leave census data incomplete and inaccurate and added to the Indigenous women's changed status.

Further interpretation of this data by ethnohistorians projects an inaccurate view of Iroquois women and their households as a binary to their dominant male counterparts. Ethnohistorians write in the context of their times. Writing on binary Iroquois culture in the 1950s and 1960s owed its depictions to structural-functionalism and modernization theory that was at the forefront of the anthropological imagination. The voices of Indigenous women are lost to the multiplicity of voices of academic theorizing. Thus, Indigenous women in contact narratives are reduced to the specific role—woman—they played in the society which they came from. Interpretation of the role—woman—is seen in a particular relationship to man, constructed by the observer. There are never any words by the women themselves that describe and give reason for their actions.

Pocahontas, Sacagawea, Molly Brant, and Kateri Tekakwitha are exemplars of Indigenous women whose story is told by colonizers. No personal narratives exist from

their lives. This fact has resulted in numerous contact narratives of their lives based in fact and fiction (see Earle 1996; and see Greer 2004). I look to these four women's stories to see how their written lives serve as metaphors for the colonial project. The colonial project comprises four stages—invasion, subordination, socialization and subjugation. I use the terms to denote the sequences for the loss of identity:

- *Invasion* as the colonizer takes over territory
- *Subordination* to authority
- *Socialization* to a dominant political hegemony
- *Subjugation* and total loss of identity<sup>26</sup>

This chapter illustrates how aspects of the narratives constructed around these women's lives encompass the four stages of intellectual colonization.

In the formative histories of nation-states in North America there is an important Indigenous woman in almost every encounter between Europeans and Indians (Valaskakis 2005:140). As we have seen, Iroquois women's roles were seen through the veil of European assumptions about Indigenous women's roles and motivations. Gail Valaskakis eloquently describes this process:

The long shadows of the Indian princess and her sister, the squaw, wind through Indian experience of this tenacious social structure and its cultural constructs. Braided together, these images of the primitive and the princess framed the voice of Indian women who later performed or spoke publicly about their Indian culture and living conditions (2005:140).

Homogenizing generalizations were made about all Indigenous women in narratives created about them. Sacagawea stands, pointing west, leading the Lewis and Clark *invasion*. Kateri Tekakwitha stands holding her cross, a potent symbol of the

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<sup>26</sup> The use of these four terms to illustrate the progressive loss of identity by Indigenous peoples comes from a workshop on unresolved historical grieving by Dr. Michael Doxtater using the movie *Forgotten Warriors* which looks at veterans of the first and second World Wars.

*subordination* of heathen peoples to the power of God. Molly Brant becomes the *socialized* consort of William Johnson, persuading five nations to remain loyal to Britain, thus affecting the outcome of the Revolutionary War. Lastly, Pocahontas continues to lay her life down to save John Smith and abandons her people for England to become *subjugated*. Out of these stories two stereotypes emerge about the native woman—that of woman as stolid drudge or squaw and the heroine. Women like Pocahontas, Sacagawea, Molly, and Kateri are heroines precisely because their actions ultimately benefited the advancement of North American society. Their roles in history are as cultural mediators between colonizer and colonized.

Sacagawea has been enshrined as the mythic heroine of westward *invasion* by the American nation (Valaskakis 2005, Bell 1994). Her story is about courage under duress. Her prowess as guide is portrayed as almost superhuman as she trudged along with the Lewis and Clark expedition carrying her baby on her back. As a woman of two worlds, Sacagawea's story is purely conjecture but clearly she is seen as a leader and cultural mediator. Valaskakis describes the role of Sacagawea as one of being a "passive extension of the land or obstacles to its development (2005: 125)." As one of two 'country wives' of a French Voyageur and purchased in barter Sacagawea knew certain landmarks and what to expect ahead, making travels easier for the expedition. To the Indigenous peoples the expedition encountered her presence as a woman on an expedition gave the sign that intentions were peaceful. Her presence also serves as a mediator or bridge between two worlds, so necessary for successful westward expansion.

Kateri's story epitomizes the narrative of the colonized savage made into the saintly figure *subordinate* to the power of the church (Greer 2004, 2004). Her story is the most documented of the four women discussed. Born into an Iroquois village in the Mohawk valley in 1656, she was a sickly and reclusive orphan who converted to Catholicism in her youth. She fled to the Jesuit mission of Sault St. Louis (Kahnawake) to avoid persecution by her fellow villagers for her changed beliefs. At her new home,

she joined a group of women who renounced sex and marriage to pursue a life of religious perfection. Penances such as fasting, self flagellation, sleep deprivation were taken to an extreme. Due to her extreme behavior, she died at the age of twenty-four. It was soon after that she became the object of a cult among native and French-Canadian Catholics. For Catholics, Kateri is an emblem of virtues.

While men negotiated treaties, traded, and waged war, Indian women lived with European men, translated for them, and bore their children in the process of becoming *socialized* to the dominant European political hegemony. Indigenous women gave their consorts a special entree into their communities. One exemplar of socialization is Molly Brant, who lived with and was consort to William Johnson the first superintendent of Indian Affairs in the British colonies. She also became head clan mother of the Iroquois confederacy. Molly's story is also largely absent from the historical record, perhaps because of the low status of women at the time. There are no pictures, papers, diaries from her life. She is mentioned only in passing in the historical record. Because of her role in Johnson's life and impact on colonial history, her absence is remarkable. Molly's role as consort or common law wife gave Johnson critical access to Iroquois communities, to the lucrative fur trade, and acquisition of land through her kin ties. She was a metaphorical bridge that Johnson needed between the colonialist world and the world of the Iroquois (Mullin 1993, Thomas 1996). Through Molly, Johnson gained access to many important political gatherings which allowed him comfortable movement to do his politicking among the Iroquois (Mullin 1993). Molly was also instrumental in convincing the five confederated nations to remain loyal to the British Crown, which shaped the outcome of the Revolutionary War and the formation of Canada and the United States.

Pocahontas is probably the most recognized of the four Indigenous women. Her story is the tale of colonization—her invasion, her subordination, her socialization, and her total *subjugation* are all found in the narratives written about her. As a result, she is

the Indian Princess of the American imagination (Kidwell 1994). Her story has been told in countless books and movies that appeal to the imagination of school-age children world-wide. Pocahontas serves as the ideal stereotype of the Indigenous woman as the “promiscuous female body, as fecund and wild and seductive as the land (Bell 1994:69).” This stereotype is encapsulated in the term ‘squaw’ used to describe Indigenous women. For Indigenous women, the use of the term ‘squaw’ is derogatory and humiliating. As Barbara Mann describes the term ‘squaw’ has to do with the Mohawk term ‘ohtiskwa’ for the female genitals (2000:20). As Bell points out, the native woman’s experience is “repressed and distorted, colonized by the settlers’ imagination and reduced to a silent and fixed image (1994:67).”

Through the ordeal of Pocahontas’ story we see that Indigenous women’s actions are cast in sexual terms. Indigenous women are victim to the *Pocahontasis* suffered by the dominant society. *Pocahontasis* is a term coined by Kanienkehaka professor Michael Doxtater which he describes as – “the process of elevating female members of another society while simultaneously attempting to degrade the same females; viewing women as virgin princesses and harlots concurrently; the admiration of North American Indigenous women when they are considered to accept the domination by European white men (Doxtater 2007).” In other words, more simply it says: I have the power to view you as a queen and a whore at the same time because you validated my power to do so. For example, women who gain position and power in the dominant society are benefiting from the effects of *Pocahontasis*. The dominant society’s perennial view of Indigenous women colors their ability to see each Indigenous woman as unique in her own right.

In summary, Sacagawea, Kateri, Molly, and Pocahontas exemplify the erosion of the Indigenous female tradition. Gender metaphors dominate Indigenous female identity. Kinship metaphors served in the plan for English imperialism to dis-empower Indigenous peoples as a whole. White European males needed to dis-empower the power holders of Indigenous society—Indigenous females. Women became subordinate, males became

dominant. My four exemplars demonstrate domination in four stages—invasion, subordination, socialization, and subjugation. Unity evokes singular power, binary denotes power imbalance, for example the dominant over subordinate, colonizers over colonized, and males over females. The feminist project seeks to balance power and over two hundred years white European feminists maintain the binary structures created by their male counterparts. The feminist movement has also participated in the intellectual colonization of Indigenous women as we shall see next.

### **Feminism Encounters Indigenous Women**

The relationship between Iroquois women and the first suffragettes is a story that speaks to a complementarity in existence in Iroquois society that changed when the gender precept inherent in feminist writing was imposed on Iroquois women. I suggest that the feminist movement continues to propagate the gender binary in its quest for equal rights for white women and white men. In doing so, the feminist movement has used the experience of Indigenous women both to serve as justification for their cause and for the development of the greater society. Meanwhile, Iroquois women have been left at the margins. Colonization of Iroquoia by Europeans and the feminist movement has left in its place the gender binary that continues to structure modern Iroquoian society on the surface. Using the work of Sally Roesch Wagner, I illustrate how the gender binary is inherent in the description of the influence of Iroquois women by early suffragettes and in her own interpretation of this encounter. The work of Gail Landsman illustrates an alternative view of Iroquois women and how they were used by the suffragettes. Landsman's work documents the rise of women's rights with the suffragette cause and at the same time the fall of Iroquois unity in society. Lastly, we shall see that feminism has begun to question the use of the gender precept in its encounter with the voices of women of color. As a result, ideas on the male-female binary are changing. But what has that done for Iroquois society? In the wake of colonization, Iroquois society continues to

struggle with the male-female binary shaped by early colonial writing and furthered by the feminist lens.

### **Early Encounters by Suffragettes**

Early feminist discourse shapes more modern views of Iroquois women. In the development of the early feminist movement, the Iroquois woman went from being exemplars of 'prototypical feminists' (Wagner 2004:268). Through the matriarchy witnessed by early suffragettes the Indigenous woman became justification for the expediency debate where she became a shining example of the advantages that would accrue to society if woman were given the vote. Even though Indigenous women are considered the proto-typical females, Indigenous women were also considered an experimental model that could be improved upon. Indian culture was presented both as an alternative to and as a justification for American society (Landsman 1992:257). Both authentic Iroquois culture and matriarchy was viewed by suffragettes and society alike, as thing of the past. What was to be hoped for was not that American culture would adopt Iroquois principles, but rather Indian women would adopt the positive values of American culture and pass them on. Iroquois women's lives on reservations lent themselves to essentialist arguments for suffrage that were consistent with and served the purposes of assimilationist government policies and white middle-class values (Landsman 1992:269). With the development of the expediency debate, Indianness had become a liability to be overcome through the help of women. The turning of Sacagawea and Pocahontas into heroines of colonization also served in this expediency process. Landsman writes that both women's stories are versions of Rayna Green's notion of the Pocahontas Perplex. Landsman quotes Green:

Both the Indian woman's nobility as a Princess and her savagery as a Squaw are defined in terms of her relationships with male figures...If she wishes to be called Princess, she must save or give aide to white men. In

doing so, the Indian woman specifically has to violate the wishes and customs of her own 'barbarous' people to make good the rescue (1992:271).

Sacagawea's endurance and courage was compared to qualities necessary for suffragists in their own expedition to lead men over the "pass of injustice (1992:273)." Once again we see how the images of Indian women were used to perpetuate the colonial project. Sacagawea and Pocahontas were exemplified by suffragists as the prototypical feminists and their strengths were viewed in relation to that of males.

As I discuss later, the binary is further maintained by many theorists of the modern feminist movement. This binary can be seen in the continued use of the term 'rights' to describe the matriarchy rather than as 'a way of life' (Wagner 2004:282). For example, Sally Roesch Wagner specifically documents the influence of Iroquois women on the early suffrage movement. Wagner's research illustrates the binary inherent in the interpretation of the Iroquois matriarchy.

Iroquois women were valued by suffragettes for the esteem they engendered in their Indigenous society. Once again though, we see a process of intellectual colonization occurring where the Iroquois women's position was distorted through the lens of the colonizer. As a result, a strong, proud Kanienkehaka woman is viewed as the ultimate feminist.

Sally Roesch Wagner makes the connection between early suffragettes and Iroquois women. Wagner, in her work *The Untold Story of The Iroquois Influence on Early Feminists*, asks what made early feminists think that human harmony based on the perfect equality of all people, with women absolute sovereigns of their lives, was an achievable goal. Where did these women look for inspiration? Wagner sees Iroquois woman as the *prototypical feminist*:

My own unconscious white supremacy had kept me from recognizing what these prototypical feminists kept insisting in their writings: They caught a glimpse of the possibility of freedom because they knew women who lived liberated lives, women who had always possessed rights beyond their wildest imagination—Iroquois women (1996:1).

Wagner acknowledges her own biases as a white historian as the lens through which she was looking at Iroquois women. Wagner refers to Iroquois women's empowerment as rights, whereas for Iroquois women 'rights' have very little meaning. For Iroquois women, it is simply a way of life.

For the suffragettes, Wagner wrote, women's rights were a lived reality in Iroquoia. It was not until she removed that lens and looked through the lens of an Indigenous woman, she saw clearly. It was Choctaw woman Paula Gunn Allen who pointed out the obvious to Wagner. Wagner cites Allen:

When we search the memories and lore of tribal peoples, we might be able to see what eons and all kinds of institutions have conspired to hide from our eyes" wrote Gunn Allen, "The evidence is all around us. It remains for us to discover what it means (1996: 4).

Wagner realizes that suffragettes such as Matilda Joslyn Gage (1826-1898), Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), and Lecretia Mott (1793-1880) had looked to tribal peoples for inspiration. Wagner acknowledges that the people of the world have not always created social, economic and religious systems of unequal power. "Knowing the peace and harmony are achievable because others have achieved them", Wagner writes, "we can continue the work to make them a reality in our country...and this transformation cannot take place without the major participation of women (2004:283)." This unequal power needs to be balanced.

Gage, Stanton, and Mott realized the extent of their oppression in contrast to the Iroquois women living esteemed lives nearby and found the inspiration to act. The three women were witness to examples of what Wagner calls “everyday decency (1996:2).” Iroquois society pointed to a way of conducting relationships, a way of governance, and a way of subsistence that was radically different from that found in colonial society. As a result of what they witnessed, suffragettes worked towards changing state laws concerning how a husband could treat his wife, gaining the vote for women, and changing perceptions of the women’s social and familial roles. Wagner also examines the writing of Iroquois men such as J.N.B. Hewitt and A.C. Parker who supported the feminist viewpoint in their expression of the exemplary role of women in Iroquois society in contrast to women of western society.

As noted, Landsman describes Sacagawea and Pocahontas as heroines of and tools for the expediency process in early feminism. The Pocahontas Perplex is what characterizes these two women’s roles in suffragist history. Similarly, Wagner describes Iroquois women as prototypical feminists. Landsman and Wagner write that Sacagawea, Pocahontas, and Iroquois women exemplify women of the suffragist project. Iroquois women’s lives served as the basis on which the suffragists built their own interpretations of how men and women should live in society. As I discuss next, the feminist project has taken up the gender conflict in a way that propagates the ongoing male-female binary.

### **The Gender Precept in Feminism**

In my discussion of feminist writing, my intent is to describe tensions in feminist theorizing about the ‘other’. As I noted earlier Europeans wrote about Iroquois diplomacy in a way that initiated a male-female binary through “euro-formed” interpretations of Iroquois life. Early suffragettes carried on the tradition as seen in my discussion of Wagner and Landsman. However, the foundations for this binary stance still exist in the feminist debate over women being *equal* but *different*.

There are two movements inherent in feminist theorizing. Firstly, simply put, feminists say we are all equal. Secondly, feminists say that women are different from men and equal and deserve greater rights in order to achieve equality. Tensions exist between the two contesting positions is described in feminist activism as ‘a debate over difference’. The tension appears as an opposition between two positions—one based on women’s right to equal power and the other based on professed unique differences tied to women’s role in reproduction or their role for nurturance (Landsman 1992:253). Feminist scholars have begun to question the dichotomous framing of *equality* and *difference*, pointing to how it postulates a homogenization of women in terms of their difference to men (see Cunningham 2006; de Ishtar 2005; Fur 2002; Goldenberg 2007; Guerrero 2003; Landsman 1992; Miheuah 2000; Schaffer and Xianlin 2007; Smith 2005; and Udel 2001). Feminist scholarship is criticized because the opposition of equality and difference ignores difference among women and perpetuates the male standard referent against which women are different (see Miheuah 1996 and 2000; Smith 2005; Guerrero 2003; Archuleta 2006; Cunningham 2006; Goldenberg 2007; Schaffer and Xianlin 2007; and Udel 2001). It is not gender equality but something else that Indigenous women struggle for. The gender precept and its impact on women of color, more specifically on Indigenous women, illustrate that as a factor in feminist theorizing gender binaries describe power in a way that has no place in representations of Kanienkehaka women.

Put simply, feminist theorizing expresses equality between the sexes in terms of power differentials and equal access to resources and rights. Exploring all the feminist literature is not necessary or useful for this discussion on representations of Indigenous women for the very fact that most Indigenous women don’t identify with feminists. What is at issue in this view is the fact that Indigenous women’s struggles are often included in the feminist cause without consent. The struggles faced by Kanienkehaka women are not the same as in the dominant society, they are not fighting for gender equality. In fact,

women of color criticize the use of 'gender' as a concept that perpetuates Western notions of identity and hierarchy.

The western feminist and Indigenous women's views find no point of convergence when the term gender is discussed. Gunlog Fur illustrates that the gender concept orders non-Western cultures and obscures other cultures' social and regional categories while intending to make women visible (2002:79). Fur describes the West as a gender-saturated society where biological sex is used to define social responsibilities (2002:91). Fur argues that the root of the gender concept stems from the immanence associated with characteristics and behaviors attached to an existential identity. Through the words of anthropologist Igor Kopytoff, Fur says that individuals do what they do as a consequence of who they are. This means that gender and sexual identities are intrinsically tied to notions of individual identities, as when women are thought to be nurturing, peace loving, and capable of doing several things at once simply because they are female (2002:78).

The gender precept has been imposed on non-western cultures through writing about the culture and history of the *other* and is viewed as another form of colonization. In an attempt to escape from the early biologism of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century where physiologists viewed femaleness as an inherent quality of the female body and argued from biological assumptions about the proper roles and responsibilities of women, feminist discourse has since attempted to separate the sexes in order to strengthen women from the standpoint that your sex does not define your place in society. Feminist discourse argues from the lofty position where gender is understood in terms of ideological concepts concerning social categories of maleness and femaleness while sex refers to ideological and physical actualities of the body.

As we have seen, Indigenous history has been constructed by mostly male outside observers. As a consequence the voice and perspectives of women have been minimized or lost and as a result the true nature of the interrelatedness of the Iroquois male and female unity is missing from the historical record. Fur and others (see Goldenberg 2007)

challenge ethnohistorians to question the concept of gender within specific cultural contexts in order to make the concept a useful tool for analysis. For example if we expand the concept ‘woman’ to include the study of other societies and their social categories and the foundations upon which they rest shed light on other ways of organizing the world we live in. Males and females are not always to be viewed in opposition. There are other ways of organizing society as we have seen in the description of the Kanienkehaka term *Iakonkwe honwe neha*.

In the Iroquois example, male and female interrelated dichotomies were separated, demarcated, and relegated to their own corners. Governance, philosophy, politics, and power relations between men and newcomers was the focus of historical writings on the Iroquois. As a result, Iroquois women have lost a sense of themselves and can no longer teach their children about who they are. Assimilation has also been facilitated and perpetuated through residential schools and eugenics. As a result the complementarity of the women’s role and the power of women in traditional politics and culture is destroyed to a large degree. In an attempt to regain a sense of themselves and their proper roles and responsibilities to their children, families, communities and nation they need to ask themselves—How did we do things? What is our own interpretation of our own history? What information do we get when we read between the lines of the white male historians? Fur asks these same questions when she suggests that when reading Indigenous histories we need to continually question what did women do when men made history? Taking it one step further, we need to continually ask what is the significance of the men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities for the whole of the community? Answering these kinds of questions as we reinterpret history would lead to a more holistic understanding of Indigenous society and elicit another perspective on social ordering that moves away from the male-female binary.

The organization of Indigenous societies into a male-female binary obliterates the real struggle occurring in the decolonial era<sup>27</sup> where Indigenous women are fighting for their very survival and the survival of future generations. This fight is not a fight for mere equality between the sexes. It is a struggle that involves whole communities of men and women, young and old. Indigenous women find that their agenda has been unfairly subsumed under the feminist cause as non-Indigenous women have interpreted Indigenous society as unequal. Therefore Indigenous women who find the strength to fight back against the effects of colonialism are automatically classified feminist and it is expected that their struggle forms part of the larger struggle for women's emancipation from patriarchy. Indigenous women's forced participation in white western feminism through this misinterpretation is another form of intellectual colonization.

Through an awareness of their expected differences and inequalities, Indigenous women are involved in a struggle that has never been their own. Joan Scott posits that gender means knowledge about sexual difference. With realization of difference, human beings order and organize concepts concerning human sexual variation in ways that speak to political contest which establishes and maintains relationships of power (Fur 2002:page 80).

It is necessary to study what is excluded or unseen as much as what is clearly present. Fur proposes that the study of gender should not be limited to the study of roles and responsibilities coded strictly as masculine or feminine. Further insight is gained when we attempt to find out what others think about biology and social roles and juxtapose that knowledge to what they do in their lives, and how they use their own gendered metaphors to explain aspects of social interaction. There are other ways of understanding gender classification which can be identified, as Fur writes “as continuous

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<sup>27</sup> The term ‘decolonial era’ is a term used by Dr. Michael Doxtater verbally to describe the current period in which Indigenous peoples find themselves. We are no longer colonized but not yet in the post colonial era, as a result we are in the decolonial era.

categories throughout long periods of time that may be linked to metaphysical explanations and recognized everyday practices (Fur 2002: 81).” The production of this knowledge is seen in written sources, and that which is not explicit but present in negations or repression. In this regard, Fur asks—Was gender a significant category within a given society, if so what did it stand for and express? How did gender function in the cultural encounter, and how and why did perceptions and practices alter in the process? Fur points to Will Roscoe, who posits working out a gender ideology to structure gender, sex, and sexuality in a formula that forms a multidimensional model of gender and sexual difference. Clusters of characteristics include expected behaviors, ideological concepts, actual activities, and social responsibilities in specific historical settings.

A source of information about Indigenous societies can be found in deconstructing the misconceptions found in the constructions of history by non-native historians and anthropologists. Fur calls this deconstruction a gendered analysis, which she describes as a multifaceted approach that accounts for words and translations, individual spiritual experiences and capacities, age-related responsibilities, common legacies of stories, myths, and accounts of creation and ideas concerning proper roles of the sexes and sexuality, about what human beings actually do (Fur 2002:97).” If we listen carefully, revealed is a whole new universe of information contained in well-known sources. Where the term *gender* is useful is as an analytical tool. As Fur writes, “The material left behind by the European side of the encounter is particularly rich in information concerning gendered understandings and metaphors in Native societies (as well as in various European cultures) and signals both pervading Native uses of gendered divisions and profound European discomfort at gender practices that differed from those acceptable to “civilized society” (Fur 2002:83).” The concept of *gender* thus can be used as a notion with which conceptions of roles in other societies are juxtaposed to elicit a whole new understanding. For example, the appearance of a woman in a particular

historical text illustrates to Fur the importance of paying attention to gender in the highly male world of diplomacy in order to make sense of things (Fur, 2002: 82). In contrast, historical texts concerning diplomacy between Indigenous peoples and the newcomers focus on the male participants. The woman's rare presence in the text was a sign of an internal political conflict concerning authority over land alienations, an authority with both gender and kin association. Her presence brought to light a deeper understanding of what was going to happen in the encounter and served to elicit a better understanding of Indigenous/newcomer diplomacy.

In conclusion, we see that contact narratives view a binary inherent in the male-female relationship in Iroquoia, but interpret it in terms of power differentials. The experience of Iroquois women was used by feminism as justification for their cause and the development of greater society. The gender precept continues even as it is questioned. Feminist debate postulates a homogenization of women in terms of their difference to men but also their equality to men. There are alternative ways to look at other meanings of gender in relation to other society's understandings of biology and social roles. This will be explored next as we see how Kanienkehaka women write back.

### **Indigenous Women Speak Back**

As we have seen, Iroquois and Indigenous women are disempowered by the misrepresentation and negation of their roles in the colonial narrative. It was the early white feminists who 'rediscovered' the true power of Indigenous and Iroquois women specifically and were inspired to get out from under patriarchy to find their own voice and roles. The feminist movement has used Iroquois women in the process of its development, resulting in a series of narratives written about the Iroquois influence on the roots of the feminist movement and the feminist movements' influence on the Iroquois. In doing so, the movement has taken it upon itself to emancipate Indigenous women from what they perceive is an unequal society. As a result, the struggle faced by Indigenous

women has been subsumed and understood in terms of a male-female binary which obliterates the real struggles occurring in the decolonial era where Indigenous women are fighting for their very survival and the survival of future generations.

It is inaccurate to label Indigenous women as feminist. What is more accurate is to look at the roots of ambivalence expressed by many Indigenous women towards the feminist movement. While Indigenous women don't deny that they have suffered at the hands of their own men and that of non-native men, they see the causes of Indigenous men's behavior and feel love and pity instead of anger. Many Indigenous men continue to cling to patriarchal privilege engendered by colonization. What else can they do after colonization took everything meaningful away from them? What Indigenous women see is the absolute power of the dominant political hegemony over the lives of all Indigenous peoples—men, women, and children alike.

When we look to what Indigenous and Iroquois women are writing, acting, and singing about, varied themes emerge. One theme is the effort to *heal unresolved historical grief*. Unresolved historical grief is an affliction identified by Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart in answer to the effects of trauma like the residential schools on Indigenous children which describes how descendants continue to experience the suffering of their ancestors. The second theme is *decolonization* of the mind, of history, and of identity. This can be seen through work being done on decolonizing Indigenous methodologies in academia, the recovery of Indigenous feminine traditions, and the attempts being made to define membership in Indigenous communities on their own terms, to name a few. The third theme is *healing* as seen in the attempts to recreate unity of Indigenous society rather than perpetuate the conflict engendered by feminism. The modern relationship between Indigenous women and feminism is one that says—'Don't tell us who we are or why we are. We'll do that.' These three themes demonstrate the contrasting vision of Indigenous women with mainstream feminists.

## **Healing Unresolved Historical Grief**

The process of colonization—invasion, subordination, socialization, and subjugation has left in its wake a breakdown of individuals, families, and whole communities. Rather than blaming men for their lot in life, Indigenous women see their fight as a struggle to regain a sense of themselves as Indigenous peoples. Healing unresolved historical grief is being undertaken by Indigenous women through various processes. Various themes emerge that illustrate how Indigenous women view themselves, themselves in relation to others, and themselves in relation to the society around them. These aspects will be discussed.

The struggle to heal is characterized by Yellow Horse Brave Heart as coping with change as a four step process I describe as forming, storming, norming, and performing. Whereas forming entails confronting oppression head on and can be seen as the first step to finding peace. The second step, storming, entails everyone coming together in dialogical engagement with one another in recognition of their joint struggle. The third step is norming, which entails acknowledgement of each others' voice and perspectives and finding common ground on which to plant a tree of peace. With the fourth step, performing, the real healing begins with everyone joining hands in a common struggle for humanity.

Indigenous women, more particularly Iroquois women, are in the storming stage in the healing process. Norming and performing are not in the foreseeable future until the dominant political hegemony relinquishes its hold on Indigenous communities. A second reason comes from the influence of the male-female binary perpetuated by the feminist movement. Indigenous women generally consider government and colonialism, not male-female relationships as the major obstacles to equality. As a result, Indigenous women's attitudes towards mainstream feminism vary—some see acceptance for their issues whereas some see tension in the negation of their perspectives. What is consistent is that Indigenous women are speaking back to colonization. Writer Emma LaRocque describes

how Indigenous women deal with the pain of colonization from a place of integrity, from a place of authenticity, and from a politically conscious place (Grant 1994:50). As LaRocque writes, “you cannot be liberated unless you have articulated what the pain was about (Grant 1994:50).” Indigenous women’s voices bridge the gap between what once was and what now is the reality, with honesty, integrity, and true grit. Confronting oppression is the first step to healing.

At this stage in the healing process, various themes emerge from the insider narratives of Indigenous women. Indigenous Women are talking about a sense of vulnerability, fear of violence, suffering, loss of innocence, sexism, hypocrisy, personal foibles, sexuality, and betrayal to name a few (see Anderson 2000; Archuleta 2007; Brant 1997; Cunningham 2006; Goodleaf 1995; Gunn Allen 1986; Mann 2006; Maracle 1996; Niro 1992; Kane and Maracle 1989; Rickard 1999; and Smith 2005). Women voice their concerns through different methods such as active protest, writing, and art, to name a few. In doing so, Indigenous women have entered the decolonization process head on.

Illustrated is a four step process of active decolonization. Indigenous women’s voices emerge and describe their position in the healing and recovery process. Insider narratives describe the effects of colonization and suggest alternative strategies. These strategies will be discussed next.

### **Decolonizing Methodologies**

As Indigenous women head into the decolonial era, an active process of decolonization of the mind, of history, and of communities is underway (see Mohawk 2003; Doxtater 1996; Doxtater 2001). Nowhere else is this process more evident than in Indigenous women’s insider narratives which communicate—through writing, art, and protest—an active engagement with the effects of colonization. There is an assumption that Indigenous women and feminist issues remain under-theorized. Indigenous women have always theorized their lives differently, not relying solely on western tools,

worldviews, or epistemologies as methods of interpretation (Archuleta 2006:88; and see Doxtater 2001). As such, Indigenous women take an active role in the reconstruction of history, the reinterpretation of myth, the revitalization of languages, and in the sharing of knowledge about formerly taboo subjects such as birthing and healing practices.

Indigenous women's involvement in the decolonizing process will be explored through a brief discussion on the indigenization of feminist practice, the reinterpretation of creation narratives, and the speaking about formerly taboo subjects. What this is all doing is serving to recreate the unity weakened through colonization.

Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith's seminal work titled *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) set the pace for the indigenization of the academy. Put simply, Smith's work advocates for the use of Indigenous theory and method in research and writing. As such, stemming from our discussion on the use of the gender precept, I propose that Iroquois women's actions need to be described in terms that spring from Iroquois women's own theory and practice. As discussed earlier, the concept 'gender' imposes western notions and orders non-western cultures. The concept structures other societies' struggles for emancipation and independence under the rubric 'feminism'.

Feminist discourse fails to take into consideration non-Western notions of roles and responsibilities of men and women that don't fit the western paradigm. Gunlog Fur, as we saw earlier, challenged us to rethink how we view social categorization. There are other cultures that do not delineate between men and women, such as the Kanienkehaka. In the Kanienkehaka language, Kanienkeha, there is no word for feminism. One has to be made up—*Iakonkwe honwe neha* means the-real-she-human-being-way. There really is no Kanienkeha word to describe the concept, feminism. Rather, the word describes a state of being, 'she is in the human being way'. To the Iroquois ear, the word *Iakonkwe honwe neha* is familiar as it speaks to each individual's responsibility to achieve humanity. As we saw earlier, feminism suggests that the man-woman binary is a power relationship. If a Kanienkeha speaker were asked to describe 'feminism', the concept would not be

viewed in terms of a woman's rights or access to power. Kaniienkehaka language speaks to a different world view where the female aspect or mother role is a central theme. Gender as it is used in feminism describes a particular relationship of tension between men and women. The problem with trying to define the concept 'feminism' in Kaniienkeha is that the language cannot transmit this same tension into any equivalent definition. Further, the Kaniienkeha linguistic aspect has a feminine gender default. Thus, it is difficult to define the concept of feminism in Kaniienkeha.

In Indigenous and specifically Iroquois tradition, women's lives carry the meaning of the human cycle of life, death, and rebirth (Kane and Maracle 1989; Mann 2000); this is called mother culture. Life is described as an ongoing process that has been forced by Christianity into a linear paradigm of sin, guilt, death, and rebirth (Kidwell 1994:149). Legends and myths, often a wealth of cultural information, give insight into the lives of women. Stories collected by ethnologists don't focus on the female aspect—it is unlikely that any collector would have been trusted with female esoteric stories. Those collected dictate a certain prudery and very little understanding of Indigenous women's perspectives. If told by women, these stories would have intrinsic differences.

Indigenous women are in the process of reclaiming their stories (see Emberley 1993, 1996; and see Grant 1994). The euro-forming of stories has been turned on its head and now the data is being indigenized. This process gives particular insight into pre-contact social structures. Through the women's retelling of stories, we see that patriarchy is not a natural phenomenon but a social construct that challenged Indigenous women's roles. For example, in the Sky Woman's narrative it was a woman who came first. Iroquois tradition describes the first human as a woman who fell from the Sky World. This first woman who came to land on the turtle's back or Mother Earth, carried a female child who later gave birth to two male twins. It is through this process of life, death, and rebirth that the story of the Earth's creation is told. Women's role is central in the telling. As Osenontion, a Kaniienkehaka woman describes, there is belief in the story. Not other

explanations, great analysis', or scientific substantiation are needed because the Iroquois people believe in the story. That is enough. As Osenntion states "we know it to be the truth, and so if someone believes otherwise, then let that one prove to us that it is not the truth (Kane and Maracle 1986:8)." Her statement is in clear challenge to those who discount Indigenous origin stories as pure fiction and calls attention to the women's perspective of the world.

Indigenous women's gatherings are a time for sharing stories. This story-telling process is transmitted to the wider setting when Indigenous women write or act out their personal narratives. Narrative themes emerge that speak to traditional women's practices that were obscured through the colonization process—birthing, healing, medicines, and the interrelatedness of women to men are some of the themes that Indigenous women communicate. Part of this narrative process evokes the reclamation of terms such as 'squaw'. For example, Kanienkehaka midwife Katsi Cook writes:

being called a squaw is like being called a cunt. However, *otsiskwah* is an excellent and empowering word to describe the clear, abundant, thready mucus the cervix produces when a woman is fertile! So when I teach the young Indian women about their bodies, I always tell them about this. Instead of using the German term *spinnbarkeit* for this characteristic of mid-cycle ovulation, let's call it *otsiskwah* (1997:44-45).

Cook, like other Indigenous women such as Beth Brant write about the role of Indigenous women in the birthing process. Brant, who wrote about the birth of her stillborn grandson with humility, love, and respect, describes her reasons for writing:

I want to bring lasting beauty to this world we inhabit. I want to justify my father's pride in me. I want to tell that I don't write as an 'individual,' but as a member of many communities—Indian, working class, gay and

lesbian, feminist, recovering, human, mammal, living entity among other living entities. I write for my People and because of my People (1997:353).

There are many other Indigenous women like Cook and Brant who also communicate women's involvement in ceremony, healing, and medicines in a way that brings the Indigenous female tradition back to life (see Horn-Miller 2002 and 2005; Mann 2000; Anderson 2000; Deer 2005; Doxtater 1996; Gunn Allen 1986; Valaskakis 2005; Kidwell 1994; Maracle 1996; Martin-Hill 2003; Niro 1992; and Kane and Maracle 1989).

As we have seen, Indigenous women are actively engaged with the effects of colonization. Insider narratives by Indigenous women communicate in writing, drama, song, and active protest their involvement with the reconstruction of history, the reinterpretation of myth, the revitalization of languages, and in the sharing of knowledge about formerly taboo subjects like birthing and traditional medicines. The effect of Indigenous women's active engagement with the various issues is the reunification of themselves, their families, and of their communities. This is what will be explored next.

### **Recreating The Unity**

As we have seen, the unity inherent in traditional Iroquoian society was impacted by colonialism. The complementarity of the roles of men and women is illustrated in traditional kinship terminology which groups the father's sisters and their female offspring through all generations together under the term aunts, creating a collectivity of female relations. Iroquoian language emphasizes the female line of relatives and the special obligations and respect for women. For example the Kaniienkeha word for 'my relations' used in a gesture of acknowledgement and respect for all, is *akonkwetohn*. The word broken down, ak-konkwe-tohn, contains the feminine aspect in 'konkwe'. What people say to each other has real and immediate impact on the way they treat each other. Kinship terms set up certain expectations of mutual obligation and responsibility and are an integral part of the structure of behavior of a society. Changing language patterns

reflect profound changes in traditional society. Through the impact of colonization, kinship terminology shifted from a matrilineal system to a patrilineal one with the use of last names as a marker of family ties rather than identification with a clan as a marker of kinship affiliation. Change in the collective family terminology also marks a change in family relationships.

The unity of traditional Iroquoian society is also seen in origin narratives that also emphasizes the importance of the female tradition. Indigenous women's narratives illustrate the efforts being made to make Indigenous societies whole again. Efforts lie in good parenting and nurturing of children in order that they may become good parents to their children. This is represented in women's efforts at relearning traditional language and communicating culture through curriculum materials for use in schools. This is also represented in teaching traditional arts and crafts to young people, storytelling, and teaching of ceremonies. Indigenous women are participating through different media in the effort to make their societies whole again (see Deer 2005; Mann 2000; Maracle 1996; and Niro 1992). Another aspect of making the community whole again is found in Indigenous women's efforts to address feminism's complicity in the colonial project.

As we have seen, differences arise between mainstream feminists and Indigenous women that centre on the root causes of oppression and particularly racism. Indigenous women's ambivalence to feminism stems from three things—the appropriation of other peoples' words, the analysis of these words from another culture's paradigm, and the ignorance of the intent of the original speaker. This same three-fold process occurs today in the dominant feminist paradigm that is based on an unacknowledged model of centre and periphery (Cunningham 2006:56). Indigenous women are expected to accept the dominant picture of what constitutes women's oppression and women's liberation. What is problematic is that the picture is only a partial match with the experiences of many Indigenous women. And what does not match is marginalized or denied, as we explored

earlier through the work of Gunlog Fur. Patricia Monture faces the exclusionary nature of feminism head on when she writes:

I am not you (read that as 'I am not white'). This allows that I may only define my existence in a negative way, as measured against the norm (yours and white). There is no place within the women's movement for a First Nations woman to focus on 'I AM ME.' (1993:335).

According to Nicaraguan, Myra Cunningham, three elements of the Indigenous women's experience form what she calls an organic whole—human rights, women's rights, and the rights of all Indigenous peoples (2006:56). Thus Cunningham also criticizes the feminist movement for its homogenization which sometimes recreates the same frameworks of discrimination and cultural degradation through which national governments exploit Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous women (2006: 56). Clearly, 'I am me' means by consequence 'I am not you'.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter I set out to show that western experts authenticate Indigenous culture as a man-woman binary. By contrast, I demonstrate that Indigenous women reject the binary and say that unity is at the root of Indigenous society. My inquiry examined three sources:

- Contact narratives, which distorted the male-female unity of Iroquois society in service to the colonial project.
- The relationship between Iroquois women and the early suffragettes demonstrates how feminism took up the reins of destruction and continues to perpetuate the gender binary.
- Insider narratives of Indigenous women illustrate the efforts being made by Indigenous women to recreate the unity.

Conflicting interests still exist though dialogue does not. Clearly, I demonstrate that the feminist-indigenist binary continues to be expressed as the authentic structure of Iroquois society.

Through narratives constructed around the lives of four women, we see how contact narratives established the gender binary—Sacagawea, Pocahontas, Molly, and Kateri lost their identities through the process of intellectual colonization. The invasion, subordination, socialization, and subjugation of Indigenous people created unnecessary conflict between men and women. Through the examination of the work of Sally Roesch Wagner and Gail Landsman, I demonstrated that the feminist gender precept continues to perpetuate conflict between the sexes. Finally, through my review of insider narratives, I pose that many Indigenous women refuse to be homogenized and marginalized.

I have shown how Indigenous women are victims of processes of authentication through intellectual colonization. This chapter illustrates the distortion of the Indigenous women's tradition through the impacts of early contact narratives and the subsequent colonization of North America. As demonstrated in the telling of Sky Woman's story there is a concept of "the women-kind" that infers what I called Iroquois womanism. The concept of Iroquois womanism stands in stark contrast to the authenticated identity of the so-called Indigenous-feminism. The impact of these factors on Kanienkehaka women is surmised as I examined the impact of the feminist-indigenist binary on the unity of Iroquois society. Iroquois social structure and democracies illustrate the important role women had in traditional Iroquois society. I describe the misinterpretations in ethnography and anthropology that have tainted subsequent research on Iroquois women. The euro-formed data continues to misrepresent Indigenous women in service to the ongoing colonial project. Further trauma imposed by colonization continues to perpetuate inaccuracies and now results in demonstrations of culture that are misguided and often do not make sense. As a result the dominant society continues to authenticate Indigenous identity knowledge.

The suffragettes, who managed to step beyond prejudice and conditioning in their own society, were also complicit in the distortion of the Iroquois women's tradition through their admiration of Iroquois women both for the esteem they held in society and also for their ability to change with colonization. The feminist movement continues to impose the gender precept on Iroquois women as it purports to represent the voices of all women world-wide. I have shown that some feminists do not speak for many Indigenous women. Indigenous women are speaking back to feminism and euro-formed historical data in a commitment to the survival of future generations. I demonstrate that the subjects Indigenous women speak about tell the story about the recovery of Indigenous women's traditions. In "Chapter 6" they speak for themselves. But first, in "Chapter 5" I speak for me because 'I am me'.

Before proceeding in the following Chapter 4 I situate myself in the Post-Modern and Post-Colonial scholarship that values individual voice and representation. This discourse uses criteria for authentication that the individual of post modernity describes in order to be understood. This re-individualization depends on *relationality* -- a process of critical reflection where I situate my research methods and research assumptions.

## Chapter Four

### All My Relations: Critical theories of relationality

#### Introduction

Conceptually, many Indigenous peoples refer to themselves as a family. This is implied in the term “all my relations” (*akwekon akenkweten*). *A Family of One Long House* also portrays the interpretation of the political entity called the Rotinohsionni, the word for the Iroquois confederation of which the Kanienkehaka are a member. As I describe in Chapter One there is a sense of a familial origin for humanity conceptually in the Sky World populated by uncles and relatives. Familial relationality is found in the simple fact that Sky Woman, her daughter and grandsons had a blood kinship.

Coincidentally, the animals, that helped obtain the soil for the planting of the strawberry and tobacco plants by Sky Woman also originated in the Sky World and became totems and symbols of family or clans which extends the family structure even further. In the case of the Iroquois the totemic structure has almost Thomistic similarities. Where Europeans say ‘earth, wind, and fire’ Iroquois family relationality to reality depicts clans from land, air, and water. For example the totems connect humanity to the human reality of relationality to the earth (deer, wolf, and bear), air (heron, hawk, and sandpiper), and water (turtle, eel, and beaver). So, the interdependency of relationality in reality is communicated through signs and symbols of Iroquois culture denotative of what can be considered the highest good. Relationality is also communicated in the use of the greeting “all my relations” which signifies one’s connection to the other that extends beyond blood to the spiritual plain.

I described in Chapter One the idea of a good life that is communicated through the Sky World narrative which serves as a theoretical model and human life on Turtle Island which is the theory put into practice. While I don’t know if the Iroquois master

narrative actually happened, I do know ethical, moral, and philosophical constructs are communicated that guides the individual to live a good life. In Chapter Two I analyze longstanding traditions in European philosophy that engage with Iroquois philosophy as nothing more than a tribal religion—a fundamentalist retelling of a myth that must be believed. So, the liberal response that depicts duty as rooted in obligation or ethics has been extended to Indigenous peoples in sciences like ethnology and anthropology. In this way individuals become secularized, must be practical and reasonable, deliberative rather than contrite, and form a like-minded consensus for what is good. In Chapter Three I describe how feminist theorists accepted the liberal criteria for what is an authentic culture. As authenticators, feminists use the idea of Iroquois matrilineal customs as part of its arsenal, not to elevate Indigenous women, but to exploit our culture in its quest for equality in the male dominated political economy of Western Christendom.

Liberals and feminists assume an authority to authenticate what Nussbaum calls “real cultures”—they pose the individual right to self-authenticate but through criteria they impose. Thus, liberals and feminists become in conflict with, and antithetical to, the interdependencies of the sort of relationality described in the Iroquois master narrative. For example, liberals have difficulty admitting non-pragmatic ratiocination of Iroquois land-air-water and human interdependencies, having long ago abandoned Western Christendom’s earth-wind-fire symbolism in favour of the signs and symbols of modern science. This philosophically suggests that philosophical relativity cannot exist between authenticators and the authenticated. Thus, a scenario exists where the two spheres of understanding continually move around each other, never joining. This scene is where this work is situated since authenticators and authenticated fits tightly with colonizers and colonized in the post-colonial discourse.

In this Chapter I situate myself in the post-colonial world. To demonstrate this theoretical and philosophical place in time and space there are some things I will do. First, there is a tradition on emancipation that comes from socialist theory. While I have

shown that while social theory values emancipating individuals from, in the case of Marx and Engels, a political economy dominated by elite social classes, there has been a tendency to homogenize and generalize individuality. For example, indigenous people are peasants in the socialist schema, and the essential nature of the social dialectic has existed everywhere in human development. Though change is supposed, like evolution, the imposed criteria do not evolve. However, socialist critique of liberalism exposes Marxian homogenizing generalizations that are quite consistent with liberal authentication. Out of this critique a critical discourse ensues under which intellectual relationality encouraged critical pedagogy and critical learning theory.

In this chapter I demonstrate how my narrative inquiry into women's stories hinges liberal and socialist theories, connotative of critical discourse. In order to outline this argument, I will describe the line of thinking as I discuss the following:

1. Socialist individuality as a model for human development and its limitations that resulted in de-individualization;
2. The post-colonial context of Indigenous "nationalism" for de-authenticating Indigenous identity;
3. Identity authentication is essentially in-authentic where homogenous cultures are filled with self-identified re-individuals<sup>28</sup>

To accomplish this task I will demonstrate the transition of discourse in human development from liberalism through socialism and on to critical discourse.

Liberalism and socialism present two views of the individual that reflect dominant philosophies. But these belief systems as *a priori* truths are not the scope of this chapter. Important to my discussion of liberal and social theory are conceptions of the individual that emerge from the work of theorists such as Mill, Marx, and Engels. These foundational conceptions shape our understanding of our place in the modern era ascribed

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<sup>28</sup> The use of the term 're-individualization' is used to describe the effect of critical discourse on the individual where they rediscover themselves.

by Benedict Anderson to have begun in 1800. Indeed, according to Wallerstein, two points bridge the 1800 line between Antiquity and Modernity. First, in practice the liberal and social philosophical systems work in complementary ways to reinforce state structures. Second, liberal democracies emerge as the main structure in Wallerstein's modern world-system. Wallerstein postulates that conservatism and socialism moved toward the liberal center and was responsible for implementing the liberal political program—not liberals themselves (1995: 149). Thus, we see that liberal ideology has triumphed.

Liberal ideology's effect on Marxism propagated a series of contrasting views that pose a new way of thinking and critiquing the liberal and Marxist conceptions of the individual. In this arena of bi-political hybridity the intermixing of views of individualism presents an expansive field of inquiry. One area of discourse that stands out is critical theory.

As a response to liberal and socialist theory, critical theory presents the alternative rhetoric of resistance and emancipation and incorporates five dominant themes or 'inner and outer technologies (Sandoval, 2000: 3)':

1. semiotics – the study of cultural signs, both individually and grouped in sign systems that includes the study of how meaning is made and understood.
2. deconstruction – cultural literacy involves deconstructing signs and symbols of culture in order to see clearly the reality of one's place in time and space.
3. meta-ideologizing – maxims, slogans and proverbs that are told by Holders of Ultimate Truth that conveys a culture's conception of the good life.
4. democratics – participatory democracy is based on a group of individuals who identify a problem, pose questions and seek answers, then decides to take action.
5. differential consciousness – A hidden, irritating, always present meaning that moves, transforms, disappears but will never go away yet represents an

infinitely extending, internally controlling yet unruly power that designates difference or is what goes without saying, a well-known fact, or cultural presuppositions (2000: 148).

These themes situate my research within a frame for decolonizing the world-system-authenticators and create space for alternative conceptions of the individual (2000: 2).

These conceptions are reflected in the eclectic work of theorists such as Homi Bhabha, Sherene H. Razack, Satya P. Mohanty, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Frantz Fanon, Paulo Freire, Audre Lorde, Max Weber, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and Edward Said to name a few. In my analysis of the individual I conceptually frame my discussion within the deconstruction and democracies themes. Deconstruction and democracies associate the conceptualization of the individual with their identity. Before I engage in this area of inquiry in order to formulate a conception of the individual from the critical discourse, I briefly review the socialist views of the individual using a different lens. In the critique of liberalism, socialism maintains a disconnect between individuals and their identity.

### **Awareness of Difference in Socialist Re-individualization**

This discussion on de-individualization in socialist theory illustrates the evolution of the individual from the liberal conception into a socialist individual. I make no comprehensive review of socialist theorists; however I do suggest that this inquiry has relevance to the following discussion. The socialism I examine includes communism and other social theories of Marxian origins. However, this socialism is not the totalitarianism of communist Russia or China, but corresponds to the communism of the 1800s described by Marx and Engels that has evolved into social theory. I focus on the socialist conception of the individual to provide a platform to describe a theory of the re-individualization of the individual in critical discourse. Here I review the tendency in socialist theory for homogenizing generalizations about humanity that places limitations on individuals and their identity. Critiquing the liberal, socialists appropriate like-minded

society in the promotion of the classless society. Either way, individual freedom has criteria that is imposed by an external agent.

Socialist theory critiques liberal individualism. In the *Communist Manifesto* (1859), Marx and Engels describe the foundation of society based on the means of production. The Manifesto anticipates the proletarian revolution to overthrow capitalism to bring about a classless society. Marx and Engels' treatise works as a way of talking about the individual as a continued critique of liberalism while affirming Darwinism. socialism, and communism in particular, survive as a theory and practice of human development that reflects its value as a critique of liberal modernity (see Wallerstein 1995). But Marx and Engels define communism is a political paradigm about class struggle. Thus, Marx and Engels responded enthusiastically to Darwin's evolutionary principle *Origins of Species: Or the Preservation of the Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859). By posing human development as a history of class struggles their postulate coincides with the Darwinian notion of the superiority of man over nature and superior races over inferior races.

In socialist society individualism is irrelevant, genders blur, and there is no division of material and social capital. In the manifesto Marx and Engels describe how man's needs, wants, religion, and responsibilities to his family are lost to needs of society at large. By working the individual expresses his true self. In essence, the individual, his nature, freedom and development are inseparably connected with society. The *individual* defined by Marx and Engels is the bourgeois middle class owner of property contrasted with the true self of the worker for the masses. Thus, the individual is de-individualized, as there is no inter-personal engagement or dialogical engagement with society.

Socialism blames this alienation on the greed of the alienated rich classes who dominate the masses and cause society to lose sight of its humanity. In the interests of the Industrial Revolution and in the course of human development, the bourgeois alienate the proletariat from personal and social property. This alienation engenders an alienation of

man from his true self as worker and infers a recurring conflict over ownership of the material and social capital—a dominant theme in socialist literature. The desire to abolish individual ownership of capital is “alleged to be the groundwork of all personal freedom, activity, and independence” write Marx and Engels (1959: 21). In their view, ownership of property is the benchmark for the bourgeois individual’s access to personal freedom, activity, and independence that is denied the masses.

Marx and Engels write of individuality in terms similar to Hobsbawm’s feudal model of political economy through an individual’s relationship to industrial society. In *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion, and Jazz* (1999) Hobsbawm describes agrarian-classness similar to terms of peasants-as-worker that Marx and Engels describe in the Manifesto. “In traditional societies...peasants regarded themselves...[as] the basic type of humanity...In a sense people or human beings were then typically peasants, the rest being untypical minorities.” Hobsbawm explains that “peasants were enormously aware of their distinction from, and almost always their subalternity to, their oppression by, the minorities of non-peasants, whom they did not like or trust (1999: 149).” The non-peasants were gentry or lords, traders, and townsmen and were thought by the peasants to be in a conspiracy to rob and oppress them.

Similarities between the peasant-lord and worker-bourgeois model are a leitmotiv in socialist thought. “In bourgeois society,” Marx and Engels write, “the past dominates the present; in communist society the present dominates the past. In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality (1959: 22).” The actions, desires, and life of the individual can be deduced only in terms of the outcome of establishing a ‘rational society’. Therefore, Marx’s and Engels describe how individuals assume juxtapositions with a society largely composed of classes. Classes are described in terms of the group. The bourgeois dominate and alienate the proletariat. The proletariat is urged to stand up and fight back, much in the same way that Hobsbawm describes peasant revolts.

Marx and Engels pose the revolutionary solution to bourgeois domination of the proletariat in establishing a rational society where “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (1959: 29).” In this society, the proletariat seizes the means of production from the bourgeoisie. As a result Marx and Engels contend that communist society develops in equal measure where no one is richer or poorer than the other. In this way, everyone is free from oppression and bourgeois freedom and individualism is abolished (1959: 22).

In this new society even women are not viewed as separate from men in terms of the classless society. Labor is not divided according to gender. “The bourgeois sees in his wife a mere instrument of production,” Marx and Engels write, “He hears that the instruments of production are to be exploited in common and, naturally, can come to no other conclusion than that the lot of being common to all will likewise fall to the women (1959: 25).” In this way equality reigns for all. Marx and Engels confront the comfortable self-preservation of the bourgeois individual. Removing the bourgeois individual and bourgeois power makes way for the masses and creates in theory a free and equal society. They write:

From the moment when labor can no longer be converted into capital, money, or rent, into a social power capable of being monopolized from the moment when individual property can no longer be transformed into bourgeois property, into capital, from that moment, you say, individuality vanishes (1959: 23).

When private property disappears the individuality of the individual vanishes.

The same sense of common separation described by Marx and Engels produces the peasant consciousness described by Hobsbawm. This consciousness of peasantness writes Hobsbawm “rests on the mutual recognition by peasants of the similarity of their relation to nature, to production and to non-peasants.” He describes that peasant

consciousness occurs in a millennial sweep that “embraces the whole world (1999: 150).” Hobsbawm makes this generalization for everyone everywhere. Individuality resides somewhere inside these homogenizing generalities. Further, Hobsbawm posits that this political action of peasants is based on the recognition of similarity rather than on a system of economic or social relations. A microcosm or ‘little world’ provides limits for class-consciousness Hobsbawm describes (1999: 151). It is these ‘little worlds’ which overlap with other analogous ‘little worlds’ to form the larger world, but also forms the boundary for change. Hobsbawm states that the peasant view is limited in scope, where their knowledge of the nation or state is ‘uncertain or patchy’ (1999: 152). Thus, the peasant is ignorant and helpless. However Hobsbawm suggest that revolution occurs through the achievement of ‘peasant consciousness’. The development of this consciousness into local or regional action comes with the application of external natural, economic, political, or ideological force, and only when villages or communities are moved in the same direction (1999: 153). Peasant revolution involves anarchic revolution toward a utopia, but on a much smaller scale. “Anarchism,” Hobsbawm writes, “the dismantling of the superstructure of rule and exploitation, leaves the traditional village as a viable economy and society (1999: 156).” Though, there are few times when this utopia is conceived or realized.

What is relevant in Hobsbawm’s discussion is this Marxian conception of peasant revolt directed in generalities. Even in history we see these ideas as the unifying thematic expression of the communist ideal of essentialized consciousness that in Hobsbawm’s case is ‘peasant consciousness’. It is this same peasant consciousness, which he identifies throughout the world – China, Europe, and Latin America. Hobsbawm describes these countries as exemplars containing the weakest of all peasant classes. Without ‘peasant consciousness’ they are incapable of representing themselves and are wards of the communist society (1999: 155). In this regard, Hobsbawm assumes that Indigenous peoples are the modern world’s peasant class.

In his own millennial treatise in *On The Edge of The New Century* (2001) Hobsbawm identifies modern era new “warlords” who have armed the peasant class for armed resistance to political hegemony in such places as Kosovo, Chechnya, and Columbia (2001: 14,15,19). Hobsbawm even holds to the revolution against the bourgeois in modern times as the collapse of liberal modernity, which he calls “the decline of the western empire (2001: 31-59).” He describes the west as conglomerations of empires that become political hegemonies that collapse in the post-colonial era because of economic and political inefficiency (2001: 40, 43).

In a similar way Anderson sees the rise of nation-states as a political invention to resist egalitarian or communist society. In *Imagined Communities* (1998), Anderson describes the impact of standardization of language and print on the evolution of nation-ness or the imagined community. “We have seen that the very conception of the newspaper implies the refraction of even ‘world events’ into a specific imagined world of vernacular readers,” writes Anderson, “also how important to that imagined community is an idea of steady, solid simultaneity through time (1998: 63).” As a vehicle for imagining the nation, Anderson describes vernacular language as one of the innovations diffused to manipulate the individual to participate in the liberal or communist nation-state. For example media and communications are used by nations to promote their conception of the good.

Anderson posits that vernacular languages dethroned Latin as the language of high culture. As a result, the haphazard development of administrative vernaculars reduces Latin to a specialized language, eventually making it almost obsolete, except for its use in the Church, law and science. Consequently interactions between production and productive relations (capitalism), technology of communications (print), and the loss of human linguistic diversity through print brought greater awareness of the larger community and contributed to the image of the nation’s antiquity. Anderson postulates that print language invents the nation and not any one particular language (Anderson,

1998: 134). Anderson adds that added to the vernacularization—beneath the decline of sacred communities, languages and lineages—a fundamental change in the way the world was comprehended occurred which made it increasingly possible to ‘think’ the nation (1998: 22). Through the development of vernaculars official nationalism becomes possible (1991: 101).

At issue in Anderson’s theory is the relationship between the literati and the masses. “The languages they sustained...has none of the self-arranged abstruseness of lawyers’ or economists’ jargons, on the margin of society’s idea of reality” writes Anderson. “The literati were adepts, strategic strata in a cosmological hierarchy of which the apex was divine. The fundamental conceptions about ‘social groups’ were centripetal and hierarchical, rather than boundary-oriented and horizontal (1998: 15).” This same notion is sustained in modern nation-states where the bourgeoisie are the ones who write, print, and diffuse the language and the proletariat worker-peasants are still kept illiterate. Like Hobsbawm, Anderson infers manipulation by nations that control individuals through powerful signs and symbols of state power—and thus individuals are socialized. Likewise in *Utopistics* (1998), Wallerstein revisits class revolution in the changes in world-systems since 1990.

In theory socialist and Marxian theorists say that man has been alienated from his true self, an individual is the bourgeois owner of property, individualism is irrelevant, and by working, an individual worker expresses his true self. Through revolution the proletariat seize the means of production from the bourgeoisie and form a utopic society. However in practice the communist revolution has different outcomes

In *After Liberalism* (1995) Wallerstein describes an asymmetry of political strength and sociopsychological stance is the basic dilemma facing the Left (Wallerstein, 1995: 213). In this situation clear inequalities exist in tandem with ignorance, fear, and apathy of the people where “individual upward mobility provides an outlet for a clever minority of the oppressed.” Wallerstein describes how “the nonbeneficiaries are

weaker—economically and militarily—than the beneficiaries (1995: 213).” Strategies for reform rather than revolution center on collective self-education, collective self-organization, establishment of an organized class structure, and reduction of the imbalance of social strength of beneficiaries. There have been successes and failures, but the fact remains that the world-system is supported by the capitalist world economy. Wallerstein points to the reasons for the failure of the implementation of communism worldwide because of the perceived affect they would have on the nonbeneficiaries of the system. Although, Wallerstein writes “the sum of the reforms achieved by the dominant movements have been worth something, even if there is no post-capitalist utopia (1995: 214).” Wallerstein lists six outcomes of the worldwide revolution in 1968 with the rise of the third world led by OPEC that have had immense impact on forces everywhere that think of themselves as antisystemic (1995: 55). Wallerstein cites the first outcome as the rise in doubt over the two-step strategy to take state power then transform society. The second outcome is the decline in acceptance of the single party state. The third outcome is the primacy of the conflict between capital and labor over other conflicts based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality. The fourth outcome is the emergence of the idea that democracy may be a profoundly anticapitalist and revolutionary idea. The fifth outcome is the decline in the idea that increased production as the essential prerequisite of socialist construction and its replacement with the concern with the consequences of productivism on ecology, quality of life, and commodification of everything (1995: 215). These five outcomes can be characterized as power balancing. However, the sixth is relevant to this discussion of individuality:

The faith in science as the foundation of stone of the construction of utopia has given way to a skepticism about classical science and popular scientism, in favor of a willingness to think in terms of a more complex

relationship between determinism and free will, order and chaos. Progress is no longer self-evident (1995: 215).

