

# COLONIALISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR LIBERATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF MALISEET WOMEN

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At the height of the Native women's struggle to correct some of the sexual inequalities in the *Indian Act*<sup>1</sup> a decade ago, a curious event happened in the life of my husband. He was attending a pipe ceremony with elders at a hotel in Ottawa when the glass ashtray in which the sweetgrass was burning split exactly in half, with a loud crack. At first it seemed to be merely a disruptive event without meaning, but on reflection he could see a powerful symbolism in that event. Many Aboriginal men, some of whom were in that room at the time, had led or supported the struggle to keep the patriarchal *Indian Act* unchanged and to prevent Aboriginal women from exercising their traditional roles in their communities. To my husband, that broken ashtray symbolized the disruptive split between men and women in Aboriginal communities across this land, a split that had been created not by the women's struggle, but by forces both inside and outside of our communities.

What were those forces, and how had they created this painful split? Even though I had spent most of my adult life trying to piece together the oral and written history of my people, nothing made any real sense until I began reading the works of Paulo Freire and Frantz Fanon, thinkers who have devoted much of their lives to understanding and writing about the oppressive forces of colonialism and the struggle for liberation.<sup>2</sup> Only then did I begin to comprehend that the divisive forces at work in our societies were no more and no less than the ugly faces of colonialism. It still remained for me to learn precisely how colonialism had operated on my community.

This did not begin to happen until I came across the works of some recent writers on Native women and colonization, specifically those of Eleanor Burke

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<sup>1</sup>R.S.C. 1985, c. I-5 [hereinafter *Indian Act*]. See K. Jameson, *Indian Women and the Law in Canada: Citizens Minus* (Ottawa: Minister of Supply and Services, 1978); B. Schwartz, *First Principles, Second Thoughts: Aboriginal People, Constitutional Reform and Canadian Statecraft* (Montréal: Institute for Research on Public Policy, 1986) at 329-352; L.E. Krosenbrink-Gelissen, *Sexual Equality as an Aboriginal Right: The Native Women's Association of Canada and the Constitutional Process on Aboriginal Matters, 1982-1987* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Verlag Breitenbach Publishers, 1991).

<sup>2</sup>P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) and F. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1966).

Leacock on the Montagnais-Naskapi of Labrador, now known as the Innu.<sup>3</sup> For this presentation, I will focus on the works of Leacock which are drawn from the writings of Paul LeJeune, a Jesuit priest who lived among the Innu during the 1630s.<sup>4</sup>

What, you may ask, do Leacock and LeJeune have to do with Maliseets, the Woo-lus'-te-goo-geu-wi'-uk or "people of the beautiful (St. John) river", when Labrador is so far away? First, the Innu and Maliseet share similar cultural traditions. Their economies are based on hunting<sup>5</sup> and their languages, both Algonquian, are almost mutually intelligible, much like French and Spanish. Second, their experiences with the fur trade and the missionaries were very similar. Both groups saw the focus of their hunting turn from large game to small furbearers after European contact,<sup>6</sup> and both were the targets of Jesuit evangelizing efforts beginning in the 17th century, if not earlier.<sup>7</sup> Finally, oral records from throughout the Wabanaki region consistently confirm what early explorers, traders, and church recorders said about the steady contact and intermarriage between Innu and Wabanaki people at missions and trading posts on the St. Lawrence River from Rivière-du-Loup and Tadoussac to Chicoutimi and Sept-Isles.<sup>8</sup> (The

<sup>3</sup>Several of the works of E.B. Leacock are referred to throughout this article. See also Leacock, "Montagnais Marriage and the Jesuits in the Seventeenth Century: Incidents from the Relations of Paul LeJeune" (1976) 6:3 *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* at 77-91.

<sup>4</sup>P. LeJeune in R.G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in North America, 1610-1791* (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers, 1896-1901) [hereinafter *JR*].

<sup>5</sup>See F. Speck, "Culture Problems in Northeastern North America" (1926) 65:4 *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* at 282-287.

<sup>6</sup>See E.B. Leacock, "The Montagnais 'Hunting Territory' and the Fur Trade," (1954) 56:5 *American Anthropologist Memoir No. 78* at 47, 71-72 and D.R. Snow, "Abenaki Fur Trade in the Sixteenth Century" (1976) 6:1 *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* at 3-11.

<sup>7</sup>See the map of the St. Lawrence attributed to Jesuits ca. 1685 showing missions in what is now northern New Brunswick in W.F. Ganong, "Crucial Maps in the Early Cartography and Place-Nomenclature of the Atlantic Coast of Canada" (1935) 7:2 *Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* at 124. See also early Jesuit relations of Fathers Biard, Masse, and LeJeune in *JR*, *supra*, note 4.

<sup>8</sup>In *The Works of Samuel de Champlain*, vol. 1 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1922) at 98-106, Samuel de Champlain, at Tadoussac in 1603, records Etechemins (Maliseets), Algonquins and Montagnais celebrating a victory together. According to a Jesuit relation of 1663-64 (*JR* 48, *supra*, note 4 at 279), there were Montagnais (Papinachquois) with others at Isle Verte (Maliseet territory) in November 1663, and a Montagnais hunting group wintered that year south of the St. Lawrence, also in Maliseet and Micmac territory (*JR* 48, *ibid.* at 279-289 and *JR* 49, *ibid.* at 16-37). For a Penobscot oral tradition of the great earthquake of 1663 at Tadoussac (Tertousaqu) see H. Stamp, "The Water Fairies" (1915) 28 *Journal of American Folklore* at 312. At the installation of a Montagnais chief, Etechemins (Maliseets) and Abenakis were present. See *JR* 52, *ibid.* at 223-227. At Midnight Mass in 1676 Father Crespicul baptized two Abenakis and three "Etechemins" at Tadoussac, and in March 1677, nine families of Etechemins and Algonquins arrived at Metebetchouan (*JR* 60, *ibid.* at 251). For

name "Wabanaki" means "the people of the dawnland", a name now commonly used for the Micmac, Maliseet, Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Abenaki people.)

