"NOBODY TOOK THE INDIAN BLOOD OUT OF ME":
An analysis of Algonquian and Iroquoian discourse concerning Bill C-31.

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the English discourses of Algonquian and Iroquoian people of southwestern Ontario in which they discuss the impact of Bill C-31, an amendment to the *Indian Act* passed in 1985 with the goal to end gender discrimination. My research focuses both on the narratives of those women who (re)gained their status following the Bill, and on the narratives of community members reacting to the attempts of reinstated women, and their families, to return to the reserve. In examining the narratives of First Nations people, I have illustrated the complexity of the issue and shown that both the women's life experiences and the reactions of community members to these women are related to key factors. The most important of these, for both Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples, is the maintenance of ties to the community; this has more relevance to people's day to day lives than does legal status conferred by the government of Canada.

Keywords: First Nations Peoples, Algonquian women, Iroquoian women, Bill C-31, discourse analysis, root metaphor, discourses of identity, narrative, cultural continuity, worldviews.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.

I have had the great fortune of working as an assistant on the research project of Regna Darnell and Lisa Philips Valentine. This project is a comparative exploration of the English discourses of Algonquian and Iroquoian people of southwestern Ontario. Through assimilationist governmental policies--often involving forced attendance at residential schools--many First Nations people have been forced to adopt English. In spite of this imposition, however, the Englishes used by First Nations peoples are creative and express their unique cultural experiences. First Nations peoples have adapted English to reflect their distinctive histories and patterns of culture (Valentine 1994:483). As law professor Patricia Monture (1991:17) of the Mohawk Nation explains,

> We have taken a language that does not speak for us and given it new life. Perhaps, we break all of the structural, style, and grammatical rules. But we have learned to use a language that was forced upon us to create powerful messages that convey to you our experiences. . .
>
> I do not believe that First Nations people use English words in the same way as people who do not share our culture with us. We all use the same words, such as respect or responsibility, but they mean different things.

The focus of this research is to document the fact that narrative conventions--the way people talk respectfully to others--largely transcend the particular structural features of the traditional Aboriginal languages across the transition of these languages to English as a primary expressive vehicle

(Darnell 1993:89). Regna Darnell has spent many years studying Cree English and has observed that when Cree individuals speak English, the phonology, semantic system, and form of constructing an argument or conversation remains effectively Cree, even for monolingual speakers of English. Moreover, in keeping with Monture's observation, words used in English are often glosses for Cree concepts not expressible in standard English (Darnell 1993). Clearly, this is English adapted to the meanings and intentions of First Nations persons immersed in a traditional world view. Individuals do not have to be fluent in their original Native languages for this to be the case. Individuals who speak only English may speak Native English because their English is learned within a culturally Native community, from Elders who remain the links in transmission of an oral tradition.

Although First Nations English speaking communities and Euro-Canadians appear to have shared discourses, the work coming out of this project documents that reality is otherwise and finds that the significant differences between southwestern Ontario Reserve Englishes and standard Canadian English "lie in areas of semantics, in discourse genres, discourse structuring, salient discourse topics, discourse content, and individual use of narrative" (Valentine 1994:484). For example, terms adopted from Euro-Canadian legal discourse are often adapted to the experience and understanding of a particular First Nation. However, when these terms are later used in public discourse, they are assumed by Euro-Canadians to have

the original meaning and therein lies the potential for miscommunication. It is the "presumed sharedness of the English discourses in and between Native groups and mainstream Euro-Canadian English speakers that causes most cross-cultural miscommunications" (Valentine 1994:483).

It was while working on this project that I decided to conduct a comparative study of Algonquian, Iroquoian and mainstream Euro-Canadian discourses concerning Bill C-31--an amendment to the *Indian Act* passed in 1985 with the goal to end gender discrimination--with the thought that I could potentially enlighten the issue by illuminating some of these cross-cultural differences in meaning and subsequent unintentional miscommunications. I wanted to learn more about Algonquian and Iroquoian women's experiences concerning their loss of status, how they spoke about these experiences and the meanings they embodied. My research focuses on the narratives of those women who gained or regained their status following the Bill, but also includes community reactions to the attempts of these women, and their families, to return to the reserve. This gives a fuller picture of the situation, acknowledging that there are complex consequences for these women, their children and the communities to which they return. Academically, my thesis topic has relevance; I have found through library research that nearly all scholarly accounts concerning Bill C-31 focus on Euro-Canadian understandings of gender discrimination as it was embodied in the *Indian Act*. Certainly, on a legal level, Section 12(1)(b) was discriminatory and

was, indeed, something which needed to be rectified. However, when I talked with the people affected by this piece of legislation, I found that the understanding of First Nations identity and community membership it stipulated was not necessarily the understanding constructed by Iroquoian or Algonquian women or men. It must be noted that Canadian law often does not mean much on reserve land and, as Regna Darnell has often pointed out to me, "things work differently on a reserve". Non-status women often had room to negotiate their role in the community and were able, in many cases, to maintain ties to the community and continue their participation within it, especially if they had children. Thus, my research has filled a void in the literature regarding First Nations women in that it has approached the issue of Bill C-31 in a fresh way.

Of equal importance was my desire to find a topic that was relevant to the people with whom I was working. In part, this was in response to anthropology's expanded audience where it is now to be expected that the consultants themselves will have access to and evaluate the finished product. But even more, it was in response to ethical issues that go beyond the simple methodological problem of 'artificial topics' and of trying to get people to talk about something in which they have no interest. The study of naturally occurring discourse is exciting because it illuminates those issues that are of concern within the target community itself. The nature of my own research, for I was not immersed in a particular community for any great period of

time and thus did not have the luxury of encountering naturally occurring discourse on a regular basis, meant that often my interviews were structured by the *a priori* expectation, due to my *a priori* announcement, that the dialogue would concern Bill C-31; I might telephone the friend of an acquaintance to request an opportunity to speak with her and she would naturally wish to know exactly what I was studying. I was forewarned by Briggs (1986) that narrative accounts that are constructed within the framework of the interview situation must be seen as a point of interaction between two subjectivities--researcher and narrator--with potentially differing cultural assumptions and senses of self. Power dynamics exist in the interview format and the interviewer (consciously or otherwise) can control the text to suit her/his agenda even when the narrator's voice is left in the narrative frame. Asking the same questions in the same order can imply a sort of homogeneity of experience and, indeed, doing so may further support the researcher's agenda. A more open and less directed interviewing style helps reduce that impact and gives voice to the narrator's themes and concerns and not those of the interviewer. With this in mind, I attempted to counteract the artificiality of the interview situation by conducting my interviews during two consecutive summers in the context of 'visiting', a very natural, summertime interaction pattern for the First Nations people with whom I was working. We would share tea and discuss many other, seemingly unrelated topics (at least at the time), prior to addressing Bill C-31

explicitly. I would not control the interview per se but would rather allow the person with whom I was speaking to approach the topic and take it where she would. I would only comment when she had come to a full stop and those comments usually entailed reiterating that which had come before. In this way, I was able to address my concerns regarding the constructed nature of the interview situation by letting the women's themes, and not my own, emerge in the narratives. At the same time, I was behaving in a way appropriate to First Nations interaction patterns. Two years experience as a research assistant to Regna Darnell and Lisa Valentine, and the benefit of attending to their own fieldwork stories, made me confident that I could interact with First Nations people politely and respectfully. Showing respect for the autonomy of a First Nations speaker entails allowing them to narrate continuously, without interruption. Silence indicates that you are listening with full attention and conveys respect for both the speaker and the wisdom of her/his words. Autonomy is also preserved by phrasing questions indirectly, by constructing them more as general observations to which others present can choose to respond or ignore. Ideal speech is a monologue in which the speaker is culturally defined as having authority, an authority grounded in life experience. The women and men who shared their stories with me were always careful to speak within their own experience and would often preface their narratives with accounts of their involvement, thus defining their authority to speak on such issues.

Occasionally, interaction with First Nations people outside the pursuit of my fieldwork did provide the opportunity for me to observe naturally occurring discourse and I was delighted to hear women talking, of their own accord, about their experiences of marrying non-status men, leaving the reserve, potentially losing their status, and subsequently regaining it. Such moments reaffirmed the validity of my research and assured me that it is, in fact, a relevant part of women's daily discourse. I recall one such occasion vividly. I was visiting with an Ojibwe woman and her daughters late one sunny June afternoon, not in the context of my own field research, but merely as the 'guest' of a mutual acquaintance. We were drinking tea and chatting when the woman started talking about how she had lost her status upon marrying a white man and how she had later regained it. About an hour later she asked me if I was working on 'a project' as I had been introduced earlier as a student of anthropology at Western. I admitted that I was actually talking with women much like herself who had regained their status through Bill C-31. She considered this for a moment, elaborated further on some of her earlier comments and, as is often the case in light of the associative nature of narrative, her thoughts led her elsewhere. A half hour later, she wondered out loud, in my general direction, why someone would want to do a project on Bill C-31. (I half fancied this was in response to her curiosity as to how this young, white woman ended up with an Ojibwe sounding name). I ventured forth with a few suggestions, purely speculative of course. She

elaborated further until the tide of the conversation again carried her away from the original topic. A half hour later yet, she commented that someone doing such a project would certainly find many people to talk to. I agreed. And again she addressed the issue from her point of view. Finally, as it was time for my friend and I to take our leave, she turned to me and asked, "Do you have any more questions, dear?" And such was my introduction to the wonderful world of indirect discourse.

While my ethical and methodological concerns led me to take an unstructured approach in each interview situation, my research agenda, on the whole, was carefully structured and well thought out. Before I began the actual field work, I conducted extensive library research to familiarize myself with the existing accounts of Bill C-31 and of gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*. I read the legislation itself and the transcripts of court cases pertaining to the issue. I also read concurrent news articles to get an idea of the prevailing attitude of the media at that time. In this way, I became familiar with Euro-Canadian discourse concerning the issue as many of the above sources were from the Euro-Canadian perspective.

The literature also contained the writings of First Nations people and when reading their words, it became immediately obvious that the issue was constructed differently by these authors. This body of work did include the reactions of individual women and men, but more often consisted of the publications of the larger political organizations intended to represent First

Nations peoples (i.e., the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Assembly of First Nations or the Native Council of Canada). I wanted to consider the 'local level' discourse of Iroquoian and Algonquian women and men of southwestern Ontario to see if they talked about the issue in the same way as their 'political representatives' whose voices are more frequently heard by mainstream Canadians. And thus I began 'interviewing'.

I was careful to converse with a mix of people to illustrate the complexity of the issue and of people's experiences. I talked with women from both Algonquian and Iroquoian nations; women who had grown up on the reserve and those who had grown up off the reserve; women who are currently living on the reserve and those living in an urban environment; women who had maintained contact with the reserve and those who had not; and women who are Christian and those who practice traditional spirituality. I talked to women at various stages of the life cycle and women who are single, married, divorced and widowed. I talked with the children of reinstated women who themselves gained status through Bill C-31. I also spoke with Iroquoian and Algonquian community members to derive a better understanding of their reactions to Bill C-31. I spoke with both women and men; who currently resided on or off the reserve; who grew up on or off the reserve; and who follow traditional or Christian religious practices.

In examining the narratives of First Nations women, I developed a better understanding of how these women experience the world and make

sense of it, that which gives their lives meaning and purpose. I have illustrated that often these women's experiences and the meanings they embody counter previous scholarly accounts of women who had lost their status. Furthermore, in examining the narratives of community members as they discuss the Bill, I have illustrated that the issue is much more complex than it is normally given credit for being. Both the women's life experiences and the reactions of community members to these women are related to a few key variables. The most important of these, for both Algonquian and Iroquoian people, is the maintenance of ties to the community; this has more relevance to people's day to day lives than does legal status conferred by the government of Canada.

In analyzing how women from different communities talk about their experiences and how members of different First Nations talk about their reactions to Bill C-31, I was able to discern their understandings of Native identity and community membership and ascertain how these understandings may differ from First Nation to First Nation. This approach acknowledges the need to reject a pan-Indian approach that does not recognize the diversity between First Nations in Canada and also acknowledges the potential for differing attitudes within a single reserve. Moreover, in examining how these understandings differ from Euro-Canadian understandings, my work builds the foundation for a better grasp of Native conceptions of Native identity and community membership which

can facilitate communication between Canadian policy makers and Canada's Aboriginal peoples. I am not interested in outlining a monolithic position toward Bill C-31 but would rather illustrate the complexity of the issue and the variety of experiences these women have had, a variety that has yet to be fully acknowledged in the literature concerning Bill C-31.

In Chapter One I review some of the recent literature regarding oral history and narrative theory. I outline the manner in which I approach the narratives I have carefully gathered and recorded over the previous two years and acknowledge the works that inform that approach.

Chapter Two proceeds with a brief history of the legislation pertaining to Indians living in Canada, the steps First Nations women took in response to this legislation and the events leading up to the passing of Bill C-31. In this chapter, I consider Euro-Canadian discourse concerning gender discrimination as it existed in the *Indian Act,* a discourse which focuses on western understandings of equality and human rights.