This point in particular represents acceptance of individual free will that characterizes Mill's liberal individual to restore order out of chaos. With this socialist revisioning revolution no longer becomes a viable concept and thus, as Wallerstein points out, progress is no longer self-evident. The individual becomes lost in this 'political confusion of multiple types' Wallerstein concedes:

So here we are tired and eclectic shells of Old Left parties; no viable concept of "a revolution;" new antisystemic movements that are vigorous but with no clear strategic vision; and new racist-populist movements of growing strength (1995: 216).

socialism's fault is its disregard for the individual. Thus, capitalism has been able to exploit socialism and instead of merely exploiting people one at a time, society is exploited all at once.

Wallerstein's strategy to resolve the world-systems crisis has four points. Firstly, the working classes retain surpluses. Secondly, popular participation and more open decision-making are expanded. Thirdly, the construction of a new universalism is based on the foundation of countless groups rather than on the mythical atomic individual. Lastly, there is a need to change thinking about state power as a tactic without investing in it or strengthening it (1995: 218-219).

Clearly Wallerstein as a social theorist incorporates Mill's notion of dialogic engagement as one aspect of liberalism relevant to the solution. "We must...become practical, consequential, constant workers in the vineyard, discussing our utopias, and pushing forward." Wallerstein writes. Wallerstein forecasts the collapse of the geopolitical-geocultural world-system by 2050 yet still holds to the collective paradigm indicative of socialist theory (1995: 218). Coincidentally, the higher synthesis of

dialectical and dialogical engagement becomes relevant to critical discourse valuation of relationality.

### **Identity, Space and Place**

Concepts by critical theorists for identity, space and place are concerned with geopolitical and geocultural definitions for identity. As I said previously Wallerstein's world-system theory seems to promote individuality, but on the while it does seem to be an "identity-less" individuality. Critical theory mediates liberal and social theory by posing a perspective that views individuals and identity as relationality. For example, Doreen Massey (1993, 1995), Martin Allor (1997), Gillian Cowlishaw (2001), and Stuart Hall (1993) describe how post-modernity's diversity and multiculturalism diffuse power of 'one' over the 'other' while negotiating more complex cultural landscapes. In the course of negotiating the critical discourse terrain clear constructs and representations of culture develop an argument I make in Chapter 5 about admitting individuals' sense of time and space as boundless and unrestricted by notions of bicultural hybridity. By contrast the primary focus in this argument has to do with a "feeling" individuality expressed by Indigenous women I describe in Chapter 6.

In this notion "feeling" extends to borders individuals self-determine. In "Power-geometry and a Progressive Sense of Place" time-space compression is described by Doreen Massey as "a term which refers to movement and communication across space." This phenomenon implies a geographical "stretching-out of social relations...and to our experience of all this (1993: 59)." This concept refers to the borders we place on our sense of ourselves and on places. Later she illustrates multiple identities of people and of places. Massey states, "what gives a place its specificity is not some long internalized history but the fact that it is constructed out of a particular constellation of relations, articulated together at a particular locus (1993: 66)." This would include a consciousness of the wider world, thus integrating the local and the global into the conception of a

place. The place is also a reflection of unequal geographical and social development. Thus, Massey proposes a progressive conception of place which incorporates four aspects – it is not static, places do not have boundaries, places do not have single, unique ‘identities’, and in this, the specificity of place is not denied. In order to understand the character of a place it is necessary to link that place to places beyond, which is achievable when you link place and space (1993: 68).

In “Places and Their Pasts” (1995) Massey examines connections between the past and the present of a place. She conceptualizes ‘place’ as deeply essentialist and internalist (1995: 183). Places are a hybrid of many histories, peoples, cultures that are often overlooked as we attempt to solidify it as ‘the place’ (Massey, 1995: 183). What is relevant to this discussion is the idea of sedimentation, described by Massey in relation to France as “composed of influences, contacts and connections which, over time, have settled into each other, molded each other, produced something new...but which we now think of as old, as established (1995: 183).” Humans create the present out of the past without acknowledging it. Massey’s notion is similar to Benedict Anderson’s and Eric Hobsbawm’s notion of the ‘invention of tradition’ for the purpose of establishing the nature and coherence of a place, which can be small or as big as a nation state (1995: 186). The identity of a place is a hybrid of many things. Massey writes that “Places...can be understood as articulations of social relationships, some of which will be to the beyond (the global), and these global relationships as much as the internal relationships of an area will influence its character, its ‘identity’ (1995: 186).” Massey says the identity of a place is not to be seen as destroyed by new importations. In Massey’s alternative reading, identity is always in the process of formation and forever unachieved (1995: 186). In this the past is bound up in the present of a place in different ways, materially, in resonance or as a self-conscious building-in of local character, and in the unembodied memories of the people. In this regard, Massey writes, “the identity of places is very much bound up with the histories which are told of them, how those histories are told,

and which history turns out to be dominant (1995: 186).” Places are inventions of the coherence of a place. Massey posits thinking of places as “constantly shifting articulations of social relations through time (1995: 188).” Nation-states may also be viewed as active creations, as Massey points out that can be seen as “ephemeral envelopes of space-time (1995: 189).” The boundaries of the nation-state and the naming of space-time within them are the reflections of power.

Taking Massey’s work further, Martin Allor discusses Montreal’s The Main<sup>29</sup> district as an illustration of relationality between discursive formations and the enacted practices of cultural activity. The Main is a site linked to other sites at the local and the global levels but which become an inherent part of the Main. The Main is a place made up of pasts and other places. “The Main’s singularity”, Allor writes “resides in the fact that its mediations of here and away, of past and present, and of identity and difference are articulated across its localization of different levels of social relations and differential temporalities (1997: 44).” The Main is viewed as a ‘liminal’ zone similar to Massey’s ephemeral envelopes where a range of cultural practices make up its essential nature, thus making it a unique and vibrant place.

Allor posits the singularity of the Main exists in the ways it can be analyzed. The Main exists as a chronotope of the complexity of cultural space and cultural communities. It also exists as an illustration of the necessity of linking the practices of cultural consumption to the location of sites of cultural activity. These locations are fluid sites that exist at vectors of the local and the global and of the sedimented past and the becoming of cultural agents (1997: 46). Thus, cultural consumers are active agents. The cultural becoming of Quebec is articulated by Allor in terms of the being (*métissage*) or the becoming (*transculture*) of the people. The Main figures as a central metaphor and exemplar of this conceptualization (1997: 48). Not a homogenous seamless place, The

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<sup>29</sup> ‘The Main’ refers to a section of Boulevard St. Laurent in Montreal, Quebec.

Main is a 24-hour street. There are different moments that involve different peoples and practices. Thus, as Allor writes, “the space of the Main are better seen as the zone where space-times of different cultural activities come into transient contact (1997: 49).” The singularity of the Main, Allor writes, reminds us that “the identity of places and communities are always already in a state of development—that cultural identity is precisely a process and not a possession (1997: 51).” The spaces of the Main are in a state of constant adjustment and rearticulation. The places and practices of cultural activity in the Main exemplify the relationing between the private and the public, the local and the global, and the discursive and the praxical in cultural activity. “The cultural identities of the people and communities of the Main are neither simply produced in these places and practices nor are they coterminous with them...there is... no simple collective identity in the singularity of individual experience outside the form of that experience living (1997: 52).”

The Main does not have a visible indigenous community. For example an “Aboriginal” performative culture, such as that described by Gillian Cowlshaw would assert its cultural power in the urban setting not unlike “native” Canadians and rural pow-wows. Cowlshaw explores the relationship between language and language and identity and identity and lived versus performed Aboriginality. At play is Althusser’s notion of interpellation where the subject comes into being when hailed by another. Individuals are forced to acquire a social identity through language but interpellation also works on a broader social level. Cowlshaw posits that recognition “and taken as real social beings outside the domain of kinship, family and the black community, Aboriginal people from infancy have to accept the meaning of ‘Aborigine’ with its salience in national and local discourses as the focus of strong, contradictory and dynamic emotions (2001: 154).” This interpellation seeks to introduce a reality rather than report an existing one and in the words of Judith Butler, “to indicate and establish a subject in subjection, to produce its social contours in space and time (2001: 154).” Thus the subject is created through the act

of hailing. Their identity responds to the interpellation process by reinforcing a reality, a pre-established identity that one is expected to fit. Cowlshaw points to Butler's concern that we are susceptible and vulnerable to the call of recognition that solicits existence in a language that we never made but through which Aborigines acquire status. The power of the name or word is indifferent to the one who bears the name or is the recipient of the language. Although, there is the political possibility of reworking the force of speech act and appropriating it from its prior contexts. The Aborigine performer works within these vacillating boundaries of legitimacy as they perform their Aboriginality.

As an act of empowerment, performances take place on the borders of the unsayable and undoable, causing fear and tension in the white observers. Cowlshaw writes that the fear and tension in the observers is derived from turning the terms of interpellation back on the white purveyor. It is the performance of inequities which the subject of white gossip which blacks have limited access to (2001: 157). The Aborigines are performing what is expected of them, but they take it to the extreme (2001: 157). The performance is the site of symbolic struggle between the neat and the rough, the respectable and the disreputable, the white and the black who depend on each other for the meanings. The performance is an answering back which is deeply political. The performances also serve to define the contours of race relations and create a division within the Aborigine community as to what constitutes identity. Some Aborigines disagree on the performance as an accurate representation of their identity.

Street performances sever the aboriginal identity from the white identity, but only partially. All kinds of interactions occur which breach the cultural divide – in work and recreation, marriages, identities, and in the bodies of individuals. Street performances are political counter-narratives which exaggerate and expose rather than ameliorate and dissolve the space of fear and horror between the races. As an antidote to the fear and tension in order that the white citizen can enjoy their citizenship to the fullest, Citizenship is offered to those aborigines who abandon practices which are deemed repugnant. As

Cowlshaw writes, “the social dimension of citizenship is embedded in and inexorably bound to present and future relations with other citizens.” Cowlshaw says that citizenship is obstructed by citizen ‘others’ in the process of enacting their own citizenship (2001: 162).

Citizenship as an act of socialization requires common and even coerced acceptance of a cultural reality. Where Cowlshaw sees one group obstructing another, Stuart Hall questions the process of cultural hybridity. For example, Hall discusses culture, community, shared experience and national identity with regard to the work of Raymond Williams. Hall views Williams’ contributions to the discussion of culture brought the politics of recognition from the “abstract to the concrete, from texts to their contexts of institutional life and ordinary behavior (1993: 351).” Hall values Williams’ view of the relationality of community as Williams saw this as the way to understand community better. In this, Williams insisted on the connection between literature, writing and structures of feelings, the way meanings and values were lived in real lives, in actual communities (1993: 351). Williams writes “Since our way of seeing things is literally our ways of living, the process of communication is in fact the process of community: the sharing of common meanings, and thence common activities and purposes; the offering, reception and comparison of new meanings, leading to the tensions and achievements of growth and change ((Williams, 1961: 10) in 1993: 352).”

Hall questions the relevance of Williams work to the revived nationalism in big and small societies, and the aspirations of marginalized peoples to nationhood. Hall writes:

The nation-state was never simply a political entity. It was always also a symbolic formation – a ‘system of representation’ – which produced an ‘idea’ of the nation as an ‘imagined community’, with whose meanings we

could identify and which, through this imaginary identification, constituted its citizens as 'subjects' (1993: 355).

Hall points to the decline of centralized nation-states and the new ambivalences and fissures within the discourse of the nation-state that presents the opportunity for smaller nationalisms to emerge in more effectively self-governing arrangements. The danger in the drive to nationhood in many of the smaller ascending small nationalisms lies in their taking the form of ethnically or culturally, or religiously or racially closed pure constructs. The contrasting goal, Hall poses, is to represent the ethnic hodge-podge of modern nationality while pushing to the past the history of conquest and domination. In this regard, Raymond Williams advocated for rooted settlements and lived, worked and placeable social identities set off against the abstractions of modern national cultural identities. Hall questions whose and which whole way of life are we to follow.

Hall sees danger in the modern world forming national and cultural identity on closed versions of culture or community and the refusal to engage with the difficult problems that arise from living with difference. "The capacity to live with difference is," according to Hall, "the coming question of the twenty-first century (1993: 361)." An important aspect is Hall's introduction of his understanding of hybridity. In this instance, using Williams' conceptions, Hall shows us that identity is an 'open, complex, unfinished game—always under construction'. As a result of the growing movement of peoples, identity is no longer a fixed entity, rather it is a hybrid composed of many identities (1993: 356). Although, Hall states, "'hybrids' retain strong links to and identifications with the traditions of their 'origin' (1993: 362). But they are without the illusion of any actual 'return' to the past...They bear the traces of particular cultures, traditions, languages, systems of belief, texts and histories which have shaped them (1993: 362)." In this way, the sedimentations remain and are what form the new/old identities or hybrids.

## **Ethnic Absolutism/Indigenous identity**

When I use “ethnic absolutism” I refer to the concept as nationalism where individuals are socialized to a dominant cultural and political hegemony. By contrast, “Indigenous identity” refers to individuals who are Indigenous to a place. In my review I focus on writers Craig Calhoun (1994), Paul Gilroy (1993), Tony Bennet and Valda Blundell (1995), Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs (1995), James McDonald (1995), and Gerald McMaster (1995). These writers move my discussion from ethnically absolute conceptions of the First Nations to the emancipated Indigenous individual.

By nationalism one means ethnic absolutism as in ‘first’ nations. This dichotomy is explored generally by Craig Calhoun in “Nationalism and Civil Society: Democracy, Diversity and Self-Determination” (1994). In this exploration of the relationality between identity and nationalism Calhoun challenges the notion of ethnic absolutism. As he questions how many different peoples can co-exist as a nation, Calhoun examines the capacity for people to live together. On nationalism Calhoun writes:

nationalism is the rhetoric of identity and solidarity in which citizens of the modern world most readily deal with the problematic nature of state power and with problems of inclusion and exclusion...nationalism is most an issue where the boundaries and power of a state do not coincide neatly with the will or identity of its members or the scale of action undertaken by other collective actors (1994: 305).

Self-determination claims of cultural similarity and common citizenship underestimate the importance of the specifically sociological problems of social integration. Led away from ethnic absolutist arguments of social solidarity, Calhoun argues that nationalism is directly and fundamentally involved in questions about the social foundations for democracy and not merely a simple question of identification and belonging within borderzones. An important aspect of this is the ability of many peoples to unite together and identify with the nation.

The problems of collective identity formation are commonly ignored by democratic theory but are endemic to modern political life. Nationalism appears in projects of unity and division. Nationalism is not itself the explanation but rather serves as a political rhetoric in which there are many issues of processes of integration at play. Calhoun asks that the idea of the nation and of social integration need to be joined, he writes:

The theory of democracy needs to deal with both of the two senses in which they raise the question of how political communities are constituted. The first is the bounded nature of all political communities, and the embeddedness of all claims to constitute a distinct and autonomous political community in relationships of contraposition to other such communities or claimants. The second is the web of relationships that constitutes a people (or nation) as a social collectivity existing independently of common subjection to the rule of a particular state (1994: 308).

In this, the role of public discourse is deemed important. “There is no single, definite, and fixed ‘peoplehood’” writes Calhoun, “which can be assumed in advance of political discussion (1994: 311-312).” No man is an island and exists in relation to others and therefore dialogue is important.

Construction of the nation is specific to the modern era and the emergence of the modern world system and problematically dominates all other identity constructs.

Calhoun writes:

...nationality is not more real than many other identities which people may claim, or feel, or reproduce in their social relations. The nationalist claim is that national identity is categorical and fixed, and that somehow it trumps all other sorts of identities, from gender to region, class to political

preference, occupation to artistic taste. This is a very problematic claim (1994: 314).

Calhoun defines the relationality of identity and nationalism as arbitrary subsets to identity claims on populations who claim the size and capacity to be self-sustaining (1994: 314). Calhoun views the underlying factors which made nationalism the major genus of identity claims a source of political mobilization in the modern era. One of the major factors is the modern notion of the individual. Calhoun states that 'I am I' is crucial to the notion of the nation as itself an individual. Individuation of the nation and of the person remains inextricably tied.

The contradiction is that although the nation is comprised of individuals, it does not promote individual distinctiveness. Conformity and intolerance of diversity are central values. Modern states encourage and rely on categorical identities rather than relational identities. This has been closely related to the growth of capitalism and the creation and promotion of political communities which call for new kinds of interrelationships. Membership in the modern polity requires more than tolerance and common subjection. Membership requires mutual communication and poses the impetus for the erasure of difference.

Calhoun questions how nationalism flourished in the wake of communism's failure. Faced with pressures or opportunities for collective action, people were thrown back on preexisting bases for identification and collective action. Nationalist identities were the easiest way to respond to abuse. When communism collapsed nationalism was available to take its place. Calhoun presents the dangers of this notion of nationalism and its totalitarian potential (1994: 326). Nationalism trumps other identities or values. New understandings of nationalisms and politics of identity will bring to light the salience of cultural divides and identities in everyday lives.

In his discussion of ethnic absolutism, Gilroy agrees with Calhoun that nationalism became the framework for marginalization. Gilroy illustrates ethnic

absolutism as reductive and essentialist for ethnic and national differences with an “absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable (1993: 65).” Gilroy sees tensions arising through the propensity for one marginalizing the other within nations.

In his discussion, Gilroy examines nationality in accounts of black resistance and black culture. Gilroy uses music to illustrate the tendency towards ethnocentrism and ethnic absolutism of black cultural theory. The notion of double consciousness plays on the dynamics of this perspective which comes from black culture being both inside and outside the west. The problem lies in black political discourse being shaped by the intellectual heritage of Euro-American modernity. Gilroy writes:

[discourse] conditions the continuing aspiration to acquire a supposedly authentic, natural and stable identity. This identity is the premise of a thinking ‘racial’ self that is both socialized and unified by its connection with other kindred souls encountered...within the fortified frontiers of those discrete ethnic cultures which also happen to coincide with the contours of a sovereign nation-state that guarantees their continuity (1993: 121-22).

This is associated with the over-integrated concept of culture. There is a conflict between two distinct perspectives – essentialist and pluralist, most notably in black art and cultural criticism. Essentialism is characterized by an archaic pan-Africanism, undertaking a realist approach to minimize political and philosophical issues. The pluralist approach celebrates complex representations of black particularity that is internally divided, thus recognizing that there is no unitary idea of black community. The polyphonic qualities of black expression are celebrated.

Essentialism is symptomatic of the cleavages within the black communities. The new movement towards nationalism in black communities illustrates a misplaced idea of national interest where aspects of elements of cultural heritage are what shape their nationalist perspective. This area is claimed by black bourgeoisie, Gilroy suggests, who persistently succumb to romantic conceptions of 'race', 'people' and 'nation' (1993: 127-128). In this way the African-American does not differ from the nationalism or ethnic absolutism of "First Nations" in Canada or "domestic dependent nations" in the United States.

Bennet and Blundell examine the issues at stake in the tensions between ethnic absolutism and Indigenous identity. For First Nations the challenge is to maintain the relationality of Indigeneity that refuses engulfment in a singular nationalized imaginary First Nation (1995: 2). First Nations cultural struggles resist assimilation within the conflicts described by Gilroy for black multiculturalism. The relationality of Indigeneity differs and involves diverse diasporic relations and identities. "For First Peoples", Bennet and Blundell write, "questions of culture and identity are always inextricably caught up with questions of self-determination and with questions of land (1995: 2)." In this debate, calls to cultural autonomy have formed an important component to establish a viable economic basis and local political structures of self-governance that mark First Peoples involvement in the politics of recognition. Another aspect of the tension is the critique and reevaluation of both Western and First Peoples' knowledges. What has marked the contemporary configurations of First Nations' cultural politics has been the blend of the emphasis on both tradition and innovation. Bennet and Blundell echo the words of Gail Valaskakis who writes that "resistance is cultural persistence...the traditionalism to which this gives rise is continually negotiated in the discourse and practice of everyday life (1995: 4)."

Bennet and Blundell propose a third strategy which involves recognition of 'innovative traditionalism' where "traditional forms of cultural expression are developed

into distinctive contemporary Indigenous cultures with their own creative roots and dynamics (Bennet and Blundell, 1995: 5).” Alternative forms of indigeneity must have more relevance in cultural studies. In order to locate these alternative forms, assessment and evaluation of both knowledges has to happen. This critical discourse enhances the value of the signifiers of aboriginality for First Peoples, thus taking the power away from Western knowledge as the authenticators of what is “real” Indigenous culture. In many instances the ethnic absolute for First Nations has been authenticated as the “sacred” culture.

For example Gelder and Jacobs (1995) discuss the movement of the sacred out into the public domain. The local has become a “national and global space where connections between language and locality, or even identity and locality have been unbound (Gelder and Jacobs, 1995: 158).” At issue is the change in words; with the revelation of the sacredness, one never needed to say where one’s locality was. Now, we can’t say where one’s locality is. What was once simply unsaid now becomes impossible to say. The conflict lies in the need to say something, especially in the case of land claims. This highlights an *imagined space* where power is retained for Aboriginal people. This imagined space is real for the people themselves, as it is the place where you go when you do ceremonies or sing songs, or do everyday things that enable you to survive as an Aboriginal person. You only show so much to an outsider to keep some of the sacred unknowable, which in turn creates an imagined space for the non-Aboriginal people. In turn they give the sacred power, as their minds imagine what may be contained therein.

The imagined space points to the idea of ethnic absolutism and sacred national identity. James McDonald in “Building a Moral Community: Tsimshian Potlatching, Implicit Knowledge, and Everyday Experiences” (1995) examines Potlatching as an expression of consciousness of ideas and how these ideas are used to build a consciousness about the world and about the relationship to that world. At issue are a

people's own perceptions about their history, their place in the contemporary world, and their future. Also McDonald describes how ideas gain substance and meaning, and are structured into an indigenous theory of practice and the decolonization of the mind.

The Potlatch performance signals a consciousness of the world in relation to the sacred ceremonies that are relearned and re-performed to give shape to a consciousness of the world and their relationships in that world. It appears also in modified forms that have relevance to the situation in which they are performed. The performance of the Potlatch is seen as an expression of self-government in First Nation terms. "By feasting" McDonald writes, "Tsimshians support and advance those of their interests that are called aboriginal rights and, at the same time, strengthen one of the foundations they can use to pursue their other interests, including those that are linked to small business and wage labor (1995: 140)." Thus the feast is an 'alternative political discourse' that speaks to the general aboriginal interests that are common across Canada such as land claims, aboriginal rights and self-government (1995: 139). Feasting also helps to shift the minds of the people involved out from under imposed colonized thinking to an empowered thinking. In this way there is an identification of ethnic absolutism (being a good Tsimshian) to being a good person (Indigenous identity).

By contrast, Gerald McMaster sees the freedom to move from ethnic absolutes to Indigenous identity communicated by artists. McMaster expresses the ambiguity of the Native art communities. There is also a socially ambiguous zone that exists between the "First Nations" reserve and urban "city-Indian" spaces that are constantly navigated by the Native artist. It is a space for resistance and the articulation of self-identity. "This is a zone of 'in between-ness'" he writes "and as such it is a socially constructed and politically charged site where shifting allegiances criss-cross permeable grids or boundaries, and where identities are to be understood as 'nomadic subjectivities' (1995: 75)." McMaster discusses this idea using concepts of liminality and *communitas* put forward by Van Gennep and Victor Turner. In this, liminality is the threshold in the states

of in-betweenness and is an ambiguous and indeterminate phase, a state of suspension (1995: 80). This state of in-betweenness is socially ambiguous and results in the search for a camaraderie in order to deal with this changed situation described by Turner as *communitas* (1995: 80).

These are what form the basis of the borderzone which McMaster states is a place where everyone is state-less, where there is freedom for interpretation. The borders are cultural and not physical and there is a displacement of time and space. Border zones hold up a 'reflecting mirror' to the dominant society which indicates their subversiveness (1995: 82). Thus the border is a site of social struggle for artists who seek to self-identify in the face of restrictive legal and official definitions. This is the place where Native art communities are located. What results is hybridization. "Today artists hybridize new cultural practices" writes McMaster, "through the improvisation and recombination of disparate cultural elements, creating a diverse cultural repertoire...today artists often live, create and appropriate between two and more spaces (1995: 85)." This border zone then is a 'creative arena' where contemporary Native artists maneuver to regain control over meanings. The artist enacts freedom through emancipatory creativity.

### **Politics of Recognition**

In the literature on the politics of recognition theorists describe the trend in critical discourse to recognize how western knowledge authenticates identity in homogenized generalizations. And though the literature largely ignores Indigenous scholarship, theorists do recognize a dilemma inside western philosophy. I use Craig Calhoun (1994) as the basis of my analysis with reference to other theorists, Joan Scott (1991), Dipesh Chakrabarty (2001), Gayatri Spivak (1993), Stuart Hall (1992), Robert Stam (1995), Elizabeth Povinelli (2001), Homi Bhabha (1990), and Cornel West (1993). For example Craig Calhoun explores and describes modern debates in social theory and

the politics of identity. His work provides the basis around which other social theorists work is situated in the politics of identity.

Modern discourse on identity Calhoun writes “has to do both with intensified effort to consolidate individual and categorical identities, to reinforce self-sameness, and with social changes that made the production and recognition of identities newly problematic (1994: 9).” Within this modern movement we find a definition of the self that stresses individual identity on the notion that self is integrally and immediately being and consciousness, name and voice (1994: 9-10).” Calhoun poses the Cartesian *cogito* as the crucial index of this new stress on identity—“I think therefore I am (1994: 10).” In this regard, the person becomes a disembodied cognitive subject where knowledge is presented as dependent on this subject. Joan Scott (1991) and Dipesh Chakrabarty (2001) explore this same issue in their examinations of the relationship between identity, experience, and historical writing. Calhoun states that individuality is further elevated by Fichte to a philosophical claim to the self-sufficiency of identity through the equation ‘I am I’ (1994: 10).” This has further been joined through the German idealist tradition by the fundamental formative power of will making identity even more complex. “As the knowing and recognizing self is made to carry this philosophical weight,” writes Calhoun, “it is also more commonly seen as fixed, as reflecting itself in simple identity rather than complex relationship (1994: 10).” This sets the stage for the dialectical transformation of debates in identity politics where simplistic self-sameness is questioned and the relationship between identity and individuality is of greater importance. Added to the discourse is the notion of moral weight that has been added to this relationship. Identity and individuality are formed through morally charged introspection (1994: 10). The self is conceived in terms of the triad of identity, individuality, and morality. Moral sources inform the crucial moments to rethink the nature and significance of subjectivity.

Add to this the fact that modernity has reduced the relevance of all-encompassing identity schemes and left us with a multiplicity of identities to sort out. Quoting Cascardi,

Calhoun describes the situation: “the modern subject is defined by its insertion into a series of separate value-spheres, each one of which tends to exclude or attempts to assert its priority over the rest (Calhoun, 1994: 12).” This tension creates external difficulties for individuals, but also creates contradictions within the subject-self.

As we attempt to sort out our selves, subjective social constructionist and essentialist notions of identity conflict. Essentialism poses that individual persons have singular, integral, harmonious and unproblematic identities. Constructionist arguments challenge the notion of collective identities as based on some essence or core features shared by the members. Moving beyond essentialism, constructionists point to the constructed nature of social and cultural histories used to bolster an essentialist identity as evidence of their argument. This is illustrated by Hobsbawm and Granger’s notion of “the invention of tradition” and explored by Scott who writes of the work of these Marxian historians who take as self-evident the identities of those whose experience is being documented and naturalized their difference. Historians concretize and set the identities of subjects through their use of experience as indicators of reality. “The evidence of [historically interpreted] experience then becomes evidence for the fact of difference” writes Scott. An alternative would be to explore “how difference is established, how it operates, how and in what ways it constitutes subjects who see and act in the world (1991: 777).” However this does not deal with the reasons why essentialist notions of identity continue to be evoked and deeply felt.

Attempts to soften the critique of constructionists point to the essence of community and reference of identity as social location. As I discussed earlier, this aspect of the relation between identity, space and place is explored in the work of Massey, Allor, Cowlishaw and others. Yet Calhoun shows that recent approaches to issues of identity stress the incompleteness, fragmentation and contradictions of both personal and collective existence. Stress is placed on the complexity of the relationality among projects of identity, social demands and personal possibilities (1994: 14). This aspect is

broached in the work of Stuart Hall who discusses the relational aspect of community in the work of Raymond Williams. This has begun with the deconstruction of essentialist categories and rhetorics and bears the label post-structuralist. Inherent are issues of claiming, legitimating, and valuing identities. Post-structuralism de-centers or deconstructs the subject and thus comes into conflict with essentialism.

Essentialism then takes on another form, standing on different ground and becomes open to different insights, coalitions, or conflicts. Calhoun writes that our task is to remain seriously self-critical about our invocations of essence and identity...paying attention to the agnostic, fractured, problematic aspects of identity. The politics of identity...have to be taken seriously. The struggles occasioned by identity politics need to be understood...not simply between those who claim different identities but within each subject as the multiple and contending discourses of era challenge any of our efforts to attain stable self-recognition or coherent subjectivity (1994: 19-20).

There is a need to recognize the role that post-structuralist historical writers have played in the rhetorical essentialist treatment of evidence to falsify and thus solidify prevailing interpretations of evidence to indicate the 'real'. Scott writes that historical representation camouflages the praxis which organizes it. As a result, historians appeal to experience as uncontested evidence and as an original point of explanation. Experience, Scott writes, becomes "a foundation on which analysis is based—that weakens the critical thrust of histories of difference. Thus, by remaining within the epistemological frame of orthodox history, these studies lose the possibility of examining those assumptions and practices that excluded considerations of difference in the first place (Scott, 1991: 777)."

Historians focus on experience that essentializes identity and reifies the subject. This system unquestioningly reproduces categories and therefore its inner relational

constitution remains unknown. "It is not individuals who have experience," writes Scott, "but subjects who are constituted through experience (Scott, 1991: 780)." Thus, active historicizing implies critical scrutiny of all explanatory categories usually taken for granted, including the category of 'experience' (Scott, 1991: 780)." Gayatri Spivak suggests that in expressing identity after our experiences are then written down, our identities are created for us. After that, Spivak says, in order to be heard we speak 'as' something. Thus, we are distanced from ourselves (1993: 194). We partake in the identities constructed for us through generalizations in order that we may have a voice. Through generalization homogenizing identities are created. The only way to stand out is to become the token voice. Being a token earns you the right to criticize (1993: 196).

In addition, the foundational characteristic of Western Christendom's master narrative becomes the historical standard. As I said earlier this historical standard becomes the criteria for authenticating knowledge, cultures, and individuals. According to Stuart Hall, the concept of the West is also an historical construct with three main characteristics. Firstly, the West is classificatory and provides a set of images thus condensing a number of characteristics into one picture. Secondly, it provides a model of comparison. Thirdly, it provides criteria against which other societies are measured while functioning as an ideology (1992: 277). For example, Robert Stam explores the notion of Eurocentrism in relation to the discourse of the West. Eurocentrism normalizes hierarchical power relations generated by colonialism and imperialism. In relation to Hall's illustration of the West as discourse, Stam writes that Eurocentrism minimizes the West's oppressive practices by regarding them as contingent, accidental and exceptional (Stam, 1995: 99). Once produced, the concept of the West became an organizing term Mann transformed into "Euro-forming" thinking and speaking. Not neutral, the discourse developed in the West for talking about the rest was influenced by particular class interests and in a dominant position and thus influences how the West views and relates to the other (1992: 294).

In questioning the foundationalist concept of identity, Scott illustrates how “the history of these concepts (understood to be contested and contradictory) then becomes the evidence by which ‘experience’ can be grasped and by which the historian’s relationship to the past he or she writes about can be articulated (Scott, 1991: 796).” Dipesh Chakrabarty also describes this process of translation. “Different Aboriginal and Indian traditions may have been with respect of narrations and enactments of the past, we both need to be able to translate them back into the discipline of history.” He writes, “We therefore need to know what history, the master code, is. But we do not simply master the master’s code; we change it, hybridise it, breathe plurality and diversity into it (2001: 8).” Western knowledge and the Eurocentric master narrative became the dominant intellectual hegemony. Admitting other master narratives values humanity’s collective memory.

There is also the need to recognize the role of the dominant political hegemony as an external authenticator. Elizabeth Povinelli focuses on the difference between critical rational judgment and moral obligation in the liberal nation-state. Moral intuitions and the seemingly unconditional nature of that composition including the effect of moral obligation in social life compel the phenomenological state of being for Povinelli. The conflict lies in the obligation to respect various identities and yet follow the moral social code which structures society and yet also places limits on the expression of those identities. At issue is the impasse within liberal multiculturalism between epistemological and deontological states. At its root is the impasse between the recognition of the worth of Indigenous customary ways of life as unique and self-referent and the desire to repudiate what are deemed immoral and repugnant treatment of human beings (2001: 76). This impasse suggests limits of recognition, toleration, and difference. The end result is that liberal modes of truth and legitimation rely on moral sensibility and critical reason to organize value and in doing so, produce them as facts. It is these facts that the indigenous subjects must live and work with. It is these facts which become inhabited into the living

and expression of indigenous identities. However, though aboriginal traditions such as Aboriginal customary law have no legal standing, the expression of aboriginal tradition has the power to cast an air of in-authenticity over present-day aboriginal performances of aboriginal culture and presents recurring challenges to the dominant society and their relationship with indigenous cultures (2001: 93).

Inherent in the politics of recognition is the issue of subjectivity. Subjectivity in this regard is best understood as a project always under construction. Crucial to this project is the issue of identity for Povinelli and Calhoun. As Calhoun points out “identity turns on the interrelated problems of self-recognition and recognition by others (Calhoun, 1994: 20).” Part of this process involves reclamation of the past in an effort to secure identities that were once denied. Similarly Chakrabarty sees mutual recognition as “the process of acquiring an identity and feeling pride in it is necessarily diverse and mixes...histories with memories.” Chakrabarty describes this cultural relativity as a process of increasing the content of all narratives (Chakrabarty, 2001: 9).

With the proliferation of large nation-states, international diasporas, wide realms of personal choice, unstable and heterogeneous networks of social relations, the use of mass media for cultural transmission and the multiplicity of discourses attempting to name or constitute persons has challenged the social basis for recognition. In this, democracy is not just about development but about diversity. “In the politics of diversity, identities are not so much given and then transcended in the interest of an overarching unity,” Chakrabarty writes, “they are acquired and performed in contexts in which unities are seen as always contingent and shifting (2001: 12).” This leads to a large range of complex identities and a politics of difference.

Resistance to imposed or fixed identities has promoted a shift from identity politics to a politics of difference. Although, the operations of deconstructing and claiming identity can coexist and inform each other. Calhoun writes that identity politics as a long-standing aspect of modern politics and social life has had to contend with

various ways of thinking about politics and personal life that are universalizing and difference-denying that have shaped the nature of politics and of academic thinking (Calhoun, 1994: 23). Calhoun poses that objectivism, systemic determinism, and instrumental, interest-based understandings of motivation stand in the way of social theorists from appreciating the importance of identity and identity-politics. Calhoun suggests that theories underestimate the struggle involved in forging identities. We do not see the tensions in our “multiple, incomplete and/or fragmented identities (and sometimes resistances), the politics implied by the differential public standing of various identities or identity claims (Calhoun, 1994: 24).” What is also missing is valuing the possibility of change in identities provoked by powerfully meaningful and emotionally significant events. Calhoun warns against a soft relativism where “all claims to recognition can proceed without judgment (Calhoun, 1994: 24).” The danger of soft relativism lies in its power to obscure the extent to which identity claims are socially nurtured and constructed and not merely reflections of each individual’s inner truth. In some cases, soft relativism runs the risk of reproducing a liberal individualism with its tendency to universalize where everyone is equally endowed with identity and an entitled respect for it.

Currently, the identity struggle is claimed within an arena of shared relevance such as a polity. Within the various identities of which political claims are made are various differentiated subgroups. And as Calhoun writes, “for identity politics to work, these must not all accentuate their differences but rather adopt a common frame of reference within which their unity is more salient (1994: 25-26).” The danger underlying a repressive sameness is the tendency to think in terms of categorical identities rather than either more complex notions of persons or shifting networks of concrete social relations. Calhoun criticizes categorical identities when he suggests that “the abstractness of categories encourages framing claims about them as though they offer a kind of trump card over the other identities of individuals addressed by them. This encourages an element of repression and/or essentialism within the powerful categorical identities

(1994: 26).” This creates tensions and power struggles between categories and the portrayal of identities as more singular and fixed than they can be. Antagonisms about identities are viewed as resolved through their singularity and fixity. In this, the capacity for internal dialogicity is removed. Once again this points to the fact that identity is a project and not a settled accomplishment. The current trend in sociological theory is to appeal to some objective underlying variable or factor. What we need to remember is that identities do change and there are always internal tensions and inconsistencies among identities and group memberships that have to be considered. Homi Bhabha addresses this in “Nation and Narration” (1990) where Bhabha introduces the notion of the nation as a transitional social reality and draws on Michael Oakeshott’s idea of the modern European state as national space constituted from competing dispositions of human association. The ambivalence of the modern society and its effect on the narratives and discourse that signify a sense of nationness is what is explored by Bhabha. The concept of the nation Bhabha views is bounded by a constantly redefined border and always in the process of hybridization. What emerges is an incomplete entity caught in what Bhabha defines as the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated.

The politics of personal identity is linked to the politics of collective identity. Calhoun writes “Identities are often personal and political projects in which we participate, empowered to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organization (1994: 28).” Going back to critical discourse then, change comes as a response by people who are moved by claims of identity or communality and also the individualistic appeals to self-realization. This argument for self-identity corresponds to Cornel West’s analysis of the new cultural politics of difference.

Cornel West describes distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference which he writes “trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general, and universal in

light of the concrete, specific, and particular; and to historicize, contextualize, and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting, and changing (1993: 203-204).” West states that “the new cultural politics of difference consists of creative responses to the precise circumstances of our present moment (1993: 204).” The new cultural politics of difference then are “distinctive articulations of talented (and usually privileged) contributors to culture who desire to align themselves with demoralized, demobilized, depoliticized, and disorganized people in order to empower and enable social action and, if possible, to enlist collective insurgency for the expansion of freedom, democracy, and individuality (1993: 204).”

According to West, the new cultural politics of difference faces three challenges – intellectual, existential, and political. Questioning notions and images has pushed forward the politics of representation. Out of this, the aim is now to “constitute and sustain discursive and institutional networks that deconstruct earlier modern strategies for identity formation, demystify power relations that incorporate class, patriarchal, and homophobic biases, and construct more multivalent and multidimensional responses that articulate the complexity and diversity of Black practices (1993: 212).” Like Scott (1991), West writes that deconstruction is not enough, explanations of the historicity of this construct are also necessary. Demystification is seen to be the most illuminating mode of theoretical inquiry. “Demystification tries to keep track of the complex dynamics of institutional and other related power structures in order to disclose options and alternatives for transformative praxis; it also attempts to grasp the way in which representational strategies are creative responses to novel circumstances and condition (1993: 213).” A new approach, West says transcends the dichotomies that exist and enable us to determine new understandings of race, ethnicity, and nationality. This is illustrated by West, who suggests that the new cultural politics of difference thrives in “communities, groups, organizations, institutions, subcultures, and networks of people of

colour who cultivate critical sensibilities and personal accountability—without inhibiting individual expressions, curiosities, and idiosyncrasies (1993: 216).”

Stam introduces the notion of polycentrism to this discussion to illustrate the world as being a place fraught with fields of power, energy and struggle and in this regard he writes, “the world has many dynamic cultural locations, many possible vantage points (1995: 102).” In his view, polycentric multiculturalism calls for changes in power relations, it clearly gives its voice to the underrepresented, it sees ‘minoritarian’ communities as active and generative participants, advantages those in place to deconstruct dominant or narrowly national discourses, it sees identities as multiple and unstable, it opens the way for an informed affiliation, and it is reciprocal and dialogical (Stam, 1995: 103). In Stam’s view, differences, rage, anger and pain all have to be acknowledged as part of the notion of multiculturalism. “A polycentric perspective” Stam writes, “would recognize not only difference but even irreconcilable difference (1995: 118).” In this way many different voices and narratives are admitted into the discourse that fall beyond simplistic classifications like race and colour.

### **Beyond Race and Color**

Moving beyond race and color creates the potential for increasing dialogically engaged discourse. In this review of literature that privileges multi-narratives over master-narratives, arguments are raised by Gilroy (2000), Andrew Lattas (2001), Mudrooroo Nyoongah (1994), and Wendy Brady (2001) that expands the content of discourse beyond race and color. Gilroy discusses this crisis of race and what he calls *raciology* to expand the discourse.

Gilroy calls for a move away from old notions of collectivity based on geography and genealogy which, for blacks and First Nations, are a response to the prospect of losing one’s identity. In time, identities have become fixed and speak to blood, history, and anthropological notions of culture and as Gilroy characterizes as a “simple process of

invariant repetition (2000: 13).” It is an ‘inadequate’ response and does little to speak to the fortitude and improvisational skills of the descendents or the complexities of contemporary cultural life. The idea of ‘tradition’ according to Gilroy, is “a closed list of rigid rules that can be applied consciously without interpretation or attention to particular historical conditions, it is a ready alibi for authoritarianism rather than a sign of cultural viability or ethical confidence (2000: 13-14).” The crisis of raciology lies in the changed traditions by political and economic translocal forces that have had great effect on the symbolic currency of ‘race’. Thus, it is necessary to move beyond thinking of identity in terms of physical or essentialized conceptions. Gilroy posits that “this crisis of “race” and representation, of politics and ethics, offers a welcome cue to free ourselves from the bonds of all raciology in a novel and ambitious abolitionist project (2000: 15).” In this, Gilroy defines a different, postracial and postanthropological version of what it means to be human – he calls for a ‘nonracial humanism (2000: 15)’.

As a starting point, Gilroy asks us to go back and look at the history of struggles over the limits of humanity in order to see how much suffering raciology has brought. As a result, new questions arise with regard to our humanity. We are confronted with new contexts for identity expression. For example, with the development of new science that allows for such things as the cultivation of cells outside the human body presents us with a whole new set of boundaries in which to express our identity that are difficult to fathom in their entirety. As Gilroy writes, “this biotechnical revolution demands a change in our understanding of ‘race,’ species, embodiment, and human specificity...it asks that we reconceptualize our relationship to ourselves, our species, our nature, and the idea of life... We need to ask...whether there should be any place in this new paradigm of life for the idea of specifically racial differences (2000: 21).” In the reconceptualization, we are moving away from the specific idea of race based on body type. As a result, there is occurring a distancing of the body from the mind. In his discussion on distancing, Gilroy

introduces us to Zygmunt Bauman's notion of 'body as task' where physical prowess gives blacks special title in exchange for their disassociation from the mind (2000: 22).

As a result, the old conceptualization of identity perceived through the triad of identity, individuality and morality are separated. In this unstable setting, there is an inability to maintain stable racial categories, thus fostering new ways of marking the body to make it different such as tattoos, branding, and piercing (2000: 22). Thus, racialized bodies are presented as objects, and the boundaries are much less visible. As a result, there is an increased emphasis on culture. As Gilroy states, "Culture... becomes akin to a form of property attached to the history and traditions of a particular group and regulated by anyone who dares to speak its name (2000:24)." Culture as a form of property to be owned and performed rather than lived is what characterizes the anxieties of the moment. The body then is called upon to supply the proof of where that culture fits in the inevitable hierarchy of value. Once again, culture provides the short-cut to belonging.

The nonracial humanism that Gilroy proposes is not so easily attainable. In this regard, the silences and lapses that characterize notions of juridical rights and sovereign entitlements must become part of the movement towards this goal. In this, 'race' and raciology must be dissected, and fully reckoned with (2000: 30). When looking at the politics of recognition in the modern era, Gilroy describes the destructive relationship between race and politics. "Modernity's new political codes," he writes, "must be acknowledged as having been compromised by the raciological drives that partly formed them and wove deadly, exclusionary force into their glittering universal promises (2000: 62)."

In addition to Gilroy's claims, Lattas illustrates the fallacy of the moral high-ground taken by western society. Lattas writes "it is anti-racism that provides white Anglo-Celtic citizens with the moral terms within which they can problematise anew the essentialising identities, cultures and social relationships of minorities (2001: 109)."

Lattas characterizes this as ‘disembodied racism (2001: 108)’. The white community “reconstitutes its moral authority by leveling the accusation of racism against those who claim to be racism’s victims (2001: 108).” Gilroy attributes the outcome on humanity as “too restrictively defined, [humanity] emerged from all this in filleted form (2000: 62).” This left the notion of humanity vulnerable to monopolization as we have seen in the work of Hall in his writing in the discourse of the West and the Rest. As such, humanity, Gilroy writes “could exist only in the neatly bounded, territorial units where true and authentic culture could take root under the unsentimental eye of ruthlessly eugenic government (2000: 62).” Like Lattas, Gilroy tries to expand the narrow limits of essentialist homogenizing generalizations.

Raised consciousness of the state of identity politics also involves a new awareness of self that Gilroy describes as ‘double consciousness (2000: 77)’ which according to Gilroy is a comparable state of being and not belonging. It is characterized as an externally created identity owned out of necessity and of impossibility. It is an understanding of identity that emerges from what Gilroy describes as “the dense, hybrid, and multiple formations of postcolonial culture in which translation is simultaneously both unremarkably routine and charged with an essential ethical significance (2000: 77).” Double consciousness can also be seen as a form of bi-cultural hybridity.

Gilroy goes on to examine the relationality of identity and belonging. As we have seen in previous sections, theoretical and political discourse clouds issues of belonging, ethnicity, and nationality. Gilroy describes this relationality when he suggests that “consciousness of identity gains additional power from the idea that it is not the end product of one great man’s “audacity” but an outcome of shared and rooted experience tied, in particular to place, location, language, and mutuality (2000: 100).” It is an abstract entity which shifts and changes rapidly as we have witnessed in Scott and Hall’s discussions on history and identity-making. There are many links that can be made from identity to political, cultural, psychological, and psychoanalytical fields (2000: 101). This

forces us to look at collectivities in a different way, one that leads us away from geography and biology or space and place. Gilroy challenges us to rethink the idea of diaspora. According to Gilroy:

...diaspora is a concept that problematizes the cultural and historical mechanics of belonging. It disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location, and consciousness. It destroys the naïve invocation of common memory as the basis of particularity in a similar fashion by drawing attention to the contingent political dynamics of commemoration (2000: 23).

The re-working and use of this idea of diaspora accounts for natural phenomena of change. Diaspora accounts for the pressures to associate and the effects of economic and political atmospheres (2000: 126). The term diaspora embraces the historical dispersal and diffusion of peoples who still think of themselves as collectives and accommodates the resultant changed peoples, cultures and realities. Thus, change becomes an asset in thinking critically about identity.

This diasporic bicultural thinking is in contrast to modern political structures and modes of power that characterize the homogenous nation-state. "When a diaspora talks back to a nation-state," writes Gilroy, "it initiates conflict between those who agree that they are more or less what they were, but cannot agree whether the more or the less should take precedence in contemporary political calculations (2000: 126)." This is related to the processes of re-identification undertaken by Black people in Gilroy's case and by Aboriginal peoples.

For example, Wendy Brady explores the right of one to authenticate the identity of the cultural other. Her query centers on the role of power in writing Aboriginal history. At issue are conflicts that are perceived to stem from an inability to cope with non-

Aboriginal society and culture. Yet, Brady points out that these conflicts are often over white understandings and recordings of Indigenous culture. As another example of disauthentication of white knowledge, Mudrooroo Nyoongah discusses films as sites of Aboriginal contestation and protestation. "Signifiers of race are accepted as essential differences," Nyoongah states, "that is until they appear to interfere with the craft of the often male auteur, then Aboriginality and even non-Aboriginality are pro-tested, are contested as unwelcome intrusions into the non-political craft of the auteur as he screams about the tyranny of 'political correctness' (1994: 260)." These 'signifiers of race' are meant to be as 'accurate' as possible and as non-controversial as possible. By their nature, films are sites of controversy as they reflect the structure of the political economy.

The conflict concerns the inability to live within the parameters and boundaries of the identities created by the colonizers achieved through non-Aboriginal historical writing or filming about the other. Brady says that the "writing of history is assumed to have validity through the act of writing, whereas for Indigenous peoples, history is worn in the body and in the connection between memory and practice (2001: 23)." Authority resides in the non-aboriginal community. Brady writes:

...non-Aboriginal historians believe they are engaged in an act of translation to communicate to the broader population (of white people) whereas we are translating in order for those individuals to comprehend our historical reality and methods of recording (2001: 23).

Some Indigenous people fall into the trap of trying to justify their history through their writing. Indigenous persons who are multi-lingual and multi-skilled in the ways of the dominant culture are perceived to have eroded their Indigenous identities and therefore devalue their Indigenousness in a modern context. The voice and positioning of the Indigenous historian is devalued for that reason. In turn, the primary status of the white historian is confirmed by their ability to write about the other.

Another aspect of the varied identities at play in Australia with relevance to Canada includes the subaltern or immigrant who is perceived to be master while also being the second lieutenant in the dominant culture. The immigrant is perceived to be yet another colonizer of the land. Brady questions whether they are allowed to write for the Indigenous other and responds with a resounding no. Aboriginal historians are engaged in an act of translating to communicate to the broader population the aboriginal historical reality and methods of recording. As aboriginal history is written, there is the extra effort in which we find is necessary to justify the Aboriginal perspective – “We fight while their words and their constructions are writ upon this land (2001: 24).” In an effort to reclaim aboriginal identity from amongst the pile of identities that encompass Australia, Brady writes that a sort of public self-destruction through the new historical writing has occurred in order to make it possible to retreat and reconfirm the aboriginal identity through the new writing. The indigenous knowledge is there. It’s a matter of deciding just how much they want to share and then writing it.

### **Conclusion**

In my review of critical discourse writing on the relationality of identity there is a trend to expand the dialogue. I see critical self-reflection as a major theme throughout the discourse literature on Indigenous identity and thus points the way in a discussion of the relationality of identity. Moving from a state of oppression through a process of emancipation where freedom is realized in critically self-reflective self aware individuals brings to light three findings from my inquiry into identity in relational terms. The following three findings derive from the literature I reviewed:

1. There is relationality between the identities of oppressors and oppressed.
2. The relationality for emancipating individuals is located in post-modern multiculturalism.
3. Once freed, the individual views a larger world they live in.

These findings are implicit in the critical discourse framework I reviewed.

In this Chapter I have situated myself in the post-colonial world by first going through socialist theory on individuality. As we have seen, the tradition of emancipation that comes from socialist theory has the tendency to homogenize and generalize individuality. In this way, Indigenous people are peasants in the socialist schema, and as we have seen the essential nature of the social dialectic has existed everywhere in human development and the imposed criteria does not evolve. However, socialist critique of liberalism exposes Marxian homogenizing generalizations that are quite consistent with liberal authentication. Indigenous peoples are caught within this web of authentication. It is out of this critique that a critical discourse ensues under which intellectual relationality encourages critical pedagogy and critical learning theory in order to emancipate Indigenous identities.

The recognition of critical discourse as part of the process to emancipate identities carries with it the realization that there is more than identity at stake. Out of the notion of identity emerge other aspects of the self in relation to the world in which we live. They are familial relations, communal relations, issues of belonging, expressions of culture and history, heritage, access to resources, inheritance, monetary gain and loss, to name a few. In order to fully understand the implications of understanding identity, your identity, and what it means, it is necessary to understand how my narrative inquiry into women's stories hinges liberal and socialist theories, and is connotative of critical discourse. I have illustrated the line of thinking as I discussed how the socialist understanding of individuality as a model for human development and its limitations that resulted in de-individualization. Critique of these limitations has resulted in the post-colonial context where Indigenous "nationalism" attempts to de-authenticate Indigenous identity and enables us to view reality on our own terms. In the wake of this movement to de-authenticate, homogenous cultures are filled with self-identified re-individuals.

Meta-narratives, or many voices (owennasohna) have long been viewed as good. In the next section I am going to talk about “I am me” or as Calhoun said earlier “I am I” as a way of initiating the discussion into the inquiry into Kanienkehaka women’s identity. I provide Chapter 5 as “Kahente’s Master Narrative” that not only includes the researcher as a participant in the discourse, but provides a platform to discuss the narrative inquiry method as praxical in expanding the content of critical discourse and critical pedagogy.

## Chapter Five

### Kahente's Master Narrative

#### Introduction

In this chapter I outline Paulo Freire's conception of the individual using *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) to articulate critical discourse theory on the individual. In this view humanity is a *thing* that is bestowed upon an individual by the dominant class, and that colonial-power can be resisted on the road to emancipating humanity. The achievement of obtaining humanity for the oppressed is outlined by Freire in the act of revolution, transformation, and the reformation of the education system. Freire posits that true humanity is in the active rebirth of the individual. Through the individual's active participation in critical self-reflection and dialogue the *conscientization* of the individual occurs and then through this process individuals achieve emancipation from oppression.

In this discussion I outline how has the critical view changed and evolved over time. In Chapter Four I described what relevant critical theorists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century offer as a complex and variegated meta-individual. As the questions of the critical discourse scholars are being asked and answered, many more come to the forefront. This critical inquiry is also taking place among Indigenous scholars such as Vine Deloria, Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, Michael Yellowbird, Jolene Rickard, Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver and Georges Sioui. Words like "indigeneity", "auto-histoire", and "americity" add to the dialogically engaged critique of colonization. Although these scholars are not the focus of this study, their work is relevant to situating myself as an Indigenous researcher. Other writers like Antonio Gramsci whose critically reflective prison writings transformed Marxism in praxis have relevance to this discussion. By consequence the work of Homi Bhabha also shows that it is in the emergence of gaps rather than in the

distinctiveness of *Otherness*—à la Edward Said—that the politics of difference is played out.

Some threads need to be laid out for my argument. In this discussion of theories of the individual a clear development derives from the liberal and socialist discourse. The liberal thesis for liberating individuals from church canon had revolutionary overtones in France and the American colonies. The ensuing *laissez faire* for liberal political economy restricted power to property owners who were mostly white men. However, Marx' and Engels' response includes international competition in the struggle for economic domination that is hardly philanthropic but meant to swing control of political economy to the industrial workers, a dehumanized worker was the collateral damage. Ironically both threads of the political economy discourse appeared in post-world-war two reconstruction with critical discourse and post-modern concerns with individuality. In this case dialogical engagement, mutual respect, and cultural relativity are tips on the iceberg of Foucaultian, Habermasian, and Freirean conceptions for navigating cultural landscapes by individuals—we are what we learn. We learn that individuality has many influences that comprise identity.

To accomplish this discussion I examined Mill as a basis for a modern liberal conception of the individual in society. For example, in my experience, the Indian Act is part of the Canadian evolutionary master narrative through a liberal theoretical perspective that provides the Indian special status—allowing me time to become like-minded with other citizens and assimilate myself to become a “fit” citizen. Ironically liberalism includes language such as devolution, fit to govern, or fitness for citizenship. The socialists critique and appropriate this frame to suggest peasant and worker consciousness as the true-self to achieve fitness.

In Chapter Two I describe a woman who is a schoolteacher. My teacher's acquisition of property defines her as an individual in the liberal community. She has two more cars than most people to signify her fitness to be a full participant in liberal society.

She is also part of the worker class, without individuality except for her worker essence. And she is a *thing*, based on the previous two criteria, whose emancipation is a transformative stage in her personal growth. Her individuality is an “it” bestowed on her by liberal and socialist authenticators.

This study is not a misanthropic inquiry into a polemic of unthinking individuals. The teacher is not Nietzsche’s cow, an “it” without any sense of identity and individuality. This inquiry is quite the opposite—expressing my humanity by trying to identify the liberal and social power exerted on people to deprive and the critically reflective capacities used to restore their ability to think for themselves. Michel Foucault wrote about signs and symbols of power that form the power-knowledge used on an individual that socializes individuals to dominant hegemonies by teaching obedience to authority. Identifying the process of colonizing Native identity through Foucaultian constructs has become the new frontier for indigenous scholarship that starts with decolonizing the mind. As discussed in Chapter Four, the critical discourse literature attempts to reconnect identity to individuals. People are not cows, not an *it*, and have a right to feel good about themselves. They do this through learning of their self.

In this chapter I begin the journey of what Georges Sioui calls an auto-histoire, a self-history that creates an edifice for indigenous critical reflection. According to Sioui, an Amerindian autohistory is an ethical approach to understanding history and is based on two premises. Indigenous cultural values have had a great influence on the Euro-American character for their influence on the cultural code. Sioui’s second premise is that the persistence of indigenous values through critical self reflection has more relevance to the social nature of historical science than merely studying social and cultural transformations, an overdone method employed by William Fenton and others of the Iroquoianist school. Our life stories reveal the depth of Indigeneity--influenced by culture, character and relationship to the world (Sioui 1992: 21).

I have a story to tell. Much like the eight women, my life story is one of continual dialogue with myself and my life. I realize that in order to illustrate the methodology of narrative inquiry, I must first apply the method to my own life. As a result I am going to share my story and use it to answer the three questions of this study as a way to illustrate the research process. Going through the process of self inquiry will also give me principal insights that will help me in listening and retelling the stories of others.

### **Kahente's auto-histoire**

In the process of writing this study my mother suffered a heart attack. I went to be with her at the hospital and who I saw was someone I haven't seen in a long time, my *mom*. The use of the term *mom* for me connotes a deep familiarity with her. The usual term "mother" is more distanced. The experience of seeing her vulnerable and scared helped me to put aside all my feelings of frustration, anger and hurt that I felt towards her. I empathized with her feelings of fear and pain, as I have been dealing with major issues for the past four years that have forced me to open myself up and deal with fears, worries, and threats that have deep rooted consequences for my life. In this critically reflective exercise, my mother has played a central and inadvertent role by what I feel are actions that resulted in a life filled with pain, insecurity, personal hardship, and yet a certain amount of happiness too. My mother has inherited a legacy of hurt from the effects of colonization on the Kanienkehaka people of Kahnawake. As a result of her own negative experiences growing up, which I know very little about, she inflicted her own pain and insecurities on me. This story is one that explores my own memories and experiences. At times it may seem harsh but this is my life as I remember it. If you don't want to risk awakening your own hurts and insecurities then stop reading now. If you want to learn of how one person critically examined her own life then keep on reading.

I grew up to be a person who couldn't be find happiness in the small things. Expressing anger was easy for me while happiness and empathy were difficult emotions

for me to show. I was smart to learn how to articulate my feelings in a way that were diplomatic. In my academics and sports I strived to be the best, to the detriment of others. I feel that I suffered in silence because I could see that I wasn't able to grow as a woman and mother. I looked towards my friend's mothers as examples of what I wanted in a mother. In measuring myself against what I saw, I saw I was flawed. And as I began to look inward I saw someone I didn't like. And so I resolved to change that person and be true to myself.

It seems harsh at first glance, what I say about my mother, but through this experience I see now that she is just another human being who has felt pain, suffering, joy, and happiness like the rest of us. I just wish I knew her story better. She has never been forthcoming about the full extent of her life. She has only hinted at it. And I have been forced to find out in a roundabout way what her life was like. Her story is not the focus here and I am resolved to tell my story instead. In this way, we will see a story about critical reflection, emancipation and self realization that illuminates my own individuality. It is filled with pain, hurt, and happiness and includes my own humorous look on my life. I feel we have to be able to laugh at our own expense. It makes things more real.

I was born two and a half months early at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. I was the first of many difficult pregnancies for my mother. My mother loves to describe how small I was and how I fit into the palm of her hand. And most importantly, how I survived, which I guess is remarkable for the times. In 1972 there wasn't much known about how to help severely premature babies. After my birth I spent the first two months of my life in an incubator. From the first day that I was born I learned how to use sleep to heal. And I have used sleep ever since to escape from reality. The solace of sleep is well documented in medical literature. My mother was never able to nurse me. I was fed through a tube inserted into a vein in my forehead. I still carry that scar to this day. Between classes at McGill Law School my mother would come to see

me. I had underdeveloped lungs and would regularly stop breathing. My mother believed that patting me all over would stimulate my development along with my breathing. This is something that I loved and would put me to sleep instantly as a child. I was her special child, the sick one, and I guess I must have learned pretty early that it is okay to have something wrong with you. You could say that affliction is one of my best attributes.