Before I describe Leacock's thesis, it is important to explain the many other reasons that her work is so relevant to an understanding of Native history in the Maritimes, and to an understanding of the gender struggles that I and many women are still experiencing.

First of all, the writings of Father LeJeune, on which Leacock has based her studies, comprise a unique body of information to which there is nothing comparable in this region. Although some European explorers and missionaries such as Champlain, Lescarbot, and Biard were in the Maritime region twenty to thirty years before LeJeune's arrival in Labrador in the 1630s, none of the Maritime recorders wrote quite as extensively of Native culture as did LeJeune, none lived quite so intimately with Native people for as long as LeJeune did, and none learned the Native language half as fluently as LeJeune. Unlike LeJeune, the Maritime recorders, for the most part, lived in ghettoized settlements at Passamaquoddy Bay or Port Royal (Annapolis) and made only infrequent forays to the villages and settlements of Native people. Consequently, the Maritime records of Micmacs and Maliseets are more a reflection of the preconceptions and misconceptions of outsiders who dealt with the people primarily in the public sphere of formalized relations. Such relations were on a male to male basis, thus the recorders utterly lacked appreciation for the role of women in our societies.<sup>9</sup>

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church records of Etchemins north of the St. Lawrence at Tadoussac, Kenogaming, and Chicoutimi, (1676-1671) see L. Larouche, *Le Second Registre de Tadoussac, 1668-1700*, Montréal, Les Presses de L'Université du Québec, 1972 aux pp. 21, 24, 25, 30-32, 34, 36, 37, 39, 85. Around 1910, Jim Paul, a Maliseet of the St. Mary's Reserve, spoke of hunting in his youth north of the St. Lawrence River. See W.H. Mechling, "The Malecite Indians with Notes on the Micmacs" (1959) 8 *Anthropologica* at 199.

<sup>9</sup>See E.B. Gonzalez, "An Ethnohistorical Analysis of Micmac Male and Female Economic Roles" (1982) 29:2 *Ethnohistory* at 117-118; D. Ezzo, "Female Status and the Life Cycle: A Cross-Cultural Perspective from Native North America," in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Twenty-Second Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1991) at 137-144; M. Chamberlain, "The Primitive Life of Wabanaki Women" (1902) 2 *Acadiensis* at 75-86; A.H. Morrison, "Wabanaki Women Extraordinaire: A Sampler from Fact and Fancy", in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Fourteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1983) at 125-136. The one exception to this general situation lies in the account of Maliseet life in the 1690s by John Giles. However, his account was written more than a century after Biard's in 1736. Furthermore, his account was that of a captive who thus experienced only a limited piece of Maliseet reality, and then only in the midst of the brutalizing crucible of the colonial wars. See J. Giles, *Memoirs of Odd Adventures, Strange Deliverances, etc., in the Captivity of John Giles, Esq., (Boston, 1736)* (Cincinnati: Spiller & Gates, 1869) at 16-17, for a description of the role of women in ritual torture of war captives. See also D. Ezzo, "Female Status in the Northeast" in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Nineteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1988) at 56, on collective female status in Wabanaki society. In the case of William Pote, his stay as a prisoner of war in two Maliseet villages in 1746 was only brief, but he does confirm Giles' account regarding the collective power of women in the ritual torture of war prisoners. W. Pote, *The Journal*

Still another reason LeJeune is so important to us is that his description of the Innu affords rare and clear details of a traditional, pre-contact hunting society only beginning to confront pressure to change. After reading LeJeune and Leacock's analyses, one can see in the accounts of Biard and others just how deeply Micmac and Maliseet societies had already changed by the early 1600s under pressure from the fur trade, which by all accounts had begun in the Maritimes nearly a century earlier. This also raises serious questions about the validity of using early Maritime accounts from this region for reconstructing traditional Micmac and Maliseet cultures.<sup>10</sup> I will have more to say on this point later.

Another reason why Lejeune's accounts are so critical to us in the Maritimes is that he clearly articulates the deliberate Jesuit designs to colonize Aboriginal people. There is nothing quite so candid in the missionary records for the Maritime area, although Jesuits had a large hand in christianizing and colonizing our people. One reason for this, of course, is that Jesuit records for the 17th century in this region are almost entirely lacking, except for those of Fathers Biard, Masse, and a few of the Jesuits later in the century.<sup>11</sup>

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of Captain William Pote During His Captivity in the French Indian War, May 1745 to August 1747, ed. by J.F. Hurst (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1896). For the Innu, see E.B. Leacock, "Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution" (1978) 19:2 *Current Anthropology* 247 at 250. Reprinted in E.B. Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981) at 133-162.

<sup>10</sup>See D.V. Burley, "Proto-Historic Ecological Effects of the Fur Trade on Micmac Culture in Northeastern New Brunswick" (1981) 28:3 *Ethnohistory* at 203-216; P.M. Seeber, "The European Influence on Abenaki Economics Before 1615" in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Fifteenth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1984) at 201-214; T.J. Brassier, "Early Indian-European Contacts" in B. Trigger, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians*, vol. 15 (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978) at 78-88. That contact with the French had been going on for some time is apparent in this comment by Biard (*JR* 1, *supra*, note 4 at 177) about Membertou who was reputed to have been over 100 years of age: "...Membertou assures us that in his youth he has seen chimonutz, that is to say, Savages, as thickly planted there as the hairs upon his head. It is maintained that they have thus diminished since the French have begun to frequent their country ... ." See also Biard (*JR* 3 at 105): "They are astonished and often complain that since the French mingle with and carry on trade with them, they are dying fast and the population is thinning out. For they assert that, before this association and intercourse, all their countries were very populous, and they tell how one by one the different coasts, according as they have begun to traffic with us, have been more reduced by disease..." Cartier's account of his reception at the Bay of Chaleur by Micmacs waving furs on sticks suggests also a well-established fur trade as of 1534 as cited in M. Lescarbot, *History of New France*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1968) at 45-46.