In Chapter Three, I juxtapose the Euro-Canadian understandings outlined in Chapter Two with the narratives of Algonquian and Iroquoian women who had been reinstated through Bill C-31 to illustrate that the issues are not constructed or understood in the same manner; the *Indian Act* is not always conceptualized as an invasion of individual rights but as a destruction of culture and of women's traditional role within it. I consider the public

discourse of the Native Women's Association of Canada, a political association which represents First Nations women. As the NWAC opposed gender discrimination in the *Indian Act,* they mobilized the metaphor of traditional motherhood in an attempt to construct an oppositional ideology to the colonial legacy that degraded and disempowered First Nations women and men. With this in mind, I analyze the images and metaphors of themselves and their communities that Iroquoian and Algonquian women create as they talk (or perhaps write) about their experiences of living without status and later (re)claiming it, and of defining and seeking solutions to the resulting problems. In their narratives, Iroquoian women adopt key cultural symbols as emblems of their identity to evoke a cultural understanding of female identity founded on traditional roles and responsibilities[1], roles and responsibilities that are structured by the metaphor of motherhood. In the narratives of Algonquian women, I have found that a similar understanding of Algonquian female identity does often exist but can be expressed through other metaphors. The understanding of cultural continuity embodied in the metaphor of motherhood is also expressed through a widespread metonym of blood in Algonquian discourse.

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[1] As this thesis proceeds, it will illustrate that an Algonquian or Iroquoian person's roles and responsibilities are crucial to her/his construction of identity. The First Nations sense of self is holistic and one's roles and responsibilities define oneself as a whole and can not be separated from one's sense of self. In light of this observation, this thesis closely connects a person's construction of identity with that person's understanding of her/his roles and responsibilities.

In Chapter Four, I continue to juxtapose the Euro-Canadian understandings outlined in Chapter Two with the narratives of Algonquian and Iroquoian community members reacting to the attempts of reinstated women, and their children, to return to the reserve. The discourse of Iroquoian community members dismisses the importance of bloodline. Instead, emphasis is placed upon the importance of ongoing ties to the community in accordance with the belief that culture is best sustained by people maintaining ties with each other. Algonquian discourse also emphasizes the importance of maintaining ties to the community; a sentiment often expressed through a metaphor of cultural roots. My approach is to situate these understandings of collective identity and community membership in the context of traditional Algonquian and Iroquoian world view to acknowledge the distinct histories and cultures of these two groups.

In her article, *Performing Native Identities*, Valentine (1994) outlines the differing cultural constructions between Iroquoian and Algonquian peoples of southwestern Ontario. She notes that the Iroquois define themselves by their matrilineal clan affiliation, by their traditional political and religious systems, and by their languages. They can point to many key symbols which they use to define themselves as a group. Algonquian people identify themselves most strongly by their connection to a land base, by their ecological/economic activities and finally by language affiliation (Valentine

1994). Moreover, in analyzing the discourse of both Iroquois Chief Jake Thomas and an Ojibwe Elder and professor of Native Studies, Valentine goes on to examine how the word 'Native' has quite different associations for the two groups. For the Iroquois, the essence of being 'Native' involves language, culture, the Great Law and Ceremonies. For Algonquian people, the essence of Native culture lies in the "association between being Native and having an intimate connection with the land" (487).

Such cultural constructions have been evident in my own research as this thesis will illustrate. Further, an interesting and relevant observation has emerged from an examination of the narratives which I have gathered. There is a marked difference in both Algonquian and Iroquoian communities' perception of what C-31 membership entails and that determined by the government. Stories related to me as to who was and was not a C-31 indicate that individuals who can trace an immediate lineage to the community, whose faces are familiar because they have maintained ties to the community or who are perceived to 'culturally' be Indian are not considered to be C-31s regardless of 'official' status. Those individuals whose ties to the community are based solely on what seems an arbitrary decision by the government are more often considered to be white outsiders. Their motives for returning to the reserve are held suspect. They are seen to be competing for scarce resources and to be a threat to the cultural stability of the community and to the mainstream Canadian conception of 'Native' which

has impact on Aboriginal political claims to being culturally and politically distinct.

Finally, my conclusion continues to challenge Euro-Canadian assumptions by illustrating the ways in which women's life experiences differ from scholarly accounts. I illustrate the ways in which women's narratives reveal them to be negotiating their continued participation in the community and resisting government intrusion into their lives and their construction of identity.

Chapter One.
"Our lives are the past we tell ourselves": Constructing the self through narrative. [2]

In recent years, a common critique of oral history has remarked upon its unrealized potential, what James Freeman and David Krantz (1979) have called "the unfulfilled promise of life histories". Formerly, oral narratives were read akin to an historical document, for the 'facts' and information they contained about people's lives. They were considered to be a transparency through which the anthropologist could see the reality that existed beyond the words themselves. The merits of oral history were seen to be immediacy and vividness: they enabled one to see and hear for oneself. Consequently, until recently, little work has been done on oral histories as narrative constructs.

Often, the intent of ethnographic narratives is to document the lives of individual women within their culture as a supplement to more standard, often male orientated, ethnographies of the same culture. Such works often focus on women who are considered to be representative of the values and roles of the female members of that culture. In these narratives, there is a vexed part/whole relation of women to the larger male-dominated society which is seen to constrain women's possibilities for action (Behar 1995:153). That female experience could ever explain the whole culture, or even a

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[2] Ochs and Capps (1996:21)

central aspect of it, is denied, for "women unlike men are not seen as true representatives of their societies" (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985:164). Even as they occupy the central role of protagonists in their own narratives, women tend to be cast as marginal social actors with limited and slanted views of their world (Behar 1995:153-54). The gathering of women's life narratives was employed by feminist scholars as a reaction against such androcentric accounts of cultures. These scholars attempted to counter the view of women's social action as supplementary and as reacting against a male world and portrayed women's action as creatively constructing a complete social world, complementary to that of men.

Furthermore, the standards of positivism in the social sciences have served to shape and limit ideas about what constitutes knowledge, who qualifies as a knower and who defines the accepted procedure for acquiring knowledge. Western assumptions about the nature of social reality and knowledge may counter the ideas of the culture under consideration. Narrative, which is gaining wider acceptance as a way to access knowledge, helps to bridge such differences.

Narratives, which once appeared transparent, are now seen as being much more complicated, involving issues such as representation, ideology, history, identity and politics as they bear on subjectivity. Life history narratives are now seen to raise issues concerning the self, or what more recently has been called the subject.

> The old notion of an Enlightenment self--autonomous, rational, and unified--has given way throughout this century to new understandings of the subject, influenced by such phenomena as Marxian materialism, Freudian psychoanalysis, Saussurian linguistics, and postmodern critiques of authority, truth and self presence... For some it has become more of a verb than a noun, more process than entity, emergent at any moment in language, discourse, ideology (Smith 1993:393).

It is through narrative that such a process can be understood. A woman telling of her life is not merely recounting events, but is actively constructing that life and her self, her subjectivity. As Toni Morrison (1994:22) notes, "Narrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created." Narrative is a fundamental means of making sense of experience and simultaneously is a result of that experience and orders that experience. In this sense, narrative and self are inseparable. Self is here understood to be an unfolding reflective awareness of being-in-the-world, including a sense of one's past and future. Individuals come to know themselves as they use narrative to apprehend experiences and navigate relationships with others (Ochs and Capps 1996:20-21). Ochs and Capps (1996:21) argue that,

> the inseparability of narrative and self is grounded in the phenomenological assumption that entities are given meaning through being experienced and the notion that narrative is an essential resource in the struggle to bring experiences to conscious awareness. At any point in time, our sense of entities is an outcome of our subjective involvement in the world. Narrative mediates this involvement. Personal narratives shape how we attend to and feel about events. They are partial representations and evocations of the world as we know it.
>
> From this perspective, narratives are versions of reality. They are embodiments of one or more points of view rather than objective, omniscient accounts.

The act of telling one's life story involves a rationalization of the past as it is projected and leads into the present. The retrospective stance allows the individual woman to bring new knowledge to bear on her life's experiences, it is an articulation of her life from a particular moment in time. The events she relates are not isolated occurrences but are part of a pattern expressing the very idea of a self, a reference point that unifies recollections in the act of selecting and presenting them in narration. Out of the innumerable scenes, moments, words, images and sensations of her life, the narrator focuses on those which allow a self to emerge that is congruent with her intent. And, indeed, a particular version of one's life story may become an essential component in one's sense of identity at a given time (Patai 1988:147). A woman may use the process to order her life and establish a vision of herself. Hankiss (1981) refers to this process as endowing certain episodes with a symbolic meaning that in effect turns them into myths; she notes that this is a never ending process, for an adult must constantly select effective strategies of life. The image of the self is never just a simple reflection of the experiences of the self: it always includes a specific response to the 'why' of the development of the self. Each person tries, in one way or another, to build up her/his own ontology (Hankiss 1981:204). A similar notion is expressed by Lugones and Spelman (1983:593): having the opportunity to talk about one's life, to interpret it, is integral to leading that life rather than being led through it.

Through narratives, women are established as social actors in their world and as agents active in determining the course of their own lives. Women are seen to be constructing a self/subjectivity through the actual act of telling of their life but, further, this act helps to structure that life. The very act of telling one's life story seems to invite structure as one rethinks the events of one's life so that they make sense. The narrative imposes a pattern on life, constructs out of it a coherent story because, consciously or unconsciously, it establishes certain stages in an individual life, makes links between them and defines implicitly or explicitly a certain consistency of relationship between the self and the outside world. In fact, women may discover patterns in their lives that they had not discerned until they found themselves talking about their life experiences. This coherence assumes a narrative stance on the part of the teller; she narrates from the moment at which she reviews and interprets her life. The present allows the narrator to impose order and meaning on her life experiences. This process is creative and entails discrimination and selection of facts. It is an interpretation of the past and not merely a reconstruction of it. The events are a symbolic way of knowing life through imagination and these symbols are not merely imagined but are chosen and arranged. These symbols also affect future actions because patterns of life are meant to remain coherent.

A sensitive use of narrative allows anthropologists to explore issues of voice and power as they play out in the story of a single individual. A

woman telling her own story is not a passive or neutral transmitter but an agent actively and creatively constructing her narrative. Furthermore, through narrative, women comment on the meaning of First National history and construct themselves as active agents in that history despite potential patriarchal resistance to their agency, which is a legacy for First Nations women in Canada as a result of the *Indian Act*. Narratives help to (re)situate the actor as central in accounts of history and culture. "History" in Sherry Ortner's (1984:159) words "is not simply something that happens to people, but something they make". A narrative should allow one to see how an actor makes culturally meaningful history, how history is produced in action and in the actor's retrospective reflections upon that action. A narrative should allow one to see the subjective mapping of experience, the working out of a culture and a social system that is often obscured in a typified account. A woman's narrative is neither a static object nor a transparency, but a structured production which reflects her attempt to respond to her situation in a positive way and to create a self that can confront the conditions of her life. Potentially, a narrative can be the articulation of a woman seeking to make sense of events that are beyond her control, but ultimately, she establishes a place for herself in terms of the things that are within her control, doing so not only through her actions but also through her representation of those actions through language. Both are acts, with consequences in the world of action. Narratives reveal women to

be actively controlling and reconstructing life, women are choosing paths from the realm, albeit sometimes narrow, of options available to them.

First Nations women's narratives often focus on the reminiscences of girlhood, family life, personal growth, as well as the importance of the preservation of traditional lifeways (cf. Cruikshank 1990 and Wolfart and Ahenakew 1992). Native women's narratives tend to integrate some elements of historic, ceremonial and social importance as they concentrate on everyday events and activities such as birth, naming, puberty, marriage and motherhood. Their concerns are in keeping with First Nations women's roles in life, as women are considered central to the spiritual well-being of their communities; they are repositories of tradition and spiritual ideals and uphold the stability of the group through both spiritual and generative power. In this way, narratives illustrate the importance of women to the well-being of their families and communities and undercut the stereotype of Indian women whose tasks and roles were merely supportive ones.

As methodology, the gathering of narratives is conducive to fieldwork with First Nations women as they are already in the habit of framing their life in story terms for their children. And some, indeed, explicitly view their life as a story (cf. Cruikshank 1990). In the way in which she frames her narrative, one can perceive how the narrator constructed her life as a story using traditional forms of oral performance. Life narratives share some basic characteristics with conventions of the oral tradition: emphasis on event,

attention to the sacredness of language, concern with landscape, affirmation of cultural values and emphasis on the continuity between generations. These properties of the oral tradition derive from a concern for communal welfare and the subordination of the individual to the collective needs of the community (Bataille and Sands 1984:4). A recurring theme is one of connection, connections with people are explored through ties of kinship while connections with the land emphasize sense of place. But kinship and landscape provide more than just a setting for narrative, they actually frame and shape the story (Cruikshank 1990:3). Women's words convey a sense of the connectedness of all things, of life flow, and episodes often are not sequential but linked thematically to establish a pattern of character developing through the response to personal experience. The chronological sequencing of events so common in Western autobiography is not an aspect of First Nations women's narratives, reflecting the fact that oral presentation is more often associative.