Originally, I started this memoir of my life in an attempt to deal with painful memories and feelings. I wanted it to be a catalyst that would propel me beyond the years filled with bouts of depression and live a normal life. At some point I realized my story was similar to the ones that the eight women had told me. Like theirs, not all my memories are negative. My earliest memory is of my brother pulling my hair as we played on a red carpet. I believe this took place in the old stone house that I lived in for the first four years of my life. This house was in the Mohawk community of Kahnawake or Caughnawaga as it was known at that time. This is my mother's home community and where her mother and father were from. She says she also spent a lot of time in Brooklyn New York where she was born. She lived in apartments with her family while her father worked the high steel. Her father fell off of a bridge in New York State when she was thirteen years old and so her mother was left with nine kids to raise on her own. She moved back to Kahnawake permanently. My mother was second oldest and helped raise her younger siblings.

Born with a distinct beauty my mother became a model in the 1960s. She used her beauty and notoriety as a launch for her activism in Indian rights at the same time. She was both loved and vilified for her work. She has told me stories of her life as a model and of her activism with much joy. I think she loved those times. I feel she has never wanted to give up being the center of attention since. She met my father at this part of her life. He is from the Six Nations Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. They had four children together and were married only for one year. He continually came in and out of my life

over the years as he pursued his doctoral studies at Stanford University and later a career in the public sector.

The years in Kahnawake are described to me in idyllic terms by my mother. She says she had lots of help from her aunts raising us as she pursued her studies at McGill or went off to work in Ottawa at Indian And Northern Affairs Canada. My mother characterizes herself as a hardworking single mom. My father was not around and according to her it was by his choice. Later on I asked him about his relationship with my mother and I have come to see that this was not so. He said he was estranged and aloof for reasons of self-preservation. He knew how volatile she could be. My mother took it upon herself to raise us. There were plenty of neighbors and relatives to help out a single mom. Her view is that this is okay and the Mohawk way is for a community to help raise your children. In certain ways I agree with this philosophy, I have experienced this same thing with my own children. Because of my mother's philosophy on raising children, my sisters, brother and I were left in other people's care quite a lot. My mother saw herself as the valiant single Mohawk mother and I don't think there were any people who disagreed with her. Upon retrospect, I see now that as a result of her being our only parent we were raised according to what appears to me as a very myopic view of the world. She only spoke in Kaniienkeha to us and encouraged others to do the same only while we lived in Kahnawake. The total immersion in the Kaniienkeha language didn't last.

My brother died when I was between two and three. My mother has said that he died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome or Crib Death. The second earliest memory I have is of trying to wake him up as he lay dead in his crib. I believe the trauma of that moment stayed with me. I believe I was the focus of my mother's frustration and grief and was most likely accused of doing something to him. This understanding comes from an extreme feeling of guilt that I have carried through my life. I never understood it. The only understanding comes from my own self reflection. After my brother's death, my mother says she went into a deep depression. She also says my older sister and I helped

her to get out of it just by reminding her of her responsibilities as our mother. She went on to get pregnant with my next youngest sister a year later. In that time she married and divorced my father all in the same year. She hasn't spoken too much about this point in her life. A protestant, my mother had my older sister and I baptized on my father's insistence, apparently. I look at the pictures of us standing outside the church in our little white suits; I don't look too impressed. The smiles on my parents' faces looks contrived. At some point in this time my mother began to attend the longhouse in Caughnawaga. The only knowledge I have of this is a naming certificate of my older sister given to me by my daughter's great grandmother. Other than that one clue and some pictures, I know nothing else about my mother's Kanienkehaka spiritual or traditional roots.

When I was between four and five my mother packed up my two sisters and I and moved us to Ottawa where she had found full-time employment at Indian and Northern Affairs. At that time she stopped talking in Kanienkeha to us. I can still see the picture of us sitting in the back seat of the brown Oldsmobile on the day we arrived. For the first few years we lived in a little red brick house across from the Museum of Man on O'Connor Street near the YMYWCA. The pictures of me at that time depict a happy little girl. I am standing in a garbage can full of water, the poor man's swimming pool. I can still see the happiness and innocence in my eyes. In this house my sisters and I had the big front room upstairs. My mother slept on a pull-out couch in the living room. Any house we lived in always had a boarder. That was how my mother made ends meet. By renting out rooms my mother opened our door to strangers. I realized later on that our safety was continually jeopardized by this practice as we grew up, although I understand it. We had to survive.

A good memory I have of this time on O'Connor Street was learning how to ride my two-wheeled bike in the park across the street. We spent lots of time in that park. It was a place where I could act out my childhood. To keep us busy my mother signed us up to many programs at the YMYWCA like Swim and Gym and after school daycare. The

kitchen staff used to look after us in the morning while my mother went to work out. I think I ate breakfast at the YMYWCA for four years straight under the watchful eyes of the kitchen ladies. Scrambled eggs with ketchup were my favorite breakfast. Upon reflection, I feel my mother had found another community to help her raise her children. She has told me with humor about the terrible tantrums I had that would last all day while I was at the daycare. She would never come to see me and on her insistence I would get shut into a room in the back to scream it out. Some days I just wouldn't talk. The strongest memory I have of that time is the chocolate pudding handprints I made for her on my Mother's Day card. I don't remember what the words were, something about being sweet I think.

At some point my dad moved into an apartment building around the corner from our house. Every Sunday my sisters and I would be dropped off at his building. In turn, my Dad would send us across the street to the Museum of Man to spend the afternoon wandering its halls while he cooked a supper of corn soup and scone bread. I wonder why we never got kicked out. I knew every exhibit by heart. My favorite was the old black and white film of the War Canoe. I also liked the life sized replica of an archaeological dig. The section on clothing and fashion through the ages fed my childhood fantasies and fostered a life long love affair with period films and clothing. Looking back on this time I think we were left alone a lot. But I think the experiences at the museum sparked my later interest in anthropology.

I went to Elgin Public School about the time the Vietnamese boat people began to enter Canada as refugees from their war-torn country. I remember one day when a group of Vietnamese children entered our school. I think this was the first time I had encountered people who were really different looking. Or at least they were to a six year old. I was friendly to everyone including the new students. We interacted like kids do. A boy named Duke was my favorite. He could turn his eyelids inside out and scare the girls. It was funny to me.

My mother would travel a lot for her work and Indian Affairs and she told me that every time she would travel I would act up and get injured. It was my way she says of letting her know I missed her and getting her home faster. One time before she left on a trip we were having breakfast and I was fussing about something. She slapped me on the back twice really hard to shut me up. That same day it happened to be a swim day for my class. When I was changing into my suit my teacher saw the marks on my back and reported my mother to social services. Later on I was taken out of class and taken to a hospital to be evaluated. I still remember sitting on the high examination table with a white paper gown on and being asked lots of questions. At the time I didn't know what was going on. After that my mother was formally charged with child abuse. She took me to the school to withdraw me and the principal wouldn't let her. She screamed at him and the teacher in front of me until he gave in. I remember she made my teacher cry. As we marched out of there my mother spoke of how proud she was that she could vindicate herself and get the teacher and school back for reporting her. The memories of the teacher's concern, the principle's bewilderment and my mother's rage have stayed with me to this day.

I didn't understand everything that had happened at that time. Upon reflection, I remember sitting in my new school classroom the next week feeling really alone. When the social services people came to our house my mother screamed at them and wouldn't let them in. I was sent to Montreal to my Aunt and her husband for two weeks. This was to keep the social services from finding me and taking me away. Later on, my mother told me that she went to court was convicted of child abuse. To me it was all one big adventure. I got to get out of school and go visit my favorite Aunt. Later on my mother told me she got the conviction removed from her record.

When we lived in the O'Connor house my older sister had her fifth or sixth birthday. I remember my mother had a beautiful cake made and put it in the fridge until the party the next day. In the meantime my sister snuck into the fridge and picked all the

icing off the top. When my mother went to check on the cake the next day she saw what my sister had done and was so enraged that she squished it into my sister's face. I remember watching it happened and innocently using my finger to take some of the icing off and eating it. I never thought much about it, except that it was funny. It wasn't until much later as I reflected on that incident that I realized that my mother has an extreme temper. She is reactionary.

At this same time I remember men coming and going in my mother's life. She was still beautiful and had long black hair. She used to let me brush it and braid it for her. As a woman, I know that long hair can be attractive to men. The men in my mother's life were mostly non-native men, I think. This is the recollections of a young girl who naively equated being Indian with dark hair, dark skin and dark eyes. I remember we were always put on show for them. Our dancing talents put to use as we pretend-tapped for them. The memories of my mother and the men are not very clear. The one that mattered the most, my father, was never around and only showed up in Christmas gifts sent from his travels around the world. He stayed away. The only man I remember most vividly was my step-father. From what I remember in conversation with family, he pursued my mother. My step-father was in my life from when I was seven or eight to thirteen. He and my mother dated but I don't know for how long. My mom, sisters and I moved in with him and his three kids pretty quickly.

My mother never married him even though he asked her. My mother said she wouldn't marry him because he is a white man and she would lose her Indian status, although they had a common law marriage and one child together. We lived in a three story house in a middle class neighborhood. The local high school was a block up the street. Those years I remember as difficult with the blended family. Yet, there were many happy times. My step-father introduced me to the joys of camping, canoeing, and cross-country skiing.

Laura was my best friend in those years. We had a lot of fun together. She and I were inseparable. Her house was my refuge from my family. From what I remember, my step sisters were angry at the world and worked hard at isolating me from my sisters. I became the brunt of their anger. They would isolate me from my sisters and focus their cynicism on me. I bore the brunt of their dissatisfaction with their lives. My step-father never disciplined his daughters and I don't think my mother realized what was going on. As a result I never felt protected. There just were too many of us and too much going on.

My mother has this philosophy about keeping kids busy, so busy that they won't get into trouble. I remember as a kid taking all kinds of classes and courses. She kept me busy with pottery class, stained glass classes, copper and enamel classes, dance class, swimming lessons, sailing lessons, tennis lessons, swim training, summer day camp, summer away camp, track and field camp, brownies, and girl guides to name a few. As a result, I had not social life of my own. Only one contrived through the many classes I took. In those years I always felt out of place at school. I was the girl with the short chlorine-bleached hair, the second hand clothes and the funny name. I stood out so I was ignored by my peers. I could say I was also partly to blame. I was quiet and caught up in my own little world. I used to read voraciously. I would even walk to school reading all the way. I walked into a number of telephone poles as a result. Although, in retrospect, I think my appetite for reading made me a good writer.

From the age of eight to thirteen I swam competitively. This was never done on my own but it was a family activity. All the six kids swam. I had a natural talent but I wasn't motivated to train all the time. Swimming competitively meant attending two practices a day, which for an eight and nine year old is unthinkable these days. We had to get up at five for our morning practices and went after school to the pool again for the afternoon practice. I remember holding my breath for long periods of time as I lay at the bottom of the pool and watched the other swimmers doing their laps. The silence under the water was very meditative for me.

As I stated earlier, I had no social life. My life was taken up with swimming. The first club that we swam for was the Ottawa Y Olympians (OYO) where the head coach was Clifford. Cliff as I called him, was my savior, my friend and my punching bag. Clifford must have seen something in me because he took the time to listen to me. He and I spent lots of time together driving around in his little gold Honda before practice eating candy and listening to Michael Jackson's Thriller album. And he picked me up from the bus depot every morning the one and only summer I went to summer school. He made sure I got to class okay. My older sister and I went cross country skiing with Cliff. Cliff took me under his wing. I could say that he was my best friend, my big brother, my protectorate. I saw him one time since I quit swimming at thirteen. He was working in a restaurant in Ottawa. As I reflect back on that time and what I realized when I met him for the last time, I see now that he was a gay man dealing with his own issues in a time where to be gay wasn't accepted like it is today. He sympathized with my anger and my energy. I think I was him as a kid—misunderstood—and that's why he wanted to help me.

At that time I was mad all the time. I would bite people and fight in the pool with the other swimmers. I was out of control. I always wonder if my mother kept me in swimming because it tired me out which also tamed me a little. There are good aspects of this time in my life. Most distinctly I remember the rewards of getting up at five in the morning to go to swim practice. On the way to practice my mother would stop at the Tim Horton's and get us an apple fritter before practice. We were not allowed sweets so that was memorable and also made me want to get up in the morning. I have to say, that was a smart tactic to get a kid out of bed. After a few years with the first club, our whole family switched en masse to a larger club in Nepean. I didn't like it there. At the new club I felt like just a number. I didn't feel like I fit in. My best friend at that club was a girl from Norway who also had a funny name. I guess the two girls with the strange names stuck together. I didn't have the same freedom to lie at the bottom of the pool and watch the

other swimmers like I did at the old club. Instead I was first encouraged, then coerced, and finally yelled at to work hard. I did for a time but lost interest, it wasn't fun anymore. After a while I lived only for the swim meets, the doughnuts, Saturday morning practices, and my friend with the funny name.

During my swimming years I was not allowed to grow my hair. Originally medium brown, my hair was bleached a strange blond green by the constant exposure to chlorine in the pool. I swam twice a day for years. I also didn't brush my hair very often so my mother would cut it at the knots. It ended up a choppy mess which was the way she left it. My mother likes to tell the story of how one day she couldn't get the brush through my hair so she broke it over my head because she was so mad. My sister was the one who reminded me of this event. It was a lime green brush. I think it's amazing how we can forget such things. Upon retrospect, it is another example of my mother's reactionary anger.

I never thought I was very attractive. I was always mistaken for a boy. I remember one time standing outside my house in the middle of the sidewalk while all the local high school kids headed home. A student came up to me and said one day I would be beautiful. I thought she was nuts. I think I must have looked at her like she was insane.

When I was thirteen I was allowed to quit swimming for good. My mom and step father gave up on me after months of taking me to swim practice only to find I had slept on the bench in the locker room during the practice. I didn't care. It then got to the point where I would pretend not to be able to wake up for practice even if they tickled my feet. All I wanted to do was sleep. Sleep was my refuge. After I was allowed to quit swimming I grew my hair and began to look after it. At that same time my mother also stopped buying my clothes. She said it was to teach me independence. As a result, I worked for a family around the corner looking after their youngest son for two dollars a day. At first I would baby-sit him after school, then as he got older I would walk him to and from school. With this money I had to buy my own clothes. I never bought anything new. I

would go to second hand stores where I found clothes that I thought were cool. I also learned to sew my own clothes. I dressed in a way that pleased me and made sense to me. Clothing was about comfort, color, and individuality. I thought I was pretty original. At that time I never thought much about having to buy my own clothes. I enjoyed looking for second hand gems and fixing them up was a creative outlet for me. I don't recall ever feeling embarrassed about the way I dressed.

People stayed away from me. I was pretty much a loner at school, right from when I was in elementary school, through junior high to high school. Throughout the years Laura and I stuck together and combated peer pressure issues like boys, clothing choices, and smoking. She supported me with blankets and food when I ran away from home and hid behind her church. We celebrated our birthdays together, just she and I. We would eat the whole cake ourselves. I began to struggle with teenage acne at this time. It made me extremely self conscious.

It was with Laura that I started exploring my spirituality. I thought at one time that I might become a Catholic like her. I remember one day I brought an empty container to her church and filled it with holy water. I started to practice praying as well. I would say the same prayer each night, the same way. At night when I would go to sleep I would visualize myself floating all over the house. I read this book on a young Navaho girl who did astral projection. I thought I could do it too. I was trying so hard to believe in something spiritual outside of my life. At night I would also visualize myself going through space, seeing all the stars as they went by in my mind. My trip would end with me heading into the biggest star of all. That's when I would fall asleep. I also became somewhat superstitious. I didn't like the number six in threes, which was against Catholic belief as Laura instructed me. When the number six would come up on the microwave, I would look away. Spirituality with no direction is a funny thing. I was all over the place with it. I kept searching for peace and meaning in my life, some way of making sense of the world with my family. Much later on I would pray for specific things as I touched my

head, my heart and my belly. My spirituality became more refined as I began to draw on my heritage as a Mohawk. My mother thought Laura was a bad influence on me and would limit how much time we spent together. I suppose that that may have contributed to the failure of my relationship with Laura for a few years in high school. We have since reconnected. Our friendship has lasted.

As a way to get some respite from her kids, my mother would send my sisters and I to Montreal to stay with her sister and her husband. This started when we were five and six and continued into our early teens. I remember those times as being fun. We were allowed to eat candy and my aunt spoiled us. An avid sewer and photographer, my aunt would sew us elaborate dresses and took many photographs of us. There was other stuff that went on with my uncle that I didn't realize the impact of or remember until much later. Upon reflection, I realize that my mother left us in their care and perhaps she didn't realize what was going on. As I look back, I feel I was not protected and my aunt was complicit in what happened.

Also as a respite, my mother would send us one at a time to Toronto to visit an old family friend, Ruth. She would always introduce us as 'her little Indian friend'. Ruth's tradition when I arrived was to take me for a pageboy haircut and make me wear folded down white socks. She liked to put olive oil in my hair to make it shiny. The memory reminds me of those residential school pictures where all the girls have shiny pageboy haircuts, pinafores, and short white socks. This tradition went on until I fought her on it one year. I hated the feeling of the oil in my hair. It never happened again. The socks and the haircut continued though. Ruth liked to tell me this story about her friend Anne who had been dying in the hospital. Ruth took me with her to visit Anne. I put my hand on her head and told her to get better. Anne did and never forgot me. I didn't know how to handle her gratitude. It made me feel uncomfortable. I had not experience with illness and near death when I was a child. When Ruth took me to visit Anne, I took her gifts of drawings and artwork and spent time talking with her. I always knew she would

give me something in return, jewelry, toys, or money. I wish that I had been more giving instead of expecting things from her. When Anne finally died in my teens, I never really thought about it. It was circumstance to me.

When I was thirteen or fourteen my mother broke up with my step father. My youngest sister had been born and my mother was fighting a lot with him and his kids. One day they were arguing on the front porch and he grabbed her arm. She reacted and accused him of abuse. She grabbed my sisters and I, put us in the van and left. We went on a two week trip to New York City with only the clothes on our back. From what I remember she spent the time talking and strategizing about how she was going to extricate herself from her relationship. When we got back to Ottawa, my mother began labeling her possessions in the house with masking tape. She also had my sisters and I sleep in the master bedroom with her. She maintained this urgent sense that my step father was a physical threat to us. I see now that she made more out of things than they really were. On the day we moved out, I remember him breaking the glasses in anger as he and my mother argued. In the years since their relationship, this man has since proven himself to be hard working and a good father to my youngest sister. I believe my mother provoked him into anger because he was not an angry man in all the years we lived with him. I never saw him hit his daughters or talk in a mean way to me. He is the person who got me interested in music and the CBC radio, which I listen to every day.

On the day we moved out, my step father left for work and a moving van came. The movers began packing up all the stuff in the house labeled with my mother's name. My mother, sisters and I moved two blocks away. The way I see it, my step father never even had a chance with my mother. She saw the chance to get out of a relationship that wasn't going the way she wanted. A door opened and she took off running. As a result I got dragged along. It was the start of a very difficult period and was the impetus to the further breakdown of my relationship with my mother.

The house we lived in after that was another big house with three floors. My mother could barely afford the rent as she was still paying a mortgage on the other house. I don't remember being particularly happy in that house. It was always cold and there was never any food around. We also had some pretty strange boarders, two at all times just like in the other house. My mother was stressed out a lot. We had this dog that continually pooped in the house. He was a crazy neglected dog named Bongo. The only saving grace was that I lived less than a block away from Laura. I think I spent most of my time at her house.

In high school I tried to continue with sports. I had always been a good long distance runner but it got to the point where I would try to go for a long run and end up crying and stopping. I couldn't understand what was going on. I think I was going through my first bout of depression. The school guidance counselor, who was also my coach, took me under her wing. She encouraged me and supported me. She finally gave me the out I needed to quit competitive sports for good.

I left home that year after a big fight with my mother. She and I were arguing and I had had enough. I pushed on her bedroom door as we argued and she took that as an attack and punched me in the eye. To me that was the last straw. I called my dad and asked him if I could stay with him. He said yes. I packed all my stuff and my Mother drove me over in silence. I lived with him for a couple months until I finished high school that year. In that time I started running again. I signed up and paid for it myself. I ran for an Ottawa track club. Manically I would run long distances to the track club along the Ottawa Canal. I would do the required workout in the weight room or on the track and then home again. On the weekends I would run ten kilometer runs for fun. Sometimes I would run in local road races. In the spring I finally had an emotional breakdown and quit for good. I began eating to make me feel better. I remember eating a lot of bagels and cream cheese, in bed. My Dad didn't know what to do. I think my Dad called my aunt in Montreal. She and her husband came down to see me before school ended that year. My

aunt took me shopping and bought me a red skirt and white and red blouse. I asked her if I could spend the summer down in Montreal with her. She said okay. So I finished that school year and headed up to Montreal on the bus. I hadn't spoken to my mother in two months.

The first two weeks of my stay in Montreal were quiet. I remember watching a lot of television and my aunt and uncle allowing me to have wine with them. I would have female friends from Ottawa come up and visit and we would go shopping and clubbing even though I was underage. I wasn't being yelled at every day and there was always food in the house. I felt independent and safe for the first time in a while. In a few weeks, my mother found out where I was from my Dad. She called one of my uncle's sons who is a lawyer. From what I remember from my mother, he instructed her to get me out of the house. My mother, father, and another aunt came to get me by smashing down the front door. I think my mother thought that my life was in danger and that I needed to be rescued. This started a big fight over my custody between my father, my aunt and uncle and my mother. I was put into a youth detention center for the rest of the weekend until my court appearance on the Monday morning where my fate would be decided. I was helpless. The Court decided to put me into the Quebec child welfare system. I wasn't rescued. I ended up in a group home for the rest of the summer where my life was regulated. I was still allowed to visit during the day with my aunt and uncle. My uncle worked at destroying any remnant of my relationship with my mother through long talks with me. I remember he would sit me down and tell me how my mother was a whore—using that word exactly. I was under a lot of stress and my health was in decline. I stopped having my periods completely. At the end of the summer I went back to court. The court decided it was in my best interest to place me in the custody of my father. I would be allowed to go back to Ottawa and live on my own. I did just that. In fact it was one of the best things that happened to me. My father contributed to my rent and I worked to support myself.

I moved into a house owned by a church group in Ottawa. I worked at two part-time jobs and finished high school. I think I was pretty responsible. My life consisted of going to work and going to school. I went to regular counseling and was put on medication until I surfaced. Despite the hardship I got top grades in my final year and in fact finished a year early. The same guidance counselor who had been my savior as a track coach kept an eye on me. As I grew more independent, I moved from the house to a downtown rooming house. I wanted to live with my best friend at the time that also went to my high school. We would go out on weekends and go drinking or playing pool. I always drank in moderation. She was the first close friend I had had in a while. I also had my first boyfriend.

During this time I walked or biked everywhere. In the short time I had lived with my Dad he had taught me how to fix my bike. I remember feeling independent. After I went back to Ottawa I never had any contact with my aunt and uncle again. I am angry with my aunt for not protecting me from her husband. And I was very angry with my mother for not protecting me.

The summer after high school the Oka Crisis happened. At that time I didn't have much contact with my mother. She took my two youngest sisters who were at the time aged four and fourteen to the Kanesatake Treatment Center with her as she did research for her Masters degree in Canadian Studies at Carleton University. My mother and sisters spent the next seventy-eight days there and I spent it in confusion in Ottawa. Before the Oka Crisis I never knew my mother to be political. She went to her job every day and came home. I never knew what being a Mohawk was about. My mother had rarely taken us back to Kahnawake to visit her relatives. So when I got news one day of my mother and sisters were behind the barricades at the Kanesatake Treatment Center at this protest that was making news all over the world I was surprised. I was also very angry at my mother for putting my two sisters in danger. Both my father and the father of my youngest sister fought hard to get them out of the situation and into safety. Since then, the

Oka Crisis has served as a continual pivotal focus for my Mother's political activism. As an adult and a mother myself, I don't think it was right to put my sisters in danger. I learned this from watching the effects on my sister's lives and from experience. In my work at the Nation Office I did bring my oldest daughter to a peaceful protest in New York State that turned violent. It's not something I would do again. Since then, I have been criticized for doing so. I took that to heart and learned my lesson. I don't know why anyone didn't tell my Mother that that was wrong.

On the positive side, the Oka Crisis and my mother's involvement evoked my awareness of something that was missing about me. It was an awareness of me as a Mohawk, although I didn't know what that meant. During the crisis I didn't sleep very much. In fact I remember not sleeping or eating for two weeks straight. I was a mess. In order to do my part in the best way I knew how, I went to a rally in Oka Park and paid attention to the news. I was happy when it was over. My mother's actions left me feeling confused. When she got back to Ottawa she wasn't the same person. She became driven by politics and radical. She lived by an extreme radicalism that I didn't understand. She lost her job at Indian and Northern Affairs. The post traumatic stress made her put on a lot of weight. She was never the same again. I both loved and reviled her at the same time. I was so mad at her for putting my sisters' lives in danger. My mother would spend all her time going to rallies, on her computer or at court. She was driven by her cause. Her explanations for her actions were nonexistent. Her life became the cause. As a result, I witnessed my other sisters' lives and well-being put on the back burner. It's like she gave up on being a mother. My fourteen year old sister was raising the four year old and my older sister was trying to finish high school.

In that time, I began a temping job for the Canadian Coast Guard head office as a Clerk for eight months before I went to university. In the first four months I put on twenty pounds. In the second four I took them off. That period of time was quiet for me. I made fast friends with a woman next door to my mother. She taught me how to cook all

kinds of foods like scalloped potatoes. I moved back home for a little bit but moved out when my friend and I decided to sublet an apartment for the summer in the Ottawa Market.

That spring I put shorts on for the first time and took a good look at myself. I had put on so much weight I felt I looked awful. I decided to do something about it. I bought a mountain bike the next week, changed my diet and began walking to work. I would walk home and then get on my bike and cycle up to the Gatineau Hills for a couple hours. I would then go home and eat. I lost the weight and began to gain some sanity and calmness back in my life. I took out my frustrations on my bike. The peace didn't last. I was attacked by a man late in the summer. It is what is called a date rape. I didn't call the police or report the incident to anyone. I promptly blocked the incident out of my memory for a whole year. It's amazing how the mind can protect you.

I had been accepted at the University of British Columbia that spring and began to make plans to head out to Vancouver. I remember feeling really hopeful when I went to the airport with my father. I was heading off to the unknown and it felt great. I also wanted to get as far away from my mother and Ottawa as I possibly could.

I lived with friends of my father's for the first semester. I was still stressed. In retrospect, I believe it had something to do with my inability to mentally deal with the rape. I had brought my bike with me and rode it to school every morning. I would get up at seven and go to school to go swimming, do weights and sauna and then go to classes. I would do the same thing after classes. This was how I dealt with my stress. I didn't hang out with any Indians on campus at first. It wasn't until I found a gathering place for native students called the First Peoples House that I began to settle in to my life. I was still searching for my identity as a Mohawk. And I was politicizing myself. I would use every research paper as an excuse to write about my people. I was Mohawk and proud. I was also becoming outspoken on native rights issues, which is funny to me now. I knew so little back then and in some ways I still don't know very much. My backbone was my

mother's involvement at Oka. I got lost in her cause. I would write all my research papers on aspects of Iroquois culture and society as a way to learn. I had to rely on my Mother for her knowledge. This was where we reconnected. We would spend time on the phone as we discussed the issues and she would fax me reams of papers to study and use in my research papers. This was the beginning of my indoctrination into her myopic view of the Iroquois world. It took me years to see the world in another way, my own way.

I remember asking a friend of mine who was an elder at the First Peoples House what being an Indian meant. She tried to help me understand in her own way using her own experiences as a west coast Indian but I was still confused. I wore the Warrior Flag and my Mohawk heritage like a suit of armor. In that same semester I remembered the rape. It came flooding back to me. I think the mind has an incredible way of protecting oneself. It let me know when I was ready to begin dealing with the trauma. I wrote a letter to my mother that included every detail, asking for her support. I never got a reply. I decided then to find help on my own. I went to counseling through student services on campus. They taught me about my strength and that I was not a victim but a survivor. This knowledge helped.

That Christmas I went home to see my family in Ottawa. It meant a great deal to me to see my sisters again. My relationship with my mother continued to be strained. I spent more time with my friends in Ottawa than with my family. I remember feeling relieved to be heading back to British Columbia after the holidays were over. In the second semester after I got back from Christmas vacation, I moved into a rooming house near campus. I took up a vegetarian diet and made friends with a girl with a funny hippy name. She and I were inseparable. We bummed smokes together and she taught me how to rock climb. I think she was as unhappy as I was.

That summer I went with another friend who was a nursing student to Banff Alberta to find work. It was the thing for university students to do. I spent the summer living in the YMYWCA and working at the Whyte Museum as an interpreter. I

developed a tour that told the story of the encounter and relationship between Banff's first white settlers and the local First Nations people. I didn't know very much but that summer was fun. I worked, partied and went hiking and climbing. I also suffered from the loss of my mother. This came out in my skin. I had huge eruptions from emotional stress. It made me feel self-conscious. It didn't clear up until I went back to Vancouver to start my second year of university. That summer I also began exploring my gift in my hands. When I would massage I could feel in my stomach what it felt like for the person. This gift allowed me to accurately pinpoint where the massage was most needed and how much pressure to apply.

In Banff I worked at developing my spirituality. I put my Indianness aside except at work and became just another hippy student hanging out in Banff. I started to wear crystals around my neck and prayed every night. I also wrote my thoughts, poems, sayings in a little black book. One night I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned and my right arm kept on flopping up on its own. I worried about my family I wondered what was going on. I tried to call my mother the next day but couldn't get through to anyone for a couple of days. I found out that on the night I was restless, my mother had been at a sundance ceremony in Maryland giving a small flesh offering on behalf of each of her daughters.<sup>30</sup> These pieces of skin were taken from her right arm. I took the reaction in my right arm as a sign that my mother and I were still connected even though I hadn't seen her in over a year. I think it was the point when I started to mend inside. I took the incident as a tangible sign of my spirituality and a lasting connection to my mother.

When my nursing student friend and I got back to Vancouver, we found an apartment near the campus. Most of my money was spent on rent so I had to find part time work on campus making sandwiches to make ends meet. My friend would ask me to

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<sup>30</sup> From what I understand, during the sundance ceremony the men are pierced in the front and back of their chest with eagle claws which are attached with ropes to a tall pole. As they dance, they reach a frenzy and the claws break free. The pain and suffering they undergo is a sacrifice to the sun. The women don't go to such extreme measures but give small flesh offerings cut from their arms as a way to symbolize their commitment and to offer a gift to the sun.

massage her legs after her nursing shift; this allowed me to develop my skills with my hands. She and I were inseparable. She and I partied on the weekends and I began to have emotional mini breakdowns when I got too drunk. I didn't know what was bothering me so much. I thought I was happy about being a student and far away from my mother. I have since come to realize that there were deeper issues that I needed to deal with.

That second school year I was in Vancouver, I went back to Kahnawake for the holidays. My mother and sisters had moved back to the community. They lived in an apartment above Watiio's butcher shop. They had no stove, just a fridge and a microwave oven. That Christmas was fun for the fact that I got to see my sisters who I hadn't seen in four months. My mother was still going up to St. Jerome courthouse to support the last three remaining warriors on trial from the Oka Crisis— 'Lasagna', 'Noriega' and 'Twenty-twenty'.<sup>31</sup> As she sat in the court, she would write Mohawk Nation News reports on the daily events and send them out by fax machine. My mother eventually turned her Mohawk Nation News reports into a book.

During the holidays I had casually dated a Mohawk man I had met through my family. After the holidays were over I went back to Vancouver feeling like I had reconnected with my family. Eventually I realized I was pregnant. I finished off that second term of school in a hormonal daze. I decided to move back home to where my family was, to have the baby and figure out what I was going to do. The relationship between the man and I had soured and I realized was going to have the baby alone.

I moved in to my mother's apartment and lived on the couch. She was in the process of building a house and was making a room in the basement where I would live. I needed to be cared for, so I didn't argue. At that time, I was encouraged by an old friend who I had worked with at the Whyte Museum to go back out to Banff to work at the museum for eight weeks. I agreed and left. I lived above the Whyte Bakery in an

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<sup>31</sup> During the Oka Crisis, the Warriors who were behind the barricades adopted code names.

apartment owned by the museum. It was a peaceful time for me as I contemplated my life and the impending birth of my baby. There, in Banff I was still the militant Mohawk. I wore tangible symbols of my culture to make it clear who I was. I had painted and sewed ribbon on a jean jacket and wrote across the back "Mohawk" in bold lettering. At this time I was six months pregnant. I remember waddling to work with the metal tags on the end of ribbons jangling on the back of my jacket. I was pregnant and proud. What a sight!

Not long after I got back to Kahnawake my family and I moved into the new house. This was a month before the baby was born. My daughter came along and all my sisters and my mother were there for her birth. I was a young twenty-one year old single mother with two years of university under her belt. I had no money except for a welfare cheque. I don't recall feeling overwhelmed by this fact. I just accepted it. It was fate. My mother never said a word against it. According to her beliefs to be a single mother was all right. I shopped at a lot of second hand stores and distant cousins gave me bags of clothing. I guess this was what a community raising a child was about. I believed that we were all mothers to my baby and for a time I feel I gave up some of my mother-self.

My mother had had an apartment build above her house for an elderly man who was her friend and mentor, Louis Karonhiaktajeh Hall. He died in the fall of 1993, not long after my baby was born. After a time I moved into the apartment above my mother's house. Living on my own gave me a sense of independence. But I also suffered from post-partum depression. It came to the point where I couldn't look after my baby. I had no choice but to rely on my mother. She would take her as I lay in bed in the dark. My mother finally took me to see a Chinese doctor who gave me acupuncture and herbs to help me. I slowly came out of the depression.

In retrospect, I wonder if being a single mother equated with something being wrong with me. I think it made me special to my family and therefore my baby was special. We were the ones who apparently needed saving. It fit right into the pattern of my life. What made me special was not what was good about me but what was wrong

with me. I spent the next year in Kahnawake. I didn't work or go to school. I looked after my baby and myself. After a time, I went back out to Vancouver for a visit. I stayed for a month. In that visit I decided that I wanted to move back to Vancouver to try to finish school. I moved to Vancouver with my daughter in the fall of 1994.

School and a young daughter was an extreme challenge. I struggled for one term and then decided to move back to Kahnawake for good. My daughter and I moved into my mother's house for a short time and then found an apartment on the outskirts of town in an apartment over a garage. I worked full time at the Mohawk Nation Office and went back to school part-time. I studied at night and often went to work on very little sleep. Once again, I had to rely on my mother to help me with my daughter. In this time I built a house near my mother. I wanted stability for my girl.

At that time, I met a man and we began a relationship. Not long after I found out I was pregnant. I decided not to move in with him and we maintained separate homes. I felt like my house was my refuge. I finished my undergraduate degree and went on to start another degree while pregnant with my second child. The relationship I had with my second daughter's father was distant. We lived around the corner from each other. I thought that this was the way it should be. I realize now that what constitutes family is far different from that relationship. This I learned from my husband. In retrospect I think I wouldn't have stayed with my second daughter's father for as long as I did if I hadn't gotten pregnant.

I found I always had a hard time with physical closeness with my children. I expressed my love for them in taking them to their practices and providing them with decent food and a home. I never thought more about it. In 2003 my mother got involved with the issue of membership in our community. I found that she changed drastically after that, becoming extreme in her views. I regret encouraging her to get involved with the Elders Committee. I did it without knowing the extent of her views.

One of my sisters is with a non-native and the way that my Mother treated her boyfriend at this time didn't correspond to what she had always taught me – to be thoughtful, everyone has a voice, to be strong in your beliefs, and to be accepting of others. I only realize later that those beliefs have to be what she believes at the time or else they are wrong. In my mind I began to question her actions and her beliefs. I didn't like what I was seeing. She ostracized my sister and her partner. At that time, I started to take a step back from her once again. At the same time I was getting ahead in my graduate studies and I felt like she was in competition with me. I was achieving the level of academic standing that she had always wanted. Whenever I would try to talk about my studies, her work became the topic of conversation and I got left in the dust. I see now that perhaps I let this happen. A part of me still thought she could do no wrong. We became slowly became estranged. In that time I tried dating men but constantly found myself in short term relationships, they never lasted. I think I was trying to find a father for my children.

I met my husband indirectly through online academic circles long before I met him in person. When we met in person we immediately knew one another. We met up again periodically over the next year until we finally began dating. Things happened quickly after that. We were married two months after we got together, in a small ceremony at my sister's home. My mother didn't come, and neither did two of my sisters. They were not supportive of our relationship. At this time I had also been in communication with my father. I had begun to reestablish a relationship with him separate from the influence of my mother. I was so proud when my father came to my wedding and gave me away. The only people at our wedding were my husband, our six children, my father, my sister and her boyfriend and I. I was sad but elated at the same time.

We had decided to marry right away because we knew we were a family and our kids needed the formality. We also needed the formality to be able to look after each

other's children in case something happened. I think we surprised a lot of people with our actions. I don't regret it at all. A blended family is a wonderful thing. It takes a lot of work but it is rewarding in the end when you see all the happy faces around the kitchen table.

My family continued to alienate my husband and all our kids. I feel my family blames my husband for the changes in me. I don't think they see my strength and independence in a positive light. My husband and I decided to have a baby right away. This happened almost immediately and we were happy but my pregnancy was not recognized until she was born. When our youngest was born, there was only myself and my husband there. It was a different birthing process than what I had experienced before. No one in my family was there to cheer me on. The only people that appeared were the spirits of three old women. I could see them standing against the wall in the hospital corridor. One of them was my husband's mother June. She died the year prior to the beginning of our relationship. Another one was my second daughter's grandmother Arlene who I had been particularly close to. She died while I was pregnant. I think the women came to support us. As I think back on that event, it makes me feel happy.

In the early phase of our marriage I was hormonal, upset with my family, and trying to bring my new family together. As a blended family, we have had our share of difficulties. My husband's former wife had died and left him a widower with five children that needed desperately to heal. I felt like Sky Woman must have felt, caring for her daughter's orphaned twins. The next three years were hard. Our relationship with my family continued to be estranged while our relationship with my father grew stronger. I suffered bouts of depression and my husband continued to be my strength and stayed by me and helped me through it all. It came to a point though where he couldn't help me anymore. My fears, worries and threats aged my husband and wore his patience to a minimum. I decided to go the traditional route. And I have found a circle of people that have helped me to heal. Kahnawake has many people with particular gifts of insight and

healing who continue to help those in need like my husband and I. As I get stronger and my individuality develops I know I am different, stronger.

My husband is a good father. He gives the nurturing one would expect from a father in the form of hugs and encouragement. I have learned a lot from my husband. As this continues, I question why the disjuncture continues in my inner circle. I see now that this continued dysfunction speaks to the love and affection I couldn't get from my mother. Her love was always projected on things that she gave to me. While I wanted hugs, her affection and love was objectified into things and activities. I realize that I used to do the same but have learned the value of physical contact rather than projecting my love into money and activities. Kids just want to be hugged and told they are special. This is one of the biggest parenting lessons I have learned.

My family life is rich. I have six kids and a full-time husband.<sup>32</sup> I feel my family continues to blame my husband for the loss of their source of entertainment, the dysfunctional me. I feel I was only interesting to them for the drama I brought to the world. Because they alienate us, they have yet to see up close what goes on in our life. Yes, I am different. The difference comes with understanding myself better. I feel I am a full woman now. My children respect me and respect each other. My husband and I are doing a good job as parents. People outside of my family see the inner happiness I feel with the work I have done on myself and comment on it in a positive way. This work has paid off in many ways. I think perhaps that with my continued work on myself and with the time I am taking to understand my mother changes will continue in me. As a result, life will only become more fulfilling. I know what my future is, I know what's important – my happiness, my husband's happiness, and the happiness of my children.

It's a precarious time. The world is changing. The environment is changing. There is threat of war and social violence. Social maladies affecting the society we live in are as

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<sup>32</sup> One child, a sixteen year old boy decided to go back to Six Nations to live with family. As a result, we have six children ranging in age from three to twenty.

hostile as anything Sky Woman faced when she got to this cold dark earth. I take her lessons to heart. All of the same things that I learned from Sky Woman help me to be able to treat our youngest child in a way that I wasn't able to treat the other two I birthed. I am more well-rounded as a mother, I am hands on, I give her hugs, and I have the incredible ability to empathize.

### **Re-humanizing the individual through critical inquiry**

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* Paulo Freire examines how education teaches the meaning of being more fully human or re-humanized. Freire examines the individual in a world in which humanity is a *thing* to be cultivated by the dominant class. Freire does not consider that the lived situation consists only of a simple awareness of reality. Instead, he writes that the individual has a historical need to fight against the social, political, and economic status taught to her. The efforts of the oppressed become focused and concrete through the type of learning school should give them, instead of encouraging them to adapt to their dominant reality, as the oppressors themselves do. Thus the achievement of cultivating true humanity for the oppressed outlined by Freire occurs in the act of revolution and the reformation of the education system. Further, praxis is discussed. Freire presents an oppositional consciousness or true humanity awakened through the active rebirth of the individual. The line of demarcation between de-individualization and Hobsbawm's 'peasant consciousness' derive from essentialist notions of the Marxist individual. Instead through the individual's active participation in critical self-reflection and through dialogue the *conscientization* of the individual occurs. Through this process individuals are involved in social movement and achieve emancipation from oppression.

Freire states that the oppressor-oppressed contradiction implies a need for the disappearance of oppressors as the dominant class. Change does not mean that oppressed replace oppressors but rather they become more human and the act of oppression ends. "An act is oppressive", writes Freire of the transaction, "only when it prevents people

from being more fully human (Freire, 2003: 56-57).” The dominance of an *oppressor consciousness* objectifies everything surrounding it into a *thing*. Freire describes the same objectification for humanity. “Humanity is a thing, and *they* possess it as an exclusive right, as inherited property.” Ironically in juxtaposition to Hobsbawm, the ‘oppressor consciousness’ described by Freire intends to subvert humanity into the pursuit of monotony instead of enlightenment [emphasis added] (2003: 59). Thus, the dominant power elites bestow humanity upon others as though it were theirs to give. The emancipatory goal of the oppressed is to achieve full humanity on their own terms and of their own volition. Freire’s view of oppressive regimes posits individuality as given and not inherent in human beings.

In the era of colonization the relationship between the colonizer and colonized is well-defined. Also characterized as socialization and homogenization, in the act of colonization, colonizers overpower individuals and deviously rewrite individual identities away from complexity and into a simplicity that it is ‘right’ to overcome. Colonizers assume the presumptive right to authenticate individual knowledge and identity—one of the central meanings of the act of colonization. This is described by Bhikhu Parekh who writes “when difference is made the basis of identity, others become our point of reference, and we constantly strive to measure ourselves against them lest we should become like them. This locates the centre of our identity outside ourselves, and secures it at the expense of our autonomy (Parekh, 1995).” The turning point in this skewed relationship arrived with the decolonization era after 1990. Critical theorizing forced a radical rethinking and reformulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonizers under western domination. The relationship is no longer simple. The homogenized worker and socialized consumer comprises the simplicity of a conception of individualism that liberal and Marxist hegemonies idealized. The questions raised by the variegation of voices shifted attention away from issues of national-origin to object position. The resulting individual voices are varied and diverse as in light through

a stained glass window. The choral refractions and intermingling calls attention to individual uniqueness.

This process of penetration by many voices into the first world is described by postcolonial scholar Gyan Prakash as “arousing, inciting, and affiliating with the subordinated others in the first world. It [the third world voice] has reached across boundaries and barriers to connect with the minority voices in the first world: socialists, radicals, feminists (emphasis added) (in Dirlik, 1994).” The voices Prakash describes also represents the ‘other’ of multicultural society identified by Wallerstein. Thus, the politics of location takes precedence over politics when informed by fixed categories. The effort lies in the emancipation of the individual from this imposed process of determination, authentication, and definition. Identities are no longer fixed but in a diaphanous state of hybridity. Homi Bhabha has developed his concept of hybridity from literary and cultural theory to describe the construction of culture and identity within conditions of colonial antagonism and inequity (Bhabha 1994; Bhabha 1996). For Bhabha, hybridity is the process by which the colonial governing authority undertakes to translate the identity of the colonized (the *Other*) within a singular universal framework, but then fails to produce something familiar but new. Bhabha contends that a new hybrid identity or subject-position emerges from the interweaving of elements of the colonizer and colonized while challenging the validity and authenticity of any essentialist cultural identity. The individual is therefore more pronounced but are also more confused. Individuals question themselves, themselves in relation to others, and themselves in relation to the culture, community, and nation-state in which they exist.

So both the colonizer and colonized then critically reflect their new positionality in re-humanizing individual (Dirlik, 1994). The awareness also precipitates deconstruction of the hegemonic relationship between the liberal socialized consumer, the Marxist homogenized worker and the dominant society. The pluralistic nature of the society creates conflict. “It is in practice impossible to create a single, permanently stable

system out of all the signs, images and markers current in the postcolony,” writes Achille Mbembe. “That is why they [all parties] are constantly being shaped and reshaped (Mbembe, 1992).” Mbembe’s postcolony is a space where individuals reside in a state of unreality upheld through power-knowledge by a rule.

Old categories for individuality no longer correctly account for the world, creating a crisis for understanding ambiguous identities. For Bhabha the indeterminate spaces in-between subject-positions laud the locale of the disruption and displacement of hegemonic colonial narratives of cultural structures and practices (Bhabha, 1994; Bhabha, 1996). Bhabha posits hybridity as one form of liminal or in-between space where the ‘cutting edge of translation and negotiation’ occurs and which he terms the *third space* (Bhabha, 1996) (Rutherford, 1990). The meta-narrative of progress that formulated our existence is no longer valid. “Not only have we lost faith in progress but also progress has had actual disintegrative effects,” writes Arif Dirlik of this progression. “Most important, over the last decade in particular our sense of a clear progression of time and event has been jumbled (Dirlik, 1994).” As old power structures are crumbling individuals are left to figure out who they are in relation to themselves, others, and the state. This is accomplished through dialogical engagement. Out of dialogue and engagement, new structures emerge. Foucault (quoting Servan) describes this situation

A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas; it is at the stable point of reason that he secures the end of the chain; this is all the stronger in that we do not know of what it is made and we believe it to be our own work; despair and time eat away the bonds of iron and steel, but they are powerless against the habitual union of ideas, they can only tighten it still more; and on the soft fibres of the brain is founded the unshakable base of the soundest of Empires (Foucault, 1975: 102-103).

On the outcome, Mbembe writes “The postcolony is characterised by a distinct style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and a lack of proportion as well as by distinctive ways in which identities are multiplied, transformed and put into circulation (1992).” Thus, decolonization, destruction of old power structures, emergent identities, and the deconstruction of de-individualisation creates a situation where multiple voices, identities, and structures all exist together in flux, also described by Bhabha as the *third space*. Finding coherence and making each voice stand out is the key to consensus-building. The coherence of many voices would be termed *democratic* in critical discourse. I pose meta-individuality as a potentially descriptive conception inferred by discursive democracies.

As we have seen Marxist theory shows that individuals form collectives to stand up against the tyranny of the bourgeois. Freire disagrees with the Marxist stance posing instead the responsibility of each individual to assert their sovereignty by becoming aware and conscious of themselves and their situation. Citing Fromm, Freire suggests that freedom requires individual action and responsibility and not a peasant-slave or automaton in the machine (2003: 68). Achieving humanity involves the active participation of human beings. The oppressed, formed by their oppression to achieve emancipation and humanity, cease being things and enter the struggle as men and women (2003: 68). To achieve humanity individuals overcome their *thingness*.

According to Freire achieving humanity denotes the active participation of the individual. In this call for action, Freire poses critical self-reflection as the central process of emancipation. “At all stages of their liberation,” Freire writes, “the oppressed must see themselves as women and men engaged in the ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human (2003: 65-66).” Freire values true reflection that leads to action. Action spurred by critical reflection constitutes *authentic* praxis. Otherwise, action is only activism (à la Marxist revolution) and not the true liberation of the oppressed.

Self-reflection leads to the active rebirth of the individual. The emancipation of the individual constantly and unwaveringly involves the individual. Independence cannot be given but must be achieved by humans—men and women and not semi-humans. Therefore libertarian emancipatory propaganda is not useful for implanting the belief in freedom. Freire says the correct method lies in dialogical engagement. The conviction to fight for liberation must come from their *conscientização* [conscientization] rather than bestowed by the revolutionary leadership (2003: 67). Without active participation leading to conscientization of the individual, the individual otherwise lives an unauthentic and disembodied existence. Through reflection and action individuals “achieve conviction in the struggle as subjects not objects and must intervene critically in the situation that surrounds them (2003: 67).” Conviction implies an active participation and an embodied existence.

With active conviction comes active participation in the struggle therefore leading to true critique based in knowledge and a lived experience of the situation leading to reflection. Involving the individual in their emancipation promotes ‘true action’. For example transformations are not simply the domain of leaders but an entitlement of all citizens. Subsequently, dialogue must occur between individuals, between the masses, and the revolutionary leadership. “Only the leaders’ own involvement in reality, within an historical situation,” writes Freire “led them to criticize this situation and to wish to change it (2003: 67).” Active equal participation by all individuals facilitates true change. One learns from the other and out of that transaction change happens.

### **Narrative Inquiry Methodology**

It is within this context that I pose the critical pedagogical method labeled narrative inquiry. This research method uses stories that form texts as a means of capturing individual experience, with a reflexive process of inquiry. Narrative inquiry process draws out multiple and sometimes contrasting personal views of individual

Kahnawakeron:non concerning their lived experiences in the community of Kahnawake and the factors and values underpinning these views. Story is used to enter their world and interpret it to make it personally meaningful (Clandinin and Connelly 2007).

Narratives are stories by learners depicting their own historical experience or practice regarding an issue under consideration such as clan based decision making in Kahnawake. The research process synthesizes and creates meaning through a joint storytelling and re-storying process involving individuals and the researcher in a collaborative research relationship (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). This research inquiry involves the analysis and interpretation of visual media, group discussion, and dialogue with participants actively contributing to and verifying researcher interpretations.

The process of reflection and retelling experiences involves the construction of stories. In the research process, the researcher encourages the participants to reflect on their lives. Through the telling and construction of their stories, order and internal meaning structures were distilled and complex issues underpinning these experiences were identified. Our values, assumptions, and ways of thinking are shaped by cultural, social, economic, and political metaphors that we take on often without thinking (Deshler and Keily, 1995: 42). The words and concepts used by the learners send us the preferred meanings enshrined in the signs, symbols, and images currently in use by Kahnawakeron:non. The process of decoding involves recognizing what is sent. Part of the decoding process involves language analysis. Undertaken in a group setting language analysis involves the selection of key words which are dissected to uncover their contradictions, indirect influences and undesirable meanings. Alternative words are then identified that are more in line with desirable assumptions, beliefs, and values (Deshler and Keily, 1995:43).

## **The road to narrative inquiry and “I am me”**

I found out some interesting things when critically reflecting about liberal, social, and critical theories. Ironically, liberal political constructivism corresponds to our foundational principles called the Kaiianereserakowa (Great Law). Happiness and prosperity of the whole are the main tenets of the philosophy, but they do not include an entitlement for all. The Marxian-Hegelian dialectical is similar to the dialogical engagement required of Iroquoian governance practices. And critical discourse through dialogical engagement is reflected in Iroquois culture. The whole transformation of war-torn Iroquoia in ancient times through the formation of the Great Law league was sparked by Tekanawite and Jigonsaseh who asked people to critically reflect on their identity and actions. Finally, there remains the mediation by Sky Woman between polarized forces in her world signified by the twin grandsons. These perspective frames my inquiry into re-humanizing the individual.

I went through a process of rehumanization as I illustrated through my own narrative. If we go back one can see how I continually critically reflected on my life and people that entered it that gave me feedback on the questions I was asking in a way that pointed me continually inward. I had to value who I am completely before I could be the real me. I come from an early birth, a dysfunctional mother, an oppressed people, a dominant education system, and a family who loves me. I took eight women through this same process of narrative inquiry. It was through my own desire to understand myself better that I came to finally choose the topic for this project. I wanted to understand where I fit in my own community. I asked myself these questions as I critically reflected on my life. What did I learn about Mohawk women? From whom? What did I learn from my own mother on how to raise my own children? What have I passed on to my own children? Who am I as a Canadian Indian? Who am I as a Mohawk of Kahnawake? What does that mean in the larger scope of things? And finally, who am I today? What am I doing? And why am I doing that? I formed these same questions into three areas of

inquiry and used them to analyze almost eight hundred pages of data. The following questions form the basis of this study:

1. How is the Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women different from the feminist view of Iroquois women as the *other*?
2. How is the legislated definition of Mohawk Indian identity different from Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or *real human beings*?
3. What is the Kanienkehaka woman's understanding of themselves in relation to the community of Kahnawake and the Mohawk nation?

I spent a period of four months interviewing eight women from the ages of 28 years to 86 years and I interviewed them three to four times each. Sometimes they had a clear idea of what they wanted to share with me and sometimes they let the interviews follow their own path. All of the women were open and honest with me as they shared their life experiences. I had asked the women in advance if they would be interested in being a participant. I set up the first interview dates and on that day I arrived usually at their homes with my digital recorder. The atmosphere was relaxed.

In this study I pose the collective memory of individuals and their ideas of identity not to homogenize Mohawk women into some generalizable conclusion about what Kanienkehaka women should be like. I also extracted from the collected narrative data who Kanienkehaka women are within the Canadian context. And lastly I pursued some view of how Kanienkehaka women live in the community of Kahnawake. My basic research assumption was to show the relationality of these women to their world as a power to be included in making decisions about how they want their world to reflect them, not the other way around.

The next eight chapters present the lives of eight Kanienkehaka women from the community of Kahnawake who are also Sky Woman's great granddaughters. The narratives of their lives come out of interviews conducted with the women over a four-month period. The data that I've selected from their interviews focuses on the area of

identity. My reportage is by no means a biography of their lives. Rather it is a small representation of the broad vista of their memories and experiences. Their identity comes from and is situated within the greater context of the community, the nation, and the state of Canada.

These women provide the expertise to help me answer my inquiry questions. Even though I have collected nine hundred pages of narrative, I have drawn from that conversation their views and their knowledge that helps me answer the questions that are a narrow focus of this study. I chose to tell the women's stories in their own words, without the frame of the research questions. The analysis of metaphors and language represented in their narratives become the focus in Chapter 14 that aided my reflective and some times reflexive judgment on these historical narratives. Through our conversations there are apparent contrasting experiences as well as shared assumptions. The 'others' I learned from are also aunts, mothers, and grandmothers. In the family you learn from an 'other' about your identity. What we see is that it's that circle of mothers, daughters and aunts and their stories told through their personal narratives that gives authority to their Kanienkehaka sense of time and space.

## Chapter Six

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Alli

#### Introduction

Alli views the world through the filmmaker's lens. This lens highlights, fragments, and re-invigorates her notions of being Mohawk and being Kahnawakeron:non that was originally influenced by her mother. Yet her journey away and back to Kahnawake was filled with lessons learned. I interviewed her in the middle of a creative project that documented the life of Kahnawake women.

Alli is a twenty eight year old Kanienkehaka woman who lives in Montreal with her boyfriend of ten years, Bill. Alli grew up in the community of Kahnawake and comes from a large extended family. Baptized and raised as a Catholic, she no longer practices the Catholic faith after learning in high school about the tragic history about the Church and Indigenous peoples. Alli's mother was a full time office worker in the city of Montreal while her father worked away as an ironworker and came home on weekends. Her mother now works in the community of Kahnawake. Alli was raised mostly by her mother and they enjoy a strong bond.

Alli went to Karonhianonha School in Kahnawake and then to Queen of Angel's Academy, an all girl Catholic school in a suburb of Montreal. Alli struggled with her identity and sense of belonging to the community during her teens. She went through a severe bout of depression that lasted for several years.

In her late teens Alli left the community to go to university in the United States where she studied liberal arts. She came back to the community and began working in her field of expertise. Alli works full time out of her home building her independent business. Alli wishes to learn the Kanienkehaka language when she and her boyfriend marry and

begin a family. Alli would like to learn about the Longhouse tradition but still is hesitant to go until she is ready.

Alli travels all over North America presenting her work on Mohawk identity. She spoke candidly on various issues such as growing up in the community, learning her culture, leaving the community, her work, her identity. She also talks about her relationships with other family members, the Oka Crisis, and her identity quest.

### **Alli's Journey**

Alli credits her mother for providing a very positive and consistent model for motherhood. When she and Alli's father first got married, they made an agreement where her father would go out and work and leave the raising of the children solely to her. She was going to be the boss and he was going to be the fun happy dad who would support her. The way her mother put it according to Alli was "my rules, my everything" (Alli 1.6, A1:1). It seems to have worked out but Alli felt like she lost out on having her father around. "So all week my mom is everything. And we are alone," Alli says. "And then my dad comes home and it's great. It's a day and a half maybe and then he's gone again. It was strange. It was the reality, but then once I grew up and sort of looked back on it, it makes me a bit sad that they as a couple had to live like that their entire lives (Alli 1.1, A1:1)." Alli learned about what kind of relationship she wanted with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend did ironwork for a short time, but it was too stressful for Alli and brought back old fears she felt about her father. "I didn't want my life to be like that," Alli says. "I didn't want my kids to be like I was, you know. Having to say goodbye to him every Sunday and be afraid that he would fall off a building and I would never see him again. Every Sunday I cried as a kid cause I wasn't sure I would see my dad again. Cause I knew how dangerous the job was (Alli 1.1, A1:1)." However, she grew up in a comfortable lifestyle.

Alli's mother grew up very poor. Her own mother had to look after nine children after her husband died in an accident on the St. Lawrence River. Alli's mother's stated goal was never to be that poor again. As a result of that she grew up with her work ethic strongly developed. This work ethic is something she passed down to her children. Alli's mother took a job in the city of Montreal, worked hard, and as Alli describes, they "never worried whether we were going to have shoes for school the next day (Alli 1.7, A1:1-2)." As a result, Alli grew up with the notion that women are powerful. "What better way to grow up?" Alli asks. "To see the woman closest to you just taking care of everything (Alli 1.7, A1:1-2)." Alli learned from her mother to dream big and to get an education (Alli 1.19, A1:2). The impression Alli got from others about her mother was that her mother was capable and "fantastic." By example Alli's mother taught her that everyone was equal. This teaching affected Alli in her interactions with other non-native people. She doesn't see herself as inferior and can move freely in and off the reserve (Alli 3.5, A1:3).

Alli's attachment and respect for her mother is highly developed. When asked about her mother and the respect she feels, Alli became emotional and cried. This attachment Alli describes as something that is characteristic of Mohawk women. "From my experience," she says. "Mohawk men are kind of independent little islands and they are not that attached to their mothers as women are to their mothers (Alli 1.5, A1:1)." Alli's role model is her mother. And her mother didn't raise her with threats or coercion. The direct relationship was with her and not with the absent father. "My mother was the authority and if we disappointed her then we disappointed her", she adds. "There was not ever this idea that a man was better or scarier or we should behave because of him. Never. (Alli 1.6, A1:1)." Alli's mother taught her by example. Alli said her mother showed her that there are certain things you don't put up with and to always speak her mind, no matter what (Alli 1.9, A1: 2).

Alli spoke of the unity inherent in Iroquois culture. “I think women much more easily fall into this idea that it’s about *us*. So they think about the pair before they think about themselves,” she said. “Whereas I think men think about themselves before they think about the partnership (Alli 1.9, A1:2).” Alli expressed the desire to be a “solid” woman before starting a family. She wants to be sure of her identity rather than bring her children into the world with confusion transmitted from her own experiences (Alli 1.23, A:2). Alli has been told that the mothering instinct is something inherent. Her own mother has said to Alli “when the time comes you will be able to do it too. When the babies show up it’s a whole other world and you will be able to do it. You just do it (Alli 3.7, A1:3).” The sense of motherhood taught by her mother centers Alli’s growth.