<sup>11</sup>Father Julien Perrault on Cape Breton 1634-35 in *JR* 8, *supra*, note 4 at 157-167. Father Gabriel Dreuillettes on the Kennebec River 1646-47 and 1651-52 in: *JR* 31, *ibid.* at 183-207; *JR* 37, *ibid.* at 241-261; and *JR* 38, *ibid.* at 17-43. Father P. Morain at Rivière-du-Loup 1677 in *JR* 60, *ibid.* at 263-273. Jacques and Vincent Bigot in what is now Maine in the 1680s and 1690s, *ie.*, *JR* 65, *ibid.* at 87-97.

Along with its focus on Lejeune's accounts, Leacock's work is important to us because she did extensive fieldwork among the Innu in 1950 and 1951, at a time when the old hunting economy was still very much in evidence. The experience afforded her the opportunity to glimpse some of the reality described by LeJeune and to assess the effects of the colonial policies he so candidly described and initiated.<sup>12</sup>

Leacock focuses her attention on the role of women in Innu society, and how that role has been changed by colonization. This is precisely the object of my own inquiry in this region which began during the painful years of the 1980s. Thanks to Leacock's analysis, I have come to make some sense of the experience of women in Aboriginal society today. It is this understanding I want to share with you.

Unlike the historians and anthropologists before her, Leacock came to the startling conclusion that the band organization of 1950 with its leaders, its names, and its defined territories, simply did not exist in pre-contact times.<sup>13</sup> One of her many quotes from LeJeune tells all: "Alas, if someone could stop the wandering of the savages and give authority to one of them to rule the others, we could see them civilized and converted in a short time."<sup>14</sup>

LeJeune was obviously not faced with a formalized band, but with fluid groups of several families, not always related as kin, but uniting and dispersing as the need was felt. What was most astounding, and alien, to him was the egalitarianism, the high degree of harmony and personal autonomy, and the concomitant dispersed nature of decision-making among both men and women, which Leacock incidentally still found evident in 1950. In Leacock's analysis, personal autonomy was not only possible but necessary in a society where all were totally interdependent, and where both production and consumption were shared. Leadership arose out of personal influence, and only for as long as a task required it. It was decidedly not dependent on the power to force compliance by giving or withholding resources, as in the European sense. According to Leacock,

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<sup>12</sup>E.B. Leacock, "Matrilocality in a Simple Hunting Economy" (1955) 11:1 *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 31 at 34. Reprinted as "Matrilocality Among the Montagnais-Naskapi" in E.B. Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981) at 63-81.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.* at 248. Earlier authorities had posited that the patriarchal and patrilineal family hunting groups had been pre-European, but Leacock argues that their conclusions were drawn from early descriptions of Native cultures already deeply changed by contact. See F.G. Speck, "The Family Hunting Band as the Basis of Algonkian Social Organization" (1915) 17 *American Anthropologist* at 327-328.

<sup>14</sup>E.B. Leacock, "Class, Commodity and the Status of Women" in R. Rohrich-Leavitt, ed., *Women Cross-Culturally: Change and Challenge* (Ninth International Congress of Anthropological Sciences, The Hague: Mouton, 1975) 601 at 609.

leadership in such a society was "not only weak, but irrelevant", since decisions were made by the consensus of all who were responsible for carrying them out.<sup>15</sup> Leacock's comment is that "decision-making in this context calls for concepts other than ours of leader and led, dominant and deferent, no matter how loosely they are seen to apply."<sup>16</sup>

Only in such an egalitarian society, Leacock explains, can women be considered equal, although she prefers the term "autonomous", saying that "equality connotes rights and opportunity specific to class society and confuses similarity with equity. ... Strictly speaking who can be or wants to be equal to anyone else?"<sup>17</sup>

Leacock goes on to press the point that Europeans, anthropologists, and western society in general have ethnocentrically imposed a model of development on all people that is tied to the degree to which decision-making resembles western forms of power and control. Thus, we have models of development that move from band to tribe to chiefdom to state, all related to a movement from dispersed decision-making to the western ideal of centralized power and authority. According to Leacock, the hierarchical view of gender roles fits this ethnocentric model perfectly, even though the defining of gender roles is universal and not an automatic indicator of superiority or inferiority. As she says, "the possibility that women and men could be separate but equal is seldom considered [by the anthropologists]." She adds that even the term "tribe", meaning a territorially bounded and politically controlled entity, is nothing but a "creature of colonial relations", a creature that deliberately separates "public male authority" from "private female influence", and then labels the separation and resultant hierarchy as universal.<sup>18</sup>

Space does not permit me to cite examples from the works of early missionaries and explorers in this area, but it is sufficient to say that there are enough clues in their works to conclude that LeJeune's observations must have been true for Malisets and Micmacs as well. Early writers in the Maritimes also

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<sup>15</sup>*Supra*, note 12 at 249 and note 14 at 608-610; Leacock, *supra*, note 9 at 250. See also T. Morantz, "Northern Algonquian Concepts of Status and Leadership" (1982) 19 *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* at 482-501.

<sup>16</sup>Leacock, *supra*, note 9 at 249.

<sup>17</sup>*Supra*, note 12 at 247.