As Cruikshank (1990:x) notes, First Nations narrative has symbolic qualities, a kind of autonomous life that simultaneously reflects continuity with the past and passes on experiences, stories, and guiding principles in the present. Oral testimonies have been called "statements of cultural identity where memory continuously adapts received traditions to present circumstances" (Passerini in Cruikshank 1990:12). Traditional symbols of cultural identity infuse Algonquian and Iroquoian women's stories and I am

interested in examining how these women take their respective traditional understandings and use them to interpret events from their own experience in the construction of their identity. Considering that narrative is a fundamental means of making sense of experience, I am conducting an investigation of narrative forms for talking about, remembering, and interpreting everyday life.

Regna Darnell (personal communication) has observed that in First Nations narrative, events are less important than the systematic linking of life experience with cultural interpretation in a deeply moral framework of teaching, of cultural transmission within an oral tradition. Often, the narrator's aim is to merge the personal and the generic, the transcendent. Thus, I am examining not only the ways in which women mobilize traditional understandings to interpret their life experiences, but how these women, who have lost status and are assumed to be alienated from their communities as a result (according to the literature), are constructing their narratives as part of the autonomous, transcendent body of narrative within their respective oral traditions.

Oral narratives are cultural documents in which much is implicit and metaphors and symbol play a role in how ideas are presented (Cruikshank 1990:3). Thus, to interpret narratives one would need a sense of the speaker's cultural background to provide the context for hearing what is said. Metaphors and symbols can be considered the means by and through which

people make sense of and express their experiences. They reveal what is relevant and has meaning and they structure the way the world is experienced and ordered. In light of this observation, I focus on the metaphors and symbols that Iroquoian and Algonquian people 'live by' (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980) and situate them in the context of traditional Algonquian and Iroquoian world view.

As I place the narratives of Algonquian and Iroquoian people in the context of their traditional world views, I am careful not to create an essentialist Indian identity or to perpetuate the Euro-Canadian preoccupation with issues of authenticity. "From cigar store Indian, to cowboy and Indian movies, to the 'noble savage', native people live in a prison of images not of their own making" (Alexander 1986). These images do not reflect the history of First Nations people but rather express another heritage: those representations of Native peoples by the non-Native social imagination which fragments and freezes Native identity. These images are a product of history, consumerism and popular culture and have silently contradicted the lived experiences of First Nations people and worked insidiously to construct a discourse of subordination. Furthermore, the concern for 'authenticity' and the "desire to rescue 'authenticity' out of destructive historical change" (Clifford, 1985:121) denies culture its dynamic quality. 'Indians' are today what they have always been (constructed as it is): silent, stoic, mystical and clad in beads and feathers.

At the same time, it is important to note that traditional world views are alive and well in First Nations today. The 'elaborating symbols' (Ortner 1973) that were used in the past to conceptualize the order of the world are still evident in the narratives of Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples today. This observation is not surprising in light of the importance that First Nations peoples place on cultural continuity.

Chapter Two.
"From marriage to the grave": Euro-Canadian discourse concerning gender discrimination in the *Indian Act.*

Tobias (1976) has characterized Canadian Indian policy in terms of three general stages: protection, civilization and assimilation. The concept of protection related primarily to land and trade and essentially meant non-interference in Indian social and cultural practices. By the early part of the 19th century, however, a policy was developed with the intent to 'civilize' Indians through a combination of religious proselytization and the development of Indian reserved land settlements where groups of Indians could be located, converted and 'educated' (Tobias 1976:14-15). By the time of the first *Indian Act* in 1876, government intentions went beyond general 'civilization' to outright assimilation. This goal was expressed most cogently through the provisions of that Act, notably through measures for education, administration and enfranchisement which continued until the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 consolidated existing statutes, including pre-confederation legislation, pertaining to those individuals collectively known as Indians and defined their relationships to the state and to other residents of Canada. It established a register of legally recognized Indians for whom (along with their descendants) the federal government would be responsible and for whom it would demarcate and manage lands as Indian reserves. Two previous Acts passed by the Province of Canada in 1850, *An Act for the better*

protection of the Lands and Property of Indians in Lower Canada and *An Act for the Better Protection of Indians in Upper Canada from Imposition and the Property Occupied or Enjoyed by them from Trespass and Injury,* were introduced to protect Indians and their lands. These can be regarded as the first manifestations of the legislative program found within subsequent *Indian Acts.* The colonial government had felt it necessary to define and classify Indians since, in their view, alliances between Indian women and European traders had resulted in successive generations where racial distinctions became blurred and since Indians were the only persons who could rightfully live on Indian lands. These two Acts defined as 'Indian' all persons of Indian blood and their descendants who belonged to a particular Indian band; those non-Indians married to Indians and residing amongst them; all persons whose parents on either side were Indians; and all persons adopted in infancy by Indians and who were residing amongst them (INAC 1978:23-24).

It was in *An Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribes in this Province and to Amend the Laws Respecting Indians* of 1857 that restrictive definitions were first attached to the concept of legal Indian status. For example, Indian men who met certain criteria could be involuntarily enfranchised and enfranchisement of a man automatically lead to the enfranchisement of his wife and children. 'Status' was now considered a temporary designation as the policy objective was one of 'civilization'.

With 'civilization', it was expected that both status and reserves would become redundant and disappear.

In 1867, the Canadian Dominion was established and through section 91(24) of the *British North America Act* the federal government obtained legislative authority over Indians and the lands reserved for them. The Act of 1869 entitled *An Act for the gradual enfranchisement of Indians, the better management of Indian affairs, and to extend the provisions of the Act 31st Victoria, Chapter 42* was the first statute to specifically target the status of Indian women. Section Six of this Act changed the classification criteria of Indian status from primarily self-identification and local community decision to patri-organization and imposed sex discrimination. It stipulated that Indian women who married Indian men from other bands became members of the latter (as would their descendants) and, more importantly, that Indian women who married men not legally recognized as Indian lost their Indian status completely (as would their descendants) (INAC 1978:51-54). Status men who married women not legally recognized as Indian did not lose their status and, in fact, their wives would gain status. This Act established patrilineal descent and legitimate birth as the criteria for Indian status. These criteria were integral to European notions of the male-female relationship and the role of women in society. European societies were patrilineal and patriarchal and women were legally the property of their husbands, as were their children.

The *Indian Act* of 1876 granted fewer fundamental rights to women than to men, women were denied the right of full political participation in band affairs; they could neither hold electoral office nor vote for male representatives; women could not speak at public meetings; and women were granted fewer property rights than men. Jamieson (1978:1) notes that,

> The consequences for the Indian woman of the application of... the Indian Act extend from marriage to the grave--and even beyond that. The woman, on marriage, must leave her parents' home and her reserve. She may not own property on the reserve and must dispose of any property she does hold. She may be prevented from inheriting property left to her by her parents. She cannot take any further part in band business. Her children are not recognized as Indian and are therefore denied access to cultural and social amenities of the Indian community. And most punitive of all, she may be prevented from returning to live with her family on the reserve, even if she is in dire need, very ill, a widow, divorced or separated. Finally, her body may not be buried on the reserve with those of her forebears.

The state's patriarchal definition of a woman's socio-legal status as existing only in terms of male kin, either her father or, upon marriage, her husband, contrasted sharply with First Nations women's traditional status. It has been acknowledged that First Nations women traditionally held an influential position in society (Randle 1951, Brown 1975, Sanders 1975, Johnson 1975, Mathers 1975, Trigger 1978, Jamieson 1978, Medicine 1978, 1980, Leacock 1978, 1980, 1986, Rayna Green 1980, Van Kirk 1980, Grumet 1980, Tooker 1984, Brodribb 1984, Bataille and Mullen Sands 1984, Allen 1986, Silman 1987, Ezzo 1988, 1991, LaFramboise, Heyle and Ozer 1990, Solomon 1990, 1994, Reed 1992, Shirley Williams 1992, Miller 1994). Judith Brown

(1975) argues that this was particularly true of Iroquois women, "Iroquois matrons enjoyed unusual authority in their society, perhaps more than women have ever enjoyed anywhere at any time". In part this was due to the fact that the Iroquois functioned on the basis of matrilineal kinship lines and matrilocal residency where power was balanced between the two sexes. It was what Trigger (1978:63) calls "an equality based on the separation and complementarity of sexual roles".

Iroquois women possessed socio-political decision-making authority in that they chose and could depose male leaders. Iroquois women controlled agricultural production and maintained the right to distribute and dispense all food, even that procured by men. Through their control of the economic organization of the tribe, Iroquois Clan Mothers were able to make available or withhold food for meetings of the council, for war parties, for the observance of religious festivals and for the daily meals of the household. As well, their control of food led to a fair amount of control of social and political alliances, as feasting was central to these alliances.

As early as the 1860s, First Nations women and male leaders began protesting sexual discrimination in the colonial legislation pertaining to Indians, on the grounds that communities were losing valued members and children (Jamieson 1978). Sixty years later, First Nations protested to the Joint Committee of the Senate and House of Commons, which sat from 1946-1948. Jamieson (1978:55) argues that when protesting involuntary enfranchisement

and when calling for reinstatement of non-status women and their children, male leaders addressed their political rights to control band membership and did not comment upon the discriminatory nature of the *Indian Act*. They were not seeking revisions to the Act which would sustain state powers but sought empowerment for themselves while retaining legal categories that entitled status Indians to specified rights and privileges. In seeking political power they cast their goals in a legal discourse of political rights due them as governments of independent people, i.e., of sovereignty.

Political lobbying by First Nations women to alter the *Indian Act* began in 1968 when Mary Two Axe Early, A Mohawk women from Quebec, and others presented their cases to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women which made a recommendation for the elimination of the offending membership clause, Section 12(1)(b), of the *Indian Act*. Two women brought their cases to court shortly thereafter, Jeanette Lavell, an Ojibwe woman from Wikwomikong, and Yvonne Bedard, an Iroquoian woman from Six Nations.

In 1971, Lavell contested Section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* in the Ontario County Court. Her case was dismissed on the grounds that, despite her loss of Indian status, Lavell had equal rights with all other married Canadian women and thus she was not denied the human rights and freedoms established in the Bill of Rights (22 D.L.R. (3d):182-188). Later that year, Lavell's appeal to the Federal Appeals Court won on the grounds that the *Indian Act* resulted in different rights for Indian women, as compared to

Indian men, upon marriage to non-status men or Indians from different bands (22 D.L.R. (3d):188-193). The court decided that the *Indian Act* contravened the Bill of Rights and should therefore be repealed in due course. The following year, Bedard successfully presented her case before the Supreme Court of Ontario on the same grounds as Lavell (25 D.L.R (3d):551-557).

Shortly afterward, the federal government declared that it would appeal both decisions, and in 1973, Lavell and Bedard appeared before the Supreme Court of Canada. They argued that Section 12(1)(b) was pernicious in its repercussions consequent to a choice of spouse and discriminatory in that its effects are not extended to Indian men (Jamieson, 1978:3). Lavell and Bedard sought a ruling that Section 12(1)(b) was inoperative as offensive to the Bill of Rights. Their challenge failed in a decision which stripped the Bill of Rights of its potential protection of de facto equality. Equality of the law was held to be equal application of the law (38 D.L.R. 3(d):481-512). Uniform discrimination against Indian women was in law 'equality'.

With the Canadian judicial appeal process having been exhausted, opponents of Section 12(1)(b) turned their attention to international law. Canada had ratified the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, attached to the International Bill of Human Rights. As well, Canada had signed the optional Protocol which meant that a Canadian dissatisfied with the decision of the court of last resort

could appeal to the United Nations Human Rights Commission. In 1977, Sandra Lovelace, a Maliseet woman from Tobique, New Brunswick, did just that, contending that Canada was in violation of the Covenants named above (cf. Silman 1987). Because her marriage had taken place before Canada had ratified the Covenants, the Commission could not find Canada guilty of sexual discrimination. However, the court did find Canada in violation of Section 27 of the Covenant of Civil and Political Rights. That section ensures all persons the right to their culture in their community. Lovelace's exclusion from her reserve violated this right. This decision resulted in some international censure of Canada and after the Lovelace case, First Nations women, women's advocacy groups and equal rights proponents continued to pressure the federal government for removal of Section 12(1)(b) and reinstatement of Section 12(1)(b) women. The political pressure, unfavourable international opinion and the equality guarantee in the Charter combined to force the federal government to deal with legislative discrimination in the *Indian Act*. Further, with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms coming into force in April of 1985, the government faced the prospect of being taken to court, and of losing.

In June of 1985, the federal government passed Bill C-31. The Bill was intended to address some of the long standing injustices inherent in the federal government's treatment of Canada's First Nations peoples and was cited by the Honourable David Crombie, Minister of Indian Affairs and

Northern Development at the time, as a corrective measure which would eliminate "two historic wrongs in Canada's legislation regarding Indian peoples" (*House of Common's Debates,* 1985). With specific references to "discriminatory treatment based on sex and the control by government of membership in Indian communities", Bill C-31 was framed in the context of offering equality to Native women and greater autonomy to Canada's First Nations (*House of Common's Debates,* 1985).