Alli grew up without much knowledge of Iroquois culture. Raised a Catholic, Alli was always proud of being Mohawk but didn’t know the language or traditional aspects of the culture. Alli feels that this comes from the fact that her parent’s generation was more concerned about survival and overcoming poverty (Alli 2.12-13, A1:2). Part of this survival meant accessing entitlements for Indians with status. Alli was instructed to marry another Indian for the reason that this was the way the bureaucratic system was established (Alli 2.30, A1:3; Alli 3.5, A1:3). If one had a baby with a non-native, that baby would suffer (Alli 1.20, A1:2). Alli was told by her parents “don’t marry a non-native person because you will lose your rights. Marry a native person and you will keep your rights. But it was also very clear that it’s a very bad thing to lose your rights. You do not marry a non-native person (Alli 2.30, A1:3).” Alli describes this as an inherent awareness known by everyone and transmitted to the children. “It was just something we were aware of. Like everyone is aware of it. Everyone is aware that you make this huge choice and you are no longer one of us, you can no longer live here, we don’t want to see you (Alli 2.30, A1:3).” Her own parents didn’t agree with it but taught their children the same customs.

Alli has experienced a growing awareness of the history of colonization and its effects on the society and culture of her people. Her first teachings were in religion classes. “We hit a period where it was talking about conversions and what these great priests did for us”, she states. “It’s all written from their point of view so the books are talking about what a great thing they were bringing religion to the Indian people, kind of listing all the good things that happened and you through our upbringing I don’t think anyone’s ever sat me down either and said this is how the priests screwed us but you hear enough about the past” (Alli 1.4, A2:1). Alli has been able to come to her own conclusions about this troubled period in history. Later in university she was sitting in one of her classes and she noticed how detached the other non-native students were to discussions centering on the history of colonization and native peoples. She, like none of the other students there, felt a sense of connection and familiarity with what was being discussed. Alli describes her experience:

I was just washed over with emotion. He’s not my direct ancestor but something very similar probably happened to somebody not far down from me in my community, or in one of our original communities. To hear the way they were talking about it, no feeling, no sympathy, and no anything. And it was their ancestors that are kind of responsible for this stuff happening across the board to us (Alli 1.21-22, A2:2).

Alli knows that for her ancestors it was a struggle just to live. They didn’t have time to reflect on what was happening. To seek answers to the identity question Alli states is a privilege not accorded to her ancestors or even her parents (Alli 2.13, A2:2-3). The main tenets of Mohawk identity to Alli, mean being from Kahnawake, growing up in Kahnawake, and having Mohawk blood. Described as territoriality and blood, these two factors form the underlying basis of Mohawk identity at Kahnawake. Agreeing, Alli says that “I think that’s what a lot of people cling to. And in Kahnawake to identify

themselves and it's really not much at all. You know? For a basis of a people...its two things that you don't have any control over (Alli 2.13, A2-3)." The conflict between her mother's teaching about equality has become clouded.

Alli was raised to respect the notion of equality. She realizes that it is the Indian act which imposed notions of blood percentage as the basis of Indian identity. She describes the policies as a form of brainwashing. "The Indian Act, it dictated your life and I just feel like over the years it's sunk in to our older generations and it gets passed down," she says. "So it just becomes something in our consciousness and we wonder oh where did it come from? But it's right there on paper. And somehow we've come to believe it. And we've come to believe that blood is so important (Alli 2.25, A2:3)." Although it is still an instrument that governs the lives of status Indians, Alli feels that the Indian Act is losing its hold on the younger generations (Alli 2.25, A2:3).

Alli did not grow up with a great awareness of herself as a Mohawk from Kahnawake. She discusses her innocence to what was going on in the rest of the world and more particularly where it concerns Indigenous peoples. Alli's realization of herself started when she left the reserve to attend high school in Montreal but more poignantly her awareness of her difference came suddenly during the Oka Crisis of 1990. Alli describes this event as when she felt searing hate for the first time. Alli described the rock throwing incident which took place as elders and children left the community for safety during the Crisis (Alli 1.13-14, A2:1). This was a pivotal point in Alli's memory and awakened her consciousness to her identity as a Mohawk. Previously the only experience she had was with what was written in her history books. Being a Mohawk was, as she says, an everyday reality and not that big of a deal (Alli 1.11, A2:1). Anger at how history was misrepresented encouraged Alli to examine what was written and thought about the Church's role. Her cynicism reflects in how she responds to what she read. Alli says:

The only reason I am Catholic today is because I have an ancestor down the line who was probably tortured into it or forced into it or starving and would only get food if they converted. It seemed like such bullshit. It's not like somebody down there really really believed it and was like – this is the path for me. It was probably forced and over the years we've all become [Catholic] (Alli 1.4, A2:1).

Alli's anger is directed at what she describes as “colonization” and “genocide.” She asks, because of it, how can you not be angry? Her anger also comes from seeing friends and other households living through its after effects (Alli 1.11, A2:1).

With her awareness of the issues came increased anger. Alli's anger is focused on the imposed rules that came out of colonization. She characterizes it as being “pushed around” (Alli 1.18, A2:4). Part of this abuse includes overt acts of racism on the part of teachers at her high school. Alli describes instances where the Indian girls at her school were stereotyped. Because of the belief that Indian girls were not good in the sciences, they were not given encouragement to pursue this avenue of study. Instead, native students were streamlined into areas like media. Alli describes what happened to one particular girl. “This is the encouragement that she is getting,” she says. “Oh you native girls don't do anything so don't even try. And so she didn't. She didn't bother. It crushed her and she ended up going into media which she hated (Alli 1.19-20, A2:2).” In another instance, the racism came from other non-native students. Alli describes how other students believed certain stereotypes. She describes the stereotype in dramatic fashion:

I had a bunch of girls come up to me--I think we were in grade ten. They were like – oh so when are you going to get pregnant? I was like “excuse me?” “Well isn't that what you people do you mate at this age?” Because that's what they'd seen. All the native girls. We'd been going up the grades and that's what they'd seen and that's what they said to me point

blank. So there's this attitude that we aren't supposed to do much except mate" (Alli 1.19, A2:2)."

Confronted with stereotyping impacted Alli from an early age.

Another aspect of this awareness evoked a drive in her to confront these issues in her work. The issue of relationships between native and non-native people. The rule that a native doesn't date a non-native has evoked anger in her from a young age. It is these rules that she says don't allow you to live and limit your ability to make your own life (Alli 1.19, A2:2). The everyday reality of being a Mohawk in Kahnawake includes awareness of this fact. Some choose to live by the rule and others flaunt it in the face of the community. Still others like Alli critically reflect on it and take the time to address it in a way that makes it meaningful. Although, it still makes her angry.

Alli spent two years working on a project that allows her to examine the issue of identity and belonging for Kahnawake in great detail. In preparation for her work she studied outside the community at an Ivy League university in the United States. Alli describes going against the norms of the community in doing so. "I hated it. I felt judged. I felt like I had to fit into a box and if I didn't fit into that box I was not a good Mohawk" Alli says. She says she felt like she was not a good person and not a proper Mohawk. As she got older, she began to realize that there were unspoken rules of the community. "I started to find out well you don't do this, you don't do that. Don't even think about doing this" Alli describes. "And it's not like it was my parents or my aunty telling me, it is this kind of like whispered collectivity in my ear. You just pick it up. That's the thing I can't even point at where did I hear that? I just know I did" (Alli 1.18, A2:1-2). Alli felt like she was being forced to choose her community or her dream. The pressure was immense (Alli 1.20, A2:2).

Unwritten rules of the Kahnawake community include not having relationships with non-natives, or outsiders. Following this rule is something Alli describes as what

you do if you want to be a good girl. If you don't follow it, you get kicked off the reserve. She also recognized that if she had a baby with a non-native person, that baby would be the one to suffer. This aspect of the rule makes her angry because every Mohawk of Kahnawake is forced to choose love or the nation. On top of that there is the social pressure of all the other problems facing the community like alcoholism and abuse (Alli 1.20, A2:2). Alli, when confronted with racism now responds differently. Alli describes how her appearance allows peoples' true feelings about native people to come out. "People don't automatically know that I'm native by looking at me," Alli states. "So their true feelings come out and then I step in...it isn't like this friendly sharing thing, it's more they've crossed the line and I have to correct them and push them back over that line (Alli 1.22, A2:2)." Racism in the mainstream also has a hold in Kahnawake.

As she examines the issue of membership, identity and belonging, Alli says Kahnawake people take identity for granted. "It's not participatory," she says. "I was born there and I have the blood. So there's no effort involved and if we are going to stick around and if we are going to be good and proud and strong, there has to be a little bit of effort as far as I am concerned (Alli 2.13, A2:3)." Alli describes a sense of being lost. She says that people don't want to venture outside their comfort zone and put any effort into enacting their identity in positive and meaningful ways. Alli chose to deal with the issues head on. She feels empathy for the people she deals with in her work. In response, she feels anger (Alli 2.24, A2:3). How she channels that positively is to ask questions of the issues. She realizes that other Indigenous peoples face the same issues across Turtle Island. Kahnawake is very limited in its scope of understanding. She says "it's like there's no right combination that lets you off the hook (Alli 2.20, A2:3)." Success as a person is measured up to the standards set by the community.

If you step outside of the community's established boundaries, you are seen as betraying your Mohawk identity. Alli describes the outcome of the pressure in choral terms. "If you stay low and you stay unhappy and you continue to struggle and you stay a

part of that chorus,” she explains,” then you are a part of something and you are not targeted. You know what I mean? But you are also not happy (Alli 2.24-25, A2:3).” In her work Alli witnessed the outcome of women who are either the products of interracial relationships, are in one of their own, or have gone through one. “The fact that we paint it with these politics while these babies are still in the womb is terrible,” she says (Alli 3.12, A2:3). These women are in relationships to be happy she says. Instead the women and the children of these relationships are made to feel “subhuman and sub native (Alli 2.24-25, A2:3).” For that reason, Alli feels ashamed to be part of the community (Alli 2.24-25, A2:3).

The rule is not an outspoken thing. Alli says that “we grow up knowing how special we are and that it would be wrong to deny our kids that same special place and that you know creating a child with such and such a person does, can deny them that or makes them less worthy (Alli 3.12, A2:4).” This is not just an adult concept; Alli knew this from an early age. “It’s just the way it was,” Alli says. “It was just this is the way it is. You know? In between making mud pies and going to play tag, I found out that if I fell in love with a non-native man twenty years from now, I would lose this. My child would be this, da da da. But I was a kid. It’s not like I was anywhere near liking boys. You know sort of thing? So it was like, fine that’s adult stuff. Whatever. (Alli 3.13, A2:4).” As she grew older she came to see it as a reality for others.

For Alli interracial relationships remained a theoretical problem but excruciating enough to think about what she would do and how she would feel if it were to happen to her (Alli 3.14, A2:4). The questions she asked herself were “Am I going to choose this and be rejected from my community? Hmmm. What’s more important, love or my community (Alli 3.14, A2:4)?” Alli was able to experience this dilemma through her work with women who are experiencing the effects of Kahnawake’s rules first hand.

The situation in the community of Kahnawake Alli describes as closed-minded. “These families that are all issue free,” Alli says, “they have absolutely no compassion

for... people who haven't found their match. And maybe found their match outside of the reserve. They are so ready to push out rather than understanding and accepting (Alli 3.18, A2:4).” The guilt associated with the choice remains constant.

Alli grew up with the guilt instilled by the Catholic religion (Alli 1.3-4, A3:1). Alli says it makes you feel bad about everything. Breaking away from Catholicism was a battle between the real her and the Catholic her and took about a year. The guilt she felt was immense. Her break was hard for her parents who still practice the faith. She considers herself not conservative and more cynical which contributed to her questioning her faith in the church (Alli 1.4-5, A3:2).

Alli grew up with the knowledge that she was a Mohawk person and to be proud of that. But that didn't have any real meaning for her. She didn't realize she was any different from other people (Alli 1.11, A3:2). It wasn't until the Oka Crisis of 1990 that she began to become aware of herself as a Mohawk in the world. She was in her early teens at that time. As it became more serious and there was a lack of food and supplies, it brought Alli's awareness of the larger world to the forefront of her imagination (Alli 1.12, A3:2-3). Alli recounted seeing effigies of Mohawk Warriors being burnt in the adjacent town of Chateauguy. It was the first hint that the people of the community were different (Alli 1.12-13, A3:3). The next time Alli was confronted with her identity was again during the Oka Crisis. The Rocks at Whisky Trench incident had a lasting effect on her.<sup>33</sup> She saw her mother afraid and scared for the first time in her life. The incident has had a lasting effect on her life as Alli describes,

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<sup>33</sup> During the Crisis of 1990, as food supplies dwindled and the elderly and infirm weren't receiving the best quality of care in the community, it was decided by family members that they would move their elderly, infirm, and young loved ones to an undisclosed location in Montreal for safety. A caravan of cars and trucks went across the Mercier Bridge. On the other side is an area of highway crossed by overpasses and walled in by cement. On one side is a brewery. This area of highway is referred to as the Whisky Trench. As the caravan went through this area, there was a crowd of Montreal residents lining the sides. They began to throw rocks at the cars and through the windows. An elderly man in the caravan died of a heart attack caused by the fear he experienced in the incident. The provincial police force, the Surété du Québec, stood by and did nothing. No one has ever been charged in the incident.

I was in the front seat looking right at her and I just felt like this searing hate for the first time and I hated, I hated everybody out there. And I just, I wanted, I wanted us to crash so I could get out of the car and hurt them. You know. Then we had rocks kind of break through the back door, the back passenger, on my mom's side in the back. And all the rocks were sitting my sister and my two cousins. And there was glass everywhere. And they were cheering.

At this point in her story, Alli's face showed mixed emotions of sadness, hurt, and anger as tears began to fall down her face. She got up to get tissue and continued to wipe her tears as she continued her story.

And that's when it was clear to me that you know, we are different from other people and that there's some people that really hate us. And I hated them back. So much. And that sort of I think that incident like really has affected who I am today as a person. It affected me as a teenager, I hated, I hated people so much and I was suspicious of people and I always had my guard up and I was ready for a fight at any moment. Even though I've never fought ever. And I never did. But I was always ready for it. And I just hated white people. I went to catholic school, I went to school outside the reserve so I had friends and I guess in my mind I was like they're okay. But as in general, I hated white people (Alli 1.14, A3:3).

As Alli recounted this story the emotional side of it was apparent. Emotion to her is an important part of her being and something she sees lacking in her own family and in the Kahnawake community at large (Alli 1.14, A3:3-4). Alli's own mother turns off her emotions because as Alli believes, she doesn't want to show weakness to her children (Alli 1.14, A3:4). This emotional aspect Alli credits for helping her to be better at her work. Alli says her emotional connection to the world is what makes her success

possible, “It’s my connection to other people. Why would I want to turn that off?” (Alli 1.16, A3:4).

After experiencing the events of the Oka Crisis, Alli went into a severe depression. She describes the period as difficult as she felt useless and worthless (Alli 1.14, A3:3). She felt like she was always on edge, always ready if someone came close. If they pushed, she was ready to push back. As she struggled to overcome the anger and hate she felt, Alli realized that she didn’t want to live like that anymore. “That there has to be another way to change things than always having my fists up and having attitude,” she says (Alli 1.18, A3:4). Alli began a long process of critical self-reflection. Part of her journey she documents in her work. She continually asked herself what is it to me (Alli 2.13-14, A3:10)? As she attempts to answer that question, she says the response to her work by the community will determine how she will answer that question. She expressed apprehension because her work addresses some negative aspects of growing up on the reserve like sexual abuse and alcoholism. The process evoked a fear of rejection.

Alli’s fears the unwritten rules that govern the community of Kahnawake. Alli talked extensively about this subject. She says in Kahnawake she is hyper conscious of what people think about her (Alli 1.25, A3:6). This control over the freedom of the person angers Alli (Alli 3.14, A3:14). Alli describes the rules that govern what being a good native person are. People of the community are judged based on this. It is this concept of good that confounds Alli and she continues to question its legitimacy (Alli 1.32, A3:9). She advocates going beyond this way of thinking and expanding the idea of what a Mohawk person is. Alli describes an expanded character of being a Mohawk of Kahnawake that includes:

a sense of community and being there for one another. I think you being a good person. Being a positive member of not just the community but the world. And that is cross-cultural; those are basic things that can go across the board. And then you know we have specific things to our culture that

we should know and we should be proud of. And I think that's the thing, I think people are all proud but maybe not everyone knows stuff. You know? I think language is important but I don't think that if you can't speak Mohawk that means you are not. But I think we should all value the language and if we can send our kids to learn it that's great. If we could buy a raffle ticket that helps the language program, that's great (Alli 2.25, A3:11).

It is the effort and participation that goes into what makes the community Mohawk. Alli says people have forgotten that they are part of a community and a people. She says, "they have a responsibility there. And again I'm not saying it's huge. I'm not putting this big huge responsibility on everybody. But let's think of each other as one big family. You know? We watch out we protect our own families right now. We are very insular. But let's not forget that our families are all part of a bigger family. We should be treating each other as such (Alli 2.25-26, A3:11)." Respect, love, and compassion need to exist on a community level.

Another Kahnawake rule that Alli grappled with says that when you leave the boundaries of the community you change. You are no longer Mohawk. She was afraid that she would be considered a sell out if she didn't stay within the box. Even at the expense of fulfilling her dreams. It wasn't outwardly spoken but rather she describes it as a whispered collectivity (Alli 1.18, A3:4; Alli 1.19, A3:4; Alli 2.20-21, A3:10). Alli says it is this notion that if you leave you don't come back. Positive support wasn't heard anywhere else (Alli 1.19, A3:4-5). Alli never expected to return to the community. She says, "I loved my family. That was the battle. I loved my family but I hated Kahnawake (Alli 1.18, A3:4)." She hated the unspoken rules.

It is this feeling of being forced to choose, one or the other. The community or her dream. The community Alli says is not somewhere where she wanted to come back to. "I

just wanted to get out and get as far away as possible. Like I had this dream of the white picket fence somewhere in Middle America where I would be completely anonymous (Alli 1.20, A3:5).” As she looks back she laughs and remarks on how ridiculous that sounds. What she found was that when she did come back, community members expressed their support for her (Alli 1.24, A3:6). Being a part of the community is hard, she says, and there is no right combination that lets you off the hook (Alli 2.20-21, A3:10).

There are also rules about looking native and speaking Kanienkeha. Alli expressed anger that such stigmatism about looking native is placed on innocent babies (Alli 2.30, A3:12). Also knowing the Mohawk language is a marker of how Indian one is. Alli doesn’t identify with this notion. She sees these rules as rigid and limiting to self worth and personal growth (Alli 1.31, A3:8-9). Within this context Alli continues to critically reflect on herself. She asks what is her identity? And where does she fit in? What is her role in the community of Kahnawake (Alli 2.11-12, A3:9-10)? Alli feels that she is on the right track despite getting both positive and negative responses to her work (Alli 2.21, A3:10-11). She has chosen to focus on the positive and expressed hope for the community.

As she said earlier another troubling rule is the responsibility to have a relationship within the native community. Her own sister is in an interracial relationship. Alli says the struggle is with the belief that “I mean if you are a Mohawk you need to be acknowledged as a Mohawk” with the desire to have family close by (Alli 3.31, A3:12). Alli describes this rule as “that great responsibility of contributing to the Mohawk nation and having Mohawk children. We’ve all grown up with that as well. That’s super important.” When her sister was confronted with this dilemma Alli reassured her sister:

I said of course your baby will be Mohawk. You’re Mohawk. You’re the mom. We are matriarchal. And you know you are just going to have a responsibility to make sure that your babies know who they are. They are

not going to be able to rely on the blood thing or that we grew up in Kahnawake thing. So I said you are going to have to put some effort into making sure they know who they are and they know things (Alli 2.31-32, A3:12).

This rule in particular inspires anger in Alli (3.21, A3:14-15).

Alli says she is still on an identity quest all connected to her self-doubt relating to her identity (Alli 1.21, A3:5). It was being out in the world that gave Alli the opportunity to see her community from afar. When she went away to university she was at the heart of her struggle. “I was trying to figure out who I am,” she says. “Going from hating Kahnawake, wanting the white picket fence. Wanting to disappear into white suburbia. To the complete opposite. I was right at the heart of that battle. And so I wanted to just run away and hide under a rock (Alli 1.22, A3:5).” With this she got a more positive image of her identity and she realized that it was something that she wanted and that it was necessary (Alli 1.21, A3:5; Alli 2.29, A3:11-12). Alli came to realize that it wasn’t looks that define you as a Mohawk and that there was no standard definition. She came to terms with how she looked as she did her work (Alli 2.30, A3:12). Out of her work she now sees that she is a good Mohawk and a good Kahnawake person. Living to make yourself proud is what matters (Alli 1.29, A3:7). All these experiences shape her work. Alli is aware of the different worlds and says she is comfortable navigating between the two on a daily basis (Alli 2.1, A3:9).

Alli feels that her role in the community of Kahnawake is to make it a better place to raise her children. She says she tries “to be somebody that my neighbor would be proud to have as a neighbor. My friend would be proud to have as a friend. A Kahnawake:ronon would be proud to have as a Kahnawake:ronon (Alli 1.23, A3:6).” Alli in her line of work is always conscious of her role as ambassador (Alli 1.31, A3:8).

Although she does not currently live in the community this evokes further questions about what that says about her as a Mohawk. “Am I being cowardly by living in the city?” she asks. “There’s a certain amount of being able to be in both worlds. There’s so much here that I am just able to relax. Relax and be myself. Because definitely when I am in Kahnawake there’s a higher perception. And it’s a little stressed out. Get a little tense” (Alli 1.30, A3:6-7). Alli says her goal is to be “somewhere solid” by the time she had kids. She sees this as her responsibility to make sure they aren’t as confused as she was, and solid in their identity (Alli 1.23, A3:6). Alli does this in her work by putting a mirror up to the community in order that they may see themselves better (Alli 3.23, A3:15). “I took the approach of putting it all out there,” she adds, “and saying this is where we are with the question being is this who we want to be or where we want to be? And hopefully the audience leaves hopefully pondering the question. And saying yes, what we are doing is right, no what we are doing is wrong. We need to change things (Alli 3.27, A3:15).” Alli continues to challenge herself and her community to ask simple and seemingly rhetorical questions. Who are we? And who do we want to be? “If we don’t come up with this idea that we can all support,” she says, “you know in fifty years, it’s gonna be a lot worse than it is now in terms of cohesively being able to identify a Mohawk person (Alli 2.12, A3:10).” This challenge begins with herself and other women.

Part of her role, Alli says, is to win some ground for native women. Alli thrives on the challenge of making some change for her own daughters (Alli 1.29, A3:7). She says she wants children some day and to raise them in the community of Kahnawake. Alli wants them to feel the same sense of safety that she grew up with (Ali 2.16, A3:10; Alli 3.2-3, A3:13). It’s all about family she says (Alli 2.16, A3:10), and this is what always brings people back (Alli 3.2-3, A3:3). She has the added goal of learning the Mohawk language. This is a responsibility that she says is part of her role in the community and as a mother (Alli 1.31, A3:8). Another goal is a reconnecting with Iroquois traditions. Part

of that includes going to the Longhouse. It is not something she grew up with as a Catholic, but she says she did know her clan (Alli 2.32-33, A3:12-13). Alli says she is just waiting to find the courage to go (Alli 2.33-34, A3:13).

### **Final Thoughts**

As the youngest of the eight Kanienkehaka women, Alli has a long future ahead of her that ideally includes a career, marriage, and children. Alli continues to grapple with the questions surrounding Kanienkehaka identity in a way that is productive and meaningful to her personally and professionally. Alli's work has become a vehicle with which she can ask questions and find answers to the identity issue. In her own life, Alli still grapples with the identity question that centers on the issue of who you are outside the physical boundaries of the reserve. As much of her life takes place outside Kahnawake's reservation boundaries, this question is unresolved. But, she has resolved to not pass this on to her children. Alli has made the commitment to be firm in her identity by the time she has children.

## Chapter Seven

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Barb

#### Introduction

Barb is a dynamic individual who despite her small stature carries a strong sense of herself and her personal and professional goals. Barb sees her life as a journey upon which she embarked initially as a way to heal from trauma and now is a journey of creativity and awareness about the world. As she spoke, she wove her story much like making a coat, like a seamstress carefully mending the fabric of her life into place to present us with a colorful, creative, and original view of her life.

Barb is a thirty-seven year old businesswoman from Kahnawake. Barb comes from a dysfunctional family. Her mother suffered from depression for years and Barb and her siblings were looked after by other family members. Barb also looked after her mother and other siblings when she was young. Barb's father was an Ironworker and brought home groceries for the family on the weekend. This made life predictably unstable.

In addition to the instability at home, Barb describes trauma she experienced publicly that speaks to ongoing community dysfunction. For example, Barb went to school in the community and was one of the first cohort of students to go to the Kahnawake Survival School (KSS). Barb never finished high school because of bullying, a traumatic event she experienced at the school. Her KSS experience also influenced the way she views women's lack of self-respect that she talks about later.

Barb's father and mother were involved in events held at the nearby Akwesahsne Indian reserve in the 1970s where Barb began to be aware of her Mohawk heritage. At some point, Barb's mother turned to the longhouse community in Kahnawake and became actively involved in events during the Oka Crisis, to the detriment of her family.

Barb left the community after the Oka Crisis to help her older sister look after her children while her sister went to school. From there, Barb began a healing journey as she pursued her education in social service work.

### **Barb's Journey**

Barb grew up without her mother's guiding influence in her life. For the first seven years of Barb's life her mother was in a deep depression. As a result, Barb says there was no mother-daughter bond between them (Barb 1.1, A1:3-4). Barb's mother stayed home with the children and her father worked away. Barb describes how she played out a mothering role to her siblings at the age of four (Barb 1.2, A1:4).

Baptized in the Church, Barb was brought to the longhouse at the age of seven by her mother. Barb describes how her life changed on the outside after this exposure to traditional Mohawk culture because her mother had a life outside the home. Despite the positivity of this event on her mother, things at home became worse. Barb describes how "she wasn't there. At least before she was there sleeping. And then when she went to the longhouse she wasn't there physically. So and it always came to the longhouse, always first. The people were always first (Barb 1.3, A1:4)." According to Barb, to her mother, family came second.

Barb began to learn about being Indian when her mother involved the family in the native rights movement. Involvement to Barb meant taking the power back that included physical fighting and guns. That's what being an Indian was at that time Barb says. "It was the same attitude that they had at Oka," she adds, "Ready to die. We were all ready to die. Die for our land (Barb 1.1, A1:4)." Being Indian, Barb says, meant not feeling anything and being physically strong (Barb 1.1, A2:5).

Significantly, the central female role model in Barb's life was her maternal grandmother. "She was a spiritual woman," Barb says. "She was like mother earth. That's the way I saw her. She would be like, she was like, I think of dirt (Barb 1.9,

A1:5).” Barb visualizes her grandmother with her big hat planting in the dirt. She describes her memory and knowledge of the clans. She would tell people their family lines. Even though she was a Jehovah’s Witness, she would prepare and dispense traditional medicines. Barb discusses this peculiarity of religion and traditional life:

What I figured out is that she was in a time that you were not allowed to be longhouse”, she says. “Longhouse went underground. She didn’t like the church. So she chose one of the hardest religions. Jehovah was so hard to be that. But she just couldn’t bring herself to be pulled to that church. So she chose that religion. That’s what I figured out about her. I am almost sure of it. That’s why she chose that religion (Barb 1.9, A1:5).

As a result, Barb says her grandmother represented a real Kanienkehaka woman who passed on stories from her great grandmother and knew her clan. Barb described the continued knowledge of her clan as fortunate (Barb 1.10, A1:5). There are many people in the Kahnawake community who no longer know what clan they are.

When Barb’s mother began to attend longhouse in Kahnawake, her children went as well. There, Barb says “I learned the songs, I learned the dances, I learned the rituals. I learned the clan system, physically how they sat. The clanmothers and chiefs. I learned the positions, the protocol. I learned that women were, had a voice. That they had a big voice. A strong voice (Barb 1.5, A1:4).” Anything else Barb learned about traditional beliefs and practices she describes as “the good stuff” came from Ojibwas and Crees she encountered on her healing journey later in her narrative (Barb 1.5, A1:4). In her description, Barb clearly distinguishes between traditional spiritual practices and the performance of traditions like songs, dances, and rituals.

Other women involved in Barb’s life were those she encountered as she went about her healing. Barb says these women appeared to be powerful, spiritual, and emotional women who were not afraid to deal with the issues (Barb 1.7, A1:5). In

contrast, Barb says men hold everything in and appear to have an inner strength because of it. Barb's discussion alludes to the impact of colonization on her community.

Barb learned about the history of colonization at a young age through her involvement with her family in the native rights movement. Barb describes what it felt like to be involved in this history:

It was all about that at that time empowering ourselves again. Because we were at a point where we were just letting everybody step all over us, as Indian people. And it was the tail end of the AIM Movement. And we had to do it. It was our time. It was our time to stand up and take back our place. Take back our land. Take back our power. And at that time that's the only way we knew how to do it, with guns. So I have no regrets about that. No regrets about what the adults did around me. We had, we had some really good teachings too at that time. I got some really good, a good foundation at that time from really good spiritual and spiritual Haudenosaunee people. And I was at a good young age where I took that in, so that I remember. Like good, we had tobacco burning every morning. We had ceremony every morning. We danced for the creator; we danced for Shonkwaiiatison every morning. So that was there, that feeling was there. You know it was good (Barb 3.2, A2:5-6).

Her experience as a child in the native rights movement describes a sense of connection to the past and yet also informs various aspects of her life up to the present. We had to do what we had to do, Barb says.

Barb describes the character of Kahnawake. When asked about why certain people in the community claim ownership of aspects of traditions and practices, Barb responded how "there was a group of people that went underground and they had to keep everything going and then when it was time to come back up and share it, they hung on to

it (Barb 2.12, A2:5).” These people get to decide who gets to share in it. Barb says, all the people think the same and have been painted with the same “pain and colonization” (Barb 3.13, A2:9).

Barb currently runs her own business from her home located in the community of Kahnawake. She travels extensively with her husband of four years throughout the United States for her work. Steve and Barb go across the border on a regular basis. Their negative experiences at the United States border served to reinvigorate Barb’s interest in Mohawk politics (Barb 2.12-13, A2:5). Barb spoke of her upbringing and the influence of her grandmother, her life in the community, her travels, her involvement in the local politics, and her work. The transmission of her grandmother’s influence still effects the way Barb reacts to her world.

Barb has been active in local Kahnawake politics. Her involvement stemmed from her marriage to an Indian from the United States. Coming from similar belief systems rooted in culture both families accepted the marriage with the caveat about cross-border travel. As she recounted the problems associated with their movements, her knowledge of her culture and history reflects her view of Native rights:

I knew we were going to have problems with him coming back and forth across the border I knew they were going to try and make him a Canadian citizen. Try and tell him to get his immigration papers and go through all that process. Again I said no, no, no, we are both North American Indian. We are matriarchal society. He is supposed to come and live with me. That’s just our way. And that’s it. Not getting any Canadian citizen papers. Not doing any of that stuff. No way. I was taught that. From as far as I can remember we have no borders. We are all North American Indian. I knew that from a little girl (Barb 3.4-5, A1:5-6; Barb 3.5, A1:6; Barb 3.3, A2:6).

As Barb travels across the borders she feels “like a criminal even though I know in my thinking that it’s my right--my birthright to be able to go freely across--as long as I’m not harming anybody or harming anything, to go freely across, back and forth (Barb 3.3, A2:6).” The border, she knew, would be a problem.

Barb’s awareness of identity conflicts created by the border rights issue arose from the frequent trips across the border for her and her husband’s work (Barb 2.12-13, A2:5).

Barb worked at getting her husband papers from the community to make his trips across the border easier. As she dealt with her husband’s membership in the community, she came to understand the issue of membership, identity and citizenship better. In particular the Kahnawake Law on Membership Barb saw as problematic. “I’d go into public meetings and tell them this is going to really hurt,” Barb said. “I said it has no spirit, this law, there’s no spirit in it, that, it’s gonna destroy people, it’s gonna destroy individuals, it’s gonna destroy families, and then it’s gonna destroy the community because everybody’s gonna be fighting about it, because it’s not ready (Barb 2.14-15, A2:5).” The unspoken and unwritten rules of Kahnawake say there is a need to marry dark men and have dark babies. For Barb, that is the only thing that motivates her to having kids and she questions her sanity for thinking that way (Barb 2.18, A2: 5). Barb says this is common thinking throughout the community. She thinks the thinking probably comes from the pale skin found throughout the community from inter-marriage with French people. She has heard this theory said by other women (Barb 2.18, A2:5).

As a result of the membership law and the relationship to border-crossing Barb became critical of the current band government. She firmly maintains her position. Barb says she doesn’t like to use her Certificate of Indian Status card. A woman border guard was accurate when she informed Barb at one particularly difficult border crossing that as long as Indians use the card they are identifying with the rules under the Indian Act. Barb will still use her card for tax exemption purposes and for other things that will benefit her

like medicine and education. But she will not use the card as a declaration of her citizenship because it doesn't fit her beliefs of who she is as a Mohawk woman (Barb 3.8-9, A2:8). There's no in between Barb says. You give up your citizenship and pay duties and taxes or you lie to continue to be who you are and maintain the rights of your people (Barb 3.11, A2:8). Furthermore Barb realizes that as Indians continue to question their native identity and citizenship, it is the United States government that benefits from the confusion in the long run. With regard to the current debate over border documentation in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist downing of the World Trade Center in New York, Barb says the quicker natives get a government issued identification card the quicker native people will eventually be terminated. The more people eliminated from eligibility for a card the fewer native people the governments of the United States and Canada will need to deal with (Barb 3.12, A2:8). To Barb the whole issue of membership and citizenship across borders is the same as the membership debates current in the Kahnawake community that she spoke of earlier.

Barb went through a long period of healing. As she participated in longhouse functions, Barb realized something was missing. But she didn't know what it was (Barb 1.6, A3:16). After the 1990 crisis, Barb left the community and began her healing journey. Barb described a Cree student school counselor in Timmins, Ontario where she attended school. "She was smudging. She started to introduce me to spirituality a bit and I started to go to workshops, healing workshops with other native women in Timmons," she says, "Ojibwa women, Cree women. I started to do emotional healing but spiritual too (Barb 1.6, A3:16)." When she was finished school, she went on to a healing lodge in Manitoba. In a nine-year period, Barb followed a journey that she says enabled her to be where she is today. Barb said, "my house first was a war zone, and then the community was a war zone for me. There was no place to go but out. I know I would have been dead. Somebody would have killed me or I would have killed myself" (Barb 1.7, A3:16-17)." Her healing path led her to reflect on her personal traumas.

Barb's father committed suicide after the Oka Crisis in 1990. Barb describes the Crisis as the straw that broke the camel's back (Barb 3.16-17, A3:25). Her mother was involved and neglected her family. After her husband's death, her mother had no choice but to begin her own healing journey. Barb invited her mother to embark on a journey with her. Their shared purpose helped Barb to heal her own unresolved issues with her mother. As she recounted "we worked out some of the stuff, I worked out some of the anger with her in a session with her. About her not being there for me. There was anger I had to get out... because she is never going to be a mother (Barb 1.11, A3:18-19)." She knew her mother will never be a mother and did the best she could to raise her family.

Barb feels that healing has to be done by the community at large. "We can't do anything if we don't heal" Barb said. "We have so much trauma, anger, hurt and grief inside of us. We aren't going to make the right decision for our future or even for today. You know unless we fix ourselves up (Barb 2.17, A3:22)." The difficult path toward healing Barb says teaches a person discipline. And it gives individuals a sense of accomplishment. She transposed what she learned in healing into her business and marriage. "I work hard," she says (Barb 1.14, A3:19). Barb quit school after being asked to apologize to another student who had terrorized and beaten her at the local high school (Barb 2.5, A3:19-20).

As she said earlier Barb left the community for a time. Barb describes the community as unsafe. "It's so unsafe", Barb says. "I think it still like that for a lot of people (Barb 1.7, A3:17)." Barb says this feeling of being unsafe comes from not knowing when someone is going to give you a dirty look, punch you, say something nasty to you, or talk behind your back. All those things hurt, she says and they are hard to live with on a daily basis, which is the reality of the community. As a result, Barb mistrusts the community. She says the women of the community are angry and hateful. This anger and hate comes from insecurity about their own relationships with men (Barb 1.7; A3:17).

Barb's theory on female anger also points to insecurity in men. "They will build your house. And they will give you money and bring you food but you can't depend on them to be there emotionally. Even physically (Barb 1.8, A3:17-18)." Barb says there is an immaturity about the men of the community. They would rather do what they want to do and be with their friends rather than their partners. She says relationships are built on working together and compromise. Barb says, in the community, men never mature because of the ironworker trade. "Because they get into that trade and they go stay in New York," Barb says. "They are all together, buddies. They work, they drink, they are together, they live together (Barb 1.8, A3:17-18)." This kind of lifestyle begins at a young age when the young men enter into the ironworker trade. The tradition is for the men to stay away all week and come home on weekends. When they come home on Friday night they immediately go back out to the bar. They don't spend time with their families. And then Saturday they might have breakfast with their families but then they go out to play golf with their friends (Barb 1.8, A3:17-18). Barb says women accept this lifestyle because it's been happening for a few generations. Many of these men are unfaithful. This lifestyle is easily played out because of the male-female ratio that is one man to every five women (Barb 1.8, A3:17-18). When asked why women do this to other women Barb said many of the women have a lack of self respect because they don't have respect from their partner and they are lonely. As well, the women don't go elsewhere to find a partner (Barb 1.9, A3:18). So there are limited choices for forming relationships. Barb also feels discomfort from being judged in the community. "In the community people judge you" Barb says. "It doesn't matter if you are laying on the ground, people stepping all over you, or you are successful or you are a saint. People are going to judge you (Barb 2.10-11, A3:21)." She points to Kateri Tekakwitha as an example of this practice because Kateri has been beatified yet she is also referred to negatively by community members.

Barb describes the community as insular and “un-giving.” People hang on to aspects of traditional culture like they own it. Barb says this is a remnant of colonization and the group of people that took the traditions underground to keep them alive. The mentality is that because they have been faithful to the longhouse traditions they get to decide who to pass on the knowledge to (Barb 2.12, A3:21).

Despite the character of the community that Barb describes, she says Kahnawake will always be home. “It is like a love hate relationship that I have with Kahnawake,” she says.” It is always going to be home; my family is here; my sister is here; the culture is here; and the land; this is where my connection is (Barb 1.9-10, A3:18).” Barb describes this connection as a spiritual one that evokes the image of her grandmother and her hat working in the garden.

Barb stopped being involved politically after becoming disillusioned with the native rights movement. The more she spoke out on issues, she noticed people’s attitude toward her changing. “I was very very insulted as a Mohawk woman, as a young woman, an intelligent woman, a business woman,” Barb said. “They were disrespecting me. Like I said you get black balled pretty quickly and it’s very subtle (Barb 2.17, A3:20).” She stopped being involved altogether and continued to work on her business.

As if to expand the potential for healing and governing oneself Barb says self-government starts with yourself and radiates outward (Barb 1.13, A3:19). Barb continues to be passionate about the community, the nation, and the Iroquois Confederacy and is hopeful things will change for the better and reunite the Iroquois people. “Healing needs to happen but at the same time we need to be politically strong,” Barb says. “Our government, our economy needs to be strong (Barb 2.9, A3:20-21).” Strength is also described by Barb as knowledge of Mohawk culture, language and spirituality. Yet strength is also in knowledge of mainstream medicine, law, finance, and accounting (Barb 2.9, A3:20-21).

Barb also has a passion for her role as a wife. "I am doing everything I want to do and I love being a wife," she says. "I love my husband. He is so good. We are such a good couple. I love that. It's like I wouldn't change that for anything. It was always important to me to find a good mate. Do stuff together, and be together and not be lonely (Barb 2.19, A3:22)." Currently her family remains estranged. Barb blames her mother and father for this (Barb 2.20, A3:22-23). Barb also takes ownership of her own involvement in this. She feels she overextended herself and got too involved in the lives of her sisters to the point where it became problematic (Barb 3.15-16, A3:24-25).

Barb does not have a positive outlook on the Oka Crisis of 1990. She described her mother's involvement and how she came back with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Some of her anger is directed at the longhouse community who she says "didn't give a shit" about the trauma in her family. Nobody came around to help her family. Her mother was crazy and her father was dead (Barb 3.16-17, A3:25).

Barb describes the current struggle for native rights. "It's a different type of struggle now. We fight in different ways," she says. "Then, we were using guns. Now we are more using our thinking, our speaking, our spirit. You know. It's a different way now (Barb 3.3, A3:23)." The "thinking" she describes comes from healing the effects of family trauma by looking truthfully at who Mohawk people were, and who Mohawk people have become.

### **Final Thoughts**

Barb is grounded in her life with her husband. She is happy, and has plans to have children. Her desire is to continue on the path she began years ago. Her business is like a child that needs to be cared for and nurtured. As she works at making her business stable, she is beginning to entertain the idea of going back to school to pursue a degree in political science. Through her involvement with the membership issue, Barb discovered that she has an interest in local politics. In her current circumstances, Barb is in a good

position to be politically active on behalf of the community. She is not constrained by borders and has had the unique opportunity to go to many places throughout North America where she has the opportunity to meet different Indigenous peoples. As a result, she has a wider view of the world. She has emancipated her Mohawk identity from within the borders of Kahnawake and as she travels she never loses sight of who she is as a Mohawk.

## Chapter Eight

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Cari

#### Introduction

Cari is a small woman who always has a ready smile. She is quiet and unassuming until her hands begin the creative process. She can sit for hours placing and replacing beads, buttons, scraps of paper. She is constantly planning and imagining her next piece of work. As a result, her world is full of continuous color and movement. Every wall she paints is a unique creation that explores the meaning of the world she lives in. Nothing is left alone. She can make something creative and beautiful out of a few scraps of nothing.

Cari is a 40 year-old woman from Kahnawake. Born of mixed heritage, with a French mother and Mohawk father, she grew up in Kahnawake, the United States, and Ottawa before settling permanently in the community when she was 25 years old. She completed a fine arts degree at the University of Ottawa with her mother who had moved there after divorcing Cari's father.

Cari's mother still lives in Ottawa and her father died of cancer eight years ago. Cari lives in a house she owns with her fiancée Ralph and her teenaged son from a previous relationship, her first marriage to a non-native man. Cari is a practicing artist and works for a local Kahnawake organization teaching children.

Cari is involved in the longhouse community and was adopted into a clan a number of years ago. Cari is involved with a local powwow dance troupe that performs at various functions throughout Quebec. Cari is adventurous and has a wide variety of interests that go beyond expressions of Indigenous and Iroquois culture to science fiction and martial arts. Cari is openly expressive about her beliefs. She shares her beliefs and knowledge through the arts and gardening with the children she works with.

Cari is currently attempting to adopt a baby with her fiancée Ralph and they are designated foster parents for children who need their care. She continues to do various artistic projects in the community of Kahnawake while working at her regular job. Cari discussed various issues like the implications of her marriage to a non-native on her membership in the community, her relationship with her mother and father, her son, her artistic work, her interest in helping children, and specifically her Sky Woman mural.

### **Cari's Journey**

Cari moved back to the community of Kahnawake 15 years ago with the support of her father. Moving back she says seemed like the most natural thing to do (Cari 1.4, A1:6). Since her return, Cari actively participated in learning the Mohawk language and culture. Learning the language has been difficult for her. She did not learn it from her father, who was fluent as a child. Cari thinks his family emphasized getting an education rather than learning the Mohawk language. She says her father was encouraged to leave the reserve because there wasn't a lot of work (Cari 1.3, A1:6). "I think at one point the community was very poor and when they could afford to send one of their kids to go to university, which was extremely expensive, they only chose the men," Cari says. Cari thinks it was assumed at that time that the man would be the sole income for the family and the woman would stay home with the children (Cari 2.4, A1:7). As a result, her father met and married a non-native woman while at school and moved away from the community.

Cari identifies strongly with her Mohawk heritage. She continues to maintain a relationship with the French side of her family. While growing up, Cari came back to the community for short visits with her father. As a result, she never knew much about being Mohawk. Cari has taken time over the years to learn about the history and culture of her community from many different sources. Cari points to the Iroquois Creation Story as a source of knowledge. "I think 'what is our creation story?' " she says. "This is what I

wanted to know. What did our people used to believe? What do we still believe now? And where is this going?” Her list of questions shows the soul searching Cari says shapes her work.

How can we use the stories from generations ago, from our creation stories, how are they important today?

Are they still important?

Are they important in different ways?

How do we reinterpret these stories to try to make sense of what’s going on today?

Does that give us comfort?

“That gives me comfort,” she says answering her questions. “To be able to look at the past and our stories and find, and still find importance in them, to be able to use them today (Cari 1.14, A1:6).” As Cari learned about the culture through stories, what she found was that they presented real people with real issues and ways to resolve these issues that makes their lives relevant today. “These people are represented as being real people with real feelings, real emotions,” Cari says. “The story of the twins. The story of Sky Woman who is a single mother. It’s all relevant in our everyday lives (Cari 3.5, A1:7).” Cari takes this information and applies it to her life as a mother and educator.

Cari spent time trying to answer her questions through her artwork. As she did this, Cari found different ways to teach the culture to the children of the community in her job. Cari discussed this at length. In one of her murals there are blue herons. Cari describes the use of the bird as a current trend of hers. “They are also linked with motherhood,” Cari says. “I am not sure why but this is just what I’ve heard from different sources (Cari 3.5-6, A1:7).” When you wear blue heron feathers people know and

understand their nurturing symbolism. Cari suggests that these birds were the first ones to fly up to Sky Woman and bring her gently down to Turtle Island (Cari 3.5-6, A1:7).

Another area Cari focuses on is gardening. “It’s always the gardens that tell us first,” she says. “You know when you see the corn is getting milky, that’s when you, when you see that in your garden, that’s what it tells you. That it’s time to do a ceremony in the longhouse (Cari 3.7, A1:7-8).” Cari continues to learn and make her knowledge part of her everyday practice. Cari and her fiancée maintain a small garden in their backyard. *Idyllic and tranquil, Cari remembers a time when she faced obstacles to her happiness.*

Cari’s first marriage was to a non-native man. At the time she was in her early twenties and attending university. As a result she lost her rights as a native woman and her education funding was cut off. “I still have a lot of hurt feelings over that,” she says. “How could they have done that to me?” she questions (Cari 1.5, A2:9). This wasn’t a new situation to Cari. She had grown up with stories of her paternal aunts and their problems with being allowed to come back into the community after losing their rights after marrying out (Cari 1.5, A2:9). In her own experience, she felt shunned (Cari 1.5, A2:9). “I felt like I was being punished for something,” she says. “Because I fell in love with a white man I was being punished. Because they took away everything from me (Cari 1.5, A2:9).” Cari says she was made to feel like a child. She says that what happened to her was not right. Cari understands that colonization and government policies affected her Mohawk identity and belonging to the community. Cari explains that:

It was just that when I was living in Ottawa and I got the letter telling me that I was cut off. To me that was like okay that’s not my people doing this to me, it’s the government really. It’s the laws, it’s the rules. Its maybe ten people making up rules for the rest of us, that have a real impact on your self esteem and everything. The reality of it was that when I came back, nobody really told me that oh you can’t come back, oh you can’t live

here. Because people knew me as like a real person. I think at the end of the day we know the politics is like a lot of bullshit and the real stuff is about the families and the humanity and stuff. And people will say they have strong political ideas of how things should be, of all the laws and regulations but there is more to it than that. It's like we are all people, we are all related, we are all family, we know where we belong and that's it. Nobody ever came to my door and said please you don't belong here; you have no rights, leave (Cari 1.5, A2:9).

As a result, Cari came back to the community and was challenged to find her place in it. "Politics and rules can make you feel bad," she says. "I always knew who I was and whose family I belong to. There was never any question in my mind as to what or who I was. And who I chose to be with and who I identify with" (Cari 1.6-7, A2:9-10). Cari says identity comes from what you feel inside. To Cari, her Indian status card is just a card. What is more important is what is in her heart (Cari 1.6-7, A2:9-10).

Cari had a difficult relationship with the father of her son. This fact has not impeded her son's relationship with his father. She emphasizes the family bond and works at maintaining the one that exists between her son and his father (Cari 2.9, A1:7). Even though it has been difficult, she keeps her feelings to herself and doesn't impose them on her son. "I kind of feel like if I discourage him from going over and still being a part of his father's side of the family that it will be sending him the message that he's no go," she explains. "That if I let my personal feelings into this, that they'll rub off on him and he'll end up feeling somehow, that's there's part of him that is wrong or bad (Cari 2.9., A1:7)." Though being raised as a Catholic and recently going back to the longhouse, she doesn't force any belief or religion on her son. Her longhouse beliefs are a part of her everyday life. This is how she teaches her son traditional ways. This way of being maybe useful at some later stage in his life and will come naturally without her having to force

him to go to the longhouse, which might turn it into a negative thing The catholic faith was forced on Cari in the past and made her not want to go anymore. “I don’t want to force him, I don’t want it to become a negative experience for him and I want him to find his own path (Cari 1.15, A1:6; Cari 1.16, A1:6-7; Cari 2.9-10, A1:7).”

Cari says after so many years of the community hiding traditional culture to enable its survival, she says its time to bring it out in the open. It’s time for people to get along and be friends. “We are in a position where we can just as easily extending the hand of friendship to get rid of the ignorance and share our values and our culture,” she says. “We can start extending the hand of friendship to bring about a greater awareness of the world because I think we have ideals that need to be shared at this time in history because now the world needs it” (Cari 1.10, A2:10).

Cari wants to share her life with another child. After trying to get pregnant for some time without success, Cari and her fiancée began the process to adopt a child. While doing so, Cari encountered obstacles that brought her own experiences with membership issues to the forefront once again (Cari 1.18-19, A2:10). Cari describes the stress of trying to adopt as a person living in Kahnawake. “Whereas anybody else in the world can adopt freely from any race we are stuck,” Cari says. “We are not allowed to adopt children from another race (Cari 1.17, A2:10).” Cari feels that reproduction issues are personal and asks why the government is allowed to get involved in personal choices individuals make (Cari 1.17, A2:10)? “I really don’t feel like our government should have that type of control over us where they can tell us you can’t have kids” Cari says. “These are our reproductive rights here we are talking about (Cari 1.18-19, A2:10).” As a result, Cari finds the whole issue of adoption rules enraging and frustrating. Cari says identity shouldn’t be regulated, that it’s something you find out for yourself as you grow (Cari 1.18, A2:10).

Cari’s life centers on her work, her son, and her relationship with her fiancée. Cari says that the longhouse is a central part of her relationship with her fiancée. When she

was adopted in, she was given a new name after losing hers to the memories of her dead paternal grandparents. By the time she had come of an age to be interested, they were gone and so was her Mohawk name (Cari 1.1, A3:25-26). Her continued education about traditional culture prompted her to seek knowledge, as she describes, from the roots up. Cari says the longhouse is in tune with the elements, the landscape, the land, the seasons, which she says are very much a part of her (Cari 1.14, A3:30). Cari expresses the Longhouse as a family that is an important part of her life. Cari describes, "I go to the longhouse; -----'s Tohta (Mohawk slang for grandparents) are all there. His parents. And we are all together. And the grand kids." At the longhouse food, dancing and celebration are important elements. This is what is important. It's place to be with family. "Because that's what the community is," she says (Cari 1.15, A3:30). Cari says family is what makes Mohawks who they are.

Cari's sense of community began with the original connection through her father. It was those family connections that facilitated her reintegration back into the community. Despite the issues with losing her official recognition as an Indian, Cari says "I felt accepted. It's funny how you can feel accepted by real people and yet feel totally feel betrayed by the politics of a place" (Cari 1.6, A3:27). Cari is critical of the current politics of the Kahnawake community. "The real stuff is about the families and the humanity and stuff," Cari says. "And people will say they have strong political ideas of how things should be." (Cari 1.6, A3:27). Belonging, Cari says, goes beyond official laws and regulations. People know who they are.

As she practices her art, Cari continues to question her identity as a Mohawk and as an artist. Cari quit art school for a while because of conflicts over this very issue. "Do I do native art – and putting the quotation things here – because I am *native*?" she asks. "And does it matter. I mean if I painted say a depiction of a bullfight. That's not native, but I am an artist, I am native. Is it not considered native art? (Cari 1.7, A3:27)." Cari's friends told her to capitalize on her identity in her art. "That's what I felt like I was being

encouraged to do was to prostitute my culture in a way. You know. To capitalize on the fact of my being a native woman (Cari 1.7, A3:27). After all that, Cari decided to do art for herself. She does small art projects, murals, work for newspapers. She does themes that are personal. Cari says art should be taken for the art itself and not the artist (Cari 1.7-8, A3:27-28).

Cari sees herself as a citizen of the universe. She describes herself as part of the circle of life. “I think we are all part of humanity and we are struggling to improve ourselves and we are struggling to improve the planet,” Cari says. “That to me is my identity. And I think we are all part of it together (Cari 1.9, A3:28).” How Cari expresses this feeling by being open to everybody. “To me it is really important to try to understand, as much as we try to understand other peoples, other cultures, other civilizations,” Cari says. “The only thing that makes us different is the money thing and values (Cari 1.9-10, A3:28).” Cari wants to believe that people can work together to improve the planet and find an end to problems like war and famine (Cari 1.9-10, A3:28). As a result of this thinking, building bridges is a central image Cari uses in her art and her teaching.

Cari did an art show about bridges that included acknowledgment of women ironworkers. Cari says that ironworking has a lot to do with building bridges that are also a symbol for people crossing over to different cultures and getting to know each other. “This was the whole point of my show,” she says. “If we can build bridges made out steel and concrete, we can build bridges to help people get together to create understanding among the mistrust, the language thing, everything (Cari 1.10, A3:28).” She transports these images to her work with children.

Cari’s projects include teaching children how to do traditional crafts so that Iroquois arts don’t get lost forever (Cari 1.12, A3:29). Without little opportunity in school to do these activities, she teaches the kids in an after school program. Part of the activities include making cornbread that includes growing corn, milling the corn flour, and cooking

the bread itself (Cari 1.11, A3:29). Cari says the kids must be enjoying the activities because they keep coming back. She wants to put the kids on a figurative path that will take them to other places outside of the community to share in the language of Indigenous cultures. “We all have similar art,” Cari says. “It brings us together at pow wows. It brings us together at shows. It brings us together on so many different levels (Cari 1.13-14, A3:29-30). Cari is also working to learn the Mohawk language. “I think when you learn the language that’s part of the land. You learn all the secrets that have to do with the land too,” she says. “It’s like moving to a country and learning how to grow their foods. You have certain foods that grow in some areas. It’s the same thing with the language. Its so part of this planet that you need to know it. It’s who we are (Cari 1.12, A3:29).”

Cari’s activities also include traditional dance. As a child she was encouraged to pursue artistic activities and she says it stuck with her. Cari says traditional dancing has special meaning for her. “The native dancing was something that really pulled me in because it’s not just dancing to have fun,” she says. “It’s not just dancing to put on a show but it’s also dancing with a purpose” (Cari 1.13, A3:29). Traditional dancing is part of Cari’s spirituality and expresses her role as an Indian woman.

Though she has definite ideas about the role of Native women Cari says that the priorities of women of the community are different than outside the community. “We do prioritize our children,” she says. “So in doing that, in making our families our priorities, which is the most noble thing to do, what I think. Sometimes it takes us out of the political sphere (Cari 2.1, A3:31).” As a result, women are not commonly found in the political sphere of the community. It’s a choice that is made by the women, Cari says. To be a mother and a political force in the community is difficult. Cari says women tend to want to do everything. In her own life, she has an independent spirit. She feels she has to take care of everything. This gives her a lot of satisfaction (Cari 2.2, A3:31-32). As a result of her independence, Cari says people look at her and expect her to fulfill certain

roles in the community like being a woman, staying home, making babies and taking care of men (Cari 2.3, A3:32). This attitude, Cari says, comes from a lot of traditional men in the community. To deviate from these roles is not a good thing. Cari responds by ignoring these ideas. "I think we make our own destinies, we make our own futures," she explains. "We become what we want to become. Why should we let our sexes tell, why should we let our, I can't find the words, our genders dictate what we do in our community. I think that's totally wrong (Cari 2.3, A3:32)." She does not accept the defined roles for men and women that come from western culture.

In Cari's view the role of women has to do with positive body image. In her work, Cari developed programming for teens and young woman to address body image and self-perception using the legend of the *No Face Corn Husk Doll* Cari says is a story about vanity (Cari 3.13, A3:35). In her workshop Cari taught a number of young women how to make the doll while talking with them about the issues of self-perception and body image (Cari 3.8, A3:35). In her own past, Cari dealt with these same issues and uses her own experiences in her workshop. Cari says in the community of Kahnawake the women find pleasure in putting other women down, perhaps out of insecurity. "It's amazing how you will go around town and when women are gossiping they can be so cruel to each other", she says. "They'll comment on peoples, superficial things, oh their weight, their jobs (Cari 3.9-10, A3:35)." The self-esteem and body image problems not only come from the media but from the women themselves. Cari says the first step to stopping this is for the community to realize what is happening. There is no need to be unkind to each other, Cari says. It is important to bring this issue out and address it head on (Cari 3.10, A3:35).

Cari values the power of images to relay a particular message (Cari 3.14, A3:35-36; Cari 3.15, A3:36). As she works in her job and in her art, she uses imagery to continue to teach the community what she knows about Kanienkehaka history and culture. As we sat before a mural of Sky Woman she painted in a public building, Cari shared with me the meaning of its various elements. Cari chose three important elements

of the story to depict in the mural—Sky Woman, the water birds, and what Sky Woman brought with her from the Sky World. With these things, Cari says, “Sky Woman has everything she needs to start over a new civilization (Cari 3.2, A3:33).” Cari envisioned the world from which Sky Woman came. “Maybe which was much like ours is today,” Cari says. “And they had come to a point where maybe they were ready, they were moving on, they were getting ready to create a new world (Cari 3.2, A3:33).” For some reason Sky Woman ended up doing all the work, Cari says. “Why did she get pushed? Was she being excluded? Did she go off on her own (Cari 3.2, A3:33).” Cari expresses fascination with Sky Woman wondering who she was.

The water birds Cari use in the mural are Blue Herons to illustrate the motherhood connection that Sky Woman has to all women (Cari 3.5-6, A3:34). The dress that Sky Woman wears is a contemporary outfit that Cari sees on people at the longhouse ceremonies. Clothing, to Cari, is evocative of ceremony. The yellow and green in the dress Cari says, “to me they evoke plant life. The sunflowers. It’s like when I’m doing birds, I do blue herons. When I do flowers I always end up painting sunflowers. To me that’s an important flower I think in our culture. So I always think of those colors. You know. It’s also the same colors as corn” (Cari 3.6, A3:34). Sky Woman is also depicted with no face. “It’s like in the Christian religion you are not supposed to put a face on god,” she explains.” You know because nobody knows what he looks like and nobody is supposed to know what he looks like because he’s never been described by anybody (Cari 3.8, A3:34-35).” To Cari, there is no need to put a face on her. Cari purposefully doesn’t anthropomorphize Sky Woman. This is something that she feels is something that shouldn’t be done with Sky Woman. This is something she learned at a young age and carries with her today (Cari 3.8, A3:34-35). Cari still doesn’t put faces on the figures she paints.

Cari can relate to Sky Woman in that she herself feels excluded or pushed out. “Just because I do enjoy being alone,” Cari says. “I think maybe some people perceive

me as being a loner and not very social.” People with a voice are often excluded, Cari says. This puts these kinds of people in a place where they have to regenerate. In regenerating, these excluded people create something around them to sustain them. These people are remarkable people and remarkable people do remarkable things, Cari says. Remarkable people are the ones who create and invent (Cari 3.3, A3:33). Cari and her fiancée both work in the garden, creating (Cari 3.7, A3:34). “I think that when you are learning about the ceremonies, to actually see why we do it and to participate by having a garden, it makes it that much more important” (Cari 3.7, A3:34).” Like the creative process, Cari tries to transpose her art into life.

### **Final Thoughts**

Cari is a unique and independent woman who is constantly in motion. Her circle of friends and family is a wide one. No one is left to the margins of her world. Growing up in both worlds by virtue of her mixed heritage has enabled her to see the world as a collective. Cari is not confined by the borders of the Kahnawake reserve. Her physical self and creative mind enables her to move fluidly beyond its borders and back again.