<sup>18</sup>Leacock, *supra*, note 9 at 247-48 and note 14 at 610-611. See also A.G. Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonquian Cultures, 1504-1700* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969) at 91-95. See, for example, J.E. Chute, "The Concept of 'Tribe' as a Useful Tool for Examining Micmac Organization and Leadership" in W. Cowan, ed., *Papers of the Twenty-fourth Algonquian Conference* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1993) at 17-28.

frequently lament that our leaders did not have the power to rule people as in the European sense.<sup>19</sup>

This dispersal of decision-making among both men and women in traditional Maliseet society is certainly confirmed by any knowledge of our culture and history. It shows up in our language, which has no gender. It shows up in our terms of kinship which, for the most part, are precisely the same for maternal relatives as for paternal relatives, indicating a means of reckoning lineage and relationships that is neither patriarchal nor matriarchal, but bilateral.<sup>20</sup> According to our recently deceased elder, Dr. Peter Paul, our people showed a strong tendency towards matrilocality insofar as a husband often took up residence in or near the family of the wife. This custom survived until a 1951 change in the *Indian Act*, which outlawed it.<sup>21</sup> The fact that residency could be with either the wife's family or the husband's is but another indication of the shared nature of decision-making.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>According to Biard in *JR 1, supra*, note 4 at 75 "[Membertou] has under him a number of families whom he rules, not with so much authority as does our King over his subjects, but with sufficient power to harangue, advise, and lead them to war, to render justice to one who has a grievance and like matters." Biard in *JR 2, ibid.* at 73 says: "... among them, each man is his own master and his own protector. They have Sagamores, that is leaders in war; but their authority is most precarious, if, indeed, that may be called authority to which obedience is in no wise obligatory. The Indians follow them through the persuasion of example or of custom, of ties of kindred and alliance; sometimes even through a certain authority of power, no doubt." And Biard in *JR 3, ibid.* at 5 says: "You will see these poor barbarians, notwithstanding their great lack of government, power, letters, art and riches, yet holding their heads so high that they greatly underrate us, regarding themselves as our superiors." See also M. Lescarbot in H.P. Biggar, ed., *Nova Francia, or a Description of Acadia (1606)* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1928) at 309: "But this Sagamos hath not an absolute authority among them, but such as Tacitus reporteth of the ancient German Kings: the power of their Kings, saith he, is not free nor infinite, but they conduct the people rather by example than by commandment." See also Leacock, "Status Among the Montagnais-Naskapi of Labrador" (1958) 15 *Ethnohistory* 200 at 206.

<sup>20</sup>W.H. Mechling, "The Malecite Indians with Notes on the Micmacs" (1958) 7 *Anthropologica* at 89-103; J.A. Frisch, "Cognatic Kinship Organization Among the Northeast Algonkians" *Occasional Papers in Anthropology No. 2* (Halifax: St. Marys University, 1977) at 34-36, 45-46 & H. McGee, "Foreward" at vi.

<sup>21</sup>Existing church records from the 18th and 19th centuries reveal a marked tendency toward matrilocality, which is consistent with information from the late Dr. Peter Paul who had mapped out residence patterns on a number of New Brunswick Maliseet reserves for several decades in the 1900s. He concluded that men more often lived in the wife's community until the 1951 change in the *Indian Act*.

<sup>22</sup>It is important to note that women within our culture are accorded deep respect that comes from our powers as givers of life, much like the powers of the earth itself. This respect is evident in some of the earliest records of our people which describe our practice of not harming women and children in war. See M. Lescarbot, *The History of New France (1618)*, vol. 3 (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1914) at 215. Our women of extraordinary spiritual power are described in C. LeClercq, *New Relations of Gaspesia with the Customs and Religion of the Gaspesian Indians*, vol. 5, ed., W.F. Ganong (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1910) at 223. More evidence of this respect comes from our

How, then, did we get away from egalitarian, consensus-making, and power-sharing societies? In Leacock's analysis, the fur trade was the single most important factor in the shift from large, extended, egalitarian kin-groups with dispersed decision-making to a hierarchical social structure with strong chiefly authority and a subordinate status for women. Recent research has tended to concur with this analysis.<sup>23</sup> The fur trade struck at the heart of Native cultures, their values of sharing and cooperation, and their corresponding lack of any concept of private property. Indeed, early recorders were repeatedly surprised by the high degree of sharing and generosity among Micmacs and Maliseets in spite of the long-standing influences of the fur trade. By the end of the 1600s, however, instances of individualism and sharp dealing began to appear in the record.<sup>24</sup>

I have referred to evidence that Micmac and Maliseet societies had already undergone great changes by the beginning of the 1600s due to the fur trade. In spite of frequent references in the early records to the weakness of chiefs' authority, there is contradictory evidence suggesting the beginnings of a shift towards European-style hierarchical authority. This evidence lies in the references to chiefs arbitrating differences, redistributing goods, and dividing and assigning hunting territories. This practice was decidedly a consequence of the fur trade, as it would have been useless to portion out hunting territories in pre-fur trade times

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language. It was Dr. Paul, again, who pointed out to me that the root word in Maliseet for the female principle is also the root word for "love", "tree", and "moose", which, not coincidentally, are all sources of life and regenerative power. Even more striking examples of respect for the life-giving powers of women are the women who appear in our oral traditions. For the most part they exemplify wisdom, sharing, and humanity as flowing from their natural gifts and original instructions as women. Among them are Guluwus'kob's grandmother (Monimquess or Groundhog), who teaches her grandson all he needs to know to survive, the First Mother, who gives her body to become corn, a sacred food for the people, Malabim, who sacrifices her life so that the people will live, and the unnamed woman who literally melts the ice heart of a Gi-wakw or cannibal giant. As for the evil character, Buke-chin-squess or "stump-woman", we learn even from her of the folly and danger of power exercised over others, when that power is not derived from the life-giving and natural powers of women. See W.H. Mechling, "Malecite Tales" Memoir 49, No. 4 Anthropological Series, Canada Department of Mines, Geological Survey (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1914); C.G. Leland, *Algonquin Legends of New England* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884) at 246 and 342; J. Nicholar, *The Life and Traditions of the Red Man* (Bangor, Maine: C.H. Glass, 1893); and F.G. Speck, "Malecite Tales" (1935) 48:187 *Journal of American Folklore* at 38-47.