Many have argued that the discriminatory provisions have a sustained effect despite the amendments. After Bill C-31, reinstatement of Indian status remains dependent upon male lineage as children of reinstated mothers and non-status fathers can not transfer status to their own children. Many of the residual effects of the *Indian Act* are still felt by Native communities and the women in question. Problems have arisen as a result of women's attempts to return to their communities as the Bill does not address the issue of additional lands needed to accommodate those returning to the reserve; it says nothing about where these lands will come from and who will provide them (Green 1992:180). Further, the Bill does not provide guarantees of the funds required to service the needs of the reinstated women and their children.

> In short, given restrictive federal funding of Indian rights and services at present and the lack of specific funding guarantees in Bill C-31, bands should not expect significant funding increases. Existing criteria would prevent all reinstatees from receiving their 'rights' unless they resided on a reserve. *Indian Act* status

> will no longer confer band status and vice versa.[3] Reserve residency rights will attach to band status. Reinstated women may well find themselves without any substantiative rights if they are not guaranteed band membership, and if bands are not guaranteed the means to support their membership (Green 1992:181).

Feminist analyses report that when First Nations women first went to court to regain their legal status and to force revisions of the *Indian Act*, the National Indian Brotherhood (which later became the Assembly of First Nations) and other male-dominated political organizations engaged the women in a lengthy, bitter dispute regarding the nature of 'Indian rights' and 'women's rights'; asserting that women's rights must not be obtained at the expense of self-government powers (Fiske 1993:21). Male leaders categorized women's struggles against the Act as an inappropriate expression of western individualism and further rejected appeals to revise the Act to allow for the same marital property rights as other Canadian women (Bartlett 1986). The NIB called the women's protests the irresponsible actions of "a bunch of women libbers who fight for their own, individual rights" (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991:132). Male leadership argued that western philosophical traditions of individual human rights would undermine the collective

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[3] In attempts to reconcile the desires of both women and first generation children who want reinstatement and the First Nations who want control of band membership, Bill C-31 created two registers: one maintained by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada and the other by individual bands. Indian status held by virtue of the INAC list does not necessarily confer band membership.

identity of Aboriginal peoples and the sacred traditions that bind individuals into a mutually obligated collectivity. Some feminist scholars have argued that the NIB and other male-dominated organizations confronted women's struggles by adopting discourses from dominant society, a fact which is thought to reflect the extent to which they had internalized the patricentric privileges offered them by colonial society. Thus the Association of Iroquois and Allied Tribes, protesting against Bedard, asserted that traditional Iroquois society had been governed by patrilineal and patrilocal practices (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991:83). This discourse was assumed to have been created, in a large part, over the decades by the Indian agents.

Where Euro-Canadian advocates focused on the issue of sexual equality, First Nations groups were more concerned with the federal government's continued determination of legal status and band membership. First Nations women who had lost their status received support from various feminist groups which recognized an opportunity to advance women's rights in general. Duclos (1990:355) argues that it was predominately white women who were spokespersons for the women's movement in Canada during the 1970s. They created an image which constructs gender as the sole basis of women's oppression. As a result, feminist groups focused on sex discrimination in the *Indian Act* as an example of inequality and did not acknowledge First Nations women's dual oppression.

The NIB agreed that the *Indian Act* discriminated on the basis of gender but was concerned that if previous court decisions were upheld, the federal government would be given the ultimate power to change or even repeal the *Indian Act* without the consent of First Nations. The NIB considered Section 12(1)(b) to be a strong lever to force the federal government to negotiate revisions of the *Indian Act* in its entirety. Harold Cardinal (1977:110) notes that "Our alarm, which led to our decision to oppose the two women [Lavell and Bedard], was based on our belief that if the Bill of Rights knocked out the legal basis for the Indian Act, it would at the same time knock out all legal basis for the special status of Indians." First Nations peoples have consistently claimed the right of self government and its concomitant responsibilities, to which determination of community membership is fundamental. Some Indian politicians argue that reinstatement of women affected by Section 12(1)(b) violates this right, and that the Canadian government is arbitrarily imposing its own lately-realized equality provisions on First Nations.

Furthermore, many scholars seem to equate the position of the male dominated First Nations political organizations, such as the NIB/AFN and the Native Council of Canada, to First Nations men in general. In writing about the issue of Bill C-31, and of Native identity more generally, many scholars (Krosenbrink-Gelissen 1991, Green 1992 Fiske 1993, Satzewich 1994 and several of the contributors to Sawchuk 1992) have claimed that First

Nations' constructions of identity continue to deploy essentialist, colonial enforced categories found in the *Indian Act*, categories which discriminate both on the basis of gender and legal status. For example, Satzewich (1994) in critiquing Jensen's (1993) argument that the rise of Aboriginal nationalism has led to Native people constructing a collective Aboriginal identity, suggests that

> despite their search for authentic names and identities which seek to reject colonially-imposed categories, and despite the attempts to create definitions of themselves as 'nations', the organizations which represent the four colonially defined groups continue to use and manipulate essentialist and colonial-based definitions of their collectivities. In other words, the ways that organizations which represent status Indians, non-status Indians, Metis and Inuit people define who is 'inside' and who is 'outside' of the boundaries of the imagined community of their respective nations differs little from externally imposed colonial definitions (1994:50).

I, too, disagree with Jensen's pan-Indian construction of Native identities but I think a more effective approach would acknowledge the desire of First Nations to be seen as distinct nations, with distinct traditions, cultures and histories. While I do not deny that some comments made publicly by First Nations male political leaders could potentially be interpreted as perpetuating discrimination based on gender and colonially imposed legal categories, this attitude is certainly not as consistent as many scholars would seem to suggest, and the complexities of the various situations need to be addressed. Such comments need to be understood in the context of First Nations' mistrust of the government's agenda when issues concerning the

Indian Act are being addressed, a valid and understandable sentiment considering First Nations' past experiences with the government's policy of assimilation. I also think it would be more relevant to examine how these comments might be incidents of cross-cultural miscommunication based on the assumption that Euro-Canadians and First Nations peoples share discourses, when in reality certain crucial understandings may be unique to First Nations. Unfortunately, such analysis falls beyond the scope of this thesis which focuses more on local discourse. However, I can comment that, in terms of local discourse, the construction of identity based on colonially imposed categories was not prevalent and, in fact, these categories were often vehemently rejected. Furthermore, many individuals do not consider the organizations whose discourse Fiske, Krosenbrink-Gelissen and Satzewich analyze to be effective in representing the people themselves. Many point out that there is not a representative from their own community in, for example, the AFN and so they do not feel that their community's specific needs are necessarily being addressed. Furthermore, these groups are functioning as part of the Euro-Canadian political system, a system which has little in common with First Nations traditional systems. At the very least, it must be acknowledged that a variety of attitudes can exist within a single community and, thus, a monolithic First Nations position can not be constructed. It is my hope that, as this thesis proceeds, it will continue to deconstruct such attitudes found in the literature and illuminate the

complexity of the situation by examining discourse on the local level by placing it within the context of traditional understandings.

Chapter Three.
"We are the first teachers": Iroquoian and Algonquian women's construction of identity.

The NWAC and the metaphor of motherhood.

I examined the literature published by the Native Women's Association of Canada between the years 1982 and 1987 while it was politicking for changes to the *Indian Act*. The NWAC represents First Nations women, whether or not they have legal status. Its primary, although not exclusive, concern is to ensure that women's rights to individual equality are protected. The NWAC sees itself as searching for solutions for First Nations men as well as women and as attempting to construct an oppositional ideology to the colonial legacy that degraded and disempowered both women and men. It has had a fractious relationship with the AFN, at times supporting it while at other times attacking it. Krosenbrink-Gelissen (1991) notes that this ongoing antagonism with male-dominated political associations over revision of the *Indian Act* and constitutional reform led the NWAC to shift from a legalistic rights discourse to a moral and cultural discourse that embraced notions of traditional motherhood. It was an attempt to counter the legal ideology of the AFN and was seen as a political strategy with potential to both empower women and unite women and men against the Canadian state; their authenticity as pre-colonial traditions means that motherhood symbols can be evoked in

resisting the state and in establishing ethnopolitical boundaries (Fiske 1993:25).

The NWAC maintains that First Nations women seek harmony and compromise within their communities and hope to attain a new vision of gender equity based on this traditionalist version of motherhood: motherhood that embraces biological and social reproduction consistent with the spiritual awareness of the sacred role and responsibility of women as the first teachers and hence as the future of First Nationhood. By arguing that nationhood depends on motherhood, women engaged in a new discourse that positioned them in the centre of the ethnopolitical struggle for self-determination. It is as female members of First Nations that they oppose the intrusion of the state, not as women seeking individual rights against their male peers. They seek sexual equality within their First Nations not merely for their own benefit but also in response to their collective responsibility for future generations. And so, the Ontario Native Women's Association redefined their politics in the context of the traditional responsibility of motherhood, "As traditional women, we understand the role of the association to be the same as our roles as women, mothers and grandmothers... We are the first teachers" (O'Conner et al. 1989:38).

The symbol of traditional motherhood evokes images of the ancestors and of the collective spiritual identity of the different First Nations and promises the creation of life and hence the perpetuation of the peoples and

their cultural identity (Fiske 1993:25). As a sacred symbol it strengthens the sense of collectivity of a particular First Nation and distinguishes that Nation from non-Aboriginal society whose tradition has devalued womanhood. By evoking a spiritual continuity, symbols of traditional motherhood challenge the contemporary inequality of First Nations women's daily lives and signify that their diminished political involvement is the consequence of cultural and economic colonialism (Fiske 1993:25).

The NWAC's political strategy has helped to reestablish sexual 'equality' as a Native tradition and has thus down-played its connection to state law. However, Fiske (1993) and Krosenbrink-Gelissen (1991) both claim that the NWAC's prediction that with this discourse the association might successfully overcome political resistance of male-dominated political organizations to women's equality within First Nations was inaccurate. While reverence for traditional motherhood may be acknowledged by male leaders as an aspect of sacred family traditions, they argue, it is not embraced as a traditional basis for political equity in contemporary political structures, thus rendering the success of this strategy limited. Even where men do confirm women's political ideology, they fail to transform symbols of motherhood to emblems of Native identity; while the AFN tentatively embraced an ideology of motherhood, it has not retained it as central to Native identity. Women's redefinition of their political rights as traditional cultural values has failed to mediate the political tensions between women

and men and the NWAC is unable to reconcile its political tensions with the AFN and the NCC.

My research considers the images and metaphors of women and their communities that Iroquoian and Algonquian women create as they talk (or perhaps write) about their experiences of living without status and later (re)claiming it, and of defining and seeking solutions to the resulting problems. I examine the ways in which local women's discourse converges with and diverges from the ideals and metaphors asserted by the NWAC. Is there, indeed, evidence that women produce moral accounts of themselves as mothers and in the process generate metaphors of motherhood that come to stand for Native female identity?

I have found that Algonquian and Iroquoian women often construct their identity by appealing to women's traditional roles and responsibilities and that these roles and responsibilities are often organized and understood by the root metaphor of motherhood. However, unlike Fiske and Krosenbrink-Gelissen, I am not suggesting that women are attempting to transform symbols of motherhood to emblems of Native identity. In both Iroquoian and Algonquian traditions, the Creator gave to women roles and responsibilities which are separate from those of men. From time immemorial, both women and men have known their place and work in this part of Creation. The roles of men and women may have differed, but both were equally respected and considered essential to the survival of the group

as a whole. While symbols of Algonquian or Iroquoian collective identity exist, I found nothing to indicate that women are mobilizing symbols of female identity to 'stand for' the collective identity of the group.

Furthermore, the discourse of a political organization intending to represent all First Nations women across Canada would attempt to construct a collective female identity at the pan-Indian level. The individual Algonquian and Iroquoian women with whom I spoke construct a sense of collective identity at the community level. And, in fact, many of the women reject the notion of a pan-Indian identity. This is particularly true of Iroquoian women.

"Keeper of the Culture": Iroquoian women's construction of identity.

The narratives of Iroquoian women are striking in the way in which they illustrate how women are defining themselves in opposition to those around them. Iroquoian women often define themselves in opposition to other First Nations women and a common theme in Iroquoian discourse of identity is the desire to be perceived as unique and distinct from other First Nations. Much more frequently, however, Iroquoian women define themselves in opposition to 'white' women, in general, and 'white' feminists, in particular. In the process of defining and defending their unique cultural

identity,[4] Iroquoian women embrace key cultural symbols, such as Sky Woman, First Teacher or Keeper of the Culture, as emblems of their identity to evoke an identity founded on traditional roles and responsibilities, roles and responsibilities which are organized by the metaphor of motherhood.

The following observations are taken from a consideration of Iroquoian women's narratives and a series of articles by Iroquoian women which have appeared in various feminist journals over the years. More often than not, these articles are prefaced with an account of how reluctant the writers are to make a contribution to such a feminist journal, or, at least, a journal dealing specifically with women's issues. The article would begin with the writer positioning herself. For example, a Mohawk woman might make reference to the fact that Mohawk women were the first to protest First Nations women losing their birthright, how they are notorious for being outspoken, and how they are strong and aggressive and thus involved in the issue at hand. Then, inevitably, the women would go on to express their discomfort concerning the concepts surrounding feminism and at being associated with feminists. They claim to be tired of others interpreting for them, when what they really want is to define themselves in their own context and not in somebody else's, as they see feminists doing. When this

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[4] For the sake of clarity, I am generalizing to the level of 'Iroquoian women' and 'Iroquoian identity' in the process of describing how these women construct their identity. However, the women identify themselves first and foremost by the nation of which they are a member.

happens, no credence or credibility is given to the way Iroquoian women define themselves. Many of the writers had had previous involvement with the women's movement but had experienced it as yet another instance of marginalization.