## Chapter Nine

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Dara

#### Introduction

Dara is a woman who is undergoing a personal struggle with her health. Her world is viewed through the lens of surviving cancer on a daily basis and continuing to live a good life everyday. Dara works hard at everything in her personal and professional life, sometimes to the point of exhaustion. She is accepting of so many people and things in her life. She takes them on one by one. Despite having so many commitments she always has time for her family and tries to live life with them to its fullest potential.

Dara is a 42 year old woman who lives in the community of Kahnawake. Dara has lived in Kahnawake for most of her life except for a period of ten years where she lived across the St. Lawrence River in a suburb of Montreal. She comes from a large extended family and is the youngest of three children. Dara's mother and father were married for more than fifty years before her father died suddenly eight years ago. Dara's father worked as an ironworker and then a band council chief. Dara's main female influences include her mother whom she considers to be a fair and reasonable person until her father's death when she became bitter. Other female influences include Dara's maternal grandmother who was French.

Dara went to Lachine High, which she cites as one of her main influences on her awareness as a Mohawk. She describes events that took place in her narrative. After high school Dara worked as a model and then got married to a man from Kahnawake. It was at this time that she became involved in heavy drug use. She got away from this lifestyle when she became pregnant with her only child, a girl who is now 19 years old. She and her husband divorced and maintained a tenuous and strained relationship around their daughter. Dara became involved with a non-native man who is now her partner. They have tried to have more children without success.

During times between interviews, Dara underwent major surgery and became a grandmother. In remission from cancer, Dara has been battling the disease over the last two years. In her interviews, Dara reflects on her upbringing, her struggle with addiction, her relationship with her partner, her bout with cancer, and becoming a grandmother.

### **Dara's Journey**

Dara's father was an ironworker while her mother stayed home. Structure in her house was based on a 50-50 relationship. Both parents made joint decisions after her mother would fill in her absent father on details of the week. Dara says growing up in that environment helped her structure her own home (Dara 1.1, A1:8). Dara says her parents never made decisions about the children in front of them; it was always done behind closed doors. Her father was more of the reactionary one, whereas her mother was more fair (Dara 1.11-12, A1:8-9; Dara 1.20, A1:10-11). Because her father was away working, Dara credits her mother for having more of an influence on her (Dara 2.4, A1:11). Dara grew up knowing there were two sides to every story. This, she learned from her mother. "You know, don't just believe what somebody says because they said it. You know. People are old enough to tell lies. People are old enough to spin the truth," Dara says. "People are just really bad creatures by nature (Dara 1.12, A1:9)." With her own daughter Dara says she tried to find out both sides of the story before reprimanding her and she never hit her (Dara 1.12, A1:9). Dara describes her mother as a very "hip" parent. Her mother kept up on all the relevant events related to her children's schools and their social circles (Dara 2.1, A1:11). Dara says her mother had the advantage of growing up in New York City with children of other races. This made her a more open-minded person. As a result, Dara was also taught to recognize people as people first, not by their race (Dara 2.3, A1:11).

Dara's mother is half French. This aspect of her family gave Dara insight into a whole new world. Dara says on that side of the family she learned all about food and

French culture while on her father's side she learned about Mohawk culture. In both families respect was a big issue. Dara was presented with two different worlds that were fun and educational. The French side was not tied to native identity but being the best person you could possibly be. Both sets of grandparents instilled a positive way of thinking in their grandchildren. Dara says this came out in how she was taught to approach food. Both traditional Mohawk foods and French foods were promoted. This instilled in Dara a love of food and a respect for both worlds. Neither was superior to the other (Dara 1.15, A1:10).

Dara's father's family she says is "very native." She describes her father's family traditions and values as molded by Mohawk culture. At family gatherings respect for elders was important. After the meal was finished, her grandfather would sit around and tell stories to all the grandchildren about how he was brought up and the traditions that were taught to him (Dara 1.14, A1:9-10). Traditions included funeral traditions and the False Face society. Dara didn't know if her paternal grandparents were longhouse people but she says they did practice certain traditions, which they tried to pass on to their grandchildren (Dara 1.15, A1:10). Dara says because of her French and Mohawk heritage she feels more balanced. As a result, she is not critical of others who have a mixed heritage (Dara 1.16, A1:10).

Dara struggled with addictions in her marriage but when she discovered she was pregnant Dara realized that her own daughter was a gift from the Creator. It was time to put the needs of her baby first. Dara had to work hard to overcome her addictions (Dara 1.10, A1:8). She taught her daughter to look at both sides of an issue. "It's important that people be given a fair chance to prove themselves," Dara describes. "Not because you heard it from this person that's how they are. That's something that's between those two people. Between you and that person maybe totally different. Because you don't know what kind of history they have" (Dara 1.24-25, A1:11). Dara teaches her daughter to always look for the best in people. Dara also puts her daughter's needs before her own. In

times where she struggled financially, she would give her first choice of food and always made sure she was full (Dara 1.25, A1:11). Dara never spoiled her daughter but provided a structured life for her. This has contributed to her daughter having a very different attitude towards life. Dara notices a difference in her daughter from other young people her age (Dara 2.5, A1:11-12).

Dara has been battling breast cancer for over two years. Struggles with her health have created attitudinal differences in Dara. Before her illness, Dara says she was more reactionary. Now she has the ability to take things in stride. She takes the time to learn and understand before she acts. When she was diagnosed Dara took the time to educate herself and find materials so that her daughter could understand what was happening. For Dara, sharing her newfound knowledge was important to keeping their relationship open (Dara 1.24, A1:11).

One of Dara's biggest fears when she was diagnosed was never being able to see her grandchildren but then her daughter became pregnant (Dara 2.14, A1:12). Dara didn't judge her daughter and just accepted the pregnancy. And during the course of the interviews her daughter gave birth. Dara describes the event:

I remember being just so comfortably numb. I couldn't get up. I drank coffee to try and offset the tiredness. That didn't really help. Watching her go through this and feeling so helpless. It was like I wasn't supposed to feel like that, I was supposed to be right in there with my catcher's glove.

She continues, her eyes getting bright and her face softening as she described the birth of her grandchild.

I am trying to put myself in her shoes and go back to when I delivered her and trying to make that connection. Is it really really like that? I just couldn't remember. And so I was the one to be quiet. I wasn't at the (one giving birth), I couldn't step up to the plate. I had to be the quiet

cheerer-on and...But that was okay. I was okay with that (Dara 2.12, A1:12).

As a new grandmother, Dara made a point of letting her daughter experience being a mother on her own right from the birth.

Dara gives her daughter space. I don't want to be the second mother, she says. Because the baby has a mom and her daughter has to learn on her own (Dara 2.13, A1:12). Being a grandmother is not yet a part of Dara's identity. Dara describes it as like trying on a new pair of shoes. "What are my duties and my responsibilities to this child? How am I going to help (my grandchild) have good structure?" she asks. "I think about it a lot (Dara 2.15, A1:13)." At the time of the interviews, Dara's daughter, her fiancée, and the new baby lived in her house with her. As a result she decided to keep a distance and wait until her daughter moved into her own house. Then she would be able to decide how to play out her role as grandmother (Dara 2.15, A1:13).

As Dara looks around her community as she matured she sees many changes. She questions if there will be a Kahnawake in the future. Community and family meant different things than they do today. As a result of what she sees, she has lost interest in anything to do with the community. Dara says she just lives out her life and keeps to herself (Dara 3.10-11, A1:13). One change Dara sees is how distant people are from each other. She remembers how neighbors used to help each other in building a home. "All the men from that neighborhood used to go there and help to build that house," she says. To her, that's community (Dara 3.10-11, A1:13). Dara also observes how people looked out for each other's kids. She says other parents would reprimand you if you were caught causing destruction to people's property (Dara 3.17, A1:14). In the neighborhood everyone knew each other. They would help each other. "It wasn't just your family, your immediate family," she says. "Family meant your neighborhood (Dara 3.17, A1:14)."

Community doesn't mean the same thing. Dara points to the need to lock doors and installed security systems as evidence (Dara 3.18, A1:14-15).

Dara realizes that the history of native people has been misrepresented in books written by non-native people (Dara 1.3, A2:10). Dara described history class where native issues were presented from a one-sided non-native perspective. Natives were always made out to be bad, Dara says (Dara 1.4, A2:11). She grew up hearing her father's view point on the world from a Kanienkehaka perspective. When Dara left the reserve to go to high school, she began hearing something totally different and negative. Dara got involved in a protest that took place at her high school. She and other students walked out because of how the history of native people was being taught. They were being taught lies, Dara says. The students felt they couldn't let that continue (Dara 1.5, A2:11).

Dara expressed confidence in her identity. She is not shy about acknowledging her mixed heritage. Identity is inside, she says. Blood quantum doesn't indicate who you are. Dara's mixed heritage is part of her, she says. It doesn't mean she is any less of a person for the choices her ancestors made. Despite this fact she says she is still Mohawk. "I don't say I am Dara one quarter Mohawk, one quarter French, one quarter whatever," she says. "That's not who I say I am. I don't think that [blood quantum] should indicate who you are as an individual brought up within the culture (Dara 3.26,-27, A2:12)." Many people say they are native and grow up not thinking any differently. But if you go back and check, you might be more white than anything else Dara says. The amount of white or native blood is irrelevant because it matters what's inside and having grown up on the reserve. What also makes you native is going to school and being called a savage. All these things validate you as a native person, Dara says (Dara 3.20, A2:11-12). Being native is something you take with you. If Kahnawake didn't exist anymore, native people would still exist. Identity is what you carry with you wherever you go. Living off the reserve doesn't mean one is any less native. Living on a reserve doesn't validate who you are, Dara says (Dara 3.23, A2:12).

Dara describes a certain heaviness in the community that is hard to get rid of (Dara 3.16-17, A2:11). Dara says there is denial that permeates the community. The denial of sexual abuse among other things plays a role in how you think and how you project things. Healing, she says is going to be a long process (Dara 3.28, A2:12). Part of the community's identity lies in the Oka Crisis of 1990, not only for inside but outsiders looking in. "I think people find it a little bit easier when you tell them where you are from," Dara says. "And right away if they were around in that time of our Crisis that's who they label, or it helps them to identify who you are and the struggle that the people had to go through" (Dara 3.25, A2:12). The experience of Oka affected Dara's self-concept.

Growing up on the reserve, Dara was not conscious of her identity as a Mohawk. It was only when she went outside the community to a high school in a suburb of Montreal in the early 1980s that Dara became aware of her Mohawk identity. "You were feared," she says. "So you kind of like jumped on that wagon and road it. She laughs. People were like so scared of you because you were from Kahnawake" (Dara 1.3-4, A3:36-37). The previous students at the school had maintained a tough reputation that Dara says the current students used to their advantage. This helped in confidence issues and boosted self-esteem. Any person from Kahnawake who walked through the door was labeled a "tough ass" or "crazy Indian." These labels enabled the students to walk with their heads up high. Dara saw herself through the non-native's eyes. To Dara it was a huge statement. "All you had to do was cut your eye on somebody and its like they are jumping back, oh I don't want to mess with you," she says. "And you didn't do anything yet...like you are looking at them like that, giving them the evil eye...that's how powerful you were and you didn't even do anything (Dara 1.3-4, A3:36-37)." The perceived toughness insulated her in what Dara describes as "a bubble."

Previous to her experiences in high school, her family validated Dara's identity. You never ventured outside the view you were given by your family she says. At school

she began to hear a different view on her identity. The issues became aggressive. The eventual protest and walkout was important to her (Dara 1.5, A3:37-38). “It was a big thing,” she says to demonstrate her transition. “I mean it kind of made me feel like you’ve come full circle with who you are and identifying your native background, you know and maybe not so much based on why people should be afraid of you, you know, but it was validating, that natives weren’t always the bad guys (Dara 1.5, A3:37-38).” Similar to her experience in high school Dara was confronted with her identity was during the Oka Crisis of 1990. She and her family were part of the caravan that left the community and were assaulted with rocks by a neighboring community. Dara describes the event:

Well yeah it’s impacted because of the events that unfolded from one extreme to the other where I was in the caravan that was going out through the Mercier Bridge and that was stoned. I think we were like the fourth vehicle and to see all these non-natives gathering and there was like, oh man, like tons and tons of these stones (Dara 1.8, A3:39).

Years later, her bubble burst when she was diagnosed with cancer—a fight that differed from high school protests and 1990.

Dara says going through the fight against cancer changed her. Her whole perspective changed with the diagnosis. Dara learned how to reach out to people (Dara 1.21, A3:41). Cancer made her realize how strong she is. She kept her grandchild in her mind as an incentive to keep on going (Dara 1.23, A3:41-42). Dara says she thinks others see her as a fighter and a strong individual. She agrees but at other times she says she is also vulnerable and weak. Another aspect of strength was knowing that to battle cancer she needed to know about the disease. In learning everything she could about cancer, Dara put a face on the disease, which helped her know what she was fighting (Dara 1.28, A3:41-42). Now, Dara identifies herself as a survivor (Dara 2.10, A3:43).

One of the outcomes of her struggle with cancer is that she has become a teacher of sorts. Dara sees herself as paving the way for women who are just starting out their struggles with the disease. Dara has become a source of support through radio talk shows, interviews, and small discussion groups (Dara 3.3, A3:46; Dara 3.3, A3:46).

At the time of the interviews in 2007, Dara contemplated breast reconstruction. For Dara, having her breast back is important on an intimacy level (Dara 2.18, A3:44). “Every time I have to look in that mirror, it says there’s only half of me,” she says. “And now there’s even less because the lower half is partially gone (Dara 2.18, A3:44).” In her relationship, her breasts are an important part of their intimacy and yet her partner has validated her desire to survive over losing a breast. So the decision to have reconstructive surgery is hers alone, and a matter of validating her self worth (Dara 2.7, A3:43). To Dara, being sexy is important to her self worth and she says what you have underneath radiates it out (Dara 2.19, A3:45). Part of her consideration has to do with her grandson. “What am I going to tell him when he gets bigger?” she asks (Dara 2.20, A3:46). Dara wants to be whole and feel like a woman again.

Part of Dara’s identity also centers on her role as a grandmother. She says she is overwhelmed by becoming “a gramma” (Dara 1.23, A3:41). Dara describes how her life and being a survivor relates to her grandson:

I think looking at the average person and how they go through life. If they have no ups and downs, if it’s just a straight line. When I go back and I look at my lifeline I have a lot of mountains and a lot of dips and a lot of quarry like sized holes. There was no straight line for me. My life line could have been broken up and given to three people and it would have been enough life experience to help mold three different people because it’s been that paramount. I’ve done a lot of wrong things. Made bad judgment calls but you know what, if I had to go back I wouldn’t change

it. This is where I am today. And that's what's important. And I have all these good things to help instill into my little grandson (Dara 2.11, A3:44).

Dara sees part of her role as grandma is to teach what she knows to him (Dara 2.13, A3:43-44).

Dara works in the community operating two businesses. One business centers on health and sports while the other is about food. Dara sees sports as a vehicle to open doors for the youth of the community, giving them the opportunity to get off the streets (Dara 1.26, A3:41). Dara has observed that children today are not brought up in a structured environment. Structure is viewed as a bad thing. There are a lot of children who have no structure in their lives and are allowed to wander the streets of the community. As a result over the last ten to twenty years, many young girls end up pregnant. This shows Dara that there is something wrong (Dara 2.4, A3:42). Dara acknowledges that Kahnawake has a one sided perspective on things from many of the people closing themselves off from the outside (Dara 2.6, A3:42-43). Dara spent a lot of time outside of the community living and working. Through her family, living, and her sports, Dara learned to be open and disciplined. Dara instilled these same qualities in her own family life and hopes that it infects other people in a similar way (Dara 1.26, A3:41). She shares her knowledge of the benefits of this lifestyle with the community through sports and daily interactions.

Dara describes the character of Kahnawake as being like her family. In a crisis the family circle comes together fast to resolve the issue and on a smaller scale members get along. On the other hand there is a lot of bickering and stubbornness and people concentrate on themselves. People can't get along under one roof (Dara 3.9, A3:48). At the community level there is a lot of complaining about each other. "When there's simple problems and you could have simple solutions, it's the people that make it complicated" she says (Dara 3.9, A3:48). Dara says the federal and provincial governments are slowly

suffocating the community. They sit back and watch Kahnawake people fight among themselves. “Where are we going to be in the next twenty five years?” she asks (Dara 3.10-11, A3:48-49). Dara says the women are the ones who can see the future yet many are not grounded enough to make good decisions. “They talk one way but they do different thing,” Dara says. “”They’re just talking the talk. And they can’t walk the walk (Dara 3.11, A3:49). As a result, Dara maintains a quiet life. Dara doesn’t identify with many of the larger issues of the community. “Its like, you know what, where cancer attacked me personally, it was my fight. When I look at the issues, try to compare the issues that surround this community and how do they affect me personally. They don’t. They really don’t as an individual (Dara 3.12-13, A3:49).” Issues with community identity and family identity made Dara see her own personal battle with cancer more clearly.

Dara talked about the identity issue within her own context. Being Mohawk doesn’t mean going around quantifying yourself in terms of mixed heritage. “It doesn’t validate the person that you are,” she says. People in the community could be a mix of many different races. Dara doesn’t see the different nationalities, it doesn’t change who the person is (Dara 2.3, A3:42). Dara says what is important is to look at the bigger picture. “I am a human being,” she says. “I am a human being that was born into this particular life.” Even if she left she would continue to be native Dara says. She is a “Heinz 57”, a colloquial description of mixed ancestry. The ones ashamed to admit this are the ones who are the first to yell Onkwehonwe, something Dara admit is unreasonable in the current setting. Blood is not the dominant factor about identity, Dara says. She’s says people are shaped by life, influenced by culture and the hardships that her people had to endure (Dara 3.22, A3:50). Identity, she says, is something you carry with you (Dara 3.23, A3:50). Dara places importance in the family, being a breast cancer survivor, and a woman who will help the youth. Being a native woman, not so much (Dara 3.24, A3:51). Asked to describe herself, Dara says “I would say I am a Mohawk woman from

Kahnawake. This is my family.” As an added dimension to her self image Dara focuses on sports and cancer. “Because these are monumental...hurdles that I had to jump over, that helped mold me to who I am today,” she says. Dara talks about addictions as well. “That’s what makes me this person,” she says. “It’s not Kahnawake really, as a nation yes, that makes me, that helps me to identify with who I am, a part of me but it doesn’t mean that’s just who I am (Dara 3.25, A3:51).” Dara explains that these different facets of her would help someone understand where she comes from and why she thinks the way she does. Dara also talks of the outside forces that serve in the description and understanding of the Native person. ”Like colonization,” she says. All the negatives help a person to understand their background. When you say you are native Dara says, immediately people understand you and sympathize (Dara 3.25, A3:51).

### **Final Thoughts**

Despite her struggles with cancer, Dara is a vibrant personality. She is always thinking ahead to further projects and business opportunities she would like to work on. She works hard everyday at whatever she puts her mind to accomplishing. She is not limited by the borders of the Kahnawake community as she moves around in her personal and professional life. She is a wife, a mother, a sister, and a grandmother. Her life also includes awareness and respect for different peoples and places, a remnant of her upbringing, being of two worlds.

## **Chapter Ten**

### **Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Emma**

#### **Introduction**

Emma is a creative and sensitive woman grounded in history who has had many influences on her life. She credits elders, her stormy relationship with her mother, a troubled relationship with mother of her grand daughter, and her art with having influenced her development. Emma has a creative and intuitive imagination that enables her to see the inherent quality of people and things. As a result of the combination of her life experiences and the gifts she was given, she appears conflicted but centered.

Emma is a 51 year-old woman who lives in the community of Kahnawake. Emma grew up in the community and comes from a large extended family. Emma is the third oldest of nine children. She went to school at Kateri Elementary School in Kahnawake and to high school in Montreal. She says that Kahnawake transformed from “community” to “conflict” in her lifetime, from a time of being a self-respecting person to the current era of self-preservation. Her journey began in her own where conflict pointed her down a path that she calls her healing journey.

#### **Emma's Journey**

Emma's difficult relationship with her mother throughout her life initiated much of the turmoil she needed to overcome. Her mother stayed at home while her father worked in construction as an ironworker before he was elected to the local Band Council for eight years. Because of her difficult relationship with her mother, Emma spent much of her time with her maternal great aunt she calls Tohta. As a young child, Emma would sit quietly and sometimes participate in traditional practices with her Tohta while she visited other elder ladies of the community. Emma grew up in the longhouse tradition despite being baptized and raised Catholic. She would sneak away to attend ceremonies

and socials with one of her sisters. Emma was reinstated into the Longhouse in the early 1970s. She raised her children in the longhouse way and continues to practice her beliefs in her daily living and expressing them through her artwork.

Emma studied commercial art at Dawson College in Montreal and continues to learn—a self-taught artist. Emma teaches in one of the local schools and at a Montreal university. In our conversations, we spent time doing beadwork and sewing which made the interviews flow a bit differently from the others. Our conversations covered topics such as her relationship with her mother and father, her relationship with her grand aunt, her upbringing in the community, and her work as an artist and teacher. As she spoke, Emma would pause in her beadwork and far away look would come into her face, as though she was searching her memories for what she wanted to say. She seems to have accepted the events that she describes as part of her. Emma acknowledges that these events are what make her who she is and make her character.

Early in life Emma grew up Catholic. However she also learned about traditional ceremonies and practices from various men and women in the community. Emma's mother punished her for pursuing longhouse activities and sneaking away to learn about traditions from men in the community like Louis Hall and Demon Logan. But Emma credits elder men like these as influencing her view of womanhood. "I learned a lot about how the traditions were and about the main thing that you were supposed to be as a woman," Emma says. Emma had the opportunity to learn a more holistic view of how a woman was supposed to be from local elder men. These men knew which women were respectful and carried themselves well. In turn, they let Emma know who she could look to as role models (Emma 1.15-16, A3:55). Their knowledge made sense to her. Later she describes the balance between the elder men, but most importantly the elder women. The influence of the elder generation of Kahnawakeron:non is not doubted by Emma. "They were showing me not about making a specific decision but showing me what my choices were (Emma 1.2-3, A1:14)." Emma passes on the teaching about having choices to her

children and students. In fact she pointedly focuses on the influences in her personal development based on what she calls her own code for truth-telling.

Emma's mother passed away a few years ago, but this one relationship forced her to tell the truth. She describes their relationship as painful. Emma realized later in life that their relationship was the cause of much of her life's pain and disharmony. Emma describes herself as the child from hell. She says this because she never let her mother get away with anything, including telling lies (Emma 1.9, A1:15-16). "When my mother stepped out of bounds, I would tell her "you can't do that...you have to behave" Emma describes. "I was the mother (Emma 1.9, A1:16)." As a result, Emma spent almost every summer away from home because her mother couldn't handle her.

Emma spent a lot of time with elder women in her neighborhood and learned about Mohawk traditions and ways of being a woman. Emma remembers the secretive nature of their gatherings. To others it looked like they were having a bonfire and chatting but in reality the women would be burning tobacco and giving words. 'Giving words' is an expression used to describe the act of saying words and burning tobacco, much like praying. At that time the priest and the church were really strong in the community. To be traditional meant being a witch. This was because longhouse traditions were not really understood (Emma 1.6, A1:A15).

In later years, Emma worked on her 'self' to try to discover the source of her unhappiness. Emma did a vision quest as part of her healing path to deal with what she discovered. While in on her path, she came to understand the source of her pain—her relationship with her mother. As she reflected on this incident during her healing she realized the role her mother played in her grandmother's fall and eventual death. Her grandmother slipped on something left out by Emma's mother, was injured and died in hospital. Emma was not allowed to see her grandmother before she died, which caused her much grief. This event damaged her relationship with her mother. The old ladies were

part of the healing. And what they were doing was trying to teach Emma of how to be a daughter. Emma describes what she saw:

So I was laying on the bed and when I woke up all my grandmothers' friends were sitting there. And they told me I had to talk to my mother. That it was time to let my grandmother go. And so I told them that if they made me talk to my mother, that I would never talk to them again. None of them. That my mother betrayed everybody and that my mother told a lot of lies about a lot of things. They said you have to talk to her now. You have to let your grandmother go because your grandmother is in the spirit world and she doesn't want you to be like that. They told me this in Kanienkeha. I said well if you are going to do that, then I am never going to talking to you. I told them again three times. They said – well it has to be that way. And one of them took their chair and turned it around so that back was to me. Forcing me to make the decision. So I didn't turn my back on them they turned their back on me. And then so then that happened, I realized that “okay I have to go talk to my mother” so I went into the other room and asked my mother for cookies. (Emma 1.8, A1:15).

Emma's mother won the battle and rewarded her with cookies. Emma, upon reflection felt bought out by her mother. As a result, Emma never spoke the Mohawk language again. Speaking the language, Emma says, was too painful, reminding her of losing her grandmother and not having closure for that loss. As well, what her mother did to Emma stayed with her (Emma 1.8, A1:15). What Emma learned from the old women was the power of good secrets. Emma says it was about not letting people know things because they weren't comfortable with traditions and it went against their beliefs. Knowledge would cause harm. As a result, what she learned from the old women friends of her grandmother was that she had to be responsible for her own actions, but ironically

responsible to others by reminding them of their limitations. Emma says, she tells her students “what’s what” and then lets them decide what path to go on. It’s their life she says (Emma 1.9-10, A1:16).” In the way Emma handles her students, she is acting very much like the women she learned from.

Part of the woman circle was a condoled bear clan mother that she would call the ‘pie lady’.<sup>34</sup> The woman had a small business to support herself. Along with the clan mother, Emma’s real grandmother, her Tohta, would only speak Mohawk to her. She took Emma visiting all her old lady friends. Emma says she was like her grandmother’s tail (Emma 2.5, A1:14). Emma evokes vivid imagery as she describes what this was like:

I would be running around, either in front of her or behind her kicking the leaves. I remember even the colors of the leaves” Emma says. “I would be running around, either in front of her or behind her kicking the leaves. I remember even the colors of the leaves. It was like we were in the woods because I was so small. And we’d go and we’d visit (Emma 2.5, A1:14).

In perpetual mourning for their dead husbands, all the old women wore black. Emma vividly remembers the black stockings that the women used to roll down around their ankles (Emma 2.4, A1:14). None of the women drank; they would prepare tea and talk about traditions. In their own way, these women would follow the ceremonies appropriate to the time of the year, like preparing strawberry drink, maple candy. To Emma it was like participating in a secret club. Even though the women went to church they maintained a traditional lifestyle they didn’t share with their families but shared with Emma (Emma 2.5, A1:14).

Emma also relied on her maternal great grandmother after she turned her back on her Tohta. Her ‘Monot’, as she refers to her, was what she imagined a clan mother was

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<sup>34</sup> The condolence ceremony is a traditional ceremony that takes place when a chief or clanmother is chosen and officially installed into a position. They are then referred to as a condoled chief or clanmother.

supposed to be like (Emma 1.11, A1:16). A family rule implemented by her great grandmother was that everybody had to go to her house for every Sunday. “So every Sunday they sat around and they would talk about what’s going on in the family. Who needs help with things?” Emma describes. Adult family members were given the opportunity to work things out with the help of Monot. Sunday supper would turn out to be an all day event, with cooking, talking, and kids playing outside. Emma says it was kind of like a storybook kind of life (Emma 4.5, A1:18). Emma says her great grandmother was strong in enforcing this family tradition. “I don’t know anybody that does that anymore”, Emma says. “Where it’s like every Sunday that’s your duty is to go to your mother’s house, your grandmother’s house (Emma 4.5, A1:18).” Emma’s credits her great grandmother for enacting the important role of helping the family to deal with issues. Emma’s great grandmother never picked sides. After listening to the problem, Emma’s great grandmother asked “What do you think...how are you going to fix it? (Emma 4.6, A1:18).” Emma says as a result there were few family problems because everyone was forced to deal with issues. Emma describes this as a kind of longhouse format because everybody would come together, the women in one room talking and the men in another (Emma 4.6, A1:18).

At 11 years old, Emma became aware of the longhouse. She would think back to when she was a child and spending time with the old women. Emma found out from other kids about the longhouse. “Once you are in the loop then you find out who’s really in the loop Emma says (Emma 1.12, A1:16).” Emma began sneaking off to attend ceremonies. By the time she was 14 years old Emma got caught going to the longhouse. By that time she knew all the people were who attended. “We would have a lot of fun,” Emma says. “It was always something learning; and you’d sit and listen to them talk and it was like good. It was small (Emma 1.13, A1:16-17).” Emma says people from other Iroquois communities would travel to Kahnawake and attend ceremonies. Emma would

tell her family she was going to church but attend the longhouse instead (Emma 1.13, A1:16-17).

As a mother, Emma says she thinks about her own mother and promised herself that she would do things differently. For Emma's mother discipline meant hitting first, and then the lesson was over and done with (Emma 2.16, A1:17). Emma chose to speak and explain to her own children rather than spank them. "You get them to understand why they shouldn't do those things," Emma says. "And for them I think it was more painful for me too. More painful for me to be telling, talking to them instead of whacking them (Emma 2.16, A1:17)." In one way Emma is similar to her mother. Emma describes a high amount of drive and motivation which she thinks comes from her mother.

However she also says she has different things that motivate her:

When I am doing it I am doing it to relax, even the courses that I am teaching at night. I am doing it because it helps me to relax and when I come back I am a little bit tired but I feel good. I feel productive. It's nice that I am passing on what maybe I may not be able; ----- has no children so I am not going to have a grandchild from that side I think. So I am not going to be able to pass it on there (Emma 2.16-17, A1:17).

Emma is motivated by the desire to pass on what she knows to as many children as she can and she finds relaxation in her many activities (Emma 2.17, A1:17).

Through her students, Emma says she can see many changes that have taken place in the community. Emma says the kids don't learn about responsibility and have no order in their lives. "You have parents that are working and kids that come home and nobody's home. I'm not saying it's a bad thing to support your family but at the same time you have to have rules," Emma says. "You need to sit down and touch base and find out what's going on and talk. You know, be a family together (Emma 3.9, A1:17-18)." In her own home Emma made sure her children were always home for supper.

The influences on her approach to parenting came from her early exposure to Mohawk women elders. In those days Emma remembers how the women in her neighborhood would help each other out. The women would talk and do whatever needed to get done. If a neighbor didn't have something, you shared (Emma 4.7, A1:18). To illustrate this point, Emma tells the story of how a soup bone symbolizes the sense of community she was taught:

Well what happened is, somebody will go out and buy a soup bone. And before it used to be this great big bone with a lot of meat on it. So what you would do is you would take a pot and you would put the soup bone in there and you would cook the meat. So you would get your broth and you would cut off a little bit of the meat for your soup. Then, depended on who did the soup first. It would go to the neighbors'. Then the neighbor would make the soup. Boil the bone some more and get their broth going. Then they would send it to the other neighbor across the street...then the (neighbors) would take it over to your aunts. Which ever way we would go would depend on who needed the soup bone that day. And so they would actually share till the bone had no more marrow left on it and no more flavor. It just did the go around and everybody would share that soup bone (Emma 4.7-8, A1:18-19).

There is a rule found amongst Indigenous peoples that says nobody-eats till we all eat. This rule also translates in the communal effort put into cultivating food and other shared work. This also took place in Kahnawake where Emma described how neighbors would share is in preparing and weeding the garden. The fruits of their labor were also shared. Each family would plant something different and the abundance would be distributed around the neighborhood (Emma 4.8, A1:19). There is a lack of a sense of community that shows up in the kids Emma teaches.

Another change that Emma sees is a lack of spirituality in the community. Emma describes the strict enforcement of Catholic beliefs in her family, sometimes to the detriment of family unity. When her aunt married a Protestant she was excommunicated from the rest of the family. To Emma as a child, Catholicism was about sinning and burning in hell (Emma 1.6, A1:15). By contrast in the more relaxed contemporary times, Emma says the kids today have lost the connection to what matters most – the value of life, the value of time. The community misses the value of being with real people, talking with real people, and having normal enduring and supportive conversations (Emma 4.11, A1:19). “I do believe that there’s a higher power, and not necessarily being an entity, but I think it’s that, positive energy that goes through everything,” Emma says. “But that space that’s between everything, of how we are connected and how everything goes together, really that power that makes us be part of each other (Emma 4.13, A1:20).” Emma says the interconnectedness of everyone is seen when we do wrong to someone, there is usually something that befalls our children. This can be related to the idea of karma or you get what you put out. The idea of the interconnectedness is lost on many of the children she works with. Emma says the children don’t learn from the Sky Woman story the lessons of how to be good and kind to one another and how to work together (Emma 4.14, A1:20-21). Emma sees the results of the children not being told the stories of where we came from. One student in particular asked particular questions of Emma that showed her they were exploring their humanity. Emma says that questioning adults on such a serious issue is something different. As a child she wasn’t allowed to question adults on such things. She had no need to; she had a lot of guidance from her grandmother and her grandmother’s women friends. Emma herself questions whether the loss of spirituality has made people more inquisitive about their humanity. She doesn’t think it has. Emma says most kids don’t question their humanity or spirituality and are picking up whatever they can find wherever they can find it because they don’t have proper guidance from adults. She says kids are getting into things like devil worship,

witchcraft, and new age beliefs (Emma 4.17, A1:21). Emma is implying that a loss of spirituality caused by the imposition of religion on the Mohawk people has created a void. The spiritless, emotionless children that she sees in school are a reflection of what she sees in her family who are products of residential and industrial schools.

For example, members of Emma's family attended residential school. Emma thinks that this has affected the ability of younger generations of family members to express feelings and emotions. Emma's paternal grandmother went to residential school. Emma's own father was sent to industrial school by his mother. As a result both were different. They were unable to outwardly express their love in physical ways. For example, Emma's grandmother would give expensive cookies, chocolate or junk. "For her it was give things, no hugs, no stuff like that, just give things," Emma explained. "She would have them and that would be the best thing that she could give you. But she couldn't give you hugs and things like that (Emma 2.5, A2-12-13)." Emma says that the older generation has a hard time with trust. She says a lot of them have a hard time hugging or kissing. "I can't remember my mother ever saying I love you. Just to say I love you, and when I would say it to her, she would be like oh yeah," Emma said. "And even my father too. He wouldn't be able to say I love you but he would say 'me too' and shake his head up and down to respond to it (Emma 2.6, A2:13)." Emma sees how different that older generations are from the younger generations. She says it's a different way of being because of residential schools. Emma can also see how the indifference or spiritless relationships have affected the current generation.

As a teacher, Emma uses the children as a gauge through which she measure changes in the community of Kahnawake. Emma says that there is an overall lack of spirituality in the community that shows up in the kids she encounters. The lack of spirituality has an ironic place with forced religious education under Canadian law. In the past, everyone was required to go to church. Indian control of Indian education since the 1970s removed religion from reserve schools (Emma 4.14, A3:65). As she said earlier the

education created a spiritless older generation that could not express its feelings. So Canada's education policy affected the level of spirituality of the people of the community to the point where the kids she encounters have no belief in a higher power (Emma 4.13, A3:65).

Spirituality was not replaced with any teaching about who the people are as human beings, how they are supposed to act, and what their purpose is on earth (Emma 4.14, A3:65). An example of this case she gave in the depiction of the many questions that a student had for her one day. "How do you know that you are alive?" the student asked. "How do you know that this is not all just in your mind? That it's not for real (Emma 4.16, A3:66)." Emma replied that her body told her, her back ached and her feet were sore. "I can think, I can see, I can feel, I can taste", Emma said. "I can experience where I am at right now (Emma 4.16, A3:66)." Emma encouraged the boy to value his own existence and see that he has the ability to choose what kind of life he is going to have. He could continue to question or he could actually do things that made him feel alive. She pointed to the fact that if he didn't feel alive, then perhaps he was not doing the right things (Emma 4.16, A3:66).

Questioning your own mortality Emma feels is a problem that comes with the way kids are parented today. Emma feels that the problem lies with loose family structures. Not having meals together and therefore not having real conversations is problematic (Emma 3.8, A3:62). Order and responsibility are lost. There are no rules (Emma 3.9, A3:62; Emma 3.11, A3:62-63). The kids come home and there is no one there, Emma says. Kids don't get that feeling of love and support and family and order. Emma describes this all as a loss of support. Being able to sit down and talk to each other makes a big difference, Emma says (Emma 3.10, A3:62). There is a loss of compassion for the other Emma says (Emma 4.11, A3:64). The kids are left alone with mainstream media and video games depicting murder, killing, shooting, and fighting which serves to

desensitize the kids. As a result, kids have lost the value of life and the value of time (Emma 4.11, A3:64-65). The kids come to school overtired, Emma says.

Emma says kids today are different. The kids don't do things the same way she did at their age. The kids are technologically advanced and this affects the way people treat each other. "Even, if you don't like somebody," she says of the trend toward cyber bullying, "a long time ago they pushed each other or talked about them...to their friends or face to face, None of this hiding in the background (Emma 4.10, A2:13-14)." Emma describes how the kids use the internet to call people down and be nasty to each other. "What's wrong with the world?" she asks rhetorically even though she connected the older generation's lack of spirituality to today's isolationism (Emma 4.10, A2:13-14).

Today, Emma considers herself to be somewhat traditional. Along the way to adulthood Emma developed a connection to being an Indian. As a young adult Emma participated in the takeover of land in New York State. She was pregnant and had decided to have her baby at the occupied camp. There were complications and she ended up having the baby in a nearby hospital. When she was asked to name her baby boy Emma gave him only a Mohawk name. The doctor was furious when she refused to give the baby a last name. "I figured well, I am turtle clan and that's it, Emma turtle clan, and my son is ----- (Emma 2.19, A2:13)." When her son went to get a copy of his birth certificate, New York State refused to release his birth certificate because it had no last name. "They told him in reality that he is the only true Native American left in the United States because he is the only one that has one name from birth (Emma 2.19, A2:13)." Emma is proud of this fact. She says her son still has no last name on his birth certificate but does have one on his passport.

Emma clearly understands the changing times and even the transition to identity in her own lifetime. "I can't say I am fully traditional because I don't go to every single ceremony there is", Emma says. "Part of that is because of the political things that happen in the community...a lot of discord within each of the houses." Emma says that

that is the reason why she stays away. Emma maintains the basic spiritual beliefs of the longhouse and stays away from the political aspects (Emma 1.2, A3:51-52).

Emma describes a period in her life when her spirit was not happy and she was trying to please everybody else. In almost spiritual terms, and something that she describes as an expression of her traditional life, she painted a picture of herself at that time that she says was really dark (Emma 5.2, A3:66-67). Part of her journey included a vision quest. Emma painted a picture depicting her experiences. Not a self-portrait, Emma says the painting is a depiction of the act of looking at oneself. The look in the girl's face shows that she is someplace else. The uncertainty of Emma's future as she felt it at the time is shown in the fear in the girl's face (Emma 2.33, A3:60). At that time, Emma questioned what she was going to do next in her life. Emma continually refuses to sell the painting because she says it's not quite done, much like her journey (Emma 2.33, A3:60). The painting also helps her to remember the journey she is on. It also reminds her of what she learned in her vision quest (Emma 5.2, A3:67). Emma gets a lot of her ideas and energy from the universe. One can't lie to the universe, something at the center of her healing path.

As Emma continued on her healing journey, she realized that it was a sense of dishonesty that made her relationship with her mother so difficult. Emma describes what her vision quest revealed:

*The biggest lie that she could ever make was not letting me go see my grandmother and have my closure. And so that was what I held against her most of my growing life. And she used to say – I hate liars. And so for me, and she would say that to me, she would always say that to me. She would always call me a liar because I would always correct her. So somebody had to be a liar. Right. So I was like the black sheep of the family because I was a thorn in her side. So you know when I did my vision quest and I came to realize that the whole conflict with my mother came from that*

instance, you know and that's really where it started. I had really no idea that that's what it was. I just knew that my mother and I had conflict. I didn't realize that it came from when I was such a young child. And that whole influential part of what those old ladies were teaching me of how to be. Of like looking at all the times that we sat and we did Ohenton kariwatekwen.<sup>35</sup> And when they were doing all those ceremonies and everything and kind of, that was like the secrets but they were good secrets. And then all of the sudden learning about this other thing about having secrets was about. Of deception. So there's two sides of secrets that I realize that there was (Emma 1.9-10, A3:53).

Emma continues to tell people the truth. "There's a lot of people I rubbed the wrong way", Emma says. "If someone is doing something criminal that is going to hurt other people I can't keep my mouth shut. That's part of that, that's part of that, I guess residual from all of that stuff that happened when I was so young" (Emma 1.10, A3:53—54). Emma witnessed her mother's penchant for lying and as a young girl innocently took it upon herself to confront her mother on her lies, which resulted in Emma being the focus of her mother's frustration and anger. Her father left the raising of the children to her mother and didn't witness what went on. As a result of her mother's lack of closeness, Emma developed a strong bond with her paternal great grandmother that she values greatly.

As a grandmother to one girl, Emma says she is disheartened by her strained relationship with the mother of the baby. She and Emma's son had a hard break up and as a result, she doesn't get to see her granddaughter very much. She feels a sense of loss. "Because I am not able to have the kind of interactions that I want, I feel deprived

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<sup>35</sup> The Ohenton kariwatekwen "the words that come before all else" is a traditional recitation done before gatherings which gives thanks to the smallest plants and animals all the way up to the Sky World. Giving thanks for what has been provided by the natural world is an important aspect of Iroquois traditional beliefs.

because of that,” Emma says. “Grandmothers is what I think makes our world go around. Cause I think everything you know goes to your Gramma (Emma 2.5, A3:57).” Despite the disconnection, Emma stills feels close to her granddaughter on a spiritual level. Her spiritual gift has allowed her access to that aspect of their relationship. Emma has a heightened awareness of the world and is slowly working to develop this gift in meaningful ways. Emma described how the little girl is a child that she was supposed to have and even though she didn’t, the little girl still found a way to be in her life, indirectly (Emma 1.17, A3:56). At times Emma will dream about the little girl and out of these dreams events unfold that enable the two to spend some time together. It is as though they have a spiritual connection, Emma says (Emma 1.17, A3:56). Emma expresses a sense of hope that one day she and her granddaughter will be able to spend more time together and form a solid bond. As it is, their relationship is at the mercy of the mother. Emma does not get involved with her granddaughter’s mother but remains open to any possibility of seeing her (Emma 1.18, A3:56).

As she says about her teaching, Emma lets the mother make her own choices in her own journey (Emma 1.18, A3:56). With limited contact Emma questions how the disintegration of Kahnawake society is going to affect her granddaughter. “Who’s giving you that base of who you are?” Emma asks. “How you are supposed to live? How you are supposed to love and care for your children and your family (Emma 4.15, A3:66)?” Emma wonders who will teach her granddaughter to be proper.

Emma uses her philosophy of non-interference in her own life as she mothers her own children. Emma described how she dealt with the issue of inheritance of her house:

How come you like him better? It has nothing to do with liking anyone better. I like ‘youse’ both the same. I told him. I says as a matter of fact I love you both the same. It has nothing to do with liking. There’s a different with the way that youse are. And youse are both individual and it’s too bad that he feels like that. But he makes it worse. You come over

and visit once a week at the least. I says how often does he come visit, once or twice a year? And then I have to extend him a special invitation. I 'says' we don't have to send special invitations to their mother. Her mother doesn't do that. They just go and visit there. And they go there all the time. I said so, it's by choice. I says and some day he'll miss that and he'll say gees I shoulda. (Emma 2.15, A3:58).

Emma says that this way she doesn't live her son's lives for them.

Her sons are on their own life path and doing whatever it is they choose to do. "I can't walk their walk for them. They have to do that", Emma says. "And if part of that walk is something where I would not be proud of, I can talk to them and that and give them advice not to go that route but ultimately it's their life and they have to choose (Emma 2.21, A3:59)." Emma points out our similar ability to adapt and look out for the best interests of our children. This, she says, sets us apart from other women (Emma 2.29, A3:59).

Emma says that her artwork tells the viewer a lot about her home and her family. "And that structure, that structure that I believe in and follow is there", Emma describes. "Even if it's just those kind of pictures. Because you can see that it's really non-violent. It's like the content is calm, there's no, you could see the spirituality of it coming through (Emma 2.32, A3:60)." In some of her pieces Emma invests more of herself. One unfinished painting depicts connections to Iroquois roots, spirituality and gifts. The particular piece she says reflects her. "It's the experience that makes it me," Emma says. "And putting that on the canvas and capturing actually the look, that when you are looking at her, she is not looking directly at you, she's looking off to the side of you (Emma 5.3, A3:67-68)." Emma says it's like the viewer is invading her space and almost seeing what the girl in the picture is looking at.

Emma says that one aspect that many people don't know about her is her strong connection to the spirit world. "Every once in a while it will pop up and I'll say something, and they'll go, hmmm, where did she get that from? Who told you? You know, and its just I know", Emma describes. "It's somebody tells me, and I can't tell you who tells me, because all I know is that that spirit, the spirits that are there and I am aware of them, and sometimes I see them and sometimes I don't, sometimes I just hear them (Emma 5.3, A3:67)." When Emma did her fast, she says the spirits made her take a good look at her life, how she was living it, and the changes that she needed to make. These changes would enable her to have the kind of life she was supposed to have. Emma says she was listening to her inner voice. The messages and solutions she receives in her connections she says come from the Spirit World (Emma 5.3, A3:67).

Emma is very spiritual but grounded in history and everyday life; she has great big feelings, yet has had to cope with a difficult place to live. She tries to teach her students what she learned from community elders growing up, and sometimes she is successful because they listen. When they listen to her, the students learn about governing over oneself, relationships, and being responsible for your actions. Emma is clearly a product of her time and space.

### **Final Thoughts**

As she lives out her daily life as a mother, grandmother, teacher and community member, Emma looks around her community at current events and how people respond to the external world. She has the unique opportunity to gain a pulse of what the community feels and experiences through her students.

Emma says through her students she is able to look at the big picture of the politics of the community. Her interest, she says, probably comes from her father's involvement in local politics and her mother's insistence on getting involved in community events. Governance of the community is not just the family, Emma says. It's

a communal issue that the community has a hard time agreeing on. Often times the disagreement comes from a clash of ideas. If its not their own, they don't like it, Emma says. She feels there's a fear of success (Emma 4.1, A3:63). She sees that the community is not satisfied with the way things are run politically (Emma 3.3, A3:61). The role of women in the governance of the community is not clearly defined. As a result, the band council chiefs are left to their own and decisions are made without the consent of the people (Emma 3.4, A3:61).

In times past, everyone came together in the family and discussed things; this is what she witnessed in her own family. If things were not working, you worked together to fix it (Emma 3.4, A3:61). Emma says participation in community discussions started in the same way. Discussion took place among family members, and then moved to a discussion between friends. And it spread from there until it was a bigger issue to be looked at by the community (Emma 3.4, A3:61-62). Governance then, as Emma understands it, is about personal responsibility, taking charge of your own life first (Emma 3.5, A3:62).

Emma tried to take charge of her life and struggled with her own mother's non-recognition of her individuality. Emma's maternal great grandmother was the government of the family. The family rule was everyone had to go to her house for supper every Sunday (Emma 4.4-5, A3:63). Emma says this life was like what she imagined her ancestors would be like in a longhouse setting with her great grandmother in the role of clan mother. The family had the opportunity to talk things through and resolve issues (Emma 4.5, A3:63). After her great grandmother died, the family was no longer connected and it fell apart (Emma 4.5, A3:63). As a result, Emma and her mother had to struggle to build a friendship on their own as their relationship changed from a mother-daughter relationship (Emma 1.19, A3:56).

## Chapter Eleven

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Faith

#### Introduction

Faith is a small woman who is in constant motion. She views the world from the lens of a person who is perpetually seeking answers to life. A family-oriented person, Faith takes pride in the life she has managed to create for herself, her husband, and their children despite the almost insurmountable odds she faced growing up in the community of Kahnawake. What didn't destroy her, made her stronger.

Faith is a 55 year-old woman who lives in the community of Kahnawake. A single child raised by her mother and father in the longhouse ways, Faith grew up in Kahnawake. Her mother worked as a housekeeper and her father was a seasonal worker. Faith became aware of her difference in school and also when she attended ceremonies at one of the longhouses in the community.

When Faith married her Catholic husband, she left the longhouse for a time. She and her husband had five children. The death of one of her children made Faith look at her life and reawakened her faith in the longhouse ways. Faith talked extensively on the impact that this event had on her life and continues to have on it. Faith is a grandmother to many children and talked of passing on the ways she learned from her grandmother to her grandchildren.

Faith volunteers in many activities throughout the community of Kahnawake, and travels all over the world talking with other indigenous peoples about her beliefs and her experiences working in the community.

Faith discussed many topics in our conversations like her upbringing, her marriage, the impact of the death of her child, her relationships with her children and grandchildren, the Oka Crisis, and her volunteer activities.

## **Faith's Journey**

Faith had a difficult relationship with her mother but got along with her father (Faith1.2, A1:21). As an only child she grew up in the farming area of the community with parents who maintained a traditional lifestyle. They brought her to traditional ceremonies. But also the rural life had a different atmosphere than the more urban oriented Kahnawake town.

When her parents married, her mother gave up her Catholic faith and followed her husband to the longhouse. However before this change, they were married in the Catholic Church according to the wishes of her family. "He respected their wishes and he went through the motions", Faith says. "But afterwards we went to the longhouse, not the church and so my grandmother was really really upset with my mother for many years because of it" (Faith1.6, A2:14-15). Her mother and father maintained a strained relationship with her family. Along with this family relationship there was resentment on the part of her Catholic grandmother. Her mother became the black sheep of the family. Faith inherited the knowledge of this shunning and always knew there was a reason for it. Faith realized how strictly her grandmother was raised. If her grandmother had left the Catholic circle to marry someone, she herself would have been shunned. The boundaries were not so strict for Faith's own mother. When she married her father, her own mother wanted to throw her away, but didn't (Faith 1.6, A2:14-15).

Faith's mother had two brothers and an older sister. The children were not treated equally. The boys were favored over the girls by the mother. The boys were allowed to have free time while her mother had to work in the house cooking and cleaning for them. As a result, there was resentment between her mother and her siblings and between Faith's mother and her grandmother. "She would always confront her mother on why this was like the way it was," Faith says (Faith 1.3, A1: 21). "I can only assume that because she had a hard time with her mother, that she never felt like as if she got a break

anywhere.” Faith’s mother had to do most of the chores and looked after her mother when she became ill (Faith 1.3, A1: 21).

Faith had difficulties with her own mother. Her mother worked outside the home and as result Faith was left home alone many times. She resented the fact that her mother was not home for her and felt she received no guidance from her. Faith questioned her mother on why she had to leave the home to work and received similar answers to what her grandmother had given her own daughter. “Well you just do it and that’s all, you know (Faith 1.3, A1: 21).” The lack of sensitivity and engagement created tension between Faith and her mother.

Faith’s mother was a good cook and worked in the kitchen at the Kateri Memorial Hospital. Despite working outside the home, she kept an orderly house. “When she was home there was always supper, and it wasn’t supper that came out of a can,” Faith said. Her mother was also not involved in Faith’s education. She wasn’t allowed. With her own children, the system changed and encouraged parental participation in the schools (Faith 2.15, A1:23). Faith participated in her own children’s education.

As a child, when registering for school, Faith said families had to indicate what religion they were. The only options were Catholic or Protestant. If you indicated that you were Protestant, this allowed you to continue to be longhouse. So the longhouse children had to be Protestant. In their case, children were taught social skills, or to read instead of being given religion classes. (Faith 1.2, A2:14). “And I remember having a hard time at school because the kids were all Catholic or they were Protestant and being out there in left field as a longhouse person,” Faith says. “So either people laughed at you or people ridiculed you or people said like – you’re completely different. You’re the black sheep (Faith 3.18-19, A1:25).” Faith remembers growing up and not being told things that you need to do as a native person, as a Mohawk person. She just lived it.

Faith remembers the fear she had as a longhouse person. Faith remembers going to the longhouse and during ceremonies the neighborhood kids would be throwing rocks

at the building, laughing, and calling the people inside witches. As she sat in the longhouse, she could feel them banging a stick on the wall like they were banging on your back she says. It made Faith feel like she wanted to sink into the ground, a feeling she didn't really understand. "Because I didn't bother Catholics. I didn't bother Protestants," Faith says. "You can do whatever you want, so why can't I be left alone? (Faith 1.5-6, A2:14)." She wondered why she had to keep her longhouse faith a secret. "And I remember walking down the road coming out of the building there, them just staring at you from across the street. You know – oh my god, they know who we are," Faith described. "So I am just waiting to see if somewhere in the community, you know, they will catch you by yourself because you hear stories of other people getting beat up (Faith 1.5-6, A2:14)." The threat instilled a sense of fear of persecution by Catholic kids in Faith, it was like sitting on the edge of your seat all the time waiting for that stick to come through the wall and end up on your back in reality (Faith 1.6, A2:14).

Part of the pain that Faith felt came from putting aside her traditional beliefs for her husband's Catholic faith when they married. Faith secretly did not want to get married in the church but never told to anyone. "Because all I wanted to do was get married to him because I knew he was the one I wanted. And he was the one I wanted to have children with and so on and so on," Faith says. "And so when we got married, we got married in the church but they wanted us to get married in the back of the church because I was not Catholic (Faith 1.9, A3:69)." She also followed the wishes of her husband when they had children. "He wanted them to be baptized, go through their confirmation, go through whatever else and I just stepped back and allowed those things to happen (Faith 1.9, A3:69)." Faith secretly wanted to raise her children as longhouse but never expressed it to her husband until much later. "I knew it was going to be a confrontation and I didn't want to take that chance, so I held on to that for many many years (Faith 1.10, A3:69)." The pressure built in her for what turned out to be a betrayal of her own upbringing. The release she calls freedom.

Faith describes the moment of release as she confronted her husband. Now Faith can appear to be a stern woman, who can break into a wide grin with eyes sparkling. On this day she said a weight pressed her:

It's like all of the sudden I got so heavy that it just started spilling out. Well I am not satisfied with this, I am not happy with that. I don't like how this turned out. I don't like how this happened. You know. I just went on and on and on. And it just came rolling out. And if you could just imagine the expression on his face because it was like all of the sudden in one way I felt, it felt like I was hurting him and I didn't really want to hurt him and yet I had this tremendous drive to express myself once and for all – this is what I've been wanting to say for so long. But I don't really want to hurt your feelings but I need for you to know this is who I am (Faith 1.14, A3:70).

Faith told her husband directly how unhappy she was with the way things had turned out. She told him how frustrated she was, that she was happy with being married to him and the children but not with how they were being raised as Catholics. She said things needed to change. Faith went on to say she had no control over his feelings about the changes that needed to take place. Faith was going to do it whether or not he liked it. Faith remembers the feeling as she expressed herself. "I was very very heavy but afterwards I was very very free," she says. "And I was very very determined...I took three steps forward and I have never taken a step back again." As she reflects back on the experience, Faith realizes that she had to go through what she calls an awakening. She was born spiritually (Faith 2.24, A3:75-76). However the roots of this reformation in her religious life had its roots in a family tragedy that strained her marriage.

Faith believes that the Creator only puts in front of you what you can handle.

Faith felt the need to restore her spiritual life to handle events in life:

And if you can imagine food tasting like wood chips for how many years before I finally got my taste back. And all of the sudden waking up one morning and just like (breathing in), wow I could take a deep breath and not feel like there was somebody sitting on my shoulders and I was finally trying to climb up and I was finally getting a grip on the gravel and it was finally allowing me to get to the top of the hill. All of the sudden this awareness happened. I don't know where it comes from but all of the sudden it was there. And whether it was somebody saying it's like divine intervention, its spiritual awakening. A spiritual interference. I just take it for whatever, whoever I say that to for whatever day, they tell me that's acceptable (Faith 1.22-23, A3:75).

That was the start of her journey she says. Her journey was a quest for herself. She asked herself what makes her happy? She questioned the test she appeared to be going through and how much patience she had to find the answers. She realized her journey was about listening to things in herself (Faith 2.3, A3:76). Faith's spiritual awakening has its roots in her childhood. As an 'only' she poses independence of her beliefs as a result of being on a personal journey.

Her 'rebirth' began when her fourth daughter passed away (Faith 3.2-3, A3:76). This tragedy came up many times in our conversations. Each time, tears would come to her eyes. Her daughter suffocated while playing in a snow fort outside her home and lay there undiscovered for some time. The tragedy left a deep mark on Faith and her husband. They believed having another child would heal the grieving. But the bereavement was deep. Her struggles with her daughter's death forced Faith to question

‘What do I do now?’ She had self-doubts about her motherhood. “Because I am a mother and I always thought as a mother you have certain responsibilities and you have intuition, you know when there’s something going on with your children,” Faith says. “And here all of the sudden, at the one time when I needed my intuition the most, it didn’t work for me (Faith 1.10, A3:69).” And, because Faith didn’t have any siblings to talk this through, she had to work it out for herself. “I couldn’t trust anybody with my deepest thoughts”, she says (Faith 1.10, A3:69).

Faith spent two and a half years in deep thought. She said she thought about who she is and what she was doing. She questioned herself as a mother and daughter (Faith 1.1, A3:68, Faith 1.10, A3:69). Faith also had to deal with the anger and denial that she felt:

It was not meant for me to change what happened. I had to come to that reality. But I had to go full circle first before. I had to go through the anger. I had to go through the denial. But denial was the biggest that kept me in the longest circle. I just kept denying that this is what actually happened. Because I just could not, my heart was so broken that I could not go there. I just could not face it. And because of that denial, I was in limbo for the longest time (Faith 1.22-23, A3:75).

She began to explore her circumstances and her relationship with her family.

Faith says as an ‘only’ she was not the oldest, not the middle, and not the youngest, she was all three. Elsewhere in her life, she has always been more than one person. “I was always somebody else’s whatever—somebody else’s wife somebody else’s daughter, somebody’s cousin, niece, nephew...all those things but never identifying myself as this is who I am,” Faith describes. “And so when I asked that question, I got it, I got it big time, and I mean...it’s not ended (Faith 2.24, A3:76).” She is

finding out who she is as she goes along and becomes more outspoken about her beliefs. “I am not afraid of the change and I am not afraid to look at it now because I can put it in a place,” Faith says. “I can find a place for it where it doesn’t hurt (Faith 2.24, A3:76).” Even though she worked hard to distance herself from the pain of the tragedy she continues to cope.

Nearly 20 years later, she now realizes how much of her life she took for granted. “I just assumed everything was always there...I just assumed everything would go forever,” Faith says. “And all of the sudden there was like an awakening (Faith 3.2-3, A3:76).” She feels sad that it took her until she turned 55 years old to reach this point in her development because she missed out on so much, she says.

As she worked to find answers to her own questions, Faith realized that there were other people close to her who were dealing with similar feelings of guilt over the death of the little girl (Faith 1.10, A3:69). Faith, her children, and her husband began to work things out as a family. She found support in her children who she credits as understanding more than she initially thought. Her daughters didn’t blame her for what happened. They said she was a good mother and acknowledged that she was always there for them and would have been there for their sister (Faith 1.11, A3:70). Their words gave Faith strength and comfort in knowing that she must be doing something right to have daughters tell her this.

Faith found other resources in the community to help her find answers. She attended workshops which provided tools that helped her to look inside herself. There were women who helped her as well. Faith worked for an invalid woman who she began to confide in. This woman was also an ‘only’ and Faith began to work things out with her input (Faith 1.11, A3:69-70).

Faith also sought out traditional healers who helped her achieve a dream-like state. She described a dream where she was forced to confront herself. In it, Faith described being a fish in water swimming through a stream with high rock walls. She

turned into an eagle and went high into the sky. As an eagle she flew towards a path high on a mountainside. She says she landed and began walking up the path. As she walked, she encountered a woman with long flowing hair but she couldn't see her face. In the dream Faith recalls wanting to see the woman's face. "And I asked her who are you?" Faith recalls. "And at the third time I asked her she still wouldn't answer me (Faith 3.5, A3:77)." At this point Faith woke up but she returned the following week and was induced into a dream state again. She continued the same dream.

In the dream Faith asked the woman again 'Who are you? What do you want?' As she asked these questions she reached out to touch the woman's shoulder. As she did this the woman's head spun and all she saw was teeth coming at her. Her mouth was wide open and appeared as a dark hollow (Faith 3.6, A3:77-78). Faith described her dream in detail to the healer who told her that the woman in the dream was herself. The dream was telling her to look at herself even though she didn't want to (Faith 3.6, A3:78). Her inability to look at herself meant that her spirit would continue to be in pieces. The dream was telling her that her spirit was not emotionally secure. She was told that once she began to look at herself she would become whole (Faith 3.6, A3:78).