<sup>23</sup>See Leacock, *supra*, note 6. See also R. Bourgault, "The Indian, The Metis and the Fur Trade: Class, Sexism and Racism in the transition from 'Communism' to Capitalism" (1983) 12 *Studies in Political Economy* at 57; K. Anderson, "Commodity Exchange and Subordination: Montagnais-Naskapi and Huron Women, 1600-1650" (1985) 11:1 *Signs* at 50, 53; C. Martin, "The European Impact on the Culture of a Northeastern Algonquian Tribe: An Ecological Interpretation" (1974) 3d ser. XXXI *William and Mary Quarterly* at 3-26; E.B. Gonzalez, "Changing Economic Roles for Micmac Men and Women: An Ethnohistorical Analysis" Mercury Series, Canadian Ethnology Service, Paper no. 72 (Ottawa: National Museum of Man, 1981).

<sup>24</sup>N. Denys, *The Description and National History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia, 1672)*, ed. by W.F. Ganong (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1908) at 444-450.



when people generally followed migratory herds of caribou, which, unlike beaver, did not stay within specific territories.<sup>25</sup>

Statements by Biard and others, suggesting female subordination, are even more telling of the early changes in Micmac and Maliseet societies.<sup>26</sup> Here, some of my earlier stated concerns would apply about the misperceptions of most European men, who used their own biases and cultural assumptions in describing Aboriginal political and social realities. Indeed, the common custom of women skinning and butchering the game was far from slavery, considering that it was the women who made most of the decisions regarding the sharing and consumption of food.<sup>27</sup>

Among the most incongruous elements in early documents are the instances of abuse of women and inter-group violence.<sup>28</sup> Such abuse and violence, however, can readily be understood in light of Leacock's analysis as a consequence of the already far-reaching influence of the fur trade on Micmac and Maliseet societies. According to Leacock, "the tragically bizarre forms of personal violence among foraging people", around the world are the direct consequence of

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<sup>25</sup>Evidence includes Lescarbot's statement at *supra*, note 22 at 15: "So they have few quarrels; and if any such thing happens, the Sagamos cries a halt, and does justice to him that is offended, giving some blows with a stick to the wrongdoer, or condemning him to make some presents to the other to pacify him, which is a mild form of overlordship." For other evidence of growing chiefly authority there are the comments showing that chiefs here were responsible for arbitrating differences and redistributing goods as in Biard (*JR* 1, *supra*, note 4 at 75): "He has ... power to ... render justice to one who has a grievance. ... He does not impose taxes upon the people, but if there any profits from the chase he has a share of them, without being obliged to take part in it." On the evidence of dividing up the land see Biard in *JR* 3, *ibid.* at 89: "These Sagamies divide up the country and are nearly always arranged according to bays and rivers." There is evidence that the phenomenon of a grand chief was relatively new in this comment of Biard's regarding Membertou, the Micmac grand chief: "... he was the greatest Sagamore, the most followed, and the most feared that they had had for centuries... ."

<sup>26</sup>See Biard in *JR* 3, *supra*, note 4 at 101: "... now they have no other servants, slaves, or mechanics but the women. These poor creatures endure all the misfortunes and hardships of life; ... in short [they] undertake all the work except that alone of the grand chase, besides having the care and so weakening nourishment of their children." See also Lescarbot, *supra*, note 22 at 169: "The women were in another place apart, and did not eat with the men; wherein may be noted a bad custom among those people ... ."

<sup>27</sup>Biard in *JR* 3, *supra*, note 4 at 101: "... they [the women] prepare and erect the houses, or cabins, furnishing them with fire, wood, and water; prepare the food, preserve the meat and other provisions, that is dry them in the smoke to preserve them; go to bring the game from the place where it has been killed ... ."

<sup>28</sup>Biard in *JR* 1, *supra*, note 4 at 173: "... the women only serving them as slaves, whom they strike and beat unmercifully, and who dare not complain; and after being half killed, if it so please the murderer, they must laugh and caress him." Also Biard in *JR* 3, *ibid.* at 103: "The husbands beat them unmercifully and often for a very slight cause. See also Lescarbot, *supra*, note 22 at 165: "True it is that our savages kill one another without ceasing, and are always in fear of their enemies ... ." See also *supra*, note 24.

traditional economies that have been “thoroughly and abruptly disrupted.” It is an assessment that explains the phenomenon of suicide among Micmacs later in the 1600s, and it is an assessment that I believe speaks to our times and our communities, as well.<sup>29</sup>

Leacock’s analysis is essential for the truth it brings to the dialogue, as it cuts through the political or religious agendas of androcentric writers of history or anthropology. Most importantly, it undermines those who would have Native people believe that the system imposed on us somehow has its roots in our traditions. That so many of us believe this lie is simply another manifestation of our colonization.<sup>30</sup>

Another key factor in the change from egalitarianism to hierarchy was the conversion of Native people to Christianity. The religious agenda was the principal reason priests had come to North America. They saw little here that resembled religion in the European sense since our spirituality was non-theistic and non-institutional. To us there was, and is, spirit and power in all things, living and non-living, born and unborn, animal and human – a spirit and power to which we are required to show respect at all times through thanksgiving, ceremony, and respectful behavior. However, this respect for the power in all things (“kchimundo”) was misconstrued as savage or barbaric, and was targeted to be changed. This great power, we were told, was bad, and the only good power, “God”, existed in heaven, outside of the world. Thus, our world was to be literally despiritualized and desanctified. The power we knew to be in all beings and things, including

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<sup>29</sup>*Supra*, note 12 at 139. See G. Pelletier, “The Micmac Dilemma at the End of the Seventeenth Century” (1980) *Journal of the New Brunswick Museum* at 103-111.