The women often did not identify with feminists and their behaviour, which they consider founded on the patriarchal methods of the west in terms of confrontation, power struggles and an adversarial way of resolving issues. They perceive feminists as seeking universal sisterhood and of making the assumption that all women are the same and share the same concerns. The Iroquoian women themselves find that they can not separate their gender from their origin. They never see themselves strictly as 'women' but as 'Mohawk women', 'Seneca women', 'Cayuga women' and so on (cf. the series of articles on 'Flint Woman' 1986, 1991, 1992 by Patricia Monture of the Mohawk Nation). Feminists are seen as expecting them to make that separation because of their belief that women automatically share in sisterhood with other women, although they may not have anything else in common. In fact, many First Nations women feel they encounter problems and obstacles that go far beyond 'white women's issues'. In many cases, the women may identify more strongly with First Nations men than with women from other cultures. Mohawk women, for instance, do not want universal sisterhood and pride themselves on being 'absolutely different'. To illustrate, Mohawk women comment that their language has very descriptive

names which encapsulate who they are and how they differ, in a respectful way. Early on, a young child learns how to carry that name and the responsibilities that go along with it (cf. Osennontion and Skonaganleh:rá 1989:8). Even in cases where the language in use is the same as that of the dominant culture, Iroquoian women emphasize that they have a different world view. Feminist thinking can not be applied to this world view so that what Iroquoian women are saying 'fits' with feminist interpretations.

Furthermore, feminists are pushing for equality and these Iroquoian women do not want equality per se, but want to go back to where women were complete and beautiful. Here they are equating equality with sameness. Iroquoian women do not want to be the same as men and in fact many claim that in the past Iroquoian women were treated as more than equal: woman was the centre of the community and man was her helper. Women do not want sameness but the peaceful harmony of interdependence.

Iroquoian women see feminists as caught up in the Euro-Canadian conception of a pan-Indian collectivity and in the attitude that there is one answer for all First Nations peoples in Canada in terms of how to reassume responsibility of their own affairs. The First Nations' collective is at the community level and an important Iroquoian goal is to permit all voices to articulate themselves, potentially in different ways with different aspirations yet able to co-exist. In this way, it is not always possible to subscribe to the feminist agenda as presented by some women's groups and be acceptable in

First Nations communities. The Iroquois Great Law does not define or defend 'rights'. According to the Iroquois way there are no rights only responsibilities. And, indeed, many traditional First Nations societies understand themselves as a complex of responsibilities and duties. The issue of gender discrimination within the *Indian Act* is not always conceptualized as an invasion of individual rights but as a destruction of culture and of women's traditional role within it. As Fleeta Hill, (in Agnes Williams 1992:8) notes,

> First of all when we are talking about women,
> I have to drop you a good bombshell
> You guys in the women's movement
> Are way behind us, us Senecas.
> Because we've had all kinds of women power,
> From time, from time beginning.
> You have a lot to learn from Indian women.

Many Iroquoian women claim that they are not interested in a right conferred on them by the government of Canada. And, indeed, often when First Nations people discuss rights and borrow the rhetoric of human rights in contemporary struggle, they are using the paradigm of human rights as a means to gain recognition of historic claims (Aki-Kwe 1989:150) which is not necessarily buying into the distinctly western and liberal vision of human rights concepts. First Nations' claims must be fit into the categories and concepts of a dominant culture, in some form of equivalence, in attempting to be acknowledged. Underlying the use of human rights terminology is a plea for recognition, tolerance and respect of a different way of life, an idea of

community, political system or spiritual belief. It is a request to be recognized as a People. The recognition of another People as another culture entails more than merely recognizing rights of certain persons (Aki-Kwe 1989:150).

The Canadian human rights law is set out in individualist terms as is obvious in the use of the singular subject in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms,* and is unlikely to be interpreted by the courts as including a collective understanding of rights. As the Assembly of First Nations noted in 1982, "As Indian people we can not afford to have individual rights over ride collective rights... The Canadian Charter is in conflict with our philosophy and culture." Many First Nations people maintain that government recognition of First Nations peoples as distinct People with different but equally legitimate cultures and ways of life can not be achieved through Canadian courts and in the rhetoric of Canadian human rights. It is to this end that many First Nations women reject the single issue position of feminists and will not work only for women's issues which can oversimplify the situation at the expense of other variables.

Iroquoian women construct their identity in opposition to the women's movement by rejecting the feminist approach and by illustrating how Iroquois ways and understandings are different. To do this, Iroquoian women have embraced key cultural symbols as emblems of their identity to convey the uniqueness of that identity to those outside the group. Iroquoian women have also mobilized these same symbols within their own

communities in an attempt to transform these enduring cultural images into contemporary political responsibilities. Two Mohawk women, Osennontion from Kahnawake and Skonaganleh:rá from Tyendinaga, write (1989:8-13),

> In the context of who we are, we believe that women came first--that the first one, the first being to come amongst our relatives, came from the sky world. This first woman who came carried a child, and this first born was a woman...Women had traditional roles as Centre, maintaining the fire--the fire which is at the centre of our beliefs. She is the Keeper of the Culture. She has maintained that role despite intermarriage which caused her to be cut off from her roots, both legislatively and sometimes physically...
>
> In our community the woman was defined as nourisher and the man protector, he had the role of helper. She was responsible for the establishment of all of the norms--whether they were political, economic, social or spiritual. She had specific responsibilities to creation which were different but certainly no less important than his. In fact, if anything with the gifts given her woman was perhaps more important. There was an understanding that the woman in many respects, certainly spiritually, was more powerful and complete... The men understood that gifts were given them by the Great Mystery--ceremonies and teachings--and that there were things they had to do to be able to walk the same road beside her, because she had been given the responsibility for completing creation, something she still carries even now...
>
> In addition to all the responsibilities already talked about, perhaps the most daunting for woman is her responsibility for the men--how they conduct themselves, how they behave, how they treat her. She has to remind them of their responsibilities and she has to know when and how to correct them when they stray from those. We must remind ourselves and the Grandfathers, Fathers, Uncles, Brothers, Husbands and Sons amongst us, that they borrowed and adopted 'other' ways and that those other ways of looking at us are just not acceptable.

While interviewing Fleeta Hill, who was, at the time, the assistant to a Seneca Clan Mother (she is now a Clan Mother herself), Agnes Williams (1992:8-9), also from the Seneca Nation, observes,

> A lot of people, when they talk about women's roles in this society [i.e., Euro-Canadian], say that the oldest profession around is that of prostitution but as Native People, I feel that the oldest profession around is motherhood and it's an honorable profession and that it's a profession that should be promoted and talked about more. People do not think about it as a profession and it is a really big job. And, being a Clan Mother is, I think, a part of that, a big part.

To which Fleeta Hill responds,

> The position of motherhood in the Indian world is
> Is continuity of the race
> And continuity of the race means
> The continuity of our way of life, and our beliefs
> Handed down to the seven generations unborn.
> According to the way,
> That the creator gave us...
>
> Your prime responsibility is your --
> Invested with the land.
> The women are with the land
> And the future generations.
> And the responsibility
> That the land keeps on going forever.
> And so, you make sure,
> You have someone in there
> To care forever for your people
> For the children...
>
> But, it's such a part of what you are anyway,
> That you don't look at it,
> As being a separate issue.
> I think, that maybe the hardest part to explain
> Is Clan Mothership.
> Because of that, it's so, it's so
> It is part of you, it is your job,

> It isn't separate, it doesn't become separate.
> It's very difficult for me to tell you
> What my job is, what a Clan Mother's job is.
> In the society because it is so normal,
> Like washing dishes.

To clarify, Agnes Williams observes, "So really anybody could be, could do the duties of a Clan Mother?" To which Fleeta Hill responds,

> Only if you follow everything
> If you speak the language
> If you, if you live and understand
> What you believe in.
> And you understand your responsibilities
> Toward the Creator and that whole universe
> And that whole Idea of Life.
> Yes, anybody can, as a matter of fact,
> We are all supposed to be.

In her article, "On Key Symbols", Sherry Ortner (1973) proposes a way of ordering and categorizing key symbols according to their primary modes of operating on cultural thought and action. 'Summarizing symbols', according to Ortner (1973:1339-40), are "those symbols which are seen as summing up, expressing, representing for the participants in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what the system means to them. This category is essentially the category of sacred symbols". 'Elaborating symbols', on the other hand, are those symbols which provide

> vehicles for sorting out complex and undifferentiated feelings and ideas, making them comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action... Symbols can be seen as having elaborating power in two modes. They may have primarily conceptual elaborating power, that is, they are valued as a source of categories for conceptualizing the

> order of the world. Or they may have primarily action elaborating power; that is, they are valued as implying mechanisms for successful social action (1973:1340).

Symbols with great conceptual elaborating power are called root metaphors and in this realm the basic mechanism is the metaphor. Many aspects of experience can be likened to, and illuminated by the comparison with the symbol itself and the symbol provides a set of categories for conceptualizing other aspects of experience.

The other major type of elaborating symbols, called 'key scenarios', denotes modes of action appropriate to correct and successful living in a culture. Every culture has a number of key scenarios which both formulate appropriate goals and suggest effective action for achieving them. Ortner cites the example of actions in myth or ritual but key scenarios may also entail sequences of action which are enacted and reenacted according to unarticulated formulae in the normal course of daily life. For the purpose of discussion, Ortner has separated thought from action, but later she notes that ultimately both symbols have both types of referents. For example, root metaphors, by establishing a certain view of the world, implicitly suggest valid and effective ways of acting upon it.

Iroquoian women are constructing their identity based on women's traditional roles and responsibilities. Their understanding of these roles and responsibilities is structured by the root metaphor of motherhood. In their discourse, Iroquoian women are mobilizing symbols of traditional female

identity, such as Sky Woman, First Teacher or Keeper of the Culture, in attempts to reestablish the traditional model of Iroquoian gender relations, a model which has suffered from the intrusion of the Euro-Canadian government. Iroquoian women want to reclaim their traditional responsibilities and translate them into contemporary political action. They are appealing to a tradition where women had greater political involvement in the group to define their contemporary political roles. In her analysis of key symbols, Ortner differentiates between thought and action. However, I think it can be argued that Iroquoian women are consciously taking an elaborating symbol, a root metaphor, and are using it in attempts to reestablish a key scenario. In consciously mobilizing the root metaphor of motherhood, women are trying to reintroduce a traditional model for appropriate behaviour in the course of daily life, a model in which women's political involvement was deemed appropriate behaviour.

In the past, women collectively had more influence and women who were the leaders of the Longhouse, the Clan Mothers, had more influence as individuals. A woman's traditional political role as Clan Mother is patterned on and framed by all women's sacred role as mothers, or, ideal kinship roles and responsibilities are the metaphor through which women's political roles were understood, conceptualized and ordered (as the name, Clan Mother, would suggest). As Fleeta Hill talks about the responsibilities of a Clan Mother, she does so in the context of motherhood and, indeed, at times it is

difficult to determine whether she is talking about motherhood in general or the specific role of a Clan Mother; the line "someone in there/To care forever for your people/For the children" from the passage quoted above is equally applicable to both. In talking about motherhood as a profession or job, Williams and Hill are not appealing to the western concept which tends to be categorized as an aspect of life distinct and separate from other realms of life. Motherhood is a job in the sense that it is the essential and sacred work that the Creator bestowed upon women. But "[i]t isn't separate, it doesn't become separate" because the First Nations notion of self is holistic and one's roles and responsibilities, one's work, are crucial in defining oneself as a whole and can not be separated from one's sense of self.

In light of an imposed Euro-Canadian system of government, the contemporary role of Clan Mother is weakened. But Iroquoian women are arguing that this should not be the case. Because women are still fulfilling their sacred role in Creation--each woman has "been given the responsibility for completing creation, something she still carries even now"--they have not become as distanced from their traditional responsibilities as have men who have adopted 'other ways'. At the same time, Fleeta Hill lists the criteria for being a Clan Mother as the way that Seneca women "are all supposed to be". In others words, she is mobilizing Clan Mothership as a symbol of Seneca women's identity. In closely linking motherhood as the role and responsibility of all women with Clan Mothership which is the role and

responsibility of a small number of women, women are arguing for a more politically active identity which is sanctioned by a traditional role. Although there are only a limited number of Clan Mothers, the roles and responsibilities of a Clan Mother should be those of all women, conversely, all women's roles and responsibilities reflect those of the Clan Mother. Each woman is the 'Clan Mother' of her own household and is responsible to guide her own family.