As Faith searched for herself and began to find answers she learned skills that help her to look after herself. Faith also found resources in the women she encountered on her journey that she likens to knowing which rock to look under to find the right answer. "Is it the rock that I learned parenting skills from Elizabeth T. during my education years? Is it talking to Geraldine because I worked for her as a housekeeper when she was ill in bed and she couldn't do her own work?" Faith described. "Or is it under this rock where I talk to Lori B. and we talked about these things in depth based on her experiences? (Faith 2.23, A1:23-24)." Other resources where she found answers include her four daughters. "Listening to them and sharing it with them. Is it them telling me, well these are things that I experienced?" Faith questioned (Faith 2.23, A1:23-24). This reconnection to her family was ingrained in Faith from childhood.

Faith promotes certain family values that she learned from her paternal grandmother like family unity (Faith 2.16, A1:23). She describes her family as her circle (Faith 2.13, A1:23). Every Sunday her whole family gets together for dinner. Through Faith, the family carries on the tradition of eating cornbread and steak on Sundays. It gives Faith and her daughters an opportunity to sit around the table and talk (Faith 2.13, A1:23). Faith also makes a point of promoting healthy eating. "We always have one recipe that has corn beans or squash that we have on the table so that the kids can try it," Faith says. "And we always have veggie platters or fruit platters on the table (Faith 1.16, A1:22)." Faith usually finds the platter empty at the end of the day. When shopping, Faith also makes a point of buying extra for her grandchildren. She also doesn't lock her doors. "Because I think if anybody comes in they obviously need something," Faith explains. "You are perfectly welcome to take it (Faith 2.9, A1:22)." For Faith family values and provides a sense of security. "And I always tell my grandchildren konoronkwa (Mohawk for "I love you"), I always tell my children konoronkwa, Faith says (Faith 2.16, A1:23)." She never had expressions of love from her parents growing up, she says, but knew her mother and father loved her. Her maternal grandmother "wasn't a huggy person, but she would always make sure that she had little things for us," Faith says... Faith herself has unconditional love for people, something she learned this from her father (Faith 1.15, A1:22). Even though her grandmother didn't say so, or physically show love, she showed it in other ways. Faith's grandmother kept a toy box filled with trinkets and toys left at her house by the grandchildren and wooden spools left over from her sewing (Faith 2.16, A1:23). When her grandchildren would go to the house the toy box was there for them. Faith recalls how much fun it was to see what new toys were in the box. Faith maintains the toy box tradition for her own grandchildren (Faith 2.16, A1:23).

Life is different today Faith says. People helped each other more when she was younger. "It's not like that anymore. And the scary part is like today there's more of a division," Faith says. "You are aware now, this is the have nots and these are the ones

that have a lot of money (Faith 3.1, A1:24).” People know the difference. Before, people were all at the same level. Faith describes the community tradition called “swappin”:

If I had five chickens and you had two cows and you are killing one cow then you would say well okay I will kill your cow, if you come and help me kill the cow you can have some of the meat. And okay, I'm gonna kill two chickens today because we are having a dinner, do you want to have one of the chickens? You know what I mean? Because they don't have chickens. That's how people used to swap with each other (Faith 3.1, A1:24).

‘Swappin’ also used to take place between Kahnawake and other local communities like St. Isidore, St. Remi, and Delson. The economy used to be based on trade rather than money like it is today Faith says (Faith 3.1, A1:24).

The transition from a rural life to the highly commercial and modern times has also seen a breakdown between communities. One incident that sparked conflict and resentment was the Oka Crisis of 1990. Despite the strained relationships between communities personal growth occurred among the people of Kahnawake. During the Blockade of 1990, the women arose as the backbone of the community Faith says. The men's role on the barricades was played up in importance. “It didn't address the fact that the men would not have been there had it not been for the women cooking for them so that they were able to be there,” Faith says. In addition the children received care from the women. “You had the grandmothers and the mothers. And you had the younger kids who were taking care of the children, with the mothers who would take turns taking care of each other's kids” (Faith 3.18-19, A1:25). However her mothering instincts were tested right in the middle of the 78 day conflict.

Faith has vivid memories of the Oka Crisis and its impact on her life. During the Blockade of 1990, her daughters were trapped in Montreal. One-day people followed

Mohawk people back to a downtown hotel and a crowd of people formed in the parking lot. Her daughters called and told her that people were banging on the doors of the hotel. Faith got scared for them, but she made a point of not crying in front of her children. “I cried after I hung up, and I said, you know, nobody better hurt my kids,” Faith remembered. She felt helpless because she couldn’t go and get them (Faith 3.14, A2:16). Eventually her daughters made their way back to the community, a safe haven during those troubled days.

Many stories such as Faith’s garrisoned daughters unfolded during the 78 days. Indeed the summer of 1990 turned into a real social family setting that was not portrayed in any of the stories on the blockade. Faith saw 1990 as a return to the idea of community from an earlier time. The barricades and conflicts were highlighted. She says the sense of community was lost in the larger news issues. Everyone’s knowledge at that time was just as worthy as everyone else (Faith 3.18-19, A1:25).

Faith and her husband have maintained friendships with people outside the community. During the Blockade one of her women friends from St. Isidore called her. There remained, even in 1990, a sense of the rural community. Faith described the conversation in detail that shows the strain and pressure during the now famous conflict. The conversation even shows that 18 years later there are details of Mohawk unity that rarely are retold. In fact the conflict strained and perplexed the non-native community:

She says – the tanks are all coming down the road here, they are all going to your place. She says what’s going on? How come? What’s this? What is this, it’s new, it’s different? Something’s going on.

And I says, yeah I says they are squeezing us. They are making the reserve smaller and smaller. So they are really barricading the perimeter...then she says, please before it really gets bad, can you please bring at least, she says why don’t you come and hide here.

We can hide you in our basement. And she says you can stay there.

She says what if they bomb the community? And you are there?

You are all going to die you know?

As Faith described this conversation her voice was low and she had look of resolute strength on her face. There was never any question of escaping the conflict for Faith. She returns to community and family again:

And I says, (her husband) is on the barricades. We have two of them that are out there that are surrounded by non-native people that are in the hotel where they are staying. I am scared about that. I says, you know what? I don't give a shit anymore. Let them do whatever the hell they want.

As Faith spoke, she leaned forward. Speaking in low tones, she looks into my eyes, her face takes on a mixture of pride and pain. We were right back to that moment of the phone conversation. Faith was clear that she was not going to lose another child and would be her protector. The thought of sending her child away was out of the question.

She says yeah but what about the baby? She's only four years old? She says don't you want at least her to live? And I says, you know what? I says I don't care anymore. I says I am like this now. I says let them do whatever the hell they want. Cause you know what? They are not going to break us. They think just because they are going to do all this, I said they're going to break us but they won't. And she says, but she deserves to live. I says, no she deserves to be with her family. I says if we are going to die, she is coming with us. I says because I don't want her out there by herself knowing that we abandoned her (Faith 3.14-15, A2:17).

Faith spoke clearly and pointedly to the woman from St. Isidore. She let her know that she would never be able to raise her as Onkwehonwe because she is French. Like a mother bear with her cub, Faith said if there was going to be any violence and death, they would die as a family. “I says you carry that story with you if anything happens. That we went as a family. And you knew us as a family (Faith 3.14-15, A2:17).”

The Oka Crisis reinvigorated the importance of family to Faith. The Blockade brought out her pride and frustration. Oka was a chance to see what being native meant through other people’s eyes. The burning in effigy of a Mohawk Warrior that took place in Chateaugay brought back memories of Faith’s time in school where racism against Indian people occurred. “Because when I went to school it was a lot of non-native kids in the school where I went. And so whenever we talked about the history in the history books we never really talked about these things at home”, Faith says. “So I wasn’t really sure of my identity but yet I was told out there who I was (Faith 3.17, A2:17-18).” Faith described the books that showed Indians killing non-natives and burning them at the stake. Faith says then everyone would turn around and look at you because you are the only native person in the classroom. The other students would ask her is this true? Is this what your people do? The question of whether they still lived in teepees was also asked. All of those memories came back to her when she saw the effigy being burned (Faith 3.17, A2:17-18).

A lasting effect of 1990 was the cultural revitalization that has taken place among Mohawk people. In one way, many more people identified as being of the longhouse faith. In another way, the community expresses itself more as a collective through the use of logos that are found on cars, houses, and clothing. Faith says that when push comes to shove, the community reverts back to acting collectively like our ancestors (Faith 1.8, A2:15-16). “So we all pick up certain things that we like to identify with. So it sort of makes us part of the group”, Faith says. What also contributes to the increased expression

of Mohawk identity is the fact that there are more traditional people than Catholic people. “I think that’s why all of the sudden all these things are becoming more visible and people are more comfortable displaying it”, Faith says. “They are more comfortable with admitting that – yeah this is who I am. Take it or leave it (Faith 1.8, A2:15-16).”

It’s not the logo that identifies who you are, Faith clarifies. The logo helps to open the door so that when people talk to you they know where you come from and already have an idea of your perspective on things. Symbols enable us to talk to each other on an even footing, Faith says. “So that other people who come into your circle know right away where you are and how you conduct yourself” (Faith 1.8, A2:15-16). Over time Faith has learned to recognize those people she can relate to as an equal. It has taken some time for Faith to be comfortable in her native identity.

Faith says Indian identity was not so visibly expressed when she was young. “I think like for me personally I think because people didn’t need to have a logo on their jacket or they didn’t need to wear ribbon shirts as much because that was not the practice,” Faith says. People only wore ribbon shirts if they were attending the longhouse. Visible symbols of Mohawk identity were not present because the majority of people were Catholic, she says. “So you didn’t want to be visible out there to identify where you came from and where you were affiliated with as far as the longhouse was concerned,” Faith says. “So I think too, because people had the language that they didn’t really need to be identified outwardly as being native...they just automatically spoke the language (Faith 1.7, A2:15).” Having a good grasp of the Mohawk language brought confidence and so outward visual symbols were not necessary.

Faith is working at developing her native identity from the inside, in a more private way than the outward display of symbols. Faith sees herself as a Mohawk woman and takes her responsibilities as a woman seriously. She is taking the time to learn the planting songs, because it’s a woman’s responsibility, she says (Faith 1.16, A3:71). Faith also works hard at being a good grandmother. At one time Faith was encouraged to attend

a teachers program to become a teacher but she felt it would take up too much of her time away from her grandchildren. "I've always made excuses and that's my biggest excuse", she says (Faith 2.15, A3:74). Her children and grandchildren come first.

In her everyday life as in her spiritual life Faith uses a lot of common sense. "I look at the practical side of things. This is my situation and I make the best of my situation", Faith says (Faith 1.15, A3:71). Faith is also spontaneous. If she has something planned and someone invites her to do something else, she goes with it. She doesn't stick to a regimen she says (Faith 1.15, A3:71). As a result, Faith is involved in many activities and at times seems to be stretched thin. As a result, Faith describes her mind is like a cluttered closet. "It has too much information sometimes that I am trying to sort and I am not very good at sorting out all that information", she says. "And I am not very good at throwing out information that I don't need. And I tend to wanna take everything in" (Faith 1.15, A3:71). Her pragmatism extends to her community life as well.

Faith's community volunteerism encompasses many different organizations from the Kahnawake Survival School to the three different longhouses and involves activities like acting as a school bus monitor for the handicapped kids to doing dishes and mopping floors. "It's like wherever you are needed that's where you go", Faith says. She doesn't let community issues affect where she volunteers. With disunity among the three longhouse groups in the community, there is stigma attached to which one you go to. "Now whether or not I get accepted at any one of the three is their problem not mine", Faith says (Faith 1.13, A3:70). Faith's volunteer activities began when her youngest daughter began school. She had volunteered with her older children but it intensified when she started to volunteer for field trips. She says she could afford to go on more field trips because she had no elderly parents to look after at home. "So I allowed myself that time to spend a lot of time with the kids at school and started getting involved with the book fairs that they had and volunteering for whether they had the harvest fair", Faith describes. This work led to her involvement with the Combined Schools Committee. She

knew what the issues were because she was at the school on a daily basis (Faith 2.6, A3:72).

As part of her volunteer activities, Faith has the opportunity to attend conferences. Her first experience with traveling and representing an organization was with the Combined Schools Committee (Faith 2.7, A3:72). Since then she has traveled widely. Faith's latest volunteer activity is the development of the Quebec Bridge Monument erected to the Kahnawake Ironworkers who died when the Quebec Bridge collapsed in 1907. The monument was finished in the summer of 2008 and a large celebration took place. "I volunteered to help work at the kitchen. To help them clean up and set up the tables and that for all those people that came in there to come and eat after the ceremonies were over. And to help them put all the stuff away", Faith says. She says she values the social aspect of her volunteer activities. "You know you get to meet people in the community that sometimes you don't always have the luxury of being able to just stop and talk for a few minutes" (Faith 2.7, A3:72). Volunteering is also about self-gratification, Faith says. "I feel good walking away knowing that the job that I, or the physical labor or the ideas that I contributed to something are of benefit", Faith says. She is humble about her volunteering. She doesn't wait to be recognized she says. "Because I feel like as if I did the best that I could. And that's all I need to know. And I don't worry about anything else" (Faith 2.11, A3:73). Her pragmatism finds expression in community work, but also viewed the larger issue of local government as not simply idealistic ideas based on decision-making. She sees the need to return to more compassionate days in Kahnawake.

At the time of the interview, Faith planned to attend a focus group as part of a study taking place in the community that was looking at the feasibility of implementing the clan system as a basis for participatory democracy. Faith described her ideas on governance. Governance is a big issue she says. People automatically assume that governance is about giving direction as to where the community should be heading. The

difficulty lays in the fact that there are so many different perspectives, beliefs, thoughts, value systems that all have an impact on how people view governance, Faith says. This makes it hard to get everybody “on the same page. “

For Faith, governance begins with governing the self – your emotions, physical body, and mental capacity. Once the self is in balance, a ripple affect occurs and everything else falls into place (Faith 2.12, A3:73-74). From there, Faith uses the analogy of a canoe to describe her ideas on governance in the nation. As the canoe moves along through the water, there are no ripples. This is the nation as it moves along, working as it should – all the chiefs, clan mothers, and faith keepers are in place. Everybody is doing their ceremonies. All the families are taking care of each other. This is the ideal world according to Faith. But our canoe is not like that right now, Faith says. Our canoe is in really rough water heading towards a waterfall waiting to consume us. Are we strong enough to go over that waterfall and survive? Faith asks. Or, is our canoe going to fall apart and our people drown because we are not strong enough to help and support each other? (Faith 2.12, A3:73-74).

Faith goes on to describe the waterfall which is made up of distractions like alcohol, drugs, and monetary greed. The reason for this greed, Faith says, is because people want, and want, and want. This is what we have come to believe is what making progress is about (Faith 2.12-13, A3:74). No amount of money ever seems to be enough. Faith questions why it is no longer about taking care of everybody (Faith 2.12-13, A3:74). It doesn't cost much to be happy, Faith says. “And why can't we love each other?” Faith asks. “It doesn't cost anything to love each other. And yet we can't seem to afford to do that”, (Faith 2.13, A3:74). These are the kinds of questions that Faith wants answers to. If you take care of the little things everything will fall into place, she says. Faith goes back to the analogy of the canoe to explain what happens after all the little things are looked after. When the canoe hits the waterfall and people fall out, there are

people there who will help each other get back into the canoe. Helping each other is what community is about (Faith 2.13, A3:74).

Getting to the point where everyone is willing to help each other is where Faith questions how she would get all the people to sit around and discuss things to strengthen the community (Faith 2.13, A3:74). As a volunteer in the community, Faith has the opportunity to have contact with different people. Faith uses her contact to influence the direction of events in the community by subtly putting the idea in the ear of the person. This is her way of getting things done in the community. She is confident that the ideas will come to fruition. “And it’ll come from their idea. Not my idea” (Faith 2.14, A3:74). The results are what she is looking for, not the recognition.

### **Final Thoughts**

Faith has been on a personal journey for over twenty-three years. She wants to leave this world having straightened out her own life and with a good energy that will diffuse up through the ground she will be buried under (Faith 3.7, A3:78). Faith has come to realize her own self worth. “I come from a pure love”, Faith says. In order to understand this idea, Faith says, you have to listen to yourself and to the world around you. “Like I said it’s a reawakening. It’s noticing every single thing that’s going on as much as possible and fine tuning those feelings (Faith 3.7, A3:78).”

Faith makes sure she is always positive in her interactions with others. She comes from the view of always trying to understand the other person (Faith 3.4, A3:77). People relate to one another differently these days. Faith is attempting to go back to her roots. She remembers when people used to help each other. It’s not like that anymore, Faith says. Today the community is more divided. “You are aware now, this is the have nots and these are the ones that have a lot of money”, Faith describes. The differences between the wealthy and the poor are more pronounced (Faith 3.1, A3:76). By no means is Faith a monetarily wealthy woman. Despite this fact, Faith continues to treat everyone

equally. This same sense of unity only comes out when the community is in crisis, Faith says. "It's too bad that there's not more people who think of it on a day to day basis." Faith has had the opportunity during the Blockade of 1990 to witness how the community can express its true communal nature. "We all worked together for a common cause", Faith says. "And it didn't cost anything except our time. And our willingness to work together (Faith 3.19, A3:79)." Conflicts were put aside. There is a lasting legacy to this event in that a common link is felt by those who volunteered in the kitchens and on the barricades. "And so when we see each other we always can relate to those stories", Faith says (Faith 3.19, A3:79)." You are bonded to those people forever by common experience because you remember what took place, Faith says.

Ostracized for her beliefs, Faith grew up with a deep fear and loneliness (Faith 1.2, A3:68). Faith now can identify as being a part of the group and makes every effort to stay an active part of the community through her continuous volunteer activities. Faith has changed her outlook on herself, her life, and her community. Not an easy task, her journey started in pain and continues through the unrelenting search for knowledge. Faith always has a pad and pen in hand and takes copious notes. She is not shy about asking questions. She has learned to be more expressive. "It's like a new awakening for me. To come of my own self, you know. And being able to express it (Faith 1.14-15, A3:70-71)." And part of that expression, Faith says, is sharing her story with me.

## Chapter Twelve

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Grace

#### Introduction

Grace is a woman who moves like a hummingbird seeking nectar of knowledge from every flower she sees. Never content to stand still for long, Grace is in a continual forward motion. She sees the world from the perspective of a woman who has experienced more pain and hardship than she knows how to handle. The drive to deal with her pain and shield her family from experiencing the same thing is what motivates her to continually seek answers to life's questions.

Grace is a 61 year-old woman who lives with her husband in the Kahnawake community. Grace comes from a large extended family. She is third youngest of nine children. Her mother was a stay at home mother and her father was an ironworker. Grace's father died when she was young and her mother remarried later on. Grace experienced a troubled childhood as the result of actions taken by one of her older siblings against the wishes of her mother. This resulted in severe physical and emotional trauma that has scarred Grace's life and which she continues to struggle with as a mature adult.

Grace worked as a secretary in the community of Kahnawake for one of the major employers. Grace raised three children with her husband in the Catholic faith. Throughout her adult life, Grace has struggled with alcohol addiction and worked to form the first Alcoholics Anonymous groups in the community despite the fear of stigmatism attached to this program.

Grace's awareness of her Mohawk identity came to a forefront while in high school and then again during the Oka Crisis where she remained in the Kahnawake community when it was blockaded. Ten years ago, Grace began a battle with breast

cancer, which she is now in remission from. She trains tirelessly with her child to fundraise for cancer walks held annually in the city of Montreal. Grace helps to care for her two grandchildren and takes particular pride in doing so. In our conversations, Grace discussed various issues like her upbringing, her father's death, her relationship with her mother and step-father, her relationship with her siblings, the impact of the Oka Crisis, her alcohol addiction, her battle with cancer, being a mother, and being a grandmother.

### **Grace's Journey**

Grace credits her mother with exerting a strong influence on her life that helped her overcome struggles she faced. Grace watched her mother carry on with her life after her husband died. She never said much but lived a good life (Grace 1.2, A1:26). Grace learned from her mother to keep going, not to quit and not to give up. "I say okay if anything comes next, I'll deal with it," Grace said. "I think that's in us as women, and as Onkwehonwe, I really believe that (Grace 1.11, A1:27)." Evidence is the fact that we are still here, Grace says. "We still found ways to survive (Grace 1.11, A1:27)." This early influence shows up throughout Grace's life.

Grace was given her mother's Mohawk name. Through this name she feels a strong connection to her mother. "I am very very connected to my mother and nothing could break that bond with her," Grace says. Grace also felt that there was a level of connectedness through illness. As she struggled with her own bout with cancer later in life, Grace remembered her mother's struggle with heart attacks. "I understood how ill she was, and I understood what she had to go through (Grace 2.16, A1:31)." Despite having several heart attacks, Grace's mother continued to survive.

According to Grace, her mother had one mission—to keep the family together, to make sure they had a roof over their heads, and to eat properly. "I think she just had the basic role as a mother and Mohawk mother to know what she was supposed to do," Grace says (Grace 1.4, A1:26). Grace respects her mother and remembers that unlike her other

sisters, Grace was afraid to answer back. “There’s a certain thing you just don’t do, you don’t talk to them like that,” Grace says. “It’s something that’s in me. It’s a certain respect (Grace 2.12, A1:31).” This respect was hard to find among her siblings, which is odd because her mother reared them in a Mohawk way.

Grace learned from her mother that violence is unnecessary and doesn’t do any good, something close to Mohawk culture. There are more peaceful ways to do things (Grace 1.11, A1:27). Grace says her mother practiced the traditional custom of “saving face.” The way it was explained to Grace is that saving face is about maintaining someone’s pride. “We don’t want them in the ground. You just treat them as equal human beings,” Grace said. Destroying someone has no point. “It doesn’t get you anywhere. It doesn’t make you feel good when you fight at their level or dumb down to their level (Grace 2.10, A1:30-31).” Grace’s mother would turn around and walk away before she would destroy someone’s pride.

Despite Grace’s father’s death when she was seven years old, his influence on her life is felt in both negative and positive ways. As an ironworker, he worked in the United States. As a result the family moved around with him. In 1953, before her father died, there was a story in the local newspaper about her family, about their identity as Mohawks. Grace’s sister told her what happened:

They did this little story and when they found out we were native. She says for the next few days there was vandalism to our trailer and that she says and we had to move. My father packed us up and moved us out...and then my brother and sister, my oldest brother and sister would go to school. They would always come home with fights because they would find out they were Indian. So my father said “don’t let them know you are Indian.” So there it started to say – don’t let them know who you are. Because he knew (Grace 1.4-5, A1:26-27).

In that same period her father stopped drinking and started going to the longhouse, a positive turning point in a negative environment. At one point he came back to the community and was condoled as a chief in the longhouse. At that time he was 35 years old. "But that left an impact on me, that my father was part of the longhouse," Grace says, although she had no idea what it meant at the time. (Grace 1.4-5, A1:26-27)." Going to longhouse was new to Grace. Her own mother had been alienated from her Catholic family when she married Grace's father who had been baptized as a Protestant. Grace's mother and grandmother never had a good relationship after that. As a result, Grace's mother didn't want fights in the house about religion and would send her children to the Protestant church with their father (Grace 1.2, A1: 25-26). Unfortunately Grace's father never lived out his role as a chief. He died soon after this event when he slipped and fell off a bridge in New York State.

As a result of her father's early death, Grace's education on how to raise a family came from her mother and later her stepfather. Later in life Grace realizes that she gave her children something she never had, a father her children could go to, and a fulfilling family life. What she learned about parenting she figured out on her own from her mother and stepfather (Grace 1.14, A1:28).

Grace's mother remarried when she was middle aged. Grace calls her stepfather her father. He was the only father she knew and was a role model for her. Grace's stepfather would show her how he picked medicines, fix chairs, and do weaving, among other things. He was generous with his time and skills (Grace 1.14, A1:28). Grace learned a lot about Mohawk culture and tradition by watching her mother and stepfather interact. She knows that her stepfather was a special kind of man. These memories have stayed with her. Her relationship with her stepfather makes up part of who she is, Grace acknowledges (Grace 1.14-15, A3:82). She admits that much of her childhood learning was removed through education and the church. And later she describes how these

influences affected her own healing and cultural recovery. But their roots she saw as a young woman.

Grace has had the lifelong experience with racism like everyone else in the Kahnawake community. As a result, she has denied her identity. The denial of her Mohawk identity is something she grew up with (Grace 1.4-5, A3:80). Grace recounted a time in high school when she and other Indian kids were called 'trouble'. "I remember standing at the landing of the stairs. And in my head, I said okay I guess it's not good to be Indian. And I'm nothing but trouble," she remembers. "I just said okay you are not an Indian anymore. I was thirteen. Then I started the process denying it (Grace 1.8, A3:80)." Another clear memory of denial she has is when she was pregnant with her son. As she stood in the basement of her home she spoke out loud. "I am really really angry at you for making me an Indian. I am really really angry. Why didn't you just make me something other than what I am?" Grace says it was very tough in those days, but that's the way it was (Grace 1.8, A3:81). Grace has felt alone in her denial but has come to see that it is something that permeates the whole community. "When you are alone you are vulnerable. But when you are in a group it's different" (Grace 1.21, A3:83). Being native is not that bad.

Grace remembers in school how her history and culture was taught to her and other students. Students were told simple stories about Iroquois hunting practices and drying porcupine quills in blue berries. "And I'm like that's it? And there was nothing good written in the history books about us," Grace says. "That's about it. We were just kind of there. We weren't really part of this country (Grace 1.8, A2:19)." Like the church, schooling made it difficult for Grace to retain the Mohawk spoken language even though it was her mother tongue.

Grace can no longer speak the Mohawk language even though she only spoke Mohawk when she was young. Both her mother and father spoke Mohawk to her. Grace doesn't know when they stopped, but she thinks it may have been when she started

school. She regained some knowledge when her mother remarried. When they spoke she would get the gist but didn't really understand, she says. "And it's frustrating because they said you had it and it's like it's gone," Grace says. The way she was taught the language is very different from the way it is taught in the community today. "It was just learned in the home. It was just spoken. And nobody decided verbs or tenses. You just knew it (Grace 1.1, A1:25)." Words have no exact meaning in the language, Grace explained. Words are descriptive translations. Grace tells a story she heard from her husband about his mother and grandmother at the Bonsecours Market in Old Montreal:

He says I always remember my mother and father when they were young. His mother and grandmother, they used to go over to Montreal and they'd go on the Bonsecours Market. And they used to speak French here and English. But they spoke Mohawk a lot. And they went and they would go to the Market and they wouldn't speak English. They'd have their stuff, whatever they were selling. And there's a joke, they were trying to describe what a strainer was. And you know, how do you say strainer in Mohawk? Cause they used to eat spaghetti eh? And she'd say 'the water go in the spaghetti stay.' Something like that. And they didn't understand a strainer. You know. And it was as joke how she said it. And it was funny, that was how when they didn't know words and they would look at it, what it did (Grace 3.3, A1:32).

Grace's story illustrates how Kanienkehaka women are the keepers of the culture. Despite their diligence the women faced tremendous forces in white schools, and the churches. Not only did Kahnawake feel the effects from the longstanding schism between Protestant and Catholic sects that originated in Europe, but the community had its own

belief system that created a third and often-attacked part of the community, the longhouse.

Grace remembers vividly the origins of family dysfunction she says derives from the religious divisions that made up the community of Kahnawake. “In school I remember walking home from school and the Catholics wore the uniforms and they’d walk behind and they’d taunt you. And then when you had Protestants you’d walk behind them and you’d say stuff to them,” Grace remembers. “And you weren’t allowed to play with each other; you weren’t allowed to talk to each other (Grace 1.5, A2:19).” Grace recounted the religious divisions she witnessed when her grandfather was dying. She sat in the next room listening to her uncles arguing about how they were going to bury their father. It was a struggle between the church and the longhouse. “But they were bickering about that. That’s what I remember you know,” Grace said. “And it’s always like ‘I don’t want to be fighting about that kind of stuff later on in life about religion’ but it’s always an issue (Grace 1.5, A2:19).” Her grandfather was eventually buried by the longhouse people but in the Protestant cemetery.

At this time in her life Grace’s family was caught up in the politics of Kahnawake religious strife—something that continued to affect her family for years. Even though Grace learned by her mother’s example to say things without aggression and anger the family did not overcome the conflict. She refers to the traditional teachings of the good and the bad twin of the Iroquois Creation Story to illustrate her point. “Sawiskera and Teharonhia:wakon, they fight. And if you go to the other side, well you are not going to see clear,” Grace explains. Meaning that the non-native culture will clash with native values. Understanding this relationship between the twins helps her to not be mean (Grace 2.11, A1:31). “But I also believe my mother, maybe she didn’t speak up enough,” Grace says. “But sometimes she knew when it was no use. She said ‘Grace, its no use’...so she knew what battles not to fight. She says ‘I know it’s not worth it for me’ (Grace 2.5, A1:30).” As an example of Mohawk tradition the permanent ostracism

between her mother and an older sister showed Grace the enduring cost of firmly adhering to principles.

A long and bitter feud between her sisters and mother seemed to separate the family. Grace has had a very difficult relationship with her five sisters. Despite this fact, she still feels close to them. "I'm the kind of person that will if they were sick, I would go there, because they are still my sisters. There's still that connection (Grace 1.7, A1:27)." Grace believes that sisters are supposed to be supportive of one another. They are supposed to give each other support and if there is a problem discussion should happen and the issue should be worked out (Grace 1.12, A1:28). She believed her sisters were raised this way and believed they would act accordingly. She was wrong. Even though her family became disconnected, Grace remembered these experiences later in life that influenced her role as a mother (Grace 1.7, A1:27). Yet the roots of their familial disconnect extend from the early childhood to teenage years. All commingled in the family quarrels are the death of the father, the illness of the mother, and the divisions in the community created by the church and conflicts of tradition.

Grace uses the example of her mother's decision of how to address a serious issue regarding one of Grace's sisters. At a public meeting her mother stood up and spoke. "My mother said 'the daughter I raised is dead, this is not the daughter I know'," Grace said of an incident that saw the sister cause the family to lose face in the community (Grace 2.8, A1:30). Grace spoke to another woman about this incident. The woman explained that what her mother meant was that the person who her mother raised is not who she is today. Her mother knew what she taught her daughter, so symbolically she died (Grace 2.8, A1:30). In the same meeting, her aunt got up and explained in Mohawk what was going on and that Grace's mother had to say that 'this person has died, she is dead to me'. "That's how she said it... 'She's dead to me'," Grace explained. "That's the only way my mother knew how to survive (Grace 2.9, A1:30)." Grace says her mother

was aware of herself enough to know she couldn't fight everything and that's something she sees in herself.

Religion has also been an issue in Grace's marriage something she kept silent to keep the peace in her family. She converted to Catholicism after her marriage and raised her children as strict Catholics. "I was more Catholic than a Catholic," Grace was told (Grace 1.6, A3:80). Grace says she had difficulties with her in-laws and sister because of the religion issue. In addition the public shunning of her oldest sister by her mother caused tension in the community, she knows reflected badly on her. The family lost face. Over this dispute she long believed that her husband's mother felt Grace wasn't good enough to marry her son because of the religion issue. "She was kind of snobby and I wasn't good enough," Grace says. "But I was being painted by one brush...I wasn't accepted (Grace 4.19, A3:90)." Her father-in law was not going to go to their wedding. However, Grace was told many years later that it was her mother-in-law who stuck up for her and encouraged her husband to go to the wedding. Grace was the woman who their son chose to marry. Her mother-in-law let her father-in-law know that if he didn't go to the wedding he would run the risk of losing his son and grandchildren. "Cause I would not have lived here; I would have moved somewhere," Grace says. Starting her marriage in the middle of religious conflict was painful she says (Grace 4.19, A3:90).

During hard times in her life Grace blamed her mother. However, she learned to take responsibility for her life and not to blame her parents for the way things turned out (Grace 1.11, A3:81). When her mother was sick with heart trouble and in bed, Grace lay in bed next to her and told her how sorry she was for the hurt she had caused her. "She said 'don't ever mention it again, it's over'," Grace recounts. "She says 'I love you and I understand why it happened...you are not responsible'," (Grace 2.9, A3:84-85). Her mother would never retaliate and Grace has passed this teaching on to her own children (Grace 1.11, A3:81, Grace 1.22, A3:83-84).

Grace takes her role as a mother seriously. She thinks about motherhood constantly and works to improve upon her skills. In her own life, Grace experienced hardships that she worked her way through. “It took me years to look at it, and say ‘Grace you were always standing in the middle of a chaos and trying to figure out what am I going to do?’” Grace explains. “I never knew what to do...till now I know (Grace 2.10, A1:30).” As a result of her experiences, Grace senses danger and bad influences on her family. When she feels them, her guard goes up and she immediately goes to her children to tell them. This is part of her vow she made with her husband. She promised her husband that their children would never experience what she went through (Grace 2.10, A1:30).

Grace promised herself not to expose her children to the hardships she was exposed to. As a result of being overly protective they have turned out to be pretty good kids, she says (Grace 1.23, A1:29). Grace makes a point of letting her kids make their own decisions. “But they know I’m there,” she says. “Because I know, they always said once the mother goes the family kind of disintegrates (Grace 1.7, A1:27).” One of Grace’s daughters has children of her own. This daughter chose to stay home and raise her children. Grace reassures her daughter when she needs it, that she has made a good decision. This is her gift, Grace says. “They all have their gifts. And I got to learn not to push them,” Grace says. She doesn’t push her children to prove themselves. “Be yourself, the way you are,” she tells her children. Grace never pushes her children for her own self-interest. It’s not fair to them, she says. “Everybody will find their place. We all do as women. As mothers, grandmothers, and all that (Grace 2.20, A1:32).”

Her daughters chose to live next to her. She sees this as a compliment. As a result, Grace is able to be a grandmother on a regular basis. “I’m learning as a mother and as a grandmother how far my responsibility is – to mind your business,” Grace says (Grace 1.24, A1:29). However, she does see and understand that her children face the same identity issues she has worked a lifetime to overcome.

Grace grew up with a shame and fear of being Indian. This feeling started after the story was done on her family, for the next few days there was vandalism to their trailer and they had to move. Her father packed them up and moved them out. Her oldest brother and sister would go to school and get into fights because the kids would find out they were Indian. Her father said 'don't let them know you are Indian' because he knew, Grace says (Grace 1.4, A2:18). As a result, she wouldn't let people know she was Indian for many years.

Grace is critical of people who come back to the community and tell others how they should live when they do not have shared memory of lifelong racism. She described an incident with a man whose mother was non-native and his father was native and who grew up in the United States. This man would tell her how to do things based on what he learned by reading the history of the Mohawk people. She was critical of him because he hadn't experienced being a Mohawk like she had. "I looked at it, and I said 'you know, try and live through a crisis' like 1990 (the so-called Oka Standoff that included both the Kanasatake and Kahnawake Laurentian Mohawk communities) then come back and tell me how I should do it. I lived through that stuff," Grace said. People come back and want the material benefits of being an Indian but when it comes to the hard stuff they don't want to hear about it. These newcomers are deaf to the realities that everyday Kahnawakeron:non had to suffer (Grace 3.16, A2:23). Grace doesn't want to be considered as a poor down trodden Indian, but we did suffer she says, in different ways according to the times. This suffering is passed on. "We carry so much of our ancestors," Grace says (Grace 3.16, A2:23).

Grace felt fear in being an Indian. Her worst nightmare was being beaten up because she was Indian (Grace 1.20, A2:20-21). During the Oka Crisis of 1990, Grace was confronted with her fear head on. Grace recounts an incident during the Crisis when she and her husband were coming back into the community through three checkpoints comprised of international observers, army, then of Mohawk warriors:

We were coming back, anyway so we are in line and we are waiting to come in and all of the sudden, we are all in the car and out of the bushes jump a whole bunch of guys, non natives, with bandanas. If you ever want to know fear, that was one of the most frightening times of my life. We locked the doors and I honestly thought they were going to get in that car and drag us out and beat us up. Right there at the checkpoint. They just jumped out of the bushes and they were surrounding the car. Do you know how fearful that is? Cause they would have killed you. But I'm just coming in. I'm not bothering anyone. I'm just Grace (Grace 1.20, A2:20-21).

As she told this story she began to cry with the memories. "That's the worst fear I ever had about being an Onkwehonwe, to be beaten up by these non natives," Grace says. "You watch it on TV. You watch wars. It was the same feeling (Grace 1.20, A2:21)." In another incident Grace was talking to a woman that she knew from Montreal while waiting in a line at a store in a nearby town. An older woman who Grace says must have known she was Mohawk came over to her and was standing yelling at her and threatening her with her umbrella. Grace made a decision. "I know if I hit her back, and if she hits me I will be the one arrested, not her," Grace says. "So that's the kind of stuff we put up with as natives, as Onkwehonwe (Grace 1.20, A2:21)." The abuse forced on Kahnawake in 1990 carries an image that has been constructed through media and films.

Other examples of racism Grace witnessed she remembers vividly. During the Oka Crisis, a native woman with a newborn baby was arrested just outside the community of Kahnawake. Grace's husband and elder daughter witnessed the incident. The police took the baby and handed it to her friend's daughter and then took the mother away in handcuffs. Grace was distraught when she thought of how that mother must have felt. "So those incidents they're gone but that's the reality of who we are, how they treat

us (Grace 1.21, A2:21).” This situation Grace likened to a movie she saw once where native babies were bayoneted (Soldier Blue). What happened in the movie corresponds to what happened with the woman during the Crisis, but they couldn’t do the same thing because there were witnesses. In modern times you can still get comparisons to flashbacks in history and how we were treated, Grace says (Grace 1.21, A2:21).

Her children also carry the suffering. Grace describes an event that provoked strong feelings in her. She remembers her promise to protect her children. But during the Oka Crisis of 1990 her children were exposed to undue pain and hardship:

They were at Dawson, and in school they were talking this native studies course, (she) and all her friends were in the classroom. So they start talking about 1990 and she says they are going to put a movie on about the stoning. She said all the kids from town just put their heads on the desk and they cried. They didn’t know how to deal with it. They are young. She says ma, we just put our heads down and we were crying.’ And you know, that’s what they went through. I never wanted them to go through that. As kids you know (Grace 3.20, A1:32-33).

Grace never wanted her children to go through something like the Crisis. Grace remembered what her daughter said to her when the Mercier Bridge was finally opened up by the Mohawks and the barricades were taken down. “And, she goes ‘ma, when they opened it and all the people started going through the bridge’ and she says ‘we are not like them’,” Grace recounted. “‘We won’t stone them when they’re coming through...we should all just stand on the side of the road and wave to them as people’ (Grace 3.20, A2:24).” Grace says that this is more like the Onkwehonwe who raised her. She wonders if non-violence is a sign of weakness. Her daughter pointed out the difference between the Mohawk and the French Canadians as she understood it—If it were the Mohawks

doing the violence, then they would have been arrested (Grace 3.20, A2:24). Nothing happened to the people who stoned the Kahnawake residents. "I don't believe there was justice for natives. For us," Grace says (Grace 3.20, A2:24). Stoning is not something that happens in Canada. Grace expressed outrage that this happened at all. "You tell me when in history, when was the last time people got stoned in this country?" Grace asked. "They do it in countries where they stone women. They still do it. When in Canada did they last stone people (Grace 3.20, A2:24)?"

Grace makes a very clear statement about the survival of her people. Despite their efforts, the Canadian government has not succeeded in assimilating the Mohawk people, Grace says. "They came here and their mission was to convert us and make us white," Grace says. "And they didn't succeed. They tried everything in the book and they haven't succeeded to assimilate us totally. They haven't (Grace 4.13, A2:24).

Even after the community action to resist invasion in 1990, Grace feels frustration about the apathy in the community. There are big issues like gaming that raise concerns. But she feels apathy is a problem in the community. On her way to a longhouse meeting, she listened to the local community radio station where the issue of gaming was being discussed. She turned to her husband and expressed her frustration. "This is like anything goes in town and who's going to stop anybody anyway?" Grace asked. "When as a group or as a community do we (stop people) (Grace 1.28, A2:21-22)?" She questions why she stays. As she understands it, when a clanmother or chief was not doing what they are supposed to be doing, they were warned three times and then their title would be taken away (Grace 1.28, A2:21-22). Accountability and respect between people has slowly eroded over the years.

The effects of the erosion have played out in the community in many different ways. Grace sees particular behavior by women in the community where children are used as a tool for punishment. For example, mothers withhold their children from their grandparents if they don't like something. Grace worked hard not to fall into this trap.

Her own mother-in-law didn't like her, Grace says. She had to fight against this. "I had to siphon out the fact that she loved her grandchildren," Grace says. She decided to not break the tie between her children and their grandmother. Not many people would do that, she says (Grace 2.13, A1:31)." Grace valued how her mother-in-law helped look after her grandchildren despite the difficulties of their own relationship (Grace 3.26, A1:33).

Her relationships formed in stress and crisis shaped her way of coping. For example, Oka, family strife, all the circumstances of her life took their toll on her personally. Throughout these events she responded with what she would call negative coping mechanisms. She readily admits that alcoholism was one way she coped with her stress. The effect was evident in her emotional collapse.

Thirty years ago Grace had a nervous breakdown (Grace 1.8, A3:80-81). Grace went into a suicidal depression. She had lost weight and wasn't sleeping. Eventually she put herself in the hospital. "I'm sitting there and I'm looking out the window and I'm saying 'you know Grace, either you find out what's going on with you, what's wrong with you and you get to the bottom of whatever's going on with you or you are going to spend the rest of your life in an institution'," Grace recounts (Grace 1.9-10, A3:81). Grace abused alcohol for seventeen years to help her through her life she says. "From about 16 to 33 I drank and that didn't help the situation Grace says (Grace 1.9, A3:81)." She says the nervous breakdown that put her on her healing path (Grace 1.8, A3:80-81). The community of Kahnawake has as part of its structure a community services geared towards healing from addictions, abuse, and violence. Grace's first encounter with community services was through a grieving group. Her mother was dying and she wanted to be prepared (Grace 1.13, A3:82). This was the starting point for her healing journey.

The whole process of recovery is a kind of rebirth, Grace says (Grace 4.7, A3:89). Nobody understood that healing was a 30 year journey (Grace 4.10, A3:89). Grace was dealing with five hundred years of oppression and its effects on her life (Grace 1.21,

A3:83; Grace 1.22, A3:83). In a group healing session Grace had to write her story, which she shared with the group. "I remember that these two women, they held my arms, under my arms and I read it and I was crying and reading it," Grace describes. "But I needed those women...and that was part of the therapy that this woman was trying to teach us, that there are other women who are there to lift you up and help you and I was able to read it (Grace 4.11, A3:89-90)."

Women looked after each other a long time ago, Grace says. Her sisters would have come to her and helped her deal with situations. But these things have been lost, she says. "There's no book to teach you (Grace 1.12, A3:81-82)." Some families still have strong family ties, she says. She is surprised and envious to hear of it when it happens (Grace 1.12, A3:81-82). As a result, she learned to take care of herself, and take care of her family (Grace 4.15-16, A3:90). She says her worst fear is that her children will stop loving her. "If (my husband) or the children stop loving me I would be nothing, I would be nothing without them," she says (Grace 4.24, A3:90-91). Grace is fearful of being abandoned by her family.

After Oka, in the late 1990s Grace battled breast cancer. Her sisters didn't come to help her and as a result she felt abandoned by them. "They were afraid to look at me, I represent cancer, they don't understand it," Grace says. Yet, she recognizes that her sisters were afraid. Grace's own mother wouldn't say the word cancer, referring to cancer as 'it'. "And she just didn't know what to do," Grace says. "She just thought I am going to die before her (Grace 2.15, A1:31)." Despite her own fear and illness, Grace's mother supported her throughout her own illness. "I needed my mother and when I needed my mother she was there. She was in her seventies and she was very sick herself but she gathered up the strength to come and be with her daughter. And I think that's what it's all about. The ones that really love you (Grace 2.15, A1:31)." Other women in Grace's life include those in the community she sought out on her healing journey. In this journey Grace looked to tradition to find answers and ways to heal. Much of this knowledge has

been lost, Grace acknowledges but there are individuals who do have some answers. At one time, when her relationship with her sisters was troubling her, Grace asked another woman she considers a healer about relationships with sisters. The woman explained how if things were right her sisters would have supported her through her ordeal. Her sisters should have helped her find closure. “But we don’t have that in the community,” Grace says. “Some families do. I am surprised when I hear. And I envy that” (Grace 1.12, A1:27-28).

Grace likens her situation to others in the community who are going through a similar process of self-discovery. “But I don’t know if they are born again Indians,” Grace says. “But they think they know hunting, they shoot it and they don’t think twice...I don’t even know if they put tobacco down to say okay ‘I took your life’ (Grace 1.15, A2:20).” These kinds of traditions taught her to be respectful and leave tobacco for medicines. “All those things I took for granted. I didn’t know,” Grace says. “And those are all part of my identity. And eventually they will just be natural. You just do it instinctively (Grace 1.15, A2:20).” Grace has been attending the longhouse and begun to learn about traditional aspects of her Mohawk identity. The chiefs and clanmothers are to be respected, Grace says. But she realizes that they are human and they are put there by discussion and consensus. They are not to take the position of power. “And if I think it’s a power trip then I back away,” Grace says. I’ve learned and I go to the longhouse – I’m here to learn and I can question if I don’t agree,” (Grace 1.17, A2:20). Although she doesn’t challenge things because she is there for spiritual peace and to learn about her culture and identity (Grace 1.17, A2:20).

Grace says that one of the biggest heartaches she has is that she no longer speaks the Mohawk language. Even though her daughter and grandchildren are students of the language, Grace senses that part of her Mohawk identity lay in the words she still can hear inside her head. Grace says her mother told her she spoke only Mohawk as a young girl. She remembers a story of when she was a little girl:

I remember there was a couple, because my father worked with this couple in Ohio and she wanted to keep me. They used to take me. And she used to tell me, 'I remember Grace I tried to communicate with you. You didn't know what I was saying. But you were this blond little Indian you know. This little Mohawk Indian girl and you were speaking to me only in Mohawk' (Grace 2.20, A3:86).

Grace feels a deep sense of loss for the language, which she recognizes is very important to identity (Grace 2.20, A3:86, Grace 3.2, A3:86). "When you have the language it's in your thinking. It's Mohawk, Onkwehonwe," Grace says. "You view the world from the perspective of your language (Grace 3.3, A3:86-87)." Because her mother and mother-in-law spoke the language fluently, it made an important part of their character, Grace says.

For years Grace had a lot of Mohawk in her head. Sentences, she says. But she didn't know what they meant. When her mother spoke she would be able to understand the gist of what she was saying. But heaviness is there for Grace when she goes to the Longhouse. She can't understand what is being said. She is proud of her daughter who has studied the language intensively for two years and is now a fluent speaker. It was her daughter who explained what was going on (Grace 3.5, A3: 87). If Grace went back to school to learn the language again, like her daughter, she says she would have to give up too much. It would be language and nothing else would matter (Grace 1.1, A3:79). This attribute was learned from her mother, and that single minded attention to a challenge is what saved her life. This has made her more spiritually aware.

Grace acknowledges that she is tired of having to defend her identity. "I never get angry. I'm not a militant," she says (Grace 3.15, A2:23). The calmness she gains from her spirituality far outweighs the anger she feels. "I don't want to be bitter," Grace says. "But I am angry (Grace 3.4, A2:23)." This anger is part of who she is in this phase of her life as a Mohawk woman. Grace questions if she is a racist because of it. Upon reflection and

discussion she has come to see that what she is feeling is a well-founded prejudice instigated by effects of laws and events like 1990 on the lives of her people. The cover up of her people's history was wrong (Grace 3.14-15, A2:23). "I didn't ask for this. I didn't create this whole scenario," Grace says. Colonizers came and did this, Grace says (Grace 3.15, A2:23). The government is helped by the Canadian people. People do what the government says they should do. During the Blockade, Grace was watching the news about a violent struggle between community members and the Canadian Army. What she saw was a young soldier being viciously beaten by women. "They were angry and they were punching, they punched him in the nose. It was bleeding," Grace recounted. He was young and probably scared, she said. "But the Canadian government sends those guys here (Grace 3.18, A2:23-24)."

On her healing path Grace delved deeply into her hurts. She had a 30 year addiction. She felt she came from a tormented and mean spirited community. Her family was dysfunctional. She had a family of her own and tried to place all the things she learned in line with her role as mother. But her alcoholism, the stress of 1990, and finally cancer forced her to really look at herself.

Religion and spirituality play a big part in Grace's ability to see herself. As she participates in Longhouse ceremonies, she reflects on her beliefs. "Every faith, every belief system has a purpose, and the basic truths they have I think are good," Grace says. "But I have something that's mine, that here, traditional, it's not a religion, it's just a way of living and it took me all these years to realize that this is where I belong (Grace 4.13, A3:90)." As she carried the wampum during her reinstatement to the longhouse faith she knew that that is where she belonged. "I never really understood that before we were here, there was a world up there and they had issues going on," Grace says. "That in the sky world there were already things going on. There was nothing new that would be experienced when she came down, to Turtle Island (Grace 1.13, A3:82)." Although she is

beginning to understand what lies behind traditional faith, she still feels a sense of guilt that perplexes her (Grace 1.13, A3:82).

Grace realizes that her beliefs are her own. There were so many bad feelings created in her family because of religion that she carried around. In the end it's just her own beliefs, as an individual. Ultimately when you die it's just you and the Creator, Grace says (Grace 1.18, A3:83).

Grace enacts her spirituality in her own way. She takes tobacco and sprinkles it around her yard to make sure the good things come into the family. "It's a connection to the creator and I ask for his protection," Grace says (Grace 1.24, A1:29). Right now, Grace is conscious of how she enacts her spirituality. There are things that she had no knowledge about and is just beginning to learn about them and understand them like respect for medicines. She was taught that when you pick a medicine, you leave tobacco. "All those things I took for granted. I didn't know. And those are all part of my identity (Grace 1.15, A1:28)." Grace says eventually these actions will be natural and she will do them instinctively.

### **Final Thoughts**

Grace's mother has been dead for seven years. Yet the influence on her life she admits has shaped her. Her father has been dead for 54 years. To lose her father was a big loss. When her mother died, it was unbearable she says. It was almost unbelievable when her mother died. "You don't want to believe your mother died," Grace describes. "Because my father's gone, she was like the center of me. In the sense of my connection to whatever, family, everything here" (Grace 3.23, A3:88-89). Even the stepfather who raised her, her sisters, her children, and women in her life affected the way Grace sees the world and Kahnawake.

Grace knows where her roots are now. "No matter what, this is our home. Our roots are here" she says (Grace 1.28, A3:84). She still struggles with the community and

how people conduct themselves. They get away with things that should be addressed directly, as in times past. People also use traditional knowledge to gain leverage. People in the Longhouse talk the talk but their actions don't reflect the true nature of the philosophy. That's what hurts her she says. "So what is it really to be longhouse?" Grace questions (Grace 1.28, A3:84). As she watches others Grace learns what not to do. It is a question of trying to find a normal life she says. Find what's normal is difficult because there is no clear cut definition of what it means to be a Kanienkehaka in Kahnawake. Even so, Grace knows she has certain gifts that she has gained in part through the teachings of her mother and also through her difficult experiences. She has found a way to give back (Grace 1.26, A3:84). She does so by ensuring her children and grandchildren are safe and by making sure the legacy of dysfunction in her family doesn't continue.

Grace is learning how to be a good grandmother. She gives her children room to be parents and minds her own business (Grace 1.24, A3:84). There is a constant desire to protect her grandchildren and fix their problems but she refrains. At the most she will address the children directly if they are doing something they shouldn't (Grace 2.11-12, A3:85). She is confident with her place in their lives and that she is important to them (Grace 2.13, A3:85).

Grace is working at maintain a strong relationship with her son's children who are being raised outside the community. Grace encouraged her children to marry other natives although she feels a sense of guilt for feeling that way. "Because they have a lot to loose of who they are," Grace explained. "It was very important to me. It's always been important" (Grace 3.6, A3:87). Her son married a non-native. When he married, Grace felt a sense of loss. But, in time she has come to realize that her son is where he is supposed to be. In Mohawk culture the man is supposed to go with his wife to her family. This knowledge has helped her deal with the loss of her son to the outside world (Grace 3.8, A3:88).

Grace hopes that her son's children will not lose their Mohawk identity. The children are going to be raised outside the Mohawk culture and learn both the Mohawk way and the ways of their mother.

Grace doesn't see her grandchildren as half Mohawk. She has decided to step back and not influence the way they are being raised. With her other grandchildren, maintaining a relationship has been easier as they live near her. These children are also much loved and well adjusted. Their teachers have noticed and commented on this fact. Grace says it's because they have all of their grandparents actively involved in their lives (Grace 3.25, A3:89).

Grace has learned to put things aside that she can't deal with directly. Her own issues are her own to deal with. Everyone has their own things that they need to deal with. Grace finds freedom in this knowledge. As she goes on living her life, she continues to heal and helps to care for those around her. Grace is leaving a legacy to the community of her healing journey. All the things she has learned and experienced along the way she imparts back to the community through her children and those individuals she has touched by her activities. She was one of a group of women in the community who started the first Alcoholics Anonymous group in Kahnawake. She doesn't do what she does for personal glory but for the survival of herself and her community (Grace 4.4, A3:89).

## Chapter Thirteen

### Sky Woman's Great Granddaughter: Helen

#### Introduction

Helen's ready smile and helping hand is well known in Kahnawake. Never shy to give a hug or participate in a joke, she loves to have at least one good laugh every day. Once this happens, her day is complete. She views the world from the eyes of a person who values the learning part of life. A voracious reader, Helen reads the paper every day and always has some new knowledge to share. Her experiences as a Kanienkehaka woman come out of not being constrained by the borders of the community. This lack of boundaries is reflected in her many experiences and in how she taught her children and children of the community.

Helen is an eighty-six year old woman who was raised in New York City with her stay at home mother and ironworking father. Helen has four siblings, one of which died when she was in her late teens. Her mother died when she was twenty one. She and her family would come home to Kahnawake during the summer months and Helen came back to live in the community when she was in her late fifties.

Helen grew up with the Catholic faith and was made aware of her identity as a Mohawk while attending the Indian Club in New York City with her mother. Helen married her ironworker husband in her early twenties and didn't have any children until she was thirty-five. She gave birth to two children, which she and her husband raised in a suburb of New York City.

Helen came back to Kahnawake to live when the Kahnawake Survival School was first opened. Helen recounted in her narrative the impact that this new school had on her awareness of herself as a Mohawk from Kahnawake and on her spirituality. In the years

after it first opened she volunteered with the school and in many other organizations throughout the community.

Helen talked about many different subjects like her upbringing, the death of her sibling, her mother's death, her father, coming back to Kahnawake during the summer months, her final move back to Kahnawake, her relationship with her children and grandchildren, her work with the high school, the impact of the Oka Crisis, and her other volunteer activities.

### **Helen's Journey**

Despite living in Brooklyn for most of her early life Helen identifies with the Kahnawake community. For the birth of each of her children, Helen's mother would always come back to the community (Helen 2.1, A1:36). Helen managed to maintain close ties by returning every summer to the community with her mother while her father remained in New York City.

As a child, Helen's didn't know much about her identity as a Mohawk. Men like Tommy Two-Rivers and Mike Tarbell came from Caughnawaga (the old spelling for the name of the community) to board at her family's house when they came to Brooklyn to work in Ironwork. As a result there was always Mohawk spoken in the house. Her mother spoke Mohawk to her as a young child but stopped when she went to school (Helen 1.1, A1:33).

In Helen's world you were a Catholic before you were anything else. The only way Helen knew she was Indian by how others treated her and by the fact that she came from Caughnawaga (Helen 1.1, A1:33). "I knew I was an Indian because all the time when we went to school we were known as the *poor Indian*," Helen says. Helen grew up during the Depression. "And you had to sign on to this and to sign on to that, with your name so you got extra this and extra that". Her family managed. Her mother worked in a

bakery, and Helen would go to the bakery for lunch and have pea soup. To this day, having pea soup reminds her of that bakery (Helen 1.1, A1:33).

She went home in the summers. Helen remembers life in the community of Kahnawake during the summer months. Helen pointed to a strong relationship with the St. Lawrence River as part of her identity. In 1953 the St. Lawrence Seaway was built. The Federal Government of Canada expropriated community land along the shorefront. Helen asked her mother about the building of the Seaway. “She said ‘that’s progress.’ And I remember that word progress to this very very day,” Helen said (Helen 1.17, A2:25).

Helen’s Catholic family made sure she was baptized. Helen described later on how her beliefs have changed to be more open-minded. But she was raised in strict Catholic tradition. Growing up, Helen remembers the religious divisions that existed in the community. Helen said that you could hear the traditional ceremonies going on. But she says traditional practices were viewed at the time as ‘drums and the devil.’ The Catholic kids wouldn’t even go near the Protestant kids. Helen says religion was divisive in the community. For example even in her extended family, she wasn’t allowed to speak to her first cousin because she was Protestant (Helen 1.3, A3:34). “You were Catholic and that’s who you were,” Helen says. “You were Indian and you were Catholic. You didn’t associate with those people (Helen 1.3, A3:34).“

Helen’s mother died when Helen was in her early twenties. Helen feels that her mother’s early death is attributed to a broken heart caused by the death of her brother who died at the age of twenty-one after a lengthy illness (Helen 1.1-2, A1:33). Around the same time, Helen’s father had an accident at work and broke his back. He survived but was unable to work after that. Helen gained knowledge about her mother’s family, in particular from her grandmother. She expresses a sense that her grandmother was a strong woman. A widower, her grandmother had a grocery store. Other than small details, Helen knows little about her mother’s family (Helen 2.22, A1:37).

Helen describes herself as observant and a thinker (Helen 1.6, A3:34). She carries the same diligence she learned from her mother and grandmother. As a result, when she had her first child at thirty-four, she developed her mothering skills by taking what she had observed of children in the schools in which she had volunteered and by observing other family members with their children (Helen 1.6, A3:34). "I noticed the way our young people are being treated. Anything you want," Helen described. She decided that if she had children, she would never give them whatever they wanted. "Because they had no independence, because they couldn't do for themselves they were being smothered," Helen said. As a result when her first son was born, she treated him differently from what she had witnessed. Helen did not spoil her son but treated him with respect (Helen 1.6, A3:34).

Helen describes the positive results of her mothering in the fact that her kids grew up independent, have minds of their own, and are able to think for themselves. "I guess maybe that's what it's been from the beginning is been respecting them as the person, as children," Helen says. Helen described one instance where her sons decided to drink beer rather than go to church. She laughed as she described this. "They had the freedom," she says. "That's who they were (Helen 3.13, A1:38)." Respect for the self is important to Helen and is something she felt her children had. "You have to respect yourself. You have to do what you feel is right," Helen says (Helen 3.13, A1:38)."

Respect is an important concept to Helen. She learned it by being exposed to different types of people in Brooklyn (Helen 3.13, A1:38). Helen considers her open mindedness a gift. She was always looking for new knowledge and always reading. Her mind was always working. "I could go with my mother to the Indian club, once a month. Participate there," Helen remembers. "Of course it was all different nations there. Different nations. But I was always confident there (Helen1.12, A3:35)." Helen was also involved with the Church. All her experiences contribute to the reason she passed on the same notion of respect to her sons she learned from her elders. "Well I had told both boys

‘you are never to have arguments and separate because I will come back and haunt you, and you know I can do it’,” Helen said. “They are two different personalities my sons, completely different, but they know, they know that, and they respect each other’s ways (Helen 2.10, A1:37).” Though they had her mother’s teachings, the practice held between the boys and their working father.

Helen says her sons didn’t really know what a father was growing up. The reality was, as Helen describes, that men went out to work and mom was home taking care of everything (Helen 3.14, A1:39). This is what it was like in her family. Her husband worked and she stayed home. This type of family situation Helen says was common years ago (Helen 3.14, A1:39). Helen described her husband as a hard working and quiet man. They would take their children out to the park on Sundays, but her husband couldn’t wait for Mondays to get back to ironwork. As a result, her sons never knew the closeness that many children have with the father (Helen 3.14, A1:39). Helen says that her children realize that she is their parental connection. But, as they grew older they developed loving and respectful relationships with their father, but without the closeness that they share with their mother (Helen 3.14, A1:39).