<sup>30</sup>This issue lies at the heart of this paper. It is the point made by Fanon and Freire that for colonialism to operate, history must be misrepresented and individuals must be co-opted to become spokespersons both for colonialism and its new versions of history. The struggle for liberation, hence, requires not only an understanding of colonialism in the abstract, but a very deliberate effort to deconstruct and demythologize history, the main purpose of this paper. See S. Paul, “Sak’em’s Rules of Order” (Spring/Summer 1991) *Artscraft* at 10-11, for an attempt to reconstruct traditional band government based on early records. The problem, of course, is that European influence was already in evidence at the time of the earliest records as evidenced by the strong chiefly authority that was already displacing the dispersed nature of decision-making common to most traditional societies in Northeastern America. See W. Fenton, “Leadership in the Northeastern Woodlands of North America” (Winter 1986) *American Indian Quarterly* at 21-45; R. Grumet, “Sunksquaws, Shamans, Tradeswomen: Middle Atlantic Coastal Algonkian Women During the 17th and 18th Centuries” in M. Etienne and E.B. Leacock, eds, *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1980) at 43-62; R. Vachon, “Political Self-Determination and Traditional Native Indian Political Culture” (July-Sept. 1979) *12:3 Interculture* at 39-55; Morantz, “Northern Algonquian Concepts of Status and Leadership”, *supra*, note 15; Leacock, *supra*, note 19 at 200-209; and E.S. Rogers, “Leadership Among the Indians of Eastern Subarctic Canada” (1965) *7 Anthropologica* at 263-284.

women and the earth, was to be seen as bad and very definitely subordinate in a newly imposed hierarchy of power and authority.<sup>31</sup>

Just how closely the spiritual goals of the missionaries were tied to the colonial goals of European rulers can be seen in the writings of LeJeune, who made no secret of his agenda for colonizing the Innu. According to Leacock, his was a four part plan which aimed to change all aspects of Innu life, economic, social, and political, in addition to the spiritual. As such, his plan was to have enormous impact on the status and role of women.

LeJeune's first goal was to eradicate the Innu form of shared decision-making which occurred when all took part in hunting or trapping. In its place, Lejeune wanted to institute the idea of formal chiefly authority. To this end he was assisted by the fur trade, which logically tended to shift decision-making from the kin-group to successful (male) hunter/trappers who thereby gained both economic control and personal influence. Instinctively, LeJeune knew that permanent settlement for the Montagnais would also promote the goal of strong chiefly authority, for it would mean fewer people participating directly in production (hunting/trapping) and the related sharing and decision-making. Once settled, those who maintained access to the means of production, and to outside resources through trapping and trade, were the hunter/trapper males who controlled not only the resources, but also the people, by virtue of their ability to give or withhold resources.<sup>32</sup>

To the colonizers, this institution of European-style hierarchical power was essential to control whole communities of people in the process of colonization. As virtual foot-soldiers in the most hierarchical of institutions, the Church, Jesuit missionaries were natural instruments in the colonial designs of Europe. Not only did Jesuits speak in terms of colonial designs; they participated fully in promoting hierarchical relations.

Appalled at the high level of individual autonomy and the total repugnance for any form of punishment in Innu society, LeJeune's second goal was to introduce the principle of punishment. Such an idea, of course, was dependent on the establishment of chiefly authority and a hierarchy of power and authority to mete out the punishment. Once instituted, it would become the threat by which the

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<sup>31</sup>Akwesasne Notes, ed., *Basic Call to Consciousness* (Summertown, Tenn.: Book Publishing, 1991) at 74. See also K.M. Morrison, "Montagnais Missionaization in Early New France: The Syncretic Imperative" (1986) 1:3 *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* at 1-23.

<sup>32</sup>E.B. Leacock, "Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program for Colonization," in M. Etienne and E.B. Leacock, eds, *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1980) at 27. Reprinted in E.B. Leacock, *Myths of Male Dominance: Collected Articles on Women Cross-Culturally* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1981) at 43-62. See also *supra*, note 14 at 610-611.

subordination of children, women, or whole classes and populations would be achieved and maintained.<sup>33</sup>

LeJeune's third, and possibly most important, goal was to remove Innu children from home and community in order to educate and "civilize" them. To him this was absolutely essential since parents would not tolerate any form of punishment, and since no program of civilization or colonization could succeed amidst the influence of parents and relations.<sup>34</sup>

Of central importance to this discussion was LeJeune's fourth goal, which was to institute the idea of female subordination or patriarchy as in European family structures. Perhaps the most oft-quoted statement of LeJeune is one he addressed to a man who seemed to him to be too controlled by his wife. Lejeune told him that man "was the master and in France women do not rule their husbands."<sup>35</sup> This statement is most revealing of LeJeune's true intentions.

It is clear that LeJeune did not accomplish his ambitious goals of colonization during his stay in Labrador, except perhaps in small ways. As for our people, the Woo-lus'te-goo-geu'wi-uk, we may never know how similar or effective Jesuit programs may have been here, due to the lack of records from Jesuits who served on the St. John River from 1700 to 1763.<sup>36</sup> However, we do know from our present situation that, together with the influence of the fur trade, the missionaries were ultimately very successful.

In the area of religious conversion it appears that syncretism, or blending of the old with the new, was likely the initial response of our people, as it was among

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<sup>33</sup>Leacock, "Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program", *ibid.* at 27-28, (point two).

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.* at 28 (point three).

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.* citing LeJeune in *JR 5, supra*, note 4 at 179. See also S. Brodribb, "The Traditional Roles of Native Women in Canada and the Impact of Colonization" (1984) 4:1 *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* at 96; *supra*, note 14 at 608; and Leacock, "Montagnais Women and the Jesuit Program", *supra*, note 32 at 27-28 and 30-35, point one (permanent settlement and chiefly authority) and point four (European family structure and male authority). See also B. Medicine, "Northern American Indigenous Women and Cultural Domination" (Winter 1994) *Cultural Survival Quarterly* at 66-69; M.A. Jaimes with T. Halsey, "American Indian Women at the Center of Indigenous Resistance in Contemporary North America" in M.A. Jaimes, *The State of Native America; Genocide, Colonization and Resistance* (Boston: South End Press) at 319-323; and S. Brodribb, "The Traditional Roles of Native Women in Canada and the Impact of Colonization" (1984) 4:1 *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* at 85-103.