It would be interesting to interpret an observation made by Brian Maracle (1996:189) in the context of Iroquoian women appealing to the role of Clan Mother in attempting to sanction their own political involvement. He writes, "there are just nine Mohawk chieftainships so there should be just nine Mohawk clanmothers. But the most telling sign of the splintered state of the clans is a survey that one of my cousins made of all the Mohawk territories a few years ago. She found more than seventy women claiming to be Mohawk clanmothers!" Perhaps this has less to do with the "splintered state of the clans" and more to do with Mohawk women's attempts to heal their communities by taking political action and framing it as women's traditional role. This contemporary spin on traditional ways is reflected in Maracle's (1996:242) description of the political decision making process of the Kanyen'kehaka (Mohawk) nationalists on Six Nations, a group trying to revive and strengthen Kanyen'kehaka traditions,

> So now, when certain decisions have to be made, rather than breaking into individual clans the meeting divides in two. The

> men stay where they are and talk about hockey and fishing while the women go off to another room and talk about the issue at hand. Eventually the women return, announce their decision and the matter is settled. When it come to decision-making among the Kanyen'kehaka (these ones anyway), the women are still in charge. The men who attend these meetings, and half the people there are men, seem entirely comfortable with this arrangement and are utterly confident in the women's competence and ability to do the right thing. As one of the men said one night, "It takes a lot of manpower to do some jobs but not much womanpower."

"Nobody took the Indian blood out of me": Algonquian women's construction of identity.

Nishnawbe elder and spiritual teacher, Arthur Solomon (1990,1994) frequently writes about the need for Nishnawbek women to reclaim their traditional roles and responsibilities and the need for Nishnawbek men to respect and support women in this endeavour. The root metaphor of motherhood structures Solomon's understanding of women's traditional identity and he translates women's traditional roles and responsibilities as mothers into contemporary political action. The recovery of women's original responsibilities and their special gifts from the Creator is essential to the healing of the entire community. He writes (1994:136), "It is our mothers who are our first teachers. They are the first ones to teach us our language and the true ways of our people. It is they who are the first ones to keep our nation strong and pure." And so Ojibwe communities "have to step back and allow women to take their rightful place in the human family, because they are the real leaders and the best leaders in the human family... Strong, clear

minded women are the foundation of our nations--strong clear minded women automatically make strong, clear minded men (Solomon 1994:19)."

Solomon (1990:38) continues,

> A woman is a mature female person, who is aware of the physical gifts that were given to her by the Creator. She is the centre of the universe and without her there is no continuation of life. She is the heartbeat of our mother, the earth; without her beat, there is no life. The woman is the foundation of her nation and from her people derive most of their spiritual power.

As Shirley Williams (1992), an Ojibwe woman and teacher of Native Studies, writes about women's spiritual role in ceremony, she does so in the context of women's roles and responsibilities as mothers. Women are responsible to teach spirituality to the next generation and, indeed, "teachings begin when the child is in the womb" (1992:102). Women often counsel and Teach other members of the community in the Sweat lodge which is "the symbol of a mother's womb" (1992:102). Women have important roles in ceremonies in which their nurturing and 'mothering' extends to the whole community and in this way, women are essential to the spiritual health and well being of all members of the community.

Both Solomon's and Williams' construction of women's roles and responsibilities can be better understood within the context of traditional understandings of Nishnawbe womanhood. Women had a close connection to Mother Earth, a connection demonstrated through sacred dances in which women did not lift their feet from the earth. Just as an adult's sustenance

comes from the Mother Earth, a child's sustenance comes from the mother's body. Just as the workings of Mother Earth are regulated by Grandmother Moon in the cycle of the seasons, a woman's body is regulated by Grandmother Moon in the cycle of fertility. The Creator gave to Grandmother Moon the work of regulating when the children would be born and when the animal life, bird life and the fish life of Mother Earth would be renewed. The workings of the natural world are traditionally understood in terms of idealized kinship roles and responsibilities, the moon guides the earth just as a grandmother teaches and guides the younger generation of women. Kinship is the root metaphor by which the ordering of the natural world is understood. At the same time, contemporary kinship roles and responsibilities are constructed in terms of the way the natural world is ordered. Nishnawbek experiences with residential schools and policies of assimilation have often hampered enculturation and led to a disruption in kinship and gender relations and some traditional obligations are no longer acknowledged. Damage has been done to the environment by whites as well but, for the most part, the workings of the world remain as the Creator ordained them, the seasons still flow and the animal world still renews itself. Traditional understandings of the associations between kinship and the natural world are being mobilized and the workings of the natural world have become the root metaphor of kinship relations in attempt to reclaim and naturalize Nishnawbek traditional roles and responsibilities. This is true

of the responsibilities of both male and female Nishnawbek, but women's central role in Creation as physical, social and spiritual mothers means that healing, or regaining harmony and balance in the Circle of Creation, begins with women. Solomon is suggesting that the honour and respect held for Mother Earth be extended to Nishnawbek women because of their association with the Mother Earth and their central role in the Circle of Creation.

This manner of conceptualizing experience as a circle (the fact that kinship and the natural world both inform each other) is in keeping with Nishnawbek understandings of how the cosmos operates and, in fact, the circle is a 'summarizing symbol' in that it operates to "compound and synthesize a complex system of ideas, to 'summarize' them under a unitary form which... 'stand for' the system as a whole" (Ortner 1973:1340).

The understanding of Nishnawbe female identity organized by the root metaphor of motherhood is often expressed in Algonquian discourse in the form of alternative metaphors. The understanding of cultural continuity embodied in the metaphor of motherhood is also expressed by a metonym of blood.[5] For example, in a series of narratives gathered and recorded by Janet Silman (1987), Maliseet women of Tobique, New Brunswick, use a metonym of blood when making reference to the absurdity of becoming non-Indian

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[5] In metonymy one entity is used to refer to another. In this case, blood stands for a person's identity. This is a special case of metonymy where a part stands for the whole and is what traditional rhetoricians have called synecdoche.

upon marriage to a non-status male, "I knew I was still Indian--nobody took the Indian blood out of me" and "being Indian is our heritage; it's in our blood" (Mavis Goeres in Silman 1987:217). In their struggle to reclaim their birthright, Tobique women turn to a matrilineal past for role models and the cultural validity of a society wherein women exercised valued domestic authority. Women evoke concepts of matrilineality and Clan Mothership as symbols of traditional culture and as the source of contemporary identity. As is noted by Bet-te Paul of Tobique (in Silman 1987:226-29),

> As far as clans went, the bloodline went through the woman--that's down on paper in the archives. The blood comes from the mother not the father which is exactly the opposite of what the Indian Act imposed on us... Maybe there are memories of strong women built in us through the generations; that strain of standing up for what you believe in; fighting for your children... [because] our struggle was always for the children. Maybe some of the matrilineal stuff and the strength of the women has been passed on too.

The association between blood and Indian identity was first introduced by the colonial government through the legislative provisions of the various Acts pertaining to Indians. In contemporary discourse, Algonquian women have adopted the metonym of blood but have infused it with Algonquian meanings. The Euro-Canadian notion of blood was restrictive and focused on biological relationships, a certain percentage of Indian blood was required for an individual to have legal status. The Algonquian understanding of blood as identity is more holistic and focuses on both biological and social relationships. Blood is the symbol of kinship relations and, as the next

section will illustrate, kinship relations are essential to the organization and collective identity of the entire community. This notion of blood is social in that it provides a structure for social relations. Blood both links people to the past and binds them in the present. As a link to the past, through genealogy, blood is essential to the definition of cultural identity and the continuity of that identity.

I encountered another version of the blood metonym when talking about the issue with a community member from a local Ojibwe reserve. According to this man, this reserve has a history of outsiders being integrated into the community. In fact, legend has it, that one of the largest families began when an outside male (whose heritage was 'mostly white') married the chief's daughter. 'White blood' was always coming into the reserve and intermarriage and integration lead to the perception of some community members that their reserve is more assimilated than other First Nations. He claims that most people do not identify as strongly with being Indian as say the Mohawks who "feel more deeply Indian."

Contemporary band councils allowed women who had lost their status through section 12(1)(b) of the *Indian Act* to remain on the reserve but women were strongly advised against marrying a white man by family members because they would lose their status and because these marriages had a reputation for not lasting. When discussing local reactions to women who married out, the man claimed that some on the reserve referred to it as

'selling her blood' but that this reference is most commonly found within certain families. The reserve is traditionally patrilineal and was led by a hereditary chief. Chiefs were usually chosen from one of two families which are held to be the first or original families in the area. It is within these two families that the notion of 'selling blood' is most strongly felt. A woman from that lineage remembers a lesson repeated to her over and over again; "the one thing you NEVER do is sell your status. It is like selling out who you are as an Indian person, like selling yourself out and selling out your community, betraying the community and who you are. It is selling your blood." The term 'selling' likens loss of status through Section 12 (1)(b) to enfranchisement despite the fact that women lost their status involuntarily.

That the concern is not limited merely to the fact that women are losing their legal status is illustrated by the use of this same metaphor by a female Ojibwe elder from a reserve further north in reference to a male: "Why is it so right when a Indian man sells his Indian blood for a white woman... But when a Indian woman marries a white man she is looked upon as a non-Indian?" (Gladys Taylor in Alice Williams 1989:23).

Chapter Four.
"You can always get back": Iroquoian and Algonquian constructions of collective identity and community membership.

A car by any other name: Iroquoian constructions of collective identity.

In contrast to the Algonquian use of the metonym of blood, a Mohawk community member speaking on the issue of Bill C-31 dismisses the importance of bloodline. This is a reserve where many individuals who have regained their status have attempted to return and now number at almost 50% of the population, making the issue of great concern to community members. The man, Ernie, says, "It's too easy to recognize someone by bloodline. And if you're using bloodline as a criterion for inclusion into a community, then I think you're always going to get a false sense of community." Instead, he emphasizes the importance of ongoing ties to the community in accordance with the belief that culture is best sustained by maintaining ties with each other. He notes that over the years, his community sees itself

> more and more as a Mohawk community and less and less as an Indian community. Sort of going back to our traditional definition of ourselves... Mohawk is a nationality. Mohawk is who you are ancestrally, by tradition, by language, by belief, by all those sorts of things. What you are ancestrally biologically is no, it's never been a real issue. It was for years when the government determined who could be Indian and who wasn't. People seemed to be a lot more conscious of degrees of bloodline and stuff like that. And even with this whole issue of reinstatement, the government again has reduced it to a bloodline thing; a 25%.

His sense of being Mohawk lies elsewhere,

> When our languages are no longer spoken, we are no longer who we say we are. Skin colour doesn't mean anything. And even genetics doesn't mean anything either so the thing is that you end up someday when the language is no longer spoken and the ceremonies are no longer being conducted and all this kind of stuff, you have a whole lot of people all claiming to have some sort of rights. Rights of what? Rights to what? Rights to something their great-great-grandmother had?

Brian Maracle (1996:275) also comments on the importance of language and tradition to Iroquoian identity,

> Old-timers say that the language is the key to our culture. Without the language our ceremonies, songs and dances will cease to exist. Without the language we will be unable to recite the Creation Story, the Thanksgiving Address and the Great Law the way they were intended. Without the language the clanmothers will be unable to 'raise' a chief and the Confederacy will cease to function. Without the language the people will be unable to receive an Indian name and the names themselves will lose their meaning. Without the language we will lose our traditional way of thinking and our distinctive view of the world. And without the language we will lose touch with the Creator. Once we lose our language we lose our culture and everything that sets us apart from mainstream society.

Ernie continues on to define who should and should not be reinstated,

> I mean, people who deserved to be reinstated have moved back on to the reserve and have built their homes there and stuff. The thing is, these are people who had also maintained an ongoing relationship with the community; people who lived near by but always remained in contact with the community and with relatives and stuff, fine. But then we get these other people who have shown up and nobody knows who the hell they are (laughs ironically), where they come from... unless you go back three of four generations... nobody has seen their family in a century, ha!... It's people who just show up out of the blue and by proclamation decide that they are, you know, that they have every right to this community that their own family abandoned a century ago and that my family has continued to live on... For other people, especially those who lived around the reserve and stuff, they get back, they want their status because once they got

> their status then it means that they can build a house next door to their parents, they can live with their family, they can reoccupy sects of their land that they lost when they married off or when they were enfranchised and stuff like that. For those people, yes, the community is theirs.

But the others, those who have not maintained ties to the community and whose families have spent generations with no contact to the reserve, living in the white world, they

> seem to show up with this notion that they really don't have to learn anything because they're Indian and that all comes natural... And these people seem to have this weird idea that they have the right to be Indian. When they go back to the reserve they're just automatically Indian, there's nothing else to it... they reduce being Indian to a card, to just a physical notation. It's like a car is not a car until you put a licence plate on it and then all of a sudden, *bing*, that's an automatic car and if you put a licence plate on a cardboard box it would become a car... But the part that I think bothers me the most about them is the automatic rights... they expect to have all of this stuff that everybody else has had to work for, year, after year, after year.

To Ernie, Bill C-31 is

> a real blow to the community, to the cultural stability and all that sort of thing because all these new people are all coming in, they're all bringing their own ideas. The majority of these people have never lived on a reserve, they know nothing about reserve life, they know nothing about our own traditions, how we do things, the way we do things, that sort of thing. So they're bringing in all sorts of outside ideas.