Helen says she built a relationship based on fairness with her children as they grew up. Helen describes her children as having different temperaments. One son was a student and the other was an athlete. No comparisons were made, she says. Helen’s attitude was to be fair and honest with both. Every once in a while ‘Oh you like him better!’ would come up. “I said, I love you both but I don’t like you at this time because I don’t like the way you are acting’,” Helen said (Helen 1.6, A3:34). Letting them know what she thought emphasized personal responsibility for one’s own actions. “You can’t blame somebody else for what you are doing, that’s wrong, it’s not their fault, it’s your fault,” Helen says she told her children. “So I am always saying ‘somebody else has a problem, that’s their problem, it’s not yours. You keep your own problems. You take care of your own problems’ (Helen 3.13-14, A1:38-39).” Helen also taught her grandchildren

personal responsibility (Helen 2.6, A1:36). When they come to her with their issues with other people she says. “It’s their problem, don’t take it on, don’t let them put it on you—it’s their problem,” Helen says (Helen 2.6, A1:36).

Helen also emphasizes providing choices to children so that they learn how to make decisions. One of her sons was failing in college. He called her up and asked for advice. “I told him he should go and find himself a job,” Helen said. “I thought he was going to die, his mom telling him to drop out of school and find a job (Helen 1.7, A3:34-35).” Helen values the notion of children having choices and the freedom to decide for themselves, within reason. When her son failed she gave him three choices - work, go to school, join the army. Children should not be allowed to do whatever they want at a young age, Helen says (Helen 3.14, A1:39). Her son chose to go into the ironwork trade.

Helen adopted this teaching method with her grandchildren. Helen encourages them to read and know what is going on in the world. Helen said she felt good when her granddaughter came to her with something she was reading, unable to understand certain words. Helen explained what they meant to her granddaughter. In response, her granddaughter said, ‘Ma, you know everything.’ I says ‘no, I’ve done a lot of reading so I know a lot of things, I don’t know everything, I know a lot of things, I am aware of,’” Helen said. Helen saw her granddaughter broadening her mind and getting a different outlook (Helen 2.24, A1:37-38).

The respect that she learned she also incorporates into her life with her sons’ wives and their children. “I don’t interfere with them. I am here. I am here if they need advice,” Helen says. “My daughter in laws also, we get along very well, the whole family, it has to be that way (Helen 2.7, A1:36-37).” As a result, Helen’s family is close. Helen shared a book of photos that is taken out each Christmas. In it, there are photos from every Christmas since her sons were in what appears to be their twenties. The book is bound in red satin and white lace. Helen proudly explained how each Christmas the grandchildren would sit together and pore over the photo album and enjoy commenting

on how they had changed over the years. I asked Helen if she thought the album would be kept up after she was gone. She said she didn't know. Perhaps one of her grandchildren would look after it.

Clearly that family's closeness permeates Helen's life. She said the closeness came naturally. Sunday dinner at her house was the tradition. As her sons had their own families, she changed their family Christmas dinner tradition to a buffet on Christmas morning (Helen 2.7, A1:37). The change in Sunday dinner took place during the Oka Crisis of 1990. Though their family circle was made larger and looser she illustrates the respect that her sons have they carry with them. She went to the Island, a peninsula jutting on Kahnawake's seaway boundary, to stop the invasion of Kahnawake by the Canadian Army. Her sons were with her, stood with her to protect her, and made her run when danger was imminent (Helen 2.19, A1:37).

This dramatic example of the sons' support for Helen demonstrated to Helen the close connection between her and the children. The history of that support began years before when the Brooklyn-based family decided to move home. The move became a historic moment for Helen, and for Kahnawake.

When the government of Quebec's Bill 101 receive royal assent Kahnawake children who attended Billings High School in Chateauguay started talking about walking out. Helen saw an opportunity to be part of something big. Helen had never been involved in any political activities in Kahnawake. However this time she decided to take part in whatever was going to happen. Usually at the end of the summer, Helen would return to Brooklyn. When she saw things happening with the students, she spoke to her husband and her sons about what she wanted to do. "I don't want to go back (to Brooklyn)," Helen told them. "I would like to stay involved in this (Helen 1.5, A3:91)." Her family didn't argue with her. "They always knew who the boss was," Helen says. While her husband worked, she controlled the house and the money (Helen 1.5, A3:91).

Helen participated in setting up the first high school in the community. In 1973 the students from Billings High School participated in a walkout to protest how they were being taught in the outside school system. They wanted to be taught about their own culture in their own community. Helen's son was one of the main instigators of this movement. Helen had come back to the community to visit and decided to stay and be part of it (Helen 1.8, A3:35). Helen brought her sense of respect into her experiences at the school. "I went into the office there. I started getting to know the people," Helen says. The movement had a lot of traditional minded people, who Helen had had much experience with. "I got talking to them and respecting them, because they started talking about who they are but acting who they are (Helen 1.8, A3:35)." Helen described what she saw and how the people acted were something with which she could relate. She felt something she identified with but never understood it (Helen 1.8, A3:35).

The establishment of the Kahnawake Survival School was the greatest thing that ever happened, Helen says. She got very involved with teaching the kids. Then, she became the first administrator because of her prior experiences working in schools in Brooklyn. Helen had never been a certified teacher but had taught religion, remedial reading, among other subjects. "Everything I am doing I can use sometime, I can use somewhere," Helen says. "And when I came back I discovered that everything that I had been doing I needed (Helen 1.6-7, A3:91)." Helen describes how strong the people were who worked at establishing the Kahnawake Survival School. The School Committee knew they were strong and knew what they wanted, Helen says. "They were fighting the government," Helen described. "Let's teach our kids who they are as Mohawk, let's teach them who they are as Mohawks, so they can understand (Helen 1.9, A3:92)." This is what impacted Helen the most—the kids had a chance to understand who they are as Mohawks.

Growing up in Brooklyn New York rather than in Kahnawake meant that when she and her husband returned to live in the community, Helen knew the family had to be

accepted and trusted by the people of the Kahnawake community. As she worked in the School, Kahnawake people got to know her (Helen 2.5, A3:94). Being integrated back into the community took time. Helen was conscious of this fact. "I was accepted by staying away, by just being involved, like I said, involved in different things but in the background," Helen explained. "I never said 'well I'll take over, I do this, I know how to do this, I know how to do that' (Helen 1.19, A3:93-94)." If asked to go and do something, she would. She never made the move on her own and instead worked with a group. Helen took her volunteer activities seriously. To be on a board just to be able to put it on your resume was not her way she said. Being on a board is about having something to offer and to offer it when you can (Helen 1.15, A3:93). More recently, Helen began to step back from her volunteer activities. There was too much negativity that she couldn't live with on a continuous basis. "I have to respect myself," Helen said. "And I have to live up to who I am (Helen 2.6-7, A3:94)."

Helen taught and then became the first principal of the Kahnawake Survival School. She left her post when she went to the Vatican for the Beatification of Kateri Tekakwitha, but when she returned she went back to teaching in the school, a position she says she enjoyed more than being a principal. According to Helen teaching was a living experience for her students (Helen 1.10, A3:35). It was learning. She said hands-on learning is the only way you can learn (Helen 1.10, A3:35). Helen would take the students around the community of Kahnawake to learn about different types of community involvement and the different kinds of people involved (Helen 1.10, A3:35). Teaching for Helen was not about putting kids in a row, giving them books, and expecting them to learn. Learning was about interacting with what was going on (Helen 1.9, A3:35). Helen would bring 'her kids,' as she called them, into the community. She and her students would go around to the different offices getting information. She took the students to band council meetings. "We used to pick a topic, start talking about it. Let's get out into the community and find out about it" Helen says. "The parents started

to complain because their kids were out of school and walking around the community, but what did the kids learn?—they learned how to talk to people (Helen 1.10, A3:35).” Helen also says that her students learned about differences that exist in their own community. “I think that it’s the best experience that they had,” Helen says. “Because it got them thinking, it got them looking at the idea that everybody was not the same (Helen 1.10, A3:35).” To Helen, everything was a learning resource for her students.

As a Catholic, she had not had much interaction with people who followed other religions in the community until she became involved with the high school. When Helen started at the school, she got to know the traditional people at the School. They talked and acted who they are, Helen says. She identified with what she was hearing and seeing in the actions of the traditional people. Helen says she never knew about being a Mohawk in the traditional sense, because of her Catholic upbringing (Helen 1.8, A3:92). Being Indian was never really discussed, in the sense of being different, Helen said. She learned of her difference through experiences at school (Helen 1.2, A3:91). Being Indian didn’t mean anything to Helen as she grew up. It was only later as an adult that she began to be aware of her identity as a Mohawk (Helen 1.3, A3:91).

Helen’s experiences with volunteers at the Kahnawake Survival School opened her eyes to her Mohawk identity and heritage. “I don’t think it changed me so much as made me realize that everything that I knew that I had inside me, the reasons for why I am this person, (was) because this is who I am,” Helen says. “It had taken me a while to actually realize it...now I firmly know who I am and how I got that way, but that was the beginning of it (Helen 1.10, A3:92).” Helen’s involvement with KSS led to work with a variety of organizations in the community of Kahnawake. With so much difference in the world today, living a Mohawk life means something different than it did even in her lifetime.

The abiding symbol is the St. Lawrence Seaway, a canal that severed the Kahnawake reserve, and separated the people from the river. The Seaway remains the

symbol of progress for her, Helen says. “Look what progress did to us? It destroyed our life,” she claims.” It changed life, it changed our life here, it took the water, the river away from us, which is very much a part of us, who we were (Helen 1.17, A1:36).” Helen described the simplicity of that life where young people spent a lot of time by the riverside. In the summer, people would fish off of boats and when the men would come home from work they could be seen heading down to the river to wash up for supper. The families would be there with their supper pots and after it got too dark they would head home (Helen 1.17, A1:36). Helen describes how summer life took place by the riverside – a traditional Mohawk life that sounds closer to her view of the relationship between the being Mohawk and the Mohawk spirit.

As she began to realize what the traditional life she saw was all about, it didn’t conflict with who she is as a Catholic Mohawk. “I guess I had faith more than I did the religion (Helen 2.5, A3:94).” Helen doesn’t feel like she is outside the circle of traditionalism because she is Catholic (Helen 3.1, A3:96). Helen identifies herself as traditional because traditionalism that she learned about fits with her own thoughts and feelings which fit with everything she read in the Great Law (Helen 3.1, A3:96). “I am a traditional person,” Helen says. “But that doesn’t mean that I belong to the longhouse, but I accept all of the teachings because that’s who we are--I live my life by it (Helen 3.3, A3:97)

Helen pursued her interest in traditional Mohawk customs, including the revival of traditions like consensual decision-making. The difference of that time and of today gives the community many ways of looking at being a Mohawk. Even though KSS carried the mission to teach culture, Helen finds the continuing erosion of culture disturbing as a grandmother. “I am concerned for my grandchildren,” Helen says. “That’s why I said ‘let me sit in on this clan system, not because I care particularly about myself, but I am concerned because my grandchildren are living here, my great grandchildren my family, because they are all here now (Helen 3.9, A1:38).” Her involvement in traditional

social and political education is not for her own benefit but for her descendants. She described what she understood of the traditional consensus decision-making process:

I hang this basket up here. You're sitting way over there. Each of us is sitting. Now there is something special in there. I want you to describe it from there. I want you to describe that. We all see the same thing but we see different things in it. So we are talking about the same thing, we have the same idea, I say this constantly, because it is so true. You're sitting there discussing things and all of the sudden you realize we are all talking about the same thing. We see it in a different way, which doesn't make us wrong. We are all right because that's what we see. So we all have a different way of looking at things but it's the same thing that we are seeing. That's consensus. It doesn't have to be exactly. I don't see the same thing you see. You are looking at it a different way. But it is the same thing. And we have to acknowledge that (Helen 3.19-20, A1:39).

Helen says accepting different perspectives is simply about acknowledging and respecting each other's point of view (Helen 3.20, A1:39-40). Things get complicated too often. For example, during the Oka Crisis of 1990 exercising respect was tested, not only by outside forces threatening Kahnawake, but also the longstanding divisions that plagued the community since she was a child. Her influence at KSS extended to the Crisis.

During the Oka Crisis of 1990, Helen spoke out at a public meeting about the Crisis. The people who were behind the protest were being called trouble-makers. Many of these people Helen worked with at the Kahnawake Survival School (Helen 2.17, A3:95-96). The way Helen understood the Crisis is that the children that were participating in the protests had to grow up. They were not children anymore and what

they were doing was important (Helen 2.18, A3:96). Helen brought up the point that if people had protested against the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway like they are at Oka, it would not have gone through. “So I says ‘we have to respect what they are doing’,” Helen said. “I started to know and realize all that, so I was able to say it, I knew where I was coming from (Helen 2.17, A3:95-96).” Helen felt that something had to be said and was proud of doing so (Helen 2.17, A3:95-96).

Helen took an active role during the Blockade. Before the summer of 1990, Helen was on the Committee for the Kateri Hall. A new hall had been built after the old one had burnt down. In the Hall’s kitchen, she and other women began a ‘Meals on Wheels’ program as well as serving pilgrims from all over the world visiting the Kateri Church. When the Blockade began, Helen suggested that the Hall be opened up to the community. Food would be brought across the river by boat and redistributed in the community. “The old people started coming in and they’d spend the day there...sorting out the different bags,” Helen said. Her reasons for doing this work were not so much about the reasons for the Crisis and being a Mohawk. “It was we needed something because there were people out there who were hurting us, they were not letting people out, food was not coming in, nobody cared out there (Helen 2.16-17, A3:95).” So there was a place where people could come. Helen was touched and positively impacted by the people of the community that came in to the Hall:

You know this young man, still to this day, I don’t remember who he was. Saying he has a girlfriend and they don’t know what to do, they don’t know where to live, they got no money, they got no food, they got nothing. So we gave them a supply of food and whether they managed to go on. You know this little boy coming inside, he was five years old he says – today is my birthday. We got a cupcake, we put a candle on it and sang happy birthday to him. You know little things like that. This, about thirteen, no he has to be about

fourteen, coming in, staggering in, and saying I have to get some food. It's important. He says, 'I am going on the front.' He was going on to be a warrior. He was going to sit with one of these men who were watching here and there. So he had to leave something for his mother. Bring food into the house for his mother. You know these little things that went on, the way that it was affecting different children, different people (Helen 2.18, A3:96).

Helen says her involvement in the Crisis was a unique experience. The feeling Helen remembers is how life continued to go on despite the circumstances. Helen felt deeply rewarded by being able to provide safety, food, security, and companionship to community members who needed to know that life was still going on (Helen 2.20, A3:96). Elders would come in and help bundle food as a way to stay busy and involved. Helen and others were at the Hall from morning to night, sometimes until two o'clock in the morning (Helen 2.17-18, A3:96). She seemed to take the community's unity for granted until an odd influence changed her perspective.

Ironically, during the Oka Crisis of 1990, Catholic priest Father Lajoie gave Helen a different glimpse of her community. Father Lajoie would not leave the community when the blockade began. He went to different points in the community and spoke to the men. Every day he would come to help out with the food bank and spend time talking to people. Helen said there was the impression that nobody was looking after Father Lajoie. Helen received a phone call from a nun who expressed concern for Father Lajoie's well-being. During the blockade, when all the food supplies were used up, Father Lajoie came into the Kateri Hall. Helen said Father Lajoie expressed a new awareness of the traditional people of Kahnawake, even after serving the community for many years. "That was quite an expression for him," Helen said. "And he was crying because I guess it meant so much to him, that here these people that he's not looking

down on them, paying no attention to them, I am talking about traditional people (Helen 2.18, A2:25).” Helen knew how the traditional people of Kahnawake were looked down upon, even by the Catholic Priest.

The effect on Kahnawake seemed to be apparent not only to Helen’s changed view of its people, but extended to the outside world. Two months after the end of the Oka Crisis, Kahnawake community members were asked to go and speak in a church on the Island of Montreal. The church members, who were upper class, wanted to know more about the Crisis. “We told them. We also looked across the river. Two o’clock in the morning, two o’clock in the morning and all your lights were out and everything was fine. And we were still sitting back there trying to see where our food was coming in (Helen 2.20, A2:25).” Helen said the people of Montreal were not even aware of the hard reality for the people of the community of Kahnawake during the Blockade. The people were shocked to learn this truth—that their government in 1990 exerted power over the Indian people.

Growing up, being Indian had no real meaning for Helen. She was told she was an Indian but at the same time she would be saying to herself ‘I have no idea of this type of thing’ (Helen 1.3, A2:24-25). Kahnawake was divided along religious lines. Anything traditional was viewed as against the Catholic Church. There was a mental and physical distance maintained between the Catholics, Protestants and the Longhouse people (Helen 1.3, A2:24-25). During the Depression era, Helen knew she was an Indian because she was called *the poor Indian* (Helen 1.1, A2:24). Her work at KSS and in the 1990 blockade gave Helen an ecumenical sense of her Catholic upbringing and her Mohawk identity.

Being a Catholic is what Helen identifies with. That was who she is, Helen says. It wasn’t so much for the religion but for the feeling of it. “You were always always part of something (Helen 1.2, A3:91).” There was something good in the religion that always

impressed her. Helen hadn't had any exposure to the idea of a Creator until years later.<sup>36</sup> The connection between Creator and God was made during her time working with the Kahnawake Survival School. Helen tells the story of this moment:

Stephen, you know Stephen the sculptor, he was working Survival School at that time...So we used to talk often. Why I said creator and god, this is where it came from. We were talking. He knew I was Catholic and he is traditional. When we were speaking, he was talking creator and I was talking god. By the time we finished I am talking creator and he was talking god. And that's an absolute fact. We got an understanding with each other. We were no longer talking religion and longhouse. We were now talking as traditional people... We were talking about the same thing. Talking about the same thing. Religion was out of there completely. And longhouse was out. We were talking about tradition. We were talking about who we are (Helen 1.10-11, A3:92).

After this encounter with Stephen, Helen began to find meaning in traditional aspects of the Mohawk culture like the Iroquois master narrative called Great Law and the symbolism of the circle. Helen's awareness of the universality of faith was reinforced by an experience she had in church one day. All of the sudden a bird flew into the church over her. The bird spoke to her. "And he says 'what are you worrying about, you are all one people'," Helen explains. Helen says that became the start of self-actualization. She realized that moment 'who' she is. "I was me," Helen said (Helen 2.5, A3:94; Helen 2.12-13, A3:94-95).

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<sup>36</sup> The word 'Creator' references the Iroquois understanding of a higher power or being, the power of creation that permeates every living thing on earth.

Helen saw no difference in herself and longhouse people she dealt with. “God and the creator are one, just as two religions, they all have someone that they look up to, no matter who they are,” Helen said. “Whatever you want to call him, it, her, she, there’s only one—is it a supreme being? I don’t know—but it’s something that has affected all of our lives (Helen 2.12-13, A3:94-95).” Everything had to come from somewhere. Acceptance and appreciation is tradition Helen explains through the Golden Rule. “Taking care of each other, looking after each other,” she says, “loving each other, but that’s the truth of the Christian faith, not talking about religion or the church but the faith itself, ‘Do unto others as they would do unto you’ (Helen 2.12-13, A3:94-95).” Helen accepts this principle and lives it though the roots of her belief seemed to exist long ago.

In KSS’s early years Helen was asked by a Kahnawake Survival School committee member if religion should be taught in the school. “We don’t want to bring something that is going to divide people. They are all in here as Mohawks,” Helen said. Helen explained to her colleague that no religious divisions existed in the school. “We are all here as Mohawks and that is the way we want to be teaching each other (Helen 1.11, A3:92-93).” Everyone’s religion was personal. In her understanding, Helen viewed Mohawks as a spiritual people, which meant caring for people and taking care of things (Helen 2.6, A3:94). Later she blurred the lines of demarcation between the belief systems that created unnecessary divisions in Kahnawake.

Helen illustrated her understanding about the reality of the Mohawk beliefs intertwined with her knowledge and belief about famed Mohawk historical figure Kateri Tekakwitha. Helen saw Kateri more as a person than a saint who has a positive influence on people. “Look at their lives, they are just human people,” Helen said. “And they [saints] were like everyone else, lived lives as everyone else did, come up against difficulties, were tortured (Helen 2.14, A3:95).” Helen says that everyone who died is a saint, because everyone suffers.

Helen takes this way of thinking, the humane aspect, into her activities throughout the Kahnawake community. “The creator has put us here and we each have a gift and we start working on that gift,” Helen explains. There is a slow realization that comes out of using your gifts and as time goes on one begins to realize why you are here (Helen 1.12, A3:93). Helen’s volunteer activities with the church and the Kahnawake Survival School are who she is, Helen says. The things she has been doing for years are her gift to give. Helen makes the effort to do things to the best of her ability (Helen 1.12, A3:93). Helen doesn’t promote herself or her volunteerism. Being involved doesn’t make her better than anyone else, she says. When on a board, she speaks her mind. That is her responsibility, she says (Helen 1.16, A3:93). Helen’s volunteer activities are extensive and have been a main priority. What she has noticed about other women is that they don’t come out and participate and remain subservient Helen says. “When you go to a council meeting you got a couple of women there but they are sitting in the back,” Helen says. “They are not leaders (Helen 1.12, A3:93).” Alternatively, Helen notices that women’s issues are taking a back seat on many agendas, which is hurtful (Helen 3.7, A3:97).

Helen spent her life in service to her family, her children, and her community. She went from the Kahnawake Survival School to work with the handicapped in their homes. One thing carried on to another, Helen says (Helen 1.7, A3:91-92). Helen went to work with Meals on Wheels. She also volunteered in the Kateri Hospital. She sat on many boards like the Kateri Hospital, the Kahnawake Youth Centre, the Golden Age Club. Volunteering was her way of getting involved in things that interested her. Helen was also involved with the local radio station K103. Helen was also involved with Kahnawake Social Services up until The 1990 Oka Crisis. Her involvement ended when she saw the people who worked with social services left the community and didn’t stay throughout the blockade (Helen 1.15, A3:93). Helen also participated in a research project that would examine the clan system as the basis for participatory democracy in the community.

Helen takes her participation in the project seriously. As cited earlier, her participation is because of her grandchildren (Helen 3.20, A3:98). There are many issues involved in this overall issue of participatory democracy. When asked about her understanding on the issue, Helen responded with a question as to what the effect would be on the community and how would the community ever agree to go back to the clan system. "You know that to me is almost an impossibility, if they feel that everyone in Kahnawake has to be part of the clan system," Helen said. She questioned whether she would be excluded because she is a Christian despite still identifying with the bear clan, not being political minded, and living outside the community (Helen 3.2, A3:97). Add to this the fact that Helen has a different understanding of marrying out that addresses the complete separation of the community along religious and now racial lines. If she had married a non-Christian, she would have absorbed him into her family because she is a strong person. Whereas if she had married a man who was involved in his tradition and at the longhouse in ceremonies, it is very likely that she would have become a part of it as well (Helen 3.6, A3:97).

Helen understands Mohawk history and cultural ways. As she discusses clan membership, Helen brings up the issue of assimilation; something the original KSS mission was to meet head on under her leadership. Helen illustrated that if a man from the community married out, his clan entitlements would be lost. This was one of the main facets of assimilation, Helen said. Women were ostracized if they married out. Helen's sisters married non-native men. She said it was understood that if you married out you had nothing to do with Kahnawake. You couldn't come home. If you married out you lost your rights. You lost everything (Helen 1.3, A1:33-34). "But if a man married out he could bring his wife in and she would become part, because she has no clan so their children would have no clan," Helen said. "Whereas the woman is outside, she still has a clan and her children have a clan but she is not accepted back into the community (Helen 3.7, A2:25-26)." Helen said this exclusion of women from the community still happens

today. The Mohawk way has been replaced by rules that originate outside the community.

Helen says that assimilating Kahnawake has long been the goal of Canada. Ironically, the Indian Act is not wanted in the community but is accepted as the way Kahnawake governs over its affairs. Helen discussed the control that the Indian Act has on the lives of the people of Kahnawake. “It’s accepted as a fact ‘Oh no you can’t do that’ because they don’t want you to, you can’t spend it because they say no, you can’t do this because it’s against the law’,” Helen illustrated. “We don’t want to use the word but we are, it’s there—assimilation (Helen 3.16, A2:26)!”

For Helen, the underlying issue is about respecting each other’s point of view. This is something that she has encountered in her board and committee work over the years. Helen explains one meeting where she explained her understanding about consensus:

I says ‘you are all sitting around now what do you see?’ They all see different things, even sitting in a circle, if you got something here. I am looking at it from a different angle. We are all looking different angles but we are all looking at the same thing. It’s still right because we can all see it. And then we have to respect everyone’s idea of it, because they have to respect mine. If I respect yours you have to respect mine. It’s simple when you look at it.

Helen says we complicate things too much (Helen 3.20, A3:98).

Helen realizes the importance of tradition but also sees great importance in advancing and living in the world, as it is today, especially where it concerns the young people of the community. “They have to be aware of their background,” Helen says. “They have to be aware of who they are, their ties. But still be able to exist in everything that is out there because it is so much a part of today’s life (Helen 3.8, A3:97).” Helen

points to the fact that the modern Mohawk people are very different from their ancestors because of too many outside influences and they accept what is out there more than what is inside the community. This aspect has made Helen back off from many of her volunteer activities (Helen 3.8, A3:97). In her work in the Kateri Hospital she saw the many effects of outside influences on the Hospital. She couldn't accept all the laws and rules that were affecting the lives of the patients. "It wasn't all who we are as native people," Helen said (Helen 3.8-9, A3:97). When Helen was asked to run in the board elections again, she declined. Helen also found this same problem in her board activities with the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project. "There are some aspects of research I want nothing to do with," Helen said. "Because it's redefining us through other people's ideas, Other people's methods, thoughts (Helen 3.9, A3:97). Helen feels that she experienced only the beginning of what the younger people are up against. The questions Helen asks are—How much do we accept of what is outside the culture? And when do you question what is brought in (Helen 3.9, A3:97)? A lot of people just accept without asking questions. This is destructive. The youth have no real value system. "They are driving the cars, they got the money, they are spending it, they are drinking," Helen says. "You know when money becomes god you've lost your way (Helen 3.11, A3:98)." As a result the young people are not looking to the future.

Helen has hope for the future. She is confident that awareness will happen and the youth will see the value of being Mohawk and living in the community (Helen 3.10-11, A3:98). Even though Kahnawake is not what it was years ago, where the boundaries of the community and the outsider were clearly defined we are still our own people, Helen says (Helen 3.10-11, A3:98). The way of thinking is different today, Helen says. The kids and adults don't know anything about what's going on outside. Boundaries are now maintained by ignorance and not by living a traditional Mohawk life. There is no interest in it and Helen finds that disturbing (Helen 2.11, A3:94). When she was growing up, Helen remembers how isolated the community was. Nobody came into the community

after six o'clock. But now we are sort of integrated, she says. She wonders if there will be a total loss of identity and what kind of legacy will be there for the children. Are they even going to know this? Helen asks (Helen 3.10-11, A3:98).

For Helen balance is important. "You take the best of what you have there, and you bring it back," Helen says. "Take the best that you see and leave the rest in the garbage there (Helen3.9, A3:97-98)." Being able to do make these choices this requires you to have a good background. Adults need to understand that young children need to know what's going on by getting an education in the community so they can learn the language, to know who they are. Then, Helen says, they can go out to different places. In order to do help children make these decisions the education system needs to be improved, made more relevant to their identity, Helen says (Helen 3.12, A3:98). A system of education based on respect that Helen holds as central, and vitally important to the way she lived her life.

### **Final Thoughts**

Helen taught me something about how to help my daughters as she shared some of her wisdom on the benefits of positive reinforcement with me. I described how my daughter reacted when I moved my three kids from the local high school to another in the city of Montreal. My daughter expressed worry that she would not be a Mohawk anymore. I had responded to her that she was going to learn about other people and their differences. Helen had something to say about this when I told her about my daughter's worry. "You encourage her to do that [learn]," Helen responded. "Because the positive, when you say don't, or this is wrong. Positive reinforcement," Helen said. Helen pointed out that because my daughter was going to school outside the community this was a good opportunity for her to teach others about us (Helen 2.25-26, A1:38). "You tell her she's going to be a better Mohawk because she's going to start, do it the positive way," Helen said. "You know because once you get outside and you learn about, you see all these

different people. Then you can let people know what being a Mohawk is (Helen 2.25, A1:38).

I write this narrative with a heavy heart. The woman whose live story I had the fortune to share passed away yesterday. Even though her physical self is no longer here with us, her spirit lives on in her children and grandchildren, and all those who were affected by her. I wrote this as if she was still around me, and was going to read this after I was finished. We would sit together and share in a smile and laughter over the words I had carefully chosen to describe her and tell her story.

I went to the funeral yesterday. It rained hard. My husband says that it usually rains for people who have walked a hard path in life. The rain washes away their footsteps so that they can start fresh in the Sky World above. I thought a lot about this as I stood by her grave.

I had the fortune to give support and love to her family in their time of grief. Her husband looked so bewildered. They had been together a very long time. Her grandchildren stood over her grave and wept, saying their last good byes. I picked up a handful of dirt as is our custom and said my final goodbye to a friend as I let the dirt fall onto her casket. I cried and walked away. I felt so sad for those who had lost the center of their family. But, I also felt grateful for the fact that she was someone I can call a friend. I will miss her sparkly eyes, bursts of laughter and her soft touch as she shared her life with me.

## **Chapter Fourteen**

### **An Enduring Legacy: Sky Woman speaks back**

#### **Analysis and Conclusions**

##### **Introduction**

This study examines trends in thinking about Indigenous people's identity. In general Iroquois people have a sense of their identity that they communicate through Kanienkeha and English words and through their actions. Specifically, Kanienkehaka identity is examined through a narrative analysis of the lives of eight Kanienkehaka women from the community of Kahnawake. Their stories were told from the youngest to the oldest. Even so, we embarked on a rich journey through the lives of eight women that began 86 years ago when a baby girl was born at the Kateri Hospital in the Kanienkehaka community of Kahnawake. Our journey went through the Great Depression experienced in Brooklyn, New York to the mean streets of Caughnawaga where kids taunted each other over their respective religious differences. And then we carried on to an Ottawa, Ontario suburb where a young woman struggled through art school. From there we journeyed to a healing circle on the Plains where a young woman learned how to pray. This took us to back to Kahnawake where another young woman ducked rocks thrown through her car window. At the end, a kind and vibrant woman passed away and was mourned by a community who loved her.

This journey encompasses the lives of eight Kanienkehaka women. Their life stories are poured through crisis, heartache, passion, joy and an astonishing will to live. We can see ourselves in each one. Some of us like Helen, have made their way back to the Sky World, or as we say in Mohawk, have gone on their 'path up there, where they live, our ancestors, where there is no death or tears'. Others are still on their life walk, trying to make their way, and make sense of the world in which they live. And yet there

are those who are the bridge in between, engaging directly with the forces all around them that seek to betray those ancestors.

Their stories get lost in the mix of band politics, community conflict, continuous clashes between Kahnawake and Canada, and struggles with addiction. Their individual lives are seen as not important in the larger context of everyday life in Kahnawake. Yet their stories are important to those of us who want to learn about ourselves.

In the larger scope of Canada, the liberal nation state prefers like-minded individuals to form the basis of society. It is this kind of thinking that has been imposed on the lives of these eight women. Recall that the Canadian nation state allows the individual to choose their projects, the right for individual growth and development, and only then can Canadian society progress. The philosophical basis for Canada's treatment of its Indian populations is miles away from what we observed in the lives of the eight women. It seems hypocritical for Canada to say that the nation extends the 'right' to be self-authenticating and to pursue one's projects. Along with the expectation that deliberative individuals are expected to enter into a dialogue with like-minded individuals to achieve a consensus about a conception of the good life. Ironically, this philosophy is the basis for Canada's criteria which serves to authenticate who is fit to be a citizen of this great country. These eight women are self-authenticating as they let us know what makes them who they are--they are in dialogue with other members of their community as we saw in the activities that they pursue.

Over the last 30 years, the self-determination efforts and objectives of Indigenous peoples in Canada have increasingly been cast in the language of "recognition." The failure of Canada to recognize the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is just another example of the abject failure on the part of Canada to engage directly with the Indigenous peoples of this continent. The Declaration, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2007, calls for the recognition of the right of Indigenous peoples to control their lands and resources without any restrictions on their traditional

ways of living. Canada rejected the Declaration partly because it recognizes the principle of self-determination for Indigenous peoples and commits countries to obtaining the "free, prior, and informed consent" of native communities before using their resources. Another example of the ignorance of Indigenous peoples by Canada can be found in the failure to utilize the findings of the 1996 Report of Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) which acknowledged the nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations and the Crown; recognition of the equal right of First Nations to self-determination; recognition of the Crown's fiduciary obligation to protect Aboriginal treaty rights; recognition of First Nation's inherent right to self-government; and recognition of the right of First Nations to benefit from the development of their lands and resources. Canada's policies on Indigenous peoples has had cumulative and far-reaching effects.

The eight women of this study discussed the impact on their lives of the treatment of Indigenous peoples by Canada such as loss of language, traditional culture, alcoholism, and violence to name a few. Their words spoke of hope in a changed relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples. Is a changed relationship possible? To answer this question I pose theories articulated to grapple with multicultural, pluralistic, genderized, and ethnocentric views. My discussion focuses on what I said earlier in this study—that liberal, socialist, and feminist theoretical exemplars assumed a right to authenticate Indigenous women's identity that did not originate with the original people.

The eight women of this study speak for themselves. As they articulate their lives, they actively resist external identification such as "special status" aboriginals, feminists, and peasants. I situate myself in a frame consistent with the work of other Indigenous scholars such as Taiaiake Alfred, Jeff Corntassel, Audra Simpson, Hilary Weaver, and Devon Mihesuah. Their work finds cadence with the work of theorists like Charles Taylor, Joyce Green, and bell hooks yet I reject them because they don't know my

experience or the experiences of the eight women of this study. This research elaborates themes related to being Indigenous that come out of their words, yet implies the Indigenous women's view of becoming self-determined through recognition of collective memory.

### **Liberals, Socialists, Feminists, and Indigenists**

One solution to a changed relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples is theorized by political philosopher Charles Taylor's call for an equal recognition he describes as "a politics of recognition" (1994). Taylor suggests equal recognition is the appropriate mode for a healthy democratic society. In this regard, the refusal of equal recognition can also inflict damage on those who are denied it. Further, "The Projection of an inferior or demeaning image on another can actually distort and oppress, to the extent that the image is internalized (1994: 36)." Theorizing aside, we saw in the eight women's narratives their stories talk of an internalized distorted image of what it is to be Indian. So, what is being done about these issues that will have lasting effects far into the future?

The politics of recognition refers to the expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to reconcile Indigenous claims to nationhood with Crown sovereignty by the accommodation of Indigenous identities in some form of renewed relationship with the Canadian state. Proposed models involve the delegation of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through land claims, economic development initiatives and self-government processes. We have to remember that these are just models.

Taylor's approach to the politics of equal recognition is found in his approach to the politics of difference. He writes:

it (the politics of difference) asks that we give acknowledgement and status to something that is not universally shared. Or, otherwise put, we

give due acknowledgement only to what is universally present—everyone has an identity—through recognizing what is particular to each (1994: 39). Everyone should be recognized for his or her particular identity where there is recognition of distinctness. This view is contrasted to other intellectual theorizing about the freedom and well-being of marginalized individuals and groups living in ethnically diverse states. But how does this translate into the everyday lives of these eight women?

Taylor argues that political communities such as Canada ought to provide recognition and protection for certain cultural and national communities, to their benefit because identity develops in dialogical relationship to others (1994: 34). As culturally situated beings we do not develop our identities in isolation, rather we form them through complex relationships of recognition with others. Given that our identities are formed in this way, our identities can also be malformed in relationship with others (1994: 36). Then, if society mirrors back a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture, an individual or a group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion of their identity (1994: 25). Therefore, non-recognition or misrecognition is a form of oppression which Taylor writes, imprisons someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (1994: 25). It is this idea that unequal relations of recognition can impede human freedom and development that continues to serve as one of the main theoretical justifications for Canadian state policies geared toward the ‘protection’ of cultural difference. Thus, Canadian policies continue to bind the identities of these eight women as we saw in the example of *The Kahnawà:ke Membership Law*. As I discussed earlier in relation to the liberal conceptions of toleration and individual liberty, Taylor provides a view of multiculturalism that maintains the content of liberalism.

Taylor points to the work of Frantz Fanon who clearly outlines the role that misrecognition plays in propping up relations of colonial domination. Taylor’s affirmation of Fanon’s work in theorizing the subjectivity of the oppressed is useful to

understanding the Indian identity question. However, Taylor is mistaken in invoking Fanon to suggest that by institutionalizing a liberal regime of 'mutual recognition' we can somehow go beyond the extent to which the colonial systems of power are at play, especially here in Canada. Tensions between worldviews, perspectives, and moral standpoints among Indigenous peoples and between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state are evident.<sup>37</sup> Taylor, drawing on Hans-Georg Gadamer, calls for a 'fusion of horizons' where deliberative citizens "learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture (1994: 67)." As we move into this new 'horizon', new vocabularies of comparison are developed where can serve us in articulating contrasts. A new judgment of what is worthy is developed through a transformation of our standards (1994: 67). But, does this open the door to self-determination for Indigenous peoples?

The first step to finding answers is found in the work of Indigenous scholars counter-theorizing in the language of the colonizer. Kanienkehaka anthropologist Audra Simpson (2008) examines how Canada and the United States were rendered with the power to choose whom they would recognize as members of Indigenous communities. Simpson examines how these forms of recognition speak to Indigenous notions of citizenship-formation and territory. Simpson's work illuminates how these designations affect the possibility of movement and work to define through identification practices, their own territory and boundaries. Simpson suggests that understanding the connections between the externally authenticated identities and boundaries and those communicated by the Indigenous formations illuminate how these identifications and legal and interpretive acts re-form in practice and how they are resisted, denied, and ignored (2008: 200). Simpson questions if there is a basis in law for Iroquois self-perception, sense of

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<sup>37</sup> For further writing on this issue, see Gilbert (1995), and Giokas and Groves (2002).

jurisdiction, and movement across the border. Iroquois self-perception coincides within the different positioning and perception of Indians through time, to settler-state formation and asymmetries of power yet has resisted the “interpretive demotion” in political affairs (2008: 198). As a result, Simpson writes that it is the nation-to-nation or linking of arms metaphor of equality among people that is the basis for Iroquois self-perception (2008: 198). Simpson critiques the static and culturalist methodology taken by Canada as it metes out recognition to Canadian Indians. “Culture is allowed to change” Simpson writes, “but elements within it maintain the same value and meaning through time” (2008: 208). These cultural elements must remain evident to the juridical eye and to the expert eyes of archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists, and it must be evident through time thus framing how Indians born in Canada exercise their rights (2008: 209). In other words Canada trapped Indian identity in the 1800s.

Simpson writes that “law may be one instrument of civilization, as a regulating body and a territory (2008: 213).” The designation of “savagery” and “brutishness” was used to justify the forceful imposition of the law. These designations define, regulate Indian behavior to protect, to confine, and to contain the Indigenous in certain spaces (2008:213). Simpson articulates that the Indian Act is a uniform body of law that has sought to do all of the above. “It is very much about achieving a state of lawfulness and containment, which is an ontological state of political subject-hood that is highly regulatory and does significant legal work upon the territories, bodies and cultures of Indians in Canada (2008: 213).” Simpson writes that the structuring presupposition is that Indians reside somewhere between ward, citizen, and people presumed to be savage who must have their savagery recognized first, in order to be governed (2008: 213). These practices conflict with the theoretical criteria of liberalism that also conflicts with Taylor’s view of multiculturalism.

Despite the criteria for authentic identity Simpson describes, Indigenous scholars suggest identity begins inside the Indigenous individual. Taiaiake Alfred (Kaniienkehaka)

and Jeff Corntassel (Tsalagi) describe being Indigenous in a psychic and cultural sense. As illustrated in this study, this question needs to be asked and answered individually. Alfred and Corntassel discuss the use of terms like Mohawk, Aboriginal, and Indian among others by Indigenous peoples. The use of these terms addresses the issue of forced cooperation with the nation states in response to the compelling needs of physical survival (2005: 599). These identifiers, Alfred and Corntassel write, mark Indigenous peoples political-legal relationship with the state rather than their cultural or social ties to their communities, culture, or homeland. Alfred and Corntassel call this being 'incidentally Indigenous' (2005: 599). Being incidentally Indigenous pulls people away from cultural and community aspects of being Indigenous, aspects which are described by the eight women of this study. Alfred and Corntassel discuss strategies for resisting further encroachments on Indigenous existence and how Indigenous communities can regenerate themselves to resist and renew politically and culturally. Clearly, it appears that Indigenous communities are constantly being diverted from this renewal. How does this play out amongst individuals like the eight women of this study?

Alfred and Corntassel describe the diversion process as the continued confinement of Indigenous identities. Indigenous identities are confined to state-sanctioned legal and political definitional approaches. In this way, Indigenous nations mimic dominant non-Indigenous legal-political institutions and adhere to state-sanctioned definitions of being Indigenous. Alfred and Corntassel use the term 'politics of distraction' in the same vein as Smith, Macklem, Taylor, Kymlicka use to describe this mimicking process that takes place where energy is diverted away from the processes of decolonizing and regeneration when community relationships continue to be framed in state-centric terms such as 'Mohawk' and others (2005: 600). As seen in the women's continued reference to the Membership Law, attention to real issues are subverted by continued distractions like the community's attempt at defining membership within the parameters of Canadian legislation and yet also having to account for diverse notions of

notion of what it means to be a Mohawk of Kahnawake. Many elements are at play in the discussion on membership as we saw in the overview of *The Kahnawà:ke Membership Law*.

The wider spiritual and physical battle to be undertaken by the ‘Warrior’, according to Alfred and Corntassel that is consistent with my findings with the eight women, is to re-awaken and re-enliven the people to invest belief and energy in their power over their lives (2005: 603). The battle, they describe is fought against political manipulation of the people's own innate fears and the embedding of complacency into the psyche (2005: 603). Alfred and Corntassel, like Taylor, point to Fanon's identification of the important strength of unity in Indigenous resistance and the distractions' impact on Indigenous people as they fight amongst themselves. The mimicking of large-scale state institutions meant to confront state power only deepen the divisions (2005: 603). The divisions they describe are also discussed in the Membership issue. As a result, Kanienkehaka identities are left in a fragmented and liminal state.<sup>38</sup>

Alfred and Corntassel describe multiple sites for the (re)construction of Indigenous identities in global, state, community, and individual terms – also as sites of resistance (2005: 600). The quest for definitional authority therefore goes well beyond state borders. The demand for precisely described identity disregards the reality of the situation: that group identity varies with time and place. A prime example of the impact of this demand on a community can be seen in the discussion on the Membership Law and in its impact on the lives of the eight women. Alfred and Corntassel question how theorists and researchers account for the dynamic nature of group identity. Discussed in Alfred-Corntassel, Lakota social worker Hilary N. Weaver cautions against professional monopolies commodification of Indian people. Weaver also describes three facets of

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<sup>38</sup> Anthropologist Victor Turner first introduced his interpretation of liminality in 1967, drawing on Van Gennep's three-part structure for rites of passage. Turner focused on the middle stage of rites of passage—the transitional or liminal stage where the status of liminal individuals is socially and structurally ambiguous. In addition, liminal individuals *have* nothing: “no status, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows” (1967: 98).

Indigenous identity—self identification, community identification, and external identification (2001: 240). Cultural identity reflects the values, beliefs, and world-views of Indigenous peoples and intersects with race, class, education, region, religion, and gender and can change over time. Weaver describes identity as an ongoing process of construction through difference in relationship with others as Taylor describes. Alfred and Cornthassel also find promise in theories of identity rooted in Indigenous cultural and spiritual principles and write that “is ultimately our lived collective and individual experiences as Indigenous peoples that yield the clearest and most useful insights for establishing culturally sound strategies to resist colonialism and regenerate our communities (2005: 601).” The liberal nation-state only moves slightly in the direction that allows for minority cultures to be recognized in ways that make sense to the nation-state. Taylor warns that certain forms of political liberalism endanger recognition and promote homogeneity rather than recognizing plurality. Plurality is not something Taylor thinks we must simply accept at face value. Taylor’s solution is to adopt a discourse he calls transvaluation that highlights differences between cultures rather than glossing over or reconciling them, engendering rational calm discussion rather than stigmatization of the other (1985). The Alfred-Cornthassel postulate for communal and individual rights in Indigenous society fits with Taylor’s claim.

Claiming that individuals only become capable of understanding ourselves and defining our identity through dialogue Taylor says humans are fundamentally dialogical creatures and cannot develop into individuals without interaction with others (1991:29). Through dialogue humanity exchanges ideas with others and construct values and beliefs through education, a view described in my discussion of Mill. Coincidentally, this is how we become authentic humans. Authenticity is being true to yourself. Therefore, according to Taylor being in touch with the moral good no longer is seen to come from what society says is the moral good rather it is something that we have to connect deep within the individual. Taylor describes this as “a new form of inwardness, in which we come to

think of ourselves as beings with inner depths (1994: 29).” The question then is how does this moral intuitionism affect Indigenous peoples who live within the Canadian nation-state?

As described earlier in this work, in socialist society individualism is irrelevant, genders blur, with minimal division of material and social capital. Socialist society that Marx and Engels wrote about is familiar. In ancient times, Iroquois society posed that an individual’s needs, wants, religion, and responsibilities to family were lost to the needs of society at large. It was by one’s actions that an individual expressed their true self as they contributed to the survival of the whole. Adopted prisoners lost their former identity and became viable members of Iroquois communities with new identities. The individual, her nature, freedom and development was inseparably connected to society. To a large degree, this is still evident for Indigenous peoples within Canada as the social passion created the Indian as a ward of the Canadian nation state. There are no individuals here.

Marx and Engels tends toward homogenizing generalizations for members of socialist society, that in the social-liberal nation state de-individualizes the Indigenous individual as there is and by consequence engages little inter-personal or dialogue with the dominant society. Fiduciary responsibility is maintained and requires that the Indian to remain a ward with special Indian status. This “special status” translates into nation state legislation like the Canadian “Indian Act” or even the United States’ idea of the “domestic dependent nation.” Thus, external agents decided such things as membership, land rights, property rights, social development, and enfranchisement. I suggested that there is a presumption by the nation state of the authority to authenticate Indian identity. The authority derives from a consensus about what comprises a good. However, as it pertains to Indian people, a good Indian would be one who does not reside in the “special status” valley, but rises to fitness by casting aside the illiberal notions of basing a conception of the good life on master narratives like Sky Woman’s story. The transition remains a male-dominated process, where matrilineal lines were broken and recast under

the patrilineal Indian Act. Feminists should be the ally in balancing power in the native world, but this is not so and maintain a stance that differs from liberal and socialist homogenizing generalizations for Indigenous identity.

As I showed earlier in this study with irony, feminist theory invested itself with the authority to authenticate what is truly feminine. Of course they accuse male theorists of perpetuating a male dominated world. My central research assumption is that Indigenous women are victims of a process of authentication through intellectual colonization by the feminists. Through meta-narratives about Iroquois society and culture, modern Kanienkehaka talk about misrepresentation, abuse, and destruction of their families and communities. Chapter Three examined the female Indigenous (and more specifically Iroquois) tradition through the written exploration of contact narratives, links between Iroquois women and feminism, and insider knowledge.

I demonstrated how Indigenous women are victims of processes of authentication through intellectual colonization. The feminists distorted the Indigenous women's tradition through the impacts of early contact narratives and the subsequent colonization of North America. As I demonstrated in the telling of Sky Woman's story there is a concept of "the women-kind" (akaonhsohna) that infers what I called Iroquois womanism that stands in direct conflict with feminist writing. The concept of Iroquois womanism stands in stark contrast to the authenticated identity of the so-called Indigeno-feminism. The impact of these factors on Kanienkehaka women is surmised as I examined the impact of the feminist-indigenist binary on the unity of Iroquois society, something that the eight Mohawk women collectively refuted by their belief in the unity of family. The identification with traditional Iroquois social structure and democracies by these women illustrates the continued belief in the important role of women in Iroquois society. Through their belief and actions, this aspect of Iroquois society continues to survive. Misinterpretations in ethnography and anthropology have been exposed by these Iroquois

women's narratives. Euro-formed misrepresentations of Indigenous women render the intellectual colonial project obsolete.

The feminist theorists I examined distorted Iroquois women's reality through their admiration of Iroquois women for their place in ancient Iroquois society and also for their ability to adapt with colonization. Living in houses and wearing western clothing were indicative of adaptation. The feminist movement imposed the gender precept on Iroquois women. Despite this fact, we took on feminism as an ally in a time when we needed support. As feminist theory developed to include the voices of those women of color who were excluded from the dialogue, many of these women take up the mantle of feminism in various ways. Many, like bell hooks linked the feminist struggle to end patriarchy with the efforts to end western imperialism (1994: 204). Implicit in her argument is the call for people to consider "positionalities" which affect the idea that any of us are inherently anything—that we become who we are. She examines the confessional moment as a transformative moment in the overall project of more fully becoming who you are, where you step out of the fixed identity in which you were seen, to realize other aspects of your self (1994: 210). Significantly, hooks' idea about positionality relates closely to Taylor's ideas on the dialogical nature of human identity, where we develop in relation to others. The interrelatedness of the development of identities for hooks relates to the positioning of other women of color on feminism.

Indigenous academic Joyce Green in her work *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007) makes a cogent argument for what constitutes *aboriginal feminism*. Green describes aboriginal feminism as a form of Aboriginal emancipation that includes marginal and excluded women and those who have been excluded from their communities by virtue of colonial legislation and socio-historical forces (2007: 25).<sup>39</sup> Aboriginal feminism occurs at the intersection of racism and sexism (2007: 23). Green

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<sup>39</sup> For examples of emancipatory writing by Indigenous women and discussion on this issue, see Brant (1997), Cook (1997), and Cunningham (2006).

claims that Aboriginal feminism is an ideological framework of intellectuals and activists, an authentic expression of political analysis and political will (2007: 25). Aboriginal feminism, Green writes “interrogates power structures and practices between and among Aboriginal and dominant institutions. It leads to praxis—theoretically informed, politically self-conscious activism (2007: 25).” I agree with Green’s inventory of the effects of colonization on Indigenous women—something I don’t dispute. I realize that perhaps to an external viewer, if one were to examine my life and work in this context, I could be labeled an “aboriginal feminist”. I don’t see myself in that way. I, like the eight women of this study, see myself in terms of who I am as a Kanienkehaka woman, my responsibilities to myself, my family, and my community, and what I do to put an end to the affects of colonialism on my people. I take issue with the use of the terms ‘aboriginal’ and ‘feminism’ to describe what Indigenous women do. The terms ‘aboriginal’ and ‘feminism’ originate from the colonizers Green critiques. “Aboriginal” has little relation to the terms we use to describe ourselves as Indigenous and “feminism” is a term coined by women of western ancestry to describe a movement closer to their aims rather than ours.

Many Indigenous people don’t use the word ‘aboriginal’ to describe themselves. Declarative statements are often heard to this regard. Most recently, the Anishinabek issued a press release June 25, 2008 announcing a campaign to eliminate the inappropriate use of the term ‘aboriginal.’ In it, there is a clear statement on what the term means to the Anishinabek. Most people assume that the word ‘aboriginal’ means ‘the first inhabitants’ or ‘from the beginning.’ The root meaning of the word means the opposite. “The first two letters in the term—AB—is a Latin prefix that means “away from” or “not.” And so, Aboriginal literally means “not original” (Ahni, 2008).” The Anishinabek statement on ‘aboriginal’ is in agreement with a story told anecdotally where Kanienkehaka community elder Joe Squires questioned why a group of young people were using the term ‘aboriginal’ in their discussions. He asked the group “what is

this word 'aboriginal' that you are using?" Those assembled said: "Well that's who we are." "What's the difference between being normal and abnormal?" he asked. "What do you think the difference is if you use the term 'aboriginal'?" This forced the people to think and today reference is made to that story when discussion on the use of the word 'aboriginal' takes place. Most recently, in Harper's Apology to Canada's Aboriginal population, his statement used the word 'aboriginal' and Indian only in relation to residential schools. Thus, it was understood in terms of the colonial practice of distancing the Indigenous peoples from their lands and culture, yet again. What is important to note is that this discussion signals an important paradigm shift. Labels used to describe Indigenous peoples are no longer taken for granted.<sup>40</sup>

There are other terms proposed by Indigenous women that can be used to describe what we have become. M.A. Jaimes Guerrero calls for the use of the term "Native Womanism," which she interprets in terms of a restoration of the female principle as a way to challenge prevailing colonialist and patriarchal denigration of women and nature (2003). Using this term, Guerrero connects traditional aspects with an ecological perspective as a way to speak to the Indigenous belief in the femaleness of all things in nature and to the responsibility of women in the caretaking of the earth. Feminism's intersection with other sites of discourse like anti-colonial struggles, governance issues, Andrea Smith describes as an Indigenous articulation of notions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation states that speaks to the interconnectedness of all aspects of Indigenous life (Smith quoted in Green, 2007: 104) which results in a more inclusive vision of sovereignty (ibid: 105). Other Indigenous women don't have a term to describe the role of Indigenous women in a movement but are clear in articulating how necessary they are to the anti-colonialist movement. Makere Stewart-Harawira writes of a "return of the feminine principle...right balance and the compassionate mind to the centre

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<sup>40</sup> For further discussion on this issue, see Churchill (1999), Deer (2005), Field (1994), Yellow Bird (1999), and Retzlaff (2005).

of our political ontologies” (Stewart-Harawira quoted in Green, 2007:125). The role that Indigenous women play is a vital one. Stewart-Harawira describes the role of women in defining “alternative models of being in the world” and yet, because of a woman’s ability to reconcile the political and the spiritual, Indigenous women have the power to facilitate a sea-change in the political ontologies of governance” (2007: 125). Stewart-Harawira says it is the reconciliation between the political and the spiritual that is the primary task in the development of new and sustainable ways of compassionate coexistence (2007: 125). This is because it is women who stand at the intersection of the politics of the local, represented by their families, communities, cities and of the global, the terrain of empire and capitalism (2007: 135). It is the Indigenous women warriors, Stewart-Harawira says are the ones who “re-weave the fabric of being in the world” into a new spiritually grounded and feminine-oriented political framework and process of being together in the world. In that process, she invites us to deeply embrace the Other, who she says is as the Elders teach us, Ourselves (2007: 136).<sup>41</sup>

This way of speaking about Indigenous women’s participation in a movement is more familiar to me. I see that our women’s voices have grown stronger and we are more politically savvy. I just have to look back on the experiences in Faith’s story to see the difference. Faith’s strength is evident as she speaks about the history of colonization, her experiences with overt racism and its silencing effects on her life and conception of herself as a Kanienkehaka woman. As her story is documented, her words serve in rewriting the history of Indigenous women.

Choctaw scholar, Devon A. Mihesuah points to the importance of Indigenous women in rewriting their histories, in essence connecting the past to the present. Most writings she says are devoid of Indian voices and thereby only partial histories (1996: 15). The multifaceted nature of Indigenous peoples as a whole has been described by

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<sup>41</sup> For a good example of Indigenous women’s re-weaving the fabric of Canada, see *Lovelace v. Canada* [1981].

Alfred and Cornassel, Simpson, and Kim Anderson and illustrated by in the narratives of the eight women of this study. Mihesuah articulates the importance of recognizing differences between women of the same tribe and community, thus creating whole histories (1996: 15). Cree/Métis writer Kim Anderson describes the use of stories by local Indigenous women as a ‘traditional way’ of generating knowledge (2000: 46). It is the collective stories (and hence collective memory) that tell the story of the larger picture about Indigenous women (which I call ‘owennasohnha’). In this work, the eight women’s narratives tell a story about Kanienkehaka women’s perception of their identity and roles in the community.<sup>42</sup> I provided the women with the opportunity to critically engage with what they said. Anderson calls this ‘reader response-ability’ related to traditional oral practices in Native cultures where it is assumed that the listener has as much a part in the creation of the story as the teller (2000: 48). This concept is found in the Iroquois idea of consensus where all people present have the responsibility to contribute to the decision making either in their own voice or through a designated speaker.

The power of voice has been explored in this work using the work of Paulo Freire. There are other theorists from the feminist tradition and women of color who also theorize the power of voice, such as Gayatri Spivak who writes of the power in recognizing all elements of oneself in your work as a way to move away from the objective, disinterested positioning in deontological work in the humanities. “When one represents oneself in such a way”, Spivak writes, “it becomes...a deidentification of oneself, a claiming of an identity from a text that comes from somewhere else (1993: 6).” The recognition and claiming of all parts of one’s identity within the family, community, nation, and nation-state serves to show all elements of the self as they are. “Making sense

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<sup>42</sup> The eight women came to the interviews knowing the purpose of the interview and that their names would be used. As it turned out, one of the women came back to me with the request that I not use her name. I decided then that I would not use the names of all the women. I thought about using Kanienkeha names, which can be very lengthy and confusing. In order to make it easier on the reader, I gave the eight women English pseudonyms from the letters ‘a’ to ‘h’, putting them in alphabetical order. The women were also given copies of their transcribed interviews and asked to read them and provide feedback. Most did not and felt confident in what they had said to me.

of ourselves is what produces identity”, Spivak writes (1993: 179). This work as a body of knowledge by and about Kanienkehaka women is a translation of experiences by women. I amend Spivak to call this translation ‘identity production’.

Devon Mihesuah describes a disjuncture between the past and the present writing on Indigenous women in the same way Spivak explores this same issue when she examines the idea of translation. What is lost in the translation of Indigenous women’s identity from our voice to the English of the colonizers is the rhetorical spaces between language, the taken for granted aspects of who we are. I explored the rhetorical spaces between facets of Kanienkehaka women’s identity as they are communicated in their narratives. According to Spivak “Rhetoric must work in the silence between and around words in order to see what works and how much (1993: 181).” The rhetorical space between the words is lost in translation that can be the same for Kanienkehaka women’s lives when translated into euro-formed notions of what it means to be an Indian woman. Terms like ‘aboriginal feminist’ connote a sense of womanhood that leaves out particular rhetorical spaces understood in the language of the individual Indigenous woman’s perspectives. We work in the language understood by all, English, and therefore find other ways of communicating that rhetorical space. Spivak says, the translator must “surrender to the text. She must solicit the text to show the limits of its language, because that rhetorical aspect will point at the silence of the absolute fraying of language that the text wards off, in its special manner” (1993: 183). Translation is the most intimate act of reading. “Unless the translator has earned the right to become the intimate reader,” Spivak poses, “she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text (1993: 183).” In relation to translation of writings by women in the third world, Spivak says that the writer should be capable of “distinguishing between good and bad writing by women, resistant and conformist writing by women (1993: 188).” Similarly, a translator of Kanienkehaka women’s lives should be in touch with what is going on in the culture and community where the women come from and be capable of

distinguishing between resistant and conformist aspects of women's lives. When we take Spivak's idea of translation further, the translator confronts what may seem resistant in the dominant society and what may be reactive in the space of the lives of the women (1993: 188). Spivak describes her process of translation. She first translates at top speed. She does not stop to think about what is happening to the English and does not assume an audience. Spivak writes "if I take the intending subject as more than a springboard, I cannot jump in, I cannot surrender (1993: 189)." Spivak surrenders to the writer in her writing, not to her as the intending subject. She surrenders in friendship. This way of surrendering to the text means being literal. When this version is done, she revises, not in terms of a possible audience but by the protocols of the writing in front of her, in a sort of English (1993: 190). Ultimately what Spivak illustrates is that it is important to recognize your different relationship with the language and the text (1993: 183). Spivak writes:

The history of the language, the history of the author's moment, the history of the language-in-and-as-translation, must figure in the weaving as well...Rather than imagining that women automatically have something identifiable in common, why not say, humbly and practically, my first obligation in understanding solidarity is to learn her mother-tongue. You will see immediately what the differences are. You will also feel the solidarity every day as you make the attempt to learn the language in which the other woman learned to recognize reality at her mother's knee (1993: 186,191,192).

As demonstrated in my personal narrative, problems arise when the reality recognized at the mother's knee creates environments of hostility and mistrust. This is preparation for the intimacy of cultural translation. The listener tries to recognize reality to see how far your solidarity goes. If you want to talk about the other or make a claim to be the other, then learn the other's language.