<sup>36</sup>Jesuit priests who served on the St. John River from 1700 to 1763 were: Joseph Aubéry (1701-1709); Jean-Baptiste Logard (1709-1731); Jean-Pierre Daniélou (1731-1740); Etienne Lanveriat (1732, 1750-1754); and Charles Germain (1740-1763).

the Innu.<sup>37</sup> And so it may have been in the other areas of life that LeJeune and others targeted for change. Whether or not the colonizers here had such a clear design as LeJeune is irrelevant. From studies of colonialism around the world, however, we know that it is common, almost axiomatic, for colonized people to seek relief from their oppression or sense of crisis by adopting the ways of the colonizer, and unwittingly participating in the oppression of their own people.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to understand, as well, that the colonizing processes so vigorously initiated by LeJeune and others did not only occur at some time in the past. A close look at our communities today reveals the same processes at work. Since chiefs and councils have the powers both to give and to withhold nearly all community resources, their powers over community members are all but absolute, and limited only to the extent that the same hierarchical powers are imposed on chiefs and councils by the Canadian state through the *Indian Act*. Although we are made to believe that this "politics of dependency" and hierarchical authority are based on tradition, it is simply not the case.<sup>39</sup> Could LeJeune revisit these lands, I am sure he would be gratified.

As for the struggle of Native women to find our voices in the 1980s, we needed not only to change the *Indian Act*, but also to challenge the very untraditional power of the chiefs and councils. For many, including myself, the struggle involved considerable personal pain and sacrifice. Sometimes women were even pitted against other women. In an extreme case of accepting and participating in the oppression, I was told by some women elders that it was useless to seek any change in the *Indian Act* since "everyone knows that Indian blood passes only through the male line."

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<sup>37</sup>K.M. Morrison, "Montagnais Missionization in Early New France", *supra*, note 31; "Towards a History of Intimate Encounters: Algonkian Folklore, The Cannibal Giant" (1979) 3:4 *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* at 51-80; "Discourse and the Accomodation of Values: Towards a Revision of Mission History" (Sept. 1985) LIII 3 *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* at 365-382; "The Mythological Sources of Abenaki Catholicism: A Case Study of the Social History of Power" (1981) II *Religion* at 235-263.

<sup>38</sup>P. Freire, *supra*, note 2 at 49-51 and F. Fanon, *supra*, note 2 at 49. See also R. Conkling, "Legitimacy and Conversion in Social Change: The Case of French Missionaries and the Northeast Algonkian" (Winter 1974) 21:1 *Ethnohistory* 1 at 19, which points to the "social disruption and consequent dependence" combined with the charisma of priests as important factors in conversion.

<sup>39</sup>D. Bedford and S. Pobihushchy, "Aboriginal Participation in the Electoral Process in New Brunswick: The Politics of Dependency" (Address to the annual meeting of the Atlantic Provinces Political Studies Association, Halifax, Mount St. Vincent's University, October 1992); M. Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) at 117-166; M. Boldt, J.A. Long & L. Little Bear, eds, *The Quest for Justice: Aboriginal Peoples and Aboriginal Rights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) at 335-339; G. Kellough, "From Colonialism to Economic Imperialism: The Experience of the Canadian Indian" in J. Harp and J.R. Hofley, eds, *Structural Inequality in Canada* (Scarborough, Ontario: Prentice-Hall, 1980) at 343-377.

Even more offensive were the comments of one long-standing and much honoured chief who told a group of women at a meeting about a decade ago that the reason he did not want the *Indian Act* to be changed was that it served Native people quite well, just as a fence around a herd of cows protects them from the bulls. Here was the blatant use of crude stereotype to dehumanize Native women and legitimize our subordination by one of our own. It is these experiences I have come to understand as part of the colonial experience, and it is these experiences we must learn to recognize and label as such if we are to be liberated from the oppression of colonial power.

I am sure that each woman involved in the struggle has similar memories of the pain of colonialism. In some cases we were bolstered by a spirit and determination that often manifested itself humorously. One of the funnier incidents was the story of a Micmac woman elder who was about to be removed from the house in which she had lived for years after her non-Native husband died. Because she had married him, she had lost her Indian status and could make no claim or defence as an Indian. When called before a judge to respond to the charge that she had indeed lost her status she said, "Your honour, if you married a monkey would that make you a monkey?"<sup>40</sup>

A sad commentary on the legitimate struggle of oppressed people is their tendency to try to tear down the house of oppression using the tools of the oppressor, such as violence, hate, or abuses of power.<sup>41</sup> Sometimes this very human proclivity can leave more scars than the oppression itself and almost negate the successes achieved. In many ways this has been the experience at Tobique where much of the struggle for change to the *Indian Act* was initiated.<sup>42</sup> Even though the objective of having "non-status" women reinstated in their communities was achieved with the passage of Bill C-31 in 1985, there is a sense at Tobique now that we have all lost something of our community in the process. In order to achieve our goal, Bill C-31 had to be imposed on Native people. In the process

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<sup>40</sup>Oral information from Gaby Pelletier attributed to the late Nancy Christoff, a Micmac woman living in Saint John, N.B.

<sup>41</sup>See generally, A. Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Freedom, California: Crossing Press, 1984) at 112.