Mohawk discourse concerning C-31s, in the First Nations sense of the word, focuses on the inability of C-31s to trace their lineage to a particular clan ("Those of us who were traditional within the Mohawk system look at that and say yes, but these people have no clan. They can't be Mohawk because

they have no clan. They claim Mohawk citizenship but they have no clan as Mohawk people."), their inability to speak Mohawk ("I suppose it might be different if they're all speaking Mohawk but they're even speaking a different language!") and the extent to which the political and/or religious systems of these individuals differs from that of the Mohawk ("They're bringing in all sorts of outside ideas."). Thus, they lack the Iroquoian essence of being 'Native' (cf. Valentine 1994) and, indeed, many C-31s are considered to be white outsiders because they have had no contact with the community and know nothing of Iroquois ways.

The large number of C-31s returning to the reserve threatens scarce resources but also threatens the community's unique Iroquoian identity. A common sentiment on the reserve is that these individuals deserve recognition of some sort from the government but not 'our land'. Ernie is not concerned that these individuals are getting 'official' Indian status and at times it seems his concerns even go beyond C-31s' claims to Mohawk land and resources; he is expressly concerned about their claim to Mohawk ancestry.

While Algonquian discourse has adopted the term blood and the notion of bloodline from Euro-Canadian discourse and infused it with traditional meanings and traditional understandings of people's roles and responsibilities (although in saying this I am not claiming that bloodline is the criterion for community membership as the next section will illustrate),

this Mohawk man denounces 'bloodline' in a vehement rejection of the government's definition of Mohawk identity based on criteria which are artificial to Mohawk understandings of Mohawk identity. C-31s are individuals who 'became' Mohawk 'by proclamation' or 'official' status. 'By proclamation' effectively captures the sense of community membership having been ordained by an outside government which is seen to have positioned itself hierarchically above the general populace, whereas the traditional Iroquois system was based on consensus; a decision was made only when all individuals came to 'one mind'. 'Official' status by proclamation does not translate to Mohawk identity or right to membership in the Mohawk communities themselves. These individuals can not be Mohawk because they do not know how things are done in the Mohawk way and want to bring 'white ways' onto the reserve. They do not speak the language or know the ceremonies that are crucial to affirming Mohawk identity. The people who 'deserved' to be allowed in were Mohawk according to Mohawk criteria concerning identity and community membership. These understandings of Mohawk identity and cultural continuity are not merely defined by genetics or bloodline, but have more to do with language, ceremony, religious belief and adherence to a traditional political system. Mohawk identity is also determined by a sense of 'sticking it out' and working hard for the sake of the community. Ernie stresses that his family had stayed and worked for the reserve while other people, who had 'abandoned' the

reserve, have returned 'out of the blue' and expect to be let back in. The term 'abandoned' reflects the feeling that the community was not closed to women who had married out but, rather, implies that these women left the reserve and never looked back. The offspring of those who had 'abandoned' the reserve were no longer Mohawk because, in losing touch with the community, they lost touch with the criteria that define Mohawk identity. This does not mean that people can not choose to live in urban centres, in fact many do, but these individuals are expected to maintain ties to the reserve and to be actively involved within the community and its social network. These criteria are by far more critical in defining Mohawk identity than is legal status conferred by the government. As Maracle (1996:191) notes,

> The government's registration system has nothing to do with who we really are. Some people here may believe that they are the kind of Indian the government says they are, but I don't. Being added to one of the government's band lists was just the price I had to pay to be registered as an Indian so that I could, in turn, buy a house and return to live on the reserve.

Barth (1969) has outlined the processes by which members of an ethnic group are distinguished from non-members. He contends that the most important characteristics that members of an ethnic group have in common are those which set them apart from 'others'. In his approach, the particular criteria that symbolize and, in so doing, maintain the social separation of groups, assume crucial significance, for these criteria serve as the elements of social boundaries which constrain social interaction between and within

groups. The boundary maintenance of ethnic groups, what Barth refers to as the social arrangements of cultural differences, is a process of communicating ethnic symbols among different ethnic groups. Barth argued that these boundaries are not solely generated by the ethnic group itself, but must be a product of interplay between the group and the host society. The boundaries can be crossed by people, ideas and material goods without necessitating the discontinuance of the group or the dissipation of their cultural identity. He argues that the major determining factor distinguishing an ethnic group is that its members identify, and are identified by externals, as belonging to a category distinguishable from other categories.

In Chapter Two, Iroquoian women were seen to be constructing their identity in opposition to those around them and mobilizing ethnic symbols to do so, as well as mobilizing these key symbols within their own group to reclaim traditional identities. In this Chapter, we see again that the Iroquoian sense of collective identity (at the level of the community) is crystallized in opposition to Euro-Canadians and also in opposition to other First Nations groups and life ways. The strength of Ernie's convictions concerning Mohawk identity leads him to set up an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy when constructing C-31s as white outsiders. Throughout his narrative, he constructs firm boundaries around Mohawk identity by mobilizing those ethnic symbols that make the Mohawk collective identity unique. He rejects the pan-Indian approach of the government by denying affiliation with other

First Nations identities, for example, the hunter and gatherer identity. He distances himself from the more general identity of Indian or Native and takes pride in the fact that Mohawks are strong nationalists, more so than other First Nations. Historically, the Iroquois have resisted adopting the traditions of other First Nations and are very firm on the point that they have their own traditional ways. There is even a sense among the Mohawk that they are more nationalistic than other Iroquois Nations. As Maracle (1996:241) notes, "The other peoples at Grand River--the Cayugas, Onondagas, Oneidas, Senecas and Tuscaroras--for some reason I don't fully understand, don't exhibit the same degree of nationalism."

Bill C-31s, as white outsiders, threaten Iroquoian identity by jeopardizing mainstream society's perception of the Iroquois Nations as distinct from other First Nations. Ernie relates many stories of going home to visit the reserve and finding only 'white people', he wryly jokes about needing to the leave the reserve to find a Mohawk. This situation concerns him. While he distances himself from the notion of physical appearance as a criterion for group identification, he notes that it is, unfortunately, an important issue to mainstream Canadians. Mainstream Canadians have certain notions and expectations of how an Indian looks and behaves. He rejects these notions as immaterial and contrary to Mohawk understandings but, at the same time, acknowledges that they have political impact. He feels that C-31s are white both in terms of appearance and behaviour and, thus,

they reduce the credibility of the Mohawk claim to being politically and culturally distinct. He fears that, as a result, Mohawk issues will not be taken seriously by the public. Iroquoian peoples have continuously struggled against the threat of assimilationist government policy and, in so doing, have constructed firm ethnic boundaries by mobilizing symbols of identity unique to the Iroquois and perceived as characterizing them by outsiders.

Crucial to this identity of difference is a sense of collectivity which is steeped in traditional Iroquoian understandings of the world. The lands and waters of Great Turtle Island were created specifically for the Onkwehonwe (the 'real, first, or original people')[6] by Shonkwaya'tihson ('he has finished making our bodies'), the Creator. In fact, the Creator made the Onkwehonwe from the very soil on which they walk today and so ties to the land are very strong. The Creator gave people the knowledge of how to survive on the land and instructions on how to properly respect the land, water, plants and animals. From the Teachings, the Onkwehonwe know how they are to use the fruits of the earth and how to give Thanks to the Creator.

When the Creator made the Onkwehonwe he instructed them to live in peace. Peace was not only the absence of war but a state of mind and way of life. The people forgot the Creator's instructions and began warring among themselves. The Creator caused a man to be born and it was the Creator's will

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6 The spellings and interpretations of the terms used in this section are taken from Brian Maracle (1996).

that this man end warfare among the Iroquois by delivering a special message of peace and righteousness. This man was Peacemaker and he established peace by establishing the Rotinonhsyonni ('they make the house') or, as known in English, the Confederacy. In founding the Confederacy, Peacemaker gave to the people Kayaneren'tsherakowa ('the Great Law') which reminded them of their origin and informed the Iroquois system of government. The Confederacy was highly regarded as a divine creation based on sacred principles. The collective belief in the Great Law and the commitment to a government based on the principles of reason and open debate held together this group of autonomous individuals.

Today, many Iroquois people believe that 'the old ways' continue to teach the people how to live in respect of Creation and help to define their place and role in the universe. This way of life is embodied in the Thanksgiving Address, one of the most frequently voiced elements of Iroquois culture. The Thanksgiving Address speaks of the way that human beings are related to everything in the universe. It gives thanks to all living things and calls on its listeners to come to one mind, a mind focused on gratitude, humility and peace. It also dictates a code of conduct, to regard all life and all things in Creation as equal and to maintain a relationship with all the natural world.

An analysis of Iroquoian discourse shows the concerns community members have regarding Bill C-31 and illustrates the difference in the way the

community and the government define C-31 membership and criteria for band membership in general. I have illustrated that the concern was not so much whether or not the individual had status but whether they were Mohawk, Cayuga or Seneca. Bill C-31 was supported by community members in its intention to correct the discriminatory and arbitrary nature of the government's position on community membership and examples of past injustices were readily recounted: the Seneca man whose parents both had status but who was not registered before his father's death. When his mother remarried a white man, the son decided to take his step-father's name and as a result was later denied status. When he married a Seneca woman, she lost her status. Or the most popular example, the sister who married out and lost her status while her brother's non-status spouse gained status. Many community members wanted these absurdities corrected and supported Bill C-31, but, according to some, Bill C-31 is now out of control and people with little claim to being Iroquois are being allowed to return to the reserve. Ernie mentioned that the band council on his reserve had the option of closing their doors to C-31s but opted not to because they wanted individuals who had lost their status to be able to return to the reserve. In making this decision, the band council had in mind those individuals who were known to the community, who had maintained ties to the culture and who wanted to return so they could be closer to their family. The community is amazed by the number of individuals who have returned simply because these people

are not considered to be Mohawk and so why would they want to live on a Mohawk reserve. Mohawk concerns had less to do with 'official' status and more to do with preserving the unique Mohawk identity and the fact that, yet again, the government has taken community membership into its own hands and based it on criteria which differ from those of the Mohawk themselves.

Losing status did not mean that Iroquois women could not continue to participate in the community. Perhaps they could not live on the reserve with their non-Native spouse, but they were still able to remain actively involved in the community, indeed, they were expected to. Maude is a woman from the Cayuga Nation. Her parents had left their home reserve directly after marriage because there was no work to be found. Even so, they maintained ties to the community during their years of absence,

> We always went back there because my mom and dad made sure that we were taken back to the Longhouse for, you know, Thanksgiving ceremonies and everything all through the year so, um, we never lost that. Even though I did lose my status... I never lost the traditional part of my life because that was always there like it is today. You know, if you live off the reserve you can always get back to it if you just maintain contacts.

Maude had lost her status upon marrying a non-Native man but she maintained ties with her community and was always welcome to join in Longhouse ceremonies, "as far as the Longhouse goes, because they don't believe in any of this, that I still, I still was always a member of the Longhouse." She also asserts that "all the people pretty well that I have

contact with down there, uh, would accept me at any time with or without status" and that "the majority of people don't care, they just care that you belong to that reserve." Maude 'belonged' to that reserve because she had maintained ties to the reserve, she had relatives living there, she spoke the language, took part in the ceremonies, and thus was Cayuga.

"These roots are my roots": Algonquian constructions of collective identity.

The narratives of Algonquian people also emphasize the importance of ties to the community in defining band/community membership. Algonquian reserves are portrayed by their residents as being small and familiar, where everyone is related to everyone else. And community membership often emulates family membership. Family expectations dictate that one who is not actually living in the community is expected to return to acknowledge or celebrate key events such as Christmas, weddings, births or deaths. Family relations provide a frame for social relations with others; community and family members are often defined through participation.

> Darnell (1995:11) has remarked that she can not find in the literature
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> > much that lays out the pragmatics of what kinship is used for, of what social relations among known persons in small communities ideally are like. It is private behaviour, structured by deep-rooted assumptions about the obligations of social relationship, that provides security for the individual within a family and a community. Corporate identity is built out of intersections of relationships based on kinship.

Her observation that kinship provides the metaphorical structure of social relationships for the Plains Cree of northern Alberta and Saskatchewan is also true of many Ojibwe communities in southwestern Ontario. Using family relations to frame community relations helps to insure that there will be no closure, that relationships will continue through time. There is an expectation that individuals will change as they move through the life cycle, and may even leave the community, but relationships and ties should remain stable. This is the manner in which people remain certain that mutual responsibilities and rights will be respected and maintained. As Winona, an Ojibwe woman from southwestern Ontario, notes, "A lot of people stress the point we're all cousins. We're all related. We should try to get along because we all are cousins and everything, eh?" Kinship provides a metaphor for the appropriate behaviour and responsibilities of all members of the community.