In this work I have not claimed to be anyone other than who I am. I worked at translating the life experiences of the eight women. I have been in a powerful position as a fellow community member who comes from the same history of oppression and subjugation, and also of empowerment in tradition, all of which enabled me to see things in a certain way and articulate a deep understanding about Kanienkehaka women's identity. It must be pointed out that I have not spoken for anyone—these eight women speak for themselves. In this way I resist external identification such as “special status” aboriginals, feminists, and peasants. The liberal nation state prefers a special status project for aboriginals. Hobsbawm deems Indigenous people as peasants in the realm of Marxist's need to homogenize all human experience into a communist frame. As such I situate myself in a frame consistent with Alfred, Corntassel, Simpson, Weaver, and Mihesuah. My research elaborates themes related to being Indigenous, yet implies the Indigenous women's view of becoming self-determined through recognition of collective memory. Shared experience in a cultural space provides the frame for viewing oneself.

### **Kanienkehaka Akaohnhasohna Owennasohna**

The subtitle above is translated here as ‘Mohawk women's kind many stories’. In the case of the eight women who told me their stories, I demonstrated that in many instances feminists do not speak for many Indigenous women. In the case of the eight Kanienkehaka women thought she might be a feminist while admitting she was not really sure what being a feminist meant. However, collectively Indigenous women answer to feminism and euro-formed historical data in both positive and negative ways in their commitment to the survival of future generations. The difference is being ‘determined’ and being ‘self-determined’, and the premier stage of being ‘self-governed’.

Who can speak for Kanienkehaka women better than themselves? White euro-centric feminists have no idea of what it's like to be a Kanienkehaka woman. Their ancestors never watched their wives and children being hunted down and slaughtered like

sheep or revisit the legacy every time a young baby gets left in the snow to freeze. These non-peasants have little credence in determining who and what is a Kanienkehaka woman.

In fact these eight Kanienkehaka women are quite self-determined. They exhibit, and indeed have always exhibited, as they describe their life's journey, a sense of self and reflection. They have pondered and continue to ponder their sense of time, space, and place. And they readily transmit their knowledge in defiance of those people deemed irrelevant to the Iroquois master narrative that is told in the meta-narratives of Kahnawake women. So here's how the women indirectly answered the research questions.

A model for personal development described early in the study considered these narratives as a process for healing unresolved historical grief. The nature of the historical unresolved grief derives from the traumatized place of the colonized in the transition from being a post-colonial (hence subjugated people) to decolonial world (hence emancipated people). There is a correspondence to the journey from denial, disorientation, and discovery that exists in the journey through the eight women's narratives. Firstly, the aspect of denial (derealization) exists in the traumas identified by the women in the interpersonal relationships—a yearning for unity between genders and other women that personifies the formerly feminist matriarchal-‘thing’. Secondly, disorientation created by the patrilineal edifice of the liberal nation state instilled in the women their collective resistance to obedience to authority, and becoming socialized to the dominant Canadian political hegemony brought on by Oka. Lastly, the discovery of their ‘inner Mohawk’ in the process of healing their traumas had in many instances been evoked by their interpersonal networks of husbands, families, and most significantly, other women.

**1. How is the Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women different from the feminist view of Iroquois women as the *other*?**

I illustrated the fact that many feminists assume the authority to authenticate what is authentically feminine to pose objective and rational arguments to make their own value claims for a place in the non-Indigenous political economies. Historical literature on Iroquois women misrepresents the true nature of Iroquois women and serves to load the feminist canon. We also saw how much of the aural history of the culture has been lost and the trauma of colonization has led to incorrect and misleading representations often taken as truth by Iroquois women themselves. Thus we see Iroquois women who demonstrate a feminist-authentic way of being that is antithetical to the way of being described by the eight Kanienkehaka women of this study. As I illustrated, my own mother is one of these contrary women.

It is the dominant society's historical facts and academic research that dictate what Iroquois women are to be about. The eight women tell another story which describes the modern version of male-female unity, characteristic of our ancestors' society. It was a changed conception of woman and their roles in Iroquois society which served the colonial objective as they colonized this country. As we recall the Suffragette Movement found inspiration in the esteem Iroquois society had for its women. This notion of esteem is based on European ideas of power and how it structures relationships between individuals. John Ralston Saul describes this clash of meanings in his work *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada* (2008). What he describes is Canada as a Métis Nation, heavily influenced in its development by Aboriginal ideas. The failure to recognize this influence holds the country back from its true potential. Saul says it is Canada's taste for negotiation rather than conflict, a comfort with the constant tension between individuals and groups, and a gut belief in egalitarianism that has Aboriginal roots. Saul points to the Mohawk idea of harmony achieved through balanced relationships rather than a linear, carefully measured, theoretically rational assumptions of common or civil law. Using this notion of egalitarianism, "Canada," Saul says, "seems to have eased its way into a relatively flexible approach" (2008, 43). Taking this notion

further, as we look to the eight women's narratives, we see the ongoing struggle of Mohawk women to recreate the inner unity in the self, their families, and in the community. This view of Kanienkehaka women presents a radically different understanding about the actions and lives of Indigenous women that moves rapidly away from the feminist view of the Indigenous *other*.

Indigenous women are victims of a process of authentication through intellectual colonization. However, through the eight narratives, Kanienkehaka women talk about their response to misrepresentation, abuse, and destruction of their families and communities. As a result, we see that their lives don't fit the western feminist paradigm of the down-trodden Indian woman. What we witness is eight women's lives which carry the meaning of the human cycle of life, death and rebirth, called mother-culture.

All except one of these women never describe themselves as feminist or even aspire to its doctrines. The sole person, the crypto-feminist, is hesitant to do so and regards feminism as something outside of herself. While the women do describe a kind of suffering at the hands of men, rather than trying to be part of a hierarchy of power these women look to find meaning in their suffering. Out of that found meaning of their lives they find happiness.

There are various themes that the eight women's accounts focus on. Unresolved historical grief is how descendants continue to experience the suffering of their ancestors. Another theme that emerges is the decolonization of the mind, of history, and of identity. A third theme is the recovery of Indigenous feminine traditions. A fourth theme that emerges is healing as the unity of the individual, the family, and of society is recreated. These four themes demonstrate the contrasting vision of colonization left in its wake the breakdown of Indigenous individuals, families, and societies. Healing undertaken by these women occurs through various stages. Healing for the eight women is a major theme that emerged as they described their lives in detail. These women have taken a good look at themselves, themselves in relation to others, and themselves in relation to

their community. No longer in denial about their reality, a process Freire poses as emancipatory, the women viewed carefully the influence of religious strife and politics on their development. Coping with change in the process of bereavement derives from dialogical engagement with one another through this work in recognition of their joint struggle. A few of the eight women focused on themselves first. Others could see the joint struggle faced by others in the community as they moved in its various social circles. These women illustrate clear examples of the denial and its accompanying features of anger, shaming, and blaming.

Alli went from hating her community and herself to using the medium of her professional work to dialogically engage with others about Kanienkehaka women's identity and present a positive image of women. As a result, Alli went from feeling like a nobody and now recognizes herself as a Mohawk woman and knows what that means. Barb left the community on her healing journey and found like-minded Indigenous women whom she engaged with. Cari uses the medium of her artwork to dialogically engage with other members of her community on relevant issues. Dara on the other hand, keeps to herself and works to resolve her issues on her own. Emma also uses the medium of her artwork to dialogically engage with herself and others. Her work with the children she teaches is also a way to dialogically engage with others on relevant issues that face the community. As well, Emma speaks with other women in her community about these same issues. This is something she had done since she was very young. Faith on the other hand, is dialogically engaged with her family. On a wider communal level, Faith engages with other community members through her extensive volunteer activities. Volunteering is her way of planting ideas that take root in the community. Grace also keeps mostly to herself as she grapples with the effects of oppression on her life. At times she reaches out to other women in the community to dialogue and find answers. Grace was one of the founding members of the Alcoholics Anonymous group in the community and is also part

of the Cancer Awareness Group. Helen also used her volunteer activities and board memberships as a way to dialogically engage with others in the community.

The eight women described the skills they learned from their mothers, grandmothers, and other women in the community. Ultimately what the women learned is how to keep their family happy and together. Kanienkehaka women in their own right have not blamed men for their lot in life. Rather they see their situation as a struggle to regain a sense of themselves as Kanienkehaka women through the unification of all parts of themselves, their families and their communities. What occurs then is a three-fold reconciliation.

The eight women describe a fragmentation occurring in them, in their families, and in the community of Kahnawake. This fragmentation comes from the clash between religions and the traditional faith, loss of language, loss of belief in a higher power, the clash between a communally based economy and the importance placed on money. Through teachings from mothers, grandmothers, community women, and community men, the women experience a three-fold reconciliation of the self, the family, and the community. The reconciliation of the self occurs first. Out of that there is a reconciliation of their families through what they pass on, and then there is the reconciliation of the community also through what they pass on in their daily activities as teachers and volunteers.

The notion of a Trinitarian unity is a common theme found in many Indigenous philosophies. In her articulation of an Indigenous research agenda, Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith uses the work of Gerald Alfred to describe these 'multiple layers of belonging'. Alfred refers to Kahnawake identity as nested identity and describes a tri-unity which includes localized Kahnawake, national Mohawk, broader Iroquois with the inclusion of pan-Native as a fourth layer, not relevant to this discussion (Smith, 2001: 126). The Unity is the ideal as seen in the consensus based decision making system of the Iroquois which requires common agreement between three sides of the fire to achieve

consensus on an issue. What is required as an individual in this process is what is considered a good mind, where your actions and words are based in the knowledge that they will benefit the common good of the people of the community.

Dara says it is important to look at the individual before looking at the family and then the community. Emma learned from the traditional people how to look after herself, the children, and the whole community. Emma sees similarities in the religions in that every person is responsible for themselves and responsible for their families and their children. Emma is the kind of mother to other people that she never had. Faith described how after her daughter died she and her children and her daughters had to work things out. Faith's work in the community as a volunteer is an example of her working on the community. Faith makes a point of praying for herself, her family and the community each morning. Grace knows that she has to take care of herself, her family and everything else will work out. Helen says accepting yourself, respecting yourself, do what you feel is right and learn for yourself.

Feminism values the Indian woman who promotes the binary view on relationships, much like the view propagated by my mother who places value in the ultimate strength and power of the women in her house. As a result, men were devalued and only there for one thing to propagate the species or do the odd chore. To her, men have no other value except to the bidding of the woman. This same view is held by other women in this community among others and comes out of a disempowerment experienced by women.

The communal healing journey for resolving the historical grief has its basis in the place where everyone joins hands in a common struggle for humanity. These eight women's hands are joined by my words. They may not be joined in a public common effort but I have figuratively joined their young and old hands together as we explore their common bond as Sky Woman's great granddaughters.

All the women expressed in their discussions with me the desire for a common bond to be reignited between the members of their community. They felt disappointment that this isn't happening right now but expressed hope for the future where the bond might be reformed. Their job, they feel, is to teach their children to love themselves and love one another which will then provide the foundations for the reestablishment of this common bond. Some of the women work at this effort through their professional work life, while others do it through their teachings to their children and grandchildren.

The women all work towards a unity in themselves as the starting point. As we have seen, Alli expresses her desire to be sure of her identity before she has children in order that her children will be secure in theirs. Alli's efforts at a reconnection with her identity began as a young woman in school when she realized that the history being taught about her people was incorrect. As she went on in her professional life, she continues to reconnect herself and others as she explores the identity of various young women in the community. Barb has also made the effort to join in this communal journey not only through her own healing journey but also in her public awareness of the political issues facing her community. Cari meanwhile uses visual images to communicate a common bond and awareness of identity in the young people she encounters in her personal life. Cari has reconnected the two halves of herself, the French and Mohawk sides of her identity. The pride she feels in herself as a Mohawk she uses as a vehicle for her artwork, whereas the French side is held in balance with her close ties to her mother. This connection, she maintains in her son with promoting closeness between him and his father after their difficult split. Dara works in the community promoting a healthy lifestyle among the youth of the community. Dara as a mother has also taught her daughter to be a strong and confident individual. Emma also uses visual images to communicate her knowledge of the history and culture of the community. Her participation in the various boards throughout the community also serves the same function. Emma works with children through teaching them how to be proud of

themselves and find value in believing there is goodness in life as a Mohawk of Kahnawake. Faith works to tie her family together by having suppers and family discussions on a regular basis. Faith also ties the community together as she moves between her volunteer activities and plants the seeds of change in the ideas she communicates. Grace, as she has worked to unify herself and protect her children from harm, unites her family by her fierce struggle to keep them safe. Grace's participation in her grandchildren's lives also serves to educate and unite the children in this common struggle for peace and goodness. Meanwhile, Helen also uses her volunteer activities to unite the community. Her first priority is her family as we have seen in the red book of photographs she prepared so long ago and keeps updated with yearly pictures of her growing family at Christmas.

Denial is still very much a part of Kanienkehaka identity. It can be seen clearly in the celebration of Christmas with a tree, decorations, masses of presents, and a turkey dinner. Denial can also be seen sometimes when women tell their children "well, he wanted me to have you, you know", and sometimes we get depressed, have addictions, and pretend to be what we aren't.

## **2. How is the legislated definition of Mohawk Indian identity different from Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or *real human beings*?**

The question posed was what do liberal philosophical theories have to do with Kanienkehaka women? As illustrated, liberal political philosophy provides the foundation for the authority to authenticate who is a fit and unfit member of society. The fit will be admitted to the dialogue and the unfit will perish. Indians in Canada are continually excluded from the dialogue. This is clear in policies that placed Indians among alcoholics, criminals, and lunatics as those unfit to possess the right to vote. This has since changed yet the remnants of such policies still have an effect today. The mentality behind termination policies continues to permeate Canada's interaction with Indians. This is seen in self-government policies which dictate the boundaries within which Indians

might govern themselves, and the structure of Canada's apology to residential school survivors and its subsequent compensation methods where a monetary value is placed on the suffering experienced by survivors. No where is there compensation for its collateral victims. While Canada apologized, it never really apologized. Canada did not take ownership of its actions towards Indians and acknowledge the root of the problem, its termination policies towards Indian peoples.

Central architect of the termination policy, Duncan Campbell Scott worked to "kill the Indian in the child" on the way to assimilation into the body politic of Canada (Harper 2008: 6850). There was to be no more Indian question. This policy resulted in the overthrow of traditional communal structures and the devolution of governance under a federally mandated system which both served in the destruction of the Indian communities and identities. By contrast to the patrilineal life asserted over native people is the traditional conception of the good life illustrated in the Sky Woman narrative. This conception is based on three fundamental ideas – everyone gets the right to be fed, the right to be happy, and the right to be healed. Before contact, every person on this continent could expect food, happiness, and healing. These highly humane concepts were totally disregarded by those who crafted Indian termination policies. Power was exerted by a government that assumed the right to be fiduciary of the helpless Indian ward of the state, an equal to any drunkard, thief, lunatic, and woman.

Indian people are deemed unfit under criteria expressed by actual liberal nation state policies that place Indians under special status while pursuing fitness for citizenship as an expression of liberal toleration. This special status translates into legislation like the Indian Act. Under this Act, membership, land rights, property rights, and social development are decided by external agents. There is a presumption by the nation state to have the authority to authenticate identity and is based on a consensus about what comprises a good. However a good Indian would be one who does fit in the special status category. Thus we can look back to the example of our math teacher. On the surface, she

is an Indian according to the criteria under the Indian Act. In her life, she is outside of the special status. She is a good liberal consumer. And she lives in a disorientated state.

The eight women of this study present a different idea of the ideal life as they overcome the disorienting effects of the power exerted by the liberal nation state over their lives. For example, the Oka Crisis of 1990 told these women what Canada thought of Indians. The disorienting summer of 1990 also brought clarity. What is apparent is that each woman found out they have a choice about their identities that differs from the legislated view of being a Status Indian. Enacting their right to that choice, they fully recognize the limitations placed on their choices by the effects of colonization and the Indian Act. These limitations have become part of the Indian identity. As they critically reflected on their identity, they also viewed the traumas that created the disorientation which was fed by the liberal nation state.

The eight women described in detail their current place in the healing and recovery process. In their descriptions, all the women describe the point at which their minds changed and their disoriented minds began to clear. For Alli, it was when the first rocks came through the car windows during the exodus of her family from the community during the Oka Crisis of 1990. Alli felt a searing hate for the first time. From that point onward Alli worked to learn about herself, and in the process discovered who she is as a Mohawk woman. Barb's mind change was more drawn out and not an instant awakening as Alli's. Barb left the community during the Oka Crisis and lived with her sister in Kanasatake looking after her niece and nephew. From there, she went on a healing journey that took her out to western Canada where she found a way to heal from the trauma of her life with her depressive mother and the death of her father. Barb had to move away to decolonize her mind. It was when she came back to the community that she could see the reality of the situation and felt whole enough to begin a life with her husband. Cari described her point of decolonization of her mind when she was in the last year of her studies. Her school funding was cut off because she married a non-native.

Cari felt like she had been stabbed in the back and was being shunned by her community as what was meaningful was taken away from her.

Other women became aware of their disorientation only by looking back on their lives and went through a more subtle process of discovery. Dara's awareness came from learning about different foods from both sides of her family. From her father's she learned about the Mohawk foods and traditions whereas from her Mother's she learned about French foods. What was instilled through food was a positive way of thinking about both worlds. Emma described the influence of her grandmother on her thinking. As well, the influence of other elders in her community circle that induced her move out from under the anger of her mother and into a world where she learned to respect longhouse traditions and way of being. Emma describes this as being brought into the loop as she found out from other children about Longhouse teaching and activities. Faith came to her own awareness when one of her daughters pointed out her weight loss in response to the death of her daughter. It was from there that Faith stepped outside of herself and began to take a good look at what her life had become. She realized that she had put her own beliefs aside for her husband's. Faith had lost sight of herself. On the other hand, Grace described her father's reaction to the violence directed at their home in response to an article written about her family. Grace's innocence was changed as she was told by her father not to let people know that she is Indian. Helen described a conversation she had with Steve McComber during the early formation of the Kahnawake Survival School. Growing up, Helen had witnessed community divisions along religious lines dictated how people could relate to one another. Her conversation with Steve erased the strict boundaries and what she found was that a Catholic and a longhouse person were talking the same language. Helen and Steve were no different from one another. They were able to see commonality in their human existence and their desire to better the lives of children in the community. As the air clears, the women face the realities of their lives where they can begin to enact a conception of the good life they choose.

The eight women describe in detail their worries, fears, threats out of which can be gleaned a notion of what constitutes their ideal life. In brief, Alli describes her ideal life as one in which she speaks Kanienkeha, is a vital part of her community, and has the recognition and respect of her people. Barb describes her ideal life as one in which she lives a quiet peaceful life with her husband, can travel freely across the United States/Canadian Border, and everyone can express their identity as Haudenosaunee unencumbered by Canadian bureaucracy. Cari describes her ideal life as one in which she can adopt any child she wants and the government doesn't get involved in reproductive issues so she doesn't have to deal with the identity question anymore. This ideal life also includes a family she and her fiancé create, where her son finds his own path, where there is no ignorance, and there are shared values and culture throughout the community.

Similarly, Dara describes her ideal life as one in which she can live with her non-native boyfriend in her community, in a community where judgment is not passed on people of other races, where she works hard, and helps to look after her grandchild. Emma describes her ideal life as one in which the children of the community have a sense of spirituality and a connection to what matters most – the value of life, the value of time, the value of being with people and having real conversations. Faith expresses her ideal life as one in which her grandchildren are happy and healthy. Grace describes her ideal life as one in which her children and grandchildren are safe and she is able to be vocal about being Mohawk in a positive way. Grace doesn't want to be confronted all the time with her identity or defend who she is. Helen describes her ideal life as one in which her children and grandchildren have a decent future in the community. Helen also wants the community to feel a sense of security.

What we see then throughout the women's ideal life is the common thread of loss of identity which includes the loss of language, loss of family structures, personal pain and hardship. All of these elements structure the lives and actions of the eight women. The eight women have taken these elements on as part of their being and what they

identify with as part of community life. Their continual struggle to overcome these elements is also part of their identity.

All eight women are grappling with the after effects of loss of identity. Each described various points in their life where they encountered written, verbal, or visual misrepresentations of their Mohawk identity. Themes emerge which show that there are elements of Mohawk identity which the women say includes loss of identity, loss of Kanienkeha, confronting your identity, defence of who you are as a Mohawk, prejudice, and the common experience of being a Mohawk which includes suffering through racism, prejudice, and living on a reserve. Elements of Mohawk identity also include speaking Kanienkeha, showing and wearing of common symbols like the Confederacy Wampum, an Indian Status Card, knowledge of the stories, history and political culture of the people, attendance at longhouse ceremonies, eating traditional foods like corn, beans and squash, being a catholic or a protestant, living a quiet life in the community, and participating in political and social activism, to name a few.

As Alli says, there is no right combination of the above mentioned cultural signs and symbols to being a Mohawk. Each woman has her own notion of what that means. As we look back to their narratives we can see further similar themes that emerge, themes that speak to a notion of identity grounded in the culture and history of the community that one would normally identify as being genuinely Mohawk. For example, in her narrative, Barb described her grandmother as a 'real Mohawk.' A real Mohawk in this regard was someone who knew the stories, knew their clan, could work respectfully with medicines, planted, and has infinite patience. Another common identity marker is the knowledge of Kanienkeha. Most of the women expressed some sort of connection to language either in their desire to re-learn it or a sense of regret that they never had learned it in the first place. Not being able to speak it means part of your identity is missing says Grace. As a result of loss of language, identity markers have become more pronounced.

Faith described how traditional symbols like the bear, wolf and turtle clans, the Iroquois confederacy belt, or the Mohawk Warrior Flag worn on clothing, or emblazoned on vehicles and homes are a sign of the collective identity of the community. In the past, Faith says that no one wore the outward symbols of Mohawk identity. This is because people knew Kanienkeha more than they do today. As a result, there was no need to wear outward symbols of Mohawk identity. Faith says that symbols physically remind people of who they are because of the gap in the language and teachings of how to conduct yourself as a Mohawk. Symbols also serve as a physical marker of your belonging to the group.

Another aspect of identity is seen in enacting the culturally promoted responsibility to the land by taking care of it and respecting the medicines. Traditional customs like longhouse ceremonies are also seen as part of Mohawk identity, along with identification with a clan. We are spiritual people Helen says. Grace described her participation in longhouse activities as “going back to your true self.” Add to this the issue of loss of language and what happens is that one can’t understand ceremonies, so you are missing out. What this illustrates is the double edged sword of Mohawk identity. If one element is missing, this loss feeds into other elements resulting in an overall sense of displacement and anger.

As described earlier, denial of Mohawk identity is a common theme found in the eight women’s narratives. This denial for survival purposes has become part of the Mohawk character. Since the early 1970s with the rise of the native rights movement, empowerment in your identity became a common theme. Since then, the children born after this time carry with them a sense of pride and identify strongly with their Mohawk identity. Barb is one of these children. She described in her narrative her involvement with her family in the native rights movement. She described it as a part of who she is. Empowerment also includes being feared as a Mohawk. Dara described her high school in the city of Montreal and how the kids from Kahnawake were feared. Being feared as a

Mohawk also became part of her identity. Dara was involved in protest activities at her high school which served to validate her identity as well.

On the other hand the women saw themselves through other people's eyes. The external view became mirrored in the self. Faith saw herself through other children's eyes as she grew up as a longhouse person in the community. She experienced fear and hardship because of the misrepresentation of longhouse people as devil worshippers. This didn't change in 1990. The incident brought Faith right back to the racism she experienced as a child. Faith described in her narrative how the media at that time perpetuated racist and negative stereotypes. Grace learned from her own experiences that to be Indian is to be trouble. As a result she learned to deny her identity, which then became a part of her. Out of this denial came anger at being Indian.

As illustrated earlier, most of the women have undertaken some sort of journey to heal themselves, their families and ultimately their community – described as the tri-unity. Their struggles are also what shape their own identities as Mohawk women. These struggles contain many similar elements like addiction, abuse, persecution for their beliefs, loss of language and culture, fractured relationships with family members to name a few. Dara for example says she is shaped by her struggle with addiction, involvement in sports and her survival from cancer. Faith's struggle to overcome her daughter's death which ultimately sent her on her healing journey she credits for making her the person she is today. Whereas Grace's struggles with alcoholism, a fractured family, abuse, guilt from the catholic religion, and her survival from cancer shape her as a person. Grace characterizes this journey as trying to find what's normal. For Grace, it was about deciding you are Indian, Onkwehonwe, or Mohawk and trying to figure out what that means.

Though they are not defined by their anguish, their joy and pride in Mohawk identity stands in stark contrast to the imposed identity of the Canadian nation state. The

eight women have a very different understanding of what it means to be a Mohawk that is far different than what the legislation says a Mohawk is.

**3. What is the Kanienkehaka woman's understanding of themselves in relation to the community of Kahnawake and the Mohawk Nation?**

With all that has been presented about how the eight women think about themselves, their view is evidently an emancipated one. In their words there is a clear refusal to be determined by someone else's criteria. They know who they are. Their thinking is reminiscent of how their ancestors conducted themselves and saw their purpose in life. Our ancestors were free and independent thinkers who adhered to a strict moral code which took into consideration the needs of the whole. Kawonohstonh, a Turtle Clan Mother illustrates these ideas by her words:

The Mohawk people are a free and independent people who are governed by covenants made in very ancient times by our forebears and handed down to us their children and these covenants protect our right and freedom to govern over our own affairs in our own way. These covenants are a precious inheritance for our children and our future generations with which no one can interfere.

Kawonohstonh (Alma Green Turtle Clan Mother)

In the 1950s these words were sent to the Queen of England. Their legacy is kept alive in the aural history and reminds us of who we really are as a people.

These words or a version of them are always invoked in the Mohawk language. Many of the eight women said the same thing but in different ways—in how they describe themselves, their upbringing, and how they conduct their lives. As they go through their lives, the women discover that they are still Mohawk women, descendants of honorable ancestors such as those Kawonohstonh talks about. If we were to jump forward into the future and look back on these women through the eyes of our great

grandchildren, one can say that these eight women are free and independent women and that they also conducted their lives according to the same covenants that governed their forbears in ancient times.

All eight women express the freedom to think and live a good life in different ways. Cari works hard as a community worker and finds that there are men in the community who expect women to stay home, have babies, and take care of their men. This is not the way she chooses to live her life. Cari's work in the community is a part of her identity. Dara in her own right focuses on the safety of the community. Dara is focused on safety and says community has lost its ability to look out for one another. Everyone has to lock their doors and people don't help each other anymore. Although, Dara points out that in crisis the community will come together. Similarly, Faith described this experience during the Oka Crisis when she volunteered to work with other women in the longhouse kitchen. Her experience illustrates Dara's point in that the community knows what it should be and what it has the potential to become. Yet, those who want to maintain the status quo outnumber those who want to see change.

Emma is in the unique position of being able to get a look at a cross section of the community through her work as a teacher. In her narrative Emma described in the children the loss of spirituality and belief in something greater. As a result, they look elsewhere for answers and support that she says their parents aren't providing. Emma described how those who went to residential school were never able to give hugs but showed affection and love through the act of giving material things. Her own grandmother was the example. She says her grandmother had a hard time trusting and never said 'I love you'. People carry around a lot of hurt and personal grudges Emma says. Faith also described her grandmother in similar terms. Faith's grandmother never said I love you or hugged rather she had a toy box that she kept for the children. The community is scarred with broken families. The breakage was brought about by the effects of colonization. In Grace's view, experiencing this history makes you from this

community. Ultimately one understands the suffering and finds a common bond with others in that experience.

In her narrative, Helen described the religious divisions in the community. As a result of being raised Catholic, Helen had no interactions with traditional people until she got involved in the establishment of the Kahnawake Survival School. It was then that she had the opportunity to understand first hand what Kanienkehaka traditional-minded people were like. What Helen saw was that true traditionalism is about respecting your gifts and giving back to the community, something she could strongly identify with. What she realized is that religion was out of the question, when it got down to basic human relations, she found that the Catholic, Protestant, and longhouse people were the same. In her own right, Helen espoused to her students, her own children, and her grandchildren the need to learn about others. Learning about others will make you a better Mohawk and better able to teach others what that means, she told me.

When it came to defining what a Mohawk is, the eight women made reference to the community criteria, which includes living your whole life in the community, maintaining the status quo, living like everyone else and not standing out. There are many unspoken rules of the community that one learns from a young age from the whispered collectivity in your ear. The three basic rules are as follows:

**Rule #1 - Don't marry a non-native**

One of the most fundamental rules taught in the community is that one should have a native mate and native children. Alli says this evokes anger in her as it limits your ability to make your own choices. Alli describes the effects of this rule in that every Mohawk of Kahnawake is forced to choose love or the nation. The women and children of interracial relationships are made to feel subhuman or sub-native. On the other hand, one grows up knowing how special it is to be a Mohawk and it would be wrong to deny that to their children. Alli recognizes that the idea of defining one's identity based on the amount of native blood you have comes from the Indian Act. This way of thinking has

become ingrained and subsequently it is an idea that is passed down intergenerationally and is now seen as truth. Identity now has come to be measured against racial stereotypes perpetuated in media, literature and by our own people that relate to this notion of blood quantum. These stereotypes describe an Indian person as having dark hair, dark eyes, and an auburn or olive complexion skin tone. The only way to achieve these characteristics is to marry another Indian.

The reality is that Indigenous peoples from all over the world come with light and dark hair eyes and skin tones. It depends on the natural environment in which they live. Cari also expresses dissatisfaction with these measurements. Those are physical things she says. Your identity is whom you grew up with. Your identity is your family, your lineage and is something you find for yourself as you grow. Identity takes you on quests.

There are consequences for the enactment of this idea of blood quantum as the basis for identity. In Barb's circumstance, she chose a native husband from across the Canada/United States Border. Despite the fact that her husband is a dark Native American Indian, even this choice presents its difficulties. Their life together is ruled by Canadian bureaucracy which says he has to be a Canadian citizen to live with her. Whereas the Kahnawake Law on Membership also says her husband has to go through some sort of formal membership process to live with her in the community. Both the formal rules of Canada and Kahnawake structure Barb's life even though she doesn't agree with them. Whereas Dara says identity is in mixed blood, to deny that means you are denying part of yourself. She says, using blood quantum is not a valid way to define oneself. Identity is inside. As a result of the blood rule, Grace also had to deal with the issue of people telling her she didn't look Indian enough. Because of her own difficulties growing up, Grace realizes the necessity of her children marrying another Mohawk to avoid the same issues she dealt with. Although she understood what her elders taught her about marrying out, Grace made a point of not teaching this same thing to her own children. As a result, her children grew up with the mantra 'marry a Mohawk' that they

heard from other community members. Helen grew up with the acknowledgment that if you married out you had nothing to do with Kahnawake, you couldn't come home, you lost your rights, you lost everything.

Out of this, those who carry the most blood and therefore have the most rights take it for granted, Alli says. They use their entitlements to live in a community where there are tax free benefits, access to social welfare, and yet they don't give back in any way. Alli describes this idea using the words – 'I was born here and I have the blood.' These words speak to a sense of entitlement. Those who don't have the blood are marginalized through Indian Act and Kahnawake legislation. These factors surrounding the issue of being with your own kind are part of the everyday reality of being a Mohawk in Kahnawake. The women all expressed an awareness of this important rule.

#### Rule # 2 – Don't leave the community

Audra Simpson describes the issue of 'feeling membership' that speaks to the sense of belonging a Mohawk from Kahnawake feels as they move back and forth across the Canada/United States Border for work or pleasure. Implicit in this understanding is the fact that Kahnawake is always seen as 'home'. This sense of belonging was not as rigidly enforced as it is today in the unspoken rules of Kahnawake. In the past, many people came and went as the availability of work dictated. Today, as the resources allotted to the community by the federal government grow smaller, outside taxes grow higher, and general overall living standards are higher. The desire, the necessity, and benefits of living in the community grow stronger with the unspoken rules that are used to guard what is left for those who tough it out in the trenches, so to speak. Helen described her birth in the community and the constant travel from New York City to spend the summer months in the community with family members. In those days there was no question of her belonging. When the time came for her to move back permanently, she was welcomed. Today the rules are different. I can say from my own experience growing up away from the community means that I am always considered

what I call an 'insider-outsider'. I am from here but I am referred to in this way – “Oh, she didn't grow up here.” As a result, I too structure my life according to this fact. I work hard at being a productive member of the community and don't take for granted what living in my community has to offer.

The norms of the community upon which one is judged include not leaving to go to school on the 'outside'. This fact highlights an us-and-them attitude that permeates the community. I witnessed this with my own daughter when she moved to a school in Montreal. She expressed to me worries about losing her identity as a Mohawk if she did so. She like others, are forced to choose between their community and their dream by the unspoken pressure put on them by their community of peers. Alli is direct when she says the pressure is immense. Alli described what happened when she left to go to university in the United States. She says she felt judged and felt like she had to fit into a box. If she didn't fit into that box then she was not a good Mohawk. Cari on the other hand sees the community as bridge builders, through the ironworking trade, Kahnawake families have the opportunity to live in other places and build bridges between the community and the outside. Cari sees herself as part of this bridge building; she characterizes it as being a citizen of the universe.

Whereas, another way this rule is expressed is the fact that it is precisely the circumstances of having grown up on the reserve, going to school and being called a savage actively validate your belonging to the community of Kahnawake. In this regard, the pain engendered by called a savage you carry with you and it reminds you of where you are from. If Kahnawake didn't exist anymore, we would still exist through the legacy of colonization. In not actively healing from this pain, it remains a constant reminder of who we are and where we come from.

Identification with the reserve also comes out of participation in a common struggle like the 1990 Blockade. Events that took place during that summer of 1990 are in the narratives of the eight women. At one point there were numbers of people that left the

community to find safety in Montreal. This precipitated the famous rock throwing incident at the Whiskey Trench on the other side of the Mercier Bridge. The people that chose to leave are forever seen as traitors to other members of the community because they didn't stick it out and suffer along with the rest of the people.

In contrast to the prevailing view, Helen knew growing up away from the community that she was Indian precisely because she came from Caughnawaga. Helen's experiences growing up outside of the community contribute to a different understanding of what it means to be from the community. In her view, you should leave and take the opportunity to see the world. Rather than just accept what comes from outside without question, the skill is having the ability to evaluate and take what is good from it. A lot of people just accept what comes from the outside and don't question it at all, Helen says. As a result, the good values that come from our own teachings and from the outside go unlearned. Kahnawake is not what it was years ago, where we were all individuals. Our own people, Helen described. Helen says the kids should stay to learn about themselves as Mohawk through the language and cultural teachings. With that foundation, then they can go out to different places.

Rule # 3 – Don't rock the boat

There is a perceived sense of what is considered right and wrong behavior in Kahnawake. Right ways of being include taking part in the day to day realities of living in any small town like getting your kids off to school, doing your job, running your business, taking part in recreational activities which include sports, social clubs, and drinking at the local Legion Hall, Moose Lodge, or Knights of Columbus Hall. Right ways also include driving an American made car, living in an unostentatious house, dressing modestly, and not being outwardly emotional. Wrong ways include speaking out publicly on various issues, going to university, being smart and showing it, being physically pretty, having children with non-native partners, bringing non-native partners into the community, and being more financially or socially successful than anyone else. If

you want to belong, you have to keep a quiet lifestyle. You don't stand out, much like crabs in a bucket. Others pull you back when necessary. In her own right, Helen was accepted back into the community precisely by standing out and not imposing herself. She maintained the status quo, going where she was needed when she was needed.

Other acceptable ways of being are remarked on as 'just the way it is.' These ways would include girls fighting over boys, women fighting over men, men and women cheating on their partners, gambling, drinking to excess, and young girls having babies. To anyone looking upon the community and using the dominant society as a yardstick, they could say these ways of being are wrong and that the community is dysfunctional.

Part of this dysfunction has been described by the women as the loss of an emotional connection between people. Many of the women describe never receiving hugs or hearing the words 'I love you' from those that mattered most. Barb described how men are capable of providing physical security but can't be depended upon to be there emotionally. A contributing factor to this dysfunction in relationships is the ratio of males to females. In a community where there is one male to every five females, the result is that men have their pick. There are many instances where men go in and out of relationships even after fathering babies with the women. On their part, the women who participate in this dysfunction don't know any differently. The emotional distance and lack of respect for oneself and others has become the accepted norm of the community. As a result the women are insecure, territorial and hateful towards one another, Barb says. Women lack the self-respect to be mindful of other women's relationships. They don't have respect and security in their own homes so they go somewhere else to find a partner. Barb experienced this first hand in high school and quit because of it.

Judgment from the community is also another characteristic that Barb says held her back and slowed her down. In her own right, Cari described a certain cruelty between women in the community. Women belittle other women who look after themselves and maintain a healthy lifestyle. This is learned from a young age and starts when young girls

have babies. Young girls encourage their peers to participate in this dysfunctional lifestyle. There are many instances of young girls dropping out of school to look after their babies. A contributing and control factor used to regulate the activities of others is jealousy and backstabbing, says Dara. As a result remarkable people often get pushed out or excluded, Cari says. In her own right, Helen didn't want to participate in this dysfunction that she witnessed in her work on governing boards of various community organizations. She chose to drop out of much of her volunteerism on these boards.

As a result of this rule, people don't want to venture outside of their comfort zone and enact their identity in positive and meaningful ways, Alli says. Success as a person is measured up to the standards set by the community. If one steps outside the standards set by the community you are seen as betraying your Mohawk identity. Therefore you stay under the wire and ultimately unhappy.

Another aspect of this third rule is in the issue of denial of issues like physical and sexual abuse which serve to keep things on an even keel. The prevailing view is that if you ignore them, it will go away. Grace describes this when she says the Kahnawake community hides the truth. As a result, major issues like sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, and reverse racism are not easily dealt with. Discovering truths comprise the life's work of all these women.

Alli described the challenges of finding one's Kanienkehaka identity as she focused on her professional work. Through her work Alli strives to find meaning in her identity as a Kanienkehaka woman. Alli described a desire to be solid in her identity before starting her own family. This is Alli's way of confronting oppression head on and discontinuing the transmittal of unresolved historical grief to her children. Alli realizes that she does not have to be so concerned about mere survival and overcoming poverty like her parents and grandparents. Rather she has the luxury to confront oppression head on. By contrast, Barb was brought into direct confrontation with oppression through the actions of her parents. Taking the power back and learning to be Indian, as Barb

described it, included physical fighting and using guns. It was the feeling and determination to be ready to die, to die for the land, Barb described.

Cari uses the Iroquois culture and stories she learns about as a way to make sense of what is going on in her community today. Cari takes what she learns and paints it into murals throughout the community or teaches it to children through arts and crafts activities. She forces others to take a good look at the richness inherent in the culture and learn from it. Dara, battled with addiction and worked hard to overcome it when she became pregnant with her daughter. She discovered her own strength out of these circumstances.

Emma confronted the intergenerational oppression transmitted by her mother first by acting out and then eventually finding her way back to the traditions of the Longhouse faith. Faith began the process of healing herself after her daughter died. Her daughter's death was the catalyst to confronting the pain and grief of denying her Longhouse faith. Her daughters saw the truth and she realized that what was instilled in her by her upbringing was still there.

Other women had different encounters with their truths. Grace's deep depression for which she was hospitalized forced her to begin to confront the effects of oppression on her family. Grace has made it her life's work to continue to heal herself and maintain the safety of her family. In her own right, Helen chose to use education as the vehicle to confront oppression. The truth Helen saw was that the children needed to learn about their culture in a way that enabled them to grow. As a result, Helen worked to change the way her students thought about their community and become participants rather than mere observers. She also gave them the opportunity to learn how to respect differences.

Acknowledging each other's voice and perspectives is about finding common ground upon which to build a peaceful coexistence. In the initial overview of this process, it was felt that the women were at the denial phase. But through working with their words, I see now that these women have actually moved beyond this phase and are in the

discovery phase. All eight women are currently working towards the achievement of a peaceful coexistence first in themselves, then their families and ultimately in their community. As they discover who they are, they reach towards a normalcy where oppression is in the past the true nature of Kanienkehaka personhood and community is present.

Alli expresses a sense of confidence in her identity that she achieved as she finished up one project and headed into another. Alli feels her work is presenting a positive image and she is achieving what she set out to do. Whereas Barb through her healing journey has discovered a sense of inner peace from which she views the world more clearly. Meanwhile Cari listens to the children she works with and finds meaning in the artwork they produce. Cari is in tune with the young population of the community. Dara is preoccupied with her health and getting through as a Cancer survivor. Emma on the other hand engages with the youth of the community as she teaches in her classroom. Emma takes the opportunity to provide the kids with knowledge and an understanding of what it means to believe in something. Faith listens closely to her grandchildren, often getting down on one knee, eye to eye to ensure they are heard. Helen, in her volunteer activities and relationships with her grandchildren also has taken the opportunity to listen to what is being said around her.

## **Conclusion**

There are many in the community of Kahnawake who identify with ‘the Mohawk Nation.’ To call a people a nation, you objectify an identifiable group. The Mohawk Nation is a thing, a rigid construct built on notions of identity taken from euro-western thinkers like Mill, Marx and Engels, Rawls, Kymlicka, and Wallerstein.

The eight women don’t talk about identity in a way that communicates a sense of identification with nationhood. Rather, they talk about their identification with their families and the community itself. What this illustrates is the primacy of

interdependencies as the basis for Mohawk identity rather than any identification with a border. Through their discussion, we see then that unity of the self, of the family, and of the community has primacy in how they communicate their Mohawk identity.

The eight women personify what it means to be 'Mohawk.' They don't just use labels as external identity markers; these eight women see themselves, their children and community as Mohawk. Therefore based on this research, 'Mohawk' is a people and speaks to an unbounded identity that is interpreted in a unique way by each individual.

As an expression of their unbounded identity, the eight women described how they interacted with the borders of the reserve boundaries. If we contrast Cow Woman to this notion of 'Mohawk' as expressed by these eight women, she is a member of a First Nation. She has membership and has thingified being Mohawk along with herself. She is constrained by the man-made borders of her identity as a Canadian Indian and a Mohawk of Kahnawake.

The eight women I talked to, however, are not constrained by these same man-made borders. Barb moves across the Canada-United States border on a regular basis as she goes about her business. She is free to determine who she is as a Mohawk. Cari grew up away from the community of Kahnawake but moved back to make her life here. Dara moves in and out of the community as she runs her business. Helen was born in Kahnawake, lived in New York City and came back. There were no borders for her. I grew up away from the community and moved back to make my home here. We women are reaffirming what goes without saying in the way we all view our reserve, it is a constructed entity of Canada and also our home, our sanctuary. Our elders call Indian reserves "kanonhstaten", which interpreted means "sanctuary".

The notion of borders is only brought out when the women describe the community's unspoken rules one and two which state one has to marry a Mohawk and one doesn't leave the community, respectively. Alli is the only one currently grappling with this notion of borders as she lives in the city of Montreal away from her family. "I

ask myself what kind of Mohawk am I to be living in the city and not be living with my own people and what does that say about me?”, Alli questions. Despite living in the city, Alli still refers to herself as Mohawk, meaning her identity also transcends the boundaries of the community.

If we recall, Wallerstein promotes dialogic engagement as an aspect of liberalism relevant to solving the crisis in the collapse of the geopolitical-geocultural world system. By contrast, through this study, these eight women engage in helping me to understand and communicate that at the community level the dialogical engagement that is valued and used is at the interpersonal level – self, family, community. Kahnawake and Mohawk are not ‘things’. They are people.

This study suggests that Kanienkehaka women inherently represent their identity in ways that are not always visible to the naked eye. Identity goes without saying. As I illustrated through the narratives, modern Kanienkehaka women don’t carry stereotypical cradle boards or walk in corn fields all day as the feminists would hate. However the signs and symbols of Mohawk culture have transformed into what Faith describes as external indicators of Mohawk identity which are cultural and historical symbols encapsulated in bumper stickers, t-shirts, and ribbon shirts. Those items are not Mohawk culture but communicate a conception of personal identity and being a part of the community of people who think of themselves as Mohawk. These eight women govern over their lives. They work outside the home. They work in the home raising their children. In doing so, the covenant made between our women forebears and Sky Woman is the precious inheritance being enacted today.

What we see then is that the on-reserve workforce is dominated by women who are governing over Kahnawake affairs. Although some men represent an obstacle to the achievement of Mohawk cultural recovery, the unity missed by the feminists is also still being enacted in the dialogically engaged world of Mohawk men and women. So there is something to be said about the enactment of cultural presuppositions by women that have

its roots in the Iroquois master narrative. Sky Woman's life is our life as we live it to this day. We are her great granddaughters, but our story is no different. We became corrupted and are now in the process of healing. The eight women's stories offer a clear connection, a path to the Sky Road where our Grandmother lives and watches over us.

## Chapter Fifteen

### Denouement

As a post-modern, post-colonial, Kanienkehaka woman yet to go through decolonization, I cannot limit my involvement in the Kanienkehaka world as a researcher of this Mohawk ‘thing.’ I have to be true to myself as a participant-observer who is a Kanienkehaka and lives in the community where she works. As I worked over the last five years I continually critically reflected on my involvement in this work, these women’s lives, and on my life in the community. Especially what it will be like after this work is finished. A question I constantly reflected on—Who will benefit from this work?—is one that is left in the hands of those who read this work. It is up to the reader to determine how they can benefit from what the ten women of this study have to say about themselves as Kanienkahaka women.

What I have come to understand is that the process of planning, research, and writing have taken me on an extended research journey as part of a larger critically reflective journey that I began many years ago. The research journey started in the breakdown of my family after my mother became ill, to asking questions of myself as her daughter and taking these same questions into the research setting. This work contributes to Indigenous discourse on identity and the growing body of work that defines Indigenous methodologies for research.

I have attempted to disarm the liberal canon in a way that makes sense. Those of us who live in this Indian world are in constant survival mode and don’t have the luxury of being able to take the time to examine why we think the way we do about our identity. I have had the time and the personal mandate to do just that. That is why I examine the influences on our thinking like the idea of blood quantum. One ally in the disarmament of this understanding of the imposed thinking is Wallerstein’s critique of liberalism. Not

meant to think for me, his work cogently neutralizes the liberal project's penchant for an assumed authority to determine the identity of other people.

The practice of assuming the authority to determine the identity of the other must stop. This study shows that the Indian Act has not achieved its stated purpose. We are still here and our own understanding is still very much alive in the minds and actions of our people.

This work has taken us first through the retelling of the Sky Woman Story, the Mohawk master narrative of our origins. Through this retelling of her story Kaniienkehaka women and girls learn about mother culture. This work shows how community and tradition can be weighing on the individual. The three rules for living in Kahnawake illustrate this well. The reconnection with true Kaniienkehaka identity is through understanding oneself, oneself in their community and through a rediscovery of tradition which seems as a contradiction of sorts. By illustrating the need for connection to community and tradition as part of Kaniienkehaka identity may appear as an essentialist view where the personal accounts for everything and where the rediscovery of tradition becomes a kind of religious experience that cannot be doubted. The use of the Sky Woman story as part of a distinctly Kaniienkehaka Indigenous methodology is one way of addressing the issue of Kaniienkehaka women's identity, but it can also appear as a glorification of the wisdom of the ancestor. The insistence on the merits of Sky Woman's story is a way of clearly demarcating Kaniienkehaka identity from the settler society's hegemonic normative framework. Although the story is part of the Haudenosaunee master narrative, what must be remembered is that it is just a story.

We learn from Sky Woman of the unimaginable events that she encountered and how she overcame them to continue to live. Sky Woman is our 'mythic' heroine because she reminds us of ourselves and our immense capacity to survive. Imagine yourself in her place—that you brought life to a new world, your daughter died, your grandsons are at war against each other, and that you have the responsibility to watch over all women-

kind. No living human being can say that. So what does this Sky Woman story mean? Is it a rhetorical dogmatic set of rules that one must live by, or is her story reflected in the resiliency of nine Kanienkehaka women?

If one were to intellectualize Sky Woman's story, her story could be seen as part of a larger Haudenosaunee religious belief system which might imply that her story cannot be wrong or that it cannot be criticized. Her story may appear as a kind of doctrine by which one must live one's life to be a true Onkwehonwe and failing to follow her life's path means one stays 'corrupted'. This is not so. The beauty of Kanienkehaka thought and reason is that one can disagree. This is seen in the consensual decision making process utilized by my ancestors and recently to a limited degree by people of the Kahnawake community. In this regard one is supposed to bring alternative ideas to the group and with reason and evidence convince others of their merits. This same idea can be seen with regard to how one can and should approach Sky Woman's story. You can take what you need from it and leave the rest if you want. There are no rules here. Her story is not meant to define what one must do to achieve the good life. Our elders never tell us what to do, they tell us what they did and it is up to us to decide how we will address the issue. In this case, we all have our own stories to tell that illustrate our own experiences in this world and what we do to strive for peace and happiness. What we get out of Sky Woman's story is what she shows us is already in ourselves—strength, resilience, mother-culture, goodness, wisdom, fairness, to name a few.

My own story elicits an understanding of how I learned of and enact my Kanienkehaka identity as one of Sky Woman's great granddaughters. Our identity clashes directly with liberal and Marxist theory of the individual. These women defied determination by others and traversed the process of individualization, de-individualization, and back to re-individualization to emerge as vibrant examples of the survival of Kanienkehaka identity. The imposition of the theoretical lenses distorts views of the individual and even assumes an authority to authenticate who are truly fit

individuals. As illustrated, re-individualization takes place through critical discourse in self-determined individual women who gain strength through their critical examination of themselves in the context of their lives. It is from their life stories that I pose the valorization of the collective memory of individuals and their own thoughts on their identity—not to homogenize Kanienkehaka women into some generalizable conclusion about what Kanienkehaka women should be like. My basic research assumption was to show the relationality of these women to their world.

I examined these women's lives by asking and answering three main questions. But as I answered these three questions using their narratives I also became self-aware. Here, directly, are the answers to the questions:

**Question 1: How is the Kanienkehaka women's view of Iroquois women different from the feminist view of Iroquois women as the other?**

Their answers illustrate how they see themselves in general as everyday women. As I examined their answers to this question, I also realized that their answers spoke to an understanding of how these women relate to Kanienkahaka women's tradition in general. These women also let me know how they came to learn about the women's role and who their role models are as mothers, grandmothers, sisters, and aunties. The women also taught me how they pass this knowledge on to their children, grandchildren, and friends.

**Question 2: How is the legislated definition of Mohawk Indian identity different from Kanienkehaka women's view of themselves as Onkwehonwe or real human beings?**

In their answers, the women described how they comprehend, respond, and interpret the recognition of their identity as it is communicated in the legislation developed by the Federal Government of Canada. In their responses it was found that the women use imposed terms to communicate their identity. Words like Mohawk, Indian, and Catholic were used by these women to communicate who they are more so than words like

Onkwehonwe or even Kanienkahaka as one might expect. These terms are found in the legislation and have become accepted in the everyday vernacular of the community of Kahnawake. What is important is that these women use words like 'Indian' to describe themselves in their everyday settings. In doing so, they re-appropriate these terms so that they take on positive meaning. As illustrated, descriptors like 'Indian' and 'Mohawk' have particular meaning that comes out of the women's lives and the history of the community in relation to Canada. And as we saw in their narratives, these women view themselves very differently from what these terms connote in their use by Canada.

**Question 3: What is the Kanienkehaka woman's understanding of themselves in relation to the community of Kahnawake and the Mohawk Nation?**

In accordance with Kanienkehaka tradition, I asked—Who are you? What are you doing? Why are you doing that?—and aligned these questions to the tenets of critical discourse which requires the individual to ask themselves these same questions. In their answers, the women demonstrate their understanding of their own roles as woman, mother, grandmother, sister, aunty and friend in the community of Kahnawake.

The women's stories incorporate views on aspects of the collective culture and history of Kanienkehaka of Kahnawake, and of the community in relation to the outside world. They also bring forth new knowledge about Kanienkehaka identity through their stories about growing up in other places, their political and social activities, and their knowledge of history. Their understanding about Kanienkehaka identity is different from what the wider society of Canada has come to see as Indian identity—A dysfunctional group of misfits struggling over rights, land use, addictions, and family violence to name a few.

As we saw in their narratives, the women are in continual conflict with the Indian Act's legacy as an assimilationist policy. The legislated identity imposed on Indian peoples by the Act structures, limits, defines, and oppresses ones ability to be oneself. To

personify rather than reify ourselves, we women demonstrate that humane quality of compassion that is truly the translation for the word “kanoronkwa”. When I reflect on the type of thinking that my ancestors had about who they really were as illustrated by Kawonohstoh's words, their thinking appears to stand in contrast, indeed even conflict, with the way I was raised and taught by my own mother despite her constant espousal — “This is the Mohawk woman's way”. I ask now, what exactly does that mean? And, where does her thinking come from?

I was not a free and independent person growing up with my mother. I thought that her way of being was the right way to be as a Mohawk woman. Yet, her actions didn't mirror back what she was talking about. As I illustrated in my narrative, a number of years ago I took a step back from my mother. I think we all do this at some point, especially as our parent's age. This hasn't been easy for me, but this distance has given me time to critically reflect on myself, my relationship with my mother, and by consequence her. From a distance, I can see a woman struggling in the final twenty or so years of her life. I can imagine what I would be like at her age if I hadn't had the opportunity and supportive atmosphere to heal from my hurts. All of her dysfunction, pain, and suffering could be construed at first glance as self-interest, disrespect for the other, objectification of love, and an extreme view on the political life of Kanienkehaka people. I can see clearly now that through the dysfunction she inherited and attracted as an adult, she never learned how to access the strengths intrinsic to the role of mother.

In my narrative, I described my constant quest to learn from other women the skills my mother was not able to teach me. I only had to look around me to see what I was missing out on. I rebelled and left home at sixteen. I went back to my mother at periods when I needed a mother most—when my first daughter was born, when I built my house, and when I was struggling through graduate school the first time. Through my life I paid constant homage to the ideal I thought my mother was. I took her last name and combined it with my father's so that I could be closer to her in spirit. In university I

wrote many of my research papers on my people with her guidance. I only came to recognize later on that there are many different viewpoints that need to be looked at and respected. I was not encouraged to find other points of view and I didn't begin to see them until I had the fortitude to seek them out on my own.

When I moved back to the community of Kahnawake I continued to define myself as a Mohawk woman using the tools and externally authenticated symbols of the culture and community. I changed my band membership away from my father's where I had been automatically registered upon birth according to Indian Act regulations. I gave my first two daughters her last name. As I worked at the Mohawk Nation Office as an office manager, I couldn't have been more immersed in her perspective and gotten more respect from her. In those years I also got involved in protests where I brought my daughter along with me and exposed her to dangers that I shouldn't have. When I built my house, I built it near hers. I built it with the perspective in mind that it was mine and my daughter's and that would be it. Now there are eight of us in a house built for three. As I continued through school I completed a masters thesis on the Mohawk Warrior Flag. I see now that I didn't take into consideration all those other viewpoints out there. I couldn't see them. I had been taught to fear those who thought differently than her. As a result I was immersed in the teachings of other Mohawks who are the figurative ambassadors and mentors of what I view as an extreme and radical political side to the Mohawk Nation. These people have been involved in the Native Rights Movement since the 1960s and suffered recriminations because of it. I feel these people are caught in between the older traditional-minded generation who carry the thinking like that found in the words of Kawonohstoh and the younger generation like myself. They are part of the class structures a la Wallerstein, created out of the inequalities in Mohawk society brought about by colonization. As children, many of them grew up poor and when confronted with the riches offered by cigarettes, gambling, and ironwork, they became conflicted. To be wealthy means you have to give up some of yourself.

These people are the 'clever minority' who benefit from the continued dysfunction of the many. They have figured out how to use the capitalist world economic system to reap its benefits while mislabeling their actions as 'nation building.' One example is Louis Hall who wrote the Warrior's Manifesto and designed the Mohawk Warrior Flag, two potent symbols of the Native Rights Movement. Contrary to their original meaning and intent, Hall's symbols speak to a world where violence and anger bring the Mohawk nation to the forefront. This view is dismissive of true peace and harmony that our ancestors spoke of and keeps the Mohawk communities in upheaval.

Let us go on. In all those years I struggled with relationships. It wasn't until I met and married my husband that I came to understand why those relationships were so troubled. My husband grew up on the Six Nations Indian Reserve near Brantford, Ontario. He is the only boy in a family of nine children. He grew up poor working in tobacco and strawberry fields with his family, earning only enough money to pay for his school clothes. Yet, despite the unfortunate circumstances of his youth, he has managed to achieve recognition for his work as a filmmaker, writer, and community activist. He earned a PhD from Cornell University and teaches at a one of the most prestigious universities in Canada. He is the smartest and kindest man I know. My husband was able to see a side of me that was true to my nature as an artist, writer, and woman. He nurtures the best in me and encourages me to look at other viewpoints on the world.

In the year before we got married, my mother changed drastically and she no longer had the ability to be mindful and considerate of others. In searching for an answer to her behavior, I came to believe she had a small stroke. This has never been diagnosed. She has an aversion to the 'white man's medicine'. It was as though the trauma to her brain opened a hole in the brick wall surrounding her pain and hardship. A wall she had so carefully constructed over a lifetime. My mother became intolerable in her behavior. She acted in ways and said things that were ever more hurtful and irrational and when confronted by her family on her actions, refused to change. I can remember looking at her

and thinking she will never be what I need her to be—a woman to talk to, someone to share in my accomplishments, or a doting grandmother to my children. This woman has become someone I don't know. I felt a deep sense of loss and I began the process of mourning the mother I thought I had. I had to learn how to cope with her as she is.

The first step to coping was to put some distance between us and start thinking for myself. One of the first things I did was I married the man I wanted. In doing so, I was excommunicated. My mother didn't come to our wedding. This was painful but I took the time to understand why she did it. I see now that I didn't marry the man she chose. I chose a man who could speak for himself, is a nurturing father who is very involved in his children's lives, is open and honest, peaceful, and doesn't impose himself but shares his knowledge with others in a way that promotes dialogue.

I believe my Mother sees the Mohawk Nation as some sort of entity in itself, supreme to all other nation-states. This is the ideal in theory. But as a theory it was that developed over time to support ideas about our people that perpetuate what we have come to believe about ourselves—that we are supreme diplomats, our women are powerful, and that we are unified as a Confederacy. In reality, we are individuals with our own ideas about who we are and what we want in life. Mohawk identity is not about the little red card with a number on it and the tax-free benefits of living on an Indian reserve. The eight women I spoke to are free and independent people. In their words the women show us that the idea of a nation seems to be secondary to the idea of being a people in the way our elders talked about who Mohawks really are. There is a sense of *peopleness* that the women communicate rather than being citizens of a political entity called 'Mohawks of Kahnawake.'

As we recall, the math teacher was 'thingified' as a the ultimate liberal consumer accorded special status by her birth as a half Mohawk woman who paid her taxes, drove her cars, and owned her time share condominium. The women I talked to don't thingify themselves as a 'Mohawk' or 'Indian' and see their identity as a conduit to gaining what is

owed them through the Indian Act. The women taught me about the interconnectedness of the self, of the family, and of the community, teachings which I brought into my life.

These eight women are mothers, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, women, Catholics, Protestants, Longhouse, bear, wolf, and turtle clan members, reformed alcoholics and drug abusers, film makers, clothing designers, artists, craftswomen, teachers, mediators, and peacemakers to name a few. They have a very different view of themselves as Mohawk women, one that includes all the hardships and tribulations that came from colonization. Elements of their identity include denial, anger, fear, pride, defiance, and empowerment. These are part of who they are as Kanienkehaka women. These women are not in an in-between existence characterized by Homi Bhabha's concept of third space. These women are who they are precisely because of their suffering and their birthright as Kanienkahaka women.

There is a saying that goes 'you reap what you sow.' These words are relevant to understanding what has been achieved here. By sharing their stories, these eight women have managed to create a beautiful garden from which our future generations can learn about themselves, much like the first seeds dropped by Sky Woman as she danced and sang the first Woman's Planting Songs. Each of their stories is like one of those seeds. In the future, those children who feel like they have nothing to believe in will now have to chance to see that they do have something, a legacy that was passed down to them by women like Alli, Barb, Cari, Dara, Emma, Faith, Grace, and Helen. There are many more women out there who have similar stories to tell but no one to tell them to. I encourage others to share their stories with one another. Just think how many stories there are across the land among the descendants of Sky Woman who are yet on their walk.

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