<sup>42</sup>See *Enough is Enough: Aboriginal Women Speak Out* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987). But see also *Perley v. Higgins and Nicholas et al.*, [1986] 1 C.N.L.R. at 45-50 in which the idea of hierarchical, chiefly authority was on trial at the same time. Ironically, the idea lost in court on the basis of the *Indian Act*, which says clearly that chiefs cannot vote on any issue except in case of a tie on the part of the council. In spite of this case, the concept of strong chiefly authority is still alive and well in most Aboriginal communities, insofar as most chiefs make the majority of decisions without the input of council, much less, the people. See Boldt, *supra*, note 39.

we seem to have sacrificed our tradition of consensus-making through community meetings, one of the few egalitarian traditions we still had.<sup>43</sup>

These feelings of loss are, by no means, exclusive to Tobique. Traditional community consensus-making is gradually being shut down across the country, and it is my suspicion that this has not been the result of the women's struggle, but rather, the consequence of the unilateral imposition of Bill C-31 on Native communities by the federal government. Having won marks in the world community as the perfect humanitarian, the oppressor state acted swiftly to follow one imposition with another by "cutting a deal" with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the national organization of *Indian Act* chiefs. If the AFN would recognize the legitimacy of the State (which it did), the AFN would in turn be legitimated, not by the people, but by the State. In return, so-called self-government would be imposed on the people, and the constituency of the AFN (mostly male and mostly co-opted chiefs) would be rewarded with even more powers to oppress their people. Although seductively called "self-government", the plan would in fact be nothing more than a third order of municipal, non-Native style government. What makes it attractive to chiefs is that the AFN would have the perks of a municipality without the strictures of troublesome human rights laws, since it would be exempt from the application of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.<sup>44</sup>

Whether this was done by the federal government to assuage the offended (male) leadership in the wake of Bill C-31, or to act as opportunist, or both, is not clear. What is perfectly clear is the renewed assault on our cultures that this imposition of so-called "self-government" represents. The very fact that it is being imposed by the federal government and by chiefs and councils without consulting the people presupposes a hierarchical structure that is anything but traditional.<sup>45</sup>

Co-ordinated with the pressure on chiefs and councils to accept "self-government" have come other threats to our existence as a people, threats which may be characterized as a policy of "personal enticement." On the business side

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<sup>43</sup>For a different response to the imposition of external rules see the case of the Grand River Reserve in S.M. Weaver, "Judicial Preservation of Ethnic Group Bondaries: The Iroquois Case" in J. Sawchuk, ed., *Readings in Aboriginal Studies*, vol. 2: *Identities and State Structures* (Brandon, Manitoba: Bearpaw Publishing, 1992) at 165-175. See also J. Green, "Sexual Equality and Indian Government: An Analysis of Bill C-31, Amendments to the Indian Act" in Sawchuk, ed., *ibid.* esp. at 179-184.

<sup>44</sup>Part I of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, being Schedule B of the *Canada Act 1982* (U.K.), 1982, c. 11.

<sup>45</sup>W. Rudnicki, "Reveille for First Nations: The Politics of Indian Termination in the 1980s" (1987) 3:1 *Native Studies Review* 81; S.I. Pobihushchy, "A Perspective on Indian Nations in Canada (1986) 6:1 *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 105; M. Boldt and J.A. Long, "Native Indian Self-Government: Instrument of Autonomy or Assimilation?" in J.A. Long, M. Boldt & L. Little Bear, eds, *Governments in Conflict?: Provinces and Indian Nations in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988) at 38-56.

are the massive campaigns being mounted to lure individual Native people into the corporate, entrepreneurial world, which by its exploitative and individualistic nature, stands as one of the most serious threats to our lands and basic cultural values of respect, sharing, cooperation and reciprocity.<sup>46</sup> On the government side, there is the *First Nations Chartered Land Act* now before Parliament which promises to "liberate" us by "liberating" our lands for privatization, corporate development, and corporate takeovers.<sup>47</sup>

Those of us who struggled for Native women to be allowed to return to their communities, and for women's voices to be heard may now well ask what the struggle was worth if we are to have no voice in our communities, if the only voices to be heard outside of our communities are to be men's voices, and if our communities and cultures are thereby destroyed.

What is there in all of this for us to learn? First of all, we must remember the lesson of LeJeune, that the system of dependency and powerful chiefly authority under which we live today is a system that was very carefully devised and imposed to deny us our dignity, respect, and voice, and to control us as women, and as a people. With this in mind, we must be very careful not to legitimate the power of the imposed system, which is dedicated to keeping us subordinate both as women and as a people, no matter how noble our struggle against oppression. In other words, our struggle as Aboriginal women cannot be separated, even for a moment, from our struggle as a people.<sup>48</sup>

Just as true self-government is not and cannot be based on hierarchical authority as envisioned by the national chiefs and the federal government in the *Charlottetown Accord*,<sup>49</sup> so neither can it be a system in which women and men speak separately to the world. Hence, another important lesson is that we may only escape our oppression as Native women by joining in the struggle against oppression as Native people. And the only way to accomplish this is by making

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<sup>46</sup>R. Vachon, "Dominique Temple on Economicide" (January-March 1988) 98 *Interculture*. See also J. Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of Indian Nations* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991) at 120-37 and G. Kellough, "From Colonialism to Economic Imperialism: The Experience of the Canadian Indian" *supra*, note 39.

<sup>47</sup>L. Mandell, "A Review of the Optional First Nations Chartered Land Act" (May 1993) 4:5 *Micmac Maliseet Nations News* 14.

<sup>48</sup>See M.A. Jaimes, *supra*, note 35 at 331-336 for insight into differences between the struggles of Native women and the goals of feminism. According to Jaimes at 335, "women of color in general tend not to favour the notion of a 'politics' which would divide and weaken their community by defining 'male energy' as 'the enemy'."

<sup>49</sup>The proposed final text of the *Charlottetown Accord* is reproduced in J. Bakan & D. Schneiderman, eds, *Social Justice and the Constitution: Perspectives on a Social Union for Canada* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1992). See also W. Rudnicki, "The Aboriginal Constitutional Package of 1992: Its Hidden String", 7 October 1992 [unpublished].



our communities strong through community decision-making where we seek not to overpower chiefs or to replace them, but to take responsibility for ourselves collectively, thus making hierarchical authority irrelevant. Unless we do so, our pain and struggle of the 1980s will have been in vain, for we will remain as a people like that ashtray in Ottawa, split in two parts and deprived of our strength to resist the oppressive forces arrayed against us.