On one particular Ojibwe reserve, some of the reinstated women returning had not kept up these ties and so their motives were suspect, especially since the band was anticipating a cash settlement of land claims. Many of these women were already members of their husbands' bands which is in keeping with the patrilineal tradition of the Ojibwe. If any trouble were to arise, they were perceived as being quick to return to their husbands' bands and unwilling to become involved. I think this is why it was so important to Lily that I know she was <u>invited</u> to return to the reserve. She was also quick

to tell me that she and her children had sustained ties to the community and she emphasized her current political involvement in the group. After her marriage to a non-Native man, Lily did nothing to enfranchise herself and refused to sign the papers because the government could not make her any less "Indian by waving a piece of paper over my head". The band council did nothing immediately regarding her status; they thought the marriage would fail and that she would eventually return. After two years, the band realized she was not coming back and only then took her name off the band list. After her husband's death, the band invited her to return, claiming that there was plenty of land for her to build a house. She and her children were placed on the band list before the passing of Bill C-31, but her grandchildren were not included as they did not meet the blood quota.[7] Naturally, Lily found this very disturbing, because of her concern for the future generation but also because her grandchildren lived with her on the reserve and were more actively participating than many others who had status. Lily's experience would indicate that there is a fairly accurate, if informal, account of whose kids did what to contribute to the community.

A man from the same reserve addresses this notion of community ties when he talks about the anger women from his community felt at the discriminatory nature of Section 12(1)(b),

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[7] The children of reinstated mothers and non-status fathers can not transfer status to their own children.

> I think that's what the Indian women, what really made them feel so much more strongly about it. Here they saw these other women being allowed into the community while the Indian women it had happened to had lost their status... I mean, them and their children, they were no longer Indian people as far as the government was concerned. Anything that goes along with that, recognized as an Indian person, that's lost. But then they see Indian men marrying white women or non-native women and here these women are suddenly counted as Indian people. Them and their children from that marriage. And, in fact, that's what happened with me. I married a non-native woman. She's a member of my community now and my children, even though they don't live there and haven't spent much time there and aren't interested in living there, they're still members of that community!

He laughs ironically as he says this and shrugs his shoulders at the absurdity of the government's position regarding community membership.

This notion of ties to, and participation within, the community was often expressed through a metaphor of roots. Mary has been back on the reserve for almost a year but this is to be her first full summer. Before we sit down to talk she takes me out to her garden. She guides me through a small, carefully tended, plot of land as she talks about her experiences returning to the reserve and of her continued participation in the community. Being early in the season, the plants are just beginning to flourish. As she points out the different species struggling to break through the soil, she talks of her expectations of her garden and her expectations for the community in its recent political activities. At the end of the tour she laughs and informs me, "now that I've put down roots, I really feel like I've come home. These roots are my roots."

This metaphor captures Algonquian identification and definition of self by connection to a land base (Valentine 1994). Land becomes a symbol of identity. These roots are the collective understandings of the people, the shared cultural knowledge. They symbolize the perpetuation of cultural identity in a circular perspective where the past interacts with and informs the present and future akin to the repetitions in the cycle of nature. Similar to the metaphors of motherhood and blood, the metaphor of roots also embodies cultural continuity. These understandings can be better understood within the context of traditional Algonquian world view.

The Nishnawbek ('the good beings')[8] were put on this land by Kitchi Manitou ('Great Mystery'), the Creator, to care for it for those who would come after. There is purpose for each human life; every child of the Creator was given both a destiny and the power to accomplish that destiny. In each person's inmost being there was implanted by Kitchi Manitou 'a seed or a small clutch of talent'. This was the substance that each person was to seek through dream and vision and having taken possession of it, enhance his or her being and Creation itself (Basil Johnston 1995). Arthur Solomon (1994:71), a Nishnawbe elder and spiritual teacher, writes,

> It is true that none of us will ever be perfect
> as long as we live in these human bodies.
> Our work here on this earth is to work at our perfection
> as best we can,

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[8] The spellings and interpretations of the terms used in this section are taken from Arthur Solomon (1990, 1994).

> *So that when we have to return to the spirit world*
> *from where we came*
> *we will be able to answer the question:*
> *What have you done with the time, and the opportunities,*
> *and the gifts that I gave you?*
> Each one of us is gifted in different ways
> It is our responsibility to discover those ways
> Some of us do and some of us don't.

In this way, all of life is seen to be a process and every person is the 'thing-which-is-becoming' as opposed to a 'thing-which-is'.

The spiritual world exists parallel to, and interacts with, the physical world of the Nishnawbek.

> We prefer to speak of the Creator
> as the life force, which is within all
> things that live, whether trees, or
> animals or birds or fish or whatever (Solomon 1994:32).

Thus, it is not simply a sphere of belief separable from the pragmatics of everyday life. The sense that people interact with the spiritual world in the course of day to day life impacts on the ordering of that life and, indeed, seems often to be the context within which many aspects of life are seen, defined and given significance. This interaction is often at the level of the individual through vision quests and dreaming. The power which is obtained through the individual vision experience is used uniquely by the individual to whom it is given, resulting in a highly developed sense of individuality and autonomy in relating to the spirit world. A person's autonomy is a gift from the Creator so precious that another human should

not interfere with it in any way and Nishnawbek will not interfere with an individual's right to choose her/his own path.

Generation after generation of Nishnawbek have inhabited the same land, mastered the same skills and fought the same struggles. Like the seasons, destiny was to repeat what had come before and people were to walk in the footsteps of their Ancestors. The trail has been worn smooth by those who have gone before, giving a sense of continuity; people do not have to look to the past to know the Ancestors but are walking on their trails and reliving their lives. In this way, the trail becomes sacred. When Teresa Solomon-Gravel (in Solomon 1994:17) writes,

> Travel back
> Along the trail
> And pick up the bundles
> The knowledge that is there,

she is instructing people to look to the past and use the knowledge of the Ancestors to guide the way ahead. The Nishnawbek tie to the land is more than an emotional sentiment; the land itself is a tie to the communal past, present and future. As such, the land informs both individual and group identity, and there is often a sense that one who deserts the ancestral land will find an emptiness within, removed from the strengths of the past and the wisdom and guidance of the Ancestors.

Existence is conceptualized as a circle. This circle is central to the life way of the Nishnawbek and is a means through which personal experiences are understood. Throughout life, one aspires to the obtain the wisdom of the

Ancestors; the wisdom necessary to live in harmony with Creation. The spiritual ideal is one of the harmony, balance and inter-connectedness of all of Creation. The circle informs the proper way to relate to and treat the universe, other people and one's own mental and spiritual health. Indeed, the Nishnawbek are responsible to live in harmony with all parts of Creation. Many traditional First Nations societies understand themselves as a complex of responsibilities and duties. These responsibilities are deeply felt and are crucial to the very definition of what it means to be human. The notion of ties to, and participation within, the community are a part of these responsibilities and hark back to a hunting and gathering past where survival depended on each individual being responsible for the group, for putting collective needs before individual needs. Personal accomplishment was understood in terms of the roles one played within the family and the community and every person's 'clutch of talent' or gift from the Creator was intended to be used for the good of the collective.

The metaphor of roots captures traditional understandings of people's connection to the land which continues to inform Algonquian identity today. When talking of the issue of Bill C-31, people mobilize the metaphor of roots and its sense that the past informs the present. In discussing people's recent attempts to return to the reserve, an Ojibwe man places the current situation in the context of historical happenings. It is, in part, a narrative strategy in which he establishes himself, his family and their role in the community and

attests to his authority to speak on such issues. He compares C-31s returning to the reserve to Algonquian people who came from the United States and joined the reserve in the early 1830s. He observes that today, "their roots are really, you may as well say, as deep as any of the Native people there except for a couple of the families who were there from the very beginning." These former 'newcomers' have a long history of existing on the land and participating in the community and are now very much a part of it. He then continues on to say that the roots of non-status people who maintained ties to the reserve are just as deep. He puts contemporary experience in the context of the past experience with which he is familiar and comfortable. He tries to reestablish a valued sense of continuity despite continued government interference.

The metaphor of roots captures the essence of traditional understandings of land while at the same time reflecting contemporary realities of reserve life. Today, there is the notion of the fluidity of reserve life where people leave and return as part of the natural cycle of life. As Bob talks about his experiences returning to the reserve, he uses both the metaphor of cultural roots and that of blood,

> It's only very recently that I've kind of renewed my ties again with my reserve. 'Cause I was away -- I left when I was seventeen and essentially never went back except to visit, you know. And it's only within the past couple of years that I really started going back and staying there for a while and reconnecting with people again. People that are left anyway, a lot of them were -- died now, that I knew when I was a kid. But, uh, yeah, it's kinda, well, reconnecting with your roots, you know.

Bob's motivation for returning was the observation that as part of being an artist and writer he felt a loss of not being 'rooted' in his culture and not really knowing those things that he felt he needed to know. He conceives of his journey toward rediscovery of Native identity as circular,

> 'Cause of me, where I came from and slowly doing a turn around and going back again in a sense, in a way, because that's what I have done, you know. I've turned kinda around even though I wasn't really aware of it at the time, when things were happening. So I think that's often what happens. I don't know whether it's called -- I mean they talk about blood memory, you know, that it's part of the blood where you come from, you know, even though I'm now where near full blooded. They say that even a part, a small part of Indian blood can be pretty strong (he laughs).

These roots are the collectivity, the unity that shapes Nishnawbe existence. His journey is circular in that he is returning to the reserve but also to his ancestry; as someone interested in discovering Native spirituality, 'roots' to Bob is both the collectivity he experienced growing up on the reserve and also the heritage of his Ancestors. The past, again, interacts with and informs the present and future. His actions reflect the words of Teresa Solomon-Gravel as he is clearly travelling back along the trail to pick up the bundles of knowledge.

Among some Algonquian people there is a notion that <u>leaving</u> the reserve is more conducive to rediscovering Algonquian spirituality and traditional ways. These are the individuals who feel that many of the Algonquian reserves in southwestern Ontario are more assimilated, less

Indian than other reserves. A long history of governmental assimilationalist polices has interfered with traditional Teachings and so an individual's 'roots' (as Algonquian heritage) must be actively and consciously pursued and reconstituted. Many consider leaving the reserve as a necessary response to this government interference.

Bob talks about his experiences recovering traditional Nishnawbe spirituality,

> I guess because I've sort of actively or consciously pursued it. As I became older, I became more aware, I guess, of that side of me that was -- that almost felt empty. Even though growing up on the reserve, you do have certain things that are part of you, that makes you part of those roots. Where you came from as an Indian person, I guess. Simply the reality of growing up on the reserve. All your relatives, all your friends, they're Indian people. But in another sense, we were taught nothing of our traditions... I did want to learn more about it because there is a pride there in who you are and part of that pride comes from those roots. And when you don't know what they're made up of, where they go exactly or maybe what they came from, what they came out of I guess. I've learned quite a bit about that since then. But it was more because I decided it. I guess it was a decision to begin to learn more about it... In some ways it's kind of a paradox because a lot of people like me that left the reserve, I mean, I doubt very much if I would have learned any of this stuff if I had just simply stayed on the reserve, lived on the reserve, because a large part of my reserve, and I know a lot of reserves, that's still looked down on. It's not encouraged. It's not acknowledged as a good thing.
>
> *Traditional ways and ceremonies?*
>
> Yeah, it's seen still as a bad thing and has a stigma to it. And if I hadn't left the reserve, like I say, I wouldn't have learned these things that I've done. And in some cases, it's the people that have left and learned or maybe didn't even grow up on a reserve but have learned these things maybe in cities even, through friendship centres and people they know in the city. And they return, go back to the reserve communities as a, and are taken in as a medicine person, a person that knows all this

> stuff. And to a large extent, like on my reserve, there's almost no knowledge of it there still, you know, to a large degree. There's a few people down there that do, well, I guess see themselves, or try to follow traditional ways and people are aware of them. But they're not sought out by the people because, to a large degree, the dominant belief system or the way people live is conventional religion, you know, Catholicism or Protestantism or whatever, Evangelism. They're very strong in a lot of these communities, like my community, and it's awfully hard to do anything against that, that presence that's there. As soon as you begin to talk in a certain way about certain things somebody will look at you and (laughs) "Do you believe in God?", you know, "What church are you, what is your church?" I was just asked that yesterday. "You should go to church", that's what I was told, "You should go to church". "What church are you a member of?" "I'm not a member of any church." "Well you should go to church!" (laughs). I do go to church but in my own way.

While at first the notion of leaving the community may seem at odds with Algonquian identification with a land base, it can be understood in the context of traditional Algonquian spirituality with its emphasis on individual experience. People's actions can be seen as a modern day version of the vision quest in that they are in pursuit of knowledge, knowledge which comes to a person through direct experience of the world. It is in keeping with the journey motif of Algonquian spirituality as these people are attempting to walk on the Ancestors' trail. Not literally, on the land, but figuratively in that they are trying to recover the route of the Ancestors. Those who leave the reserve still hold the land as crucial to their sense of identity and having rediscovered traditional knowledge, their goal is often to

'come home'. This pattern is consistent with the Algonquian traditional subsistence pattern of nomadic hunters and gatherers who had a home base.

In recent times, a pattern of leaving the reserve and later returning has become naturalized and the return of reinstated women, and their children, is often understood as part of that pattern. The key, again, is that these women have maintained ties to the community and have thus kept in touch with their 'roots'; the collective identity of the community. Furthermore, some women claim that by leaving the reserve they are more in touch with their 'roots' in terms of traditional Algonquian ways. Leaving the reserve is considered by these women to be more conducive to recovering the strength that is traditional to Native female identity. As an Iroquoian woman comments,

> I can remember talking to a bunch of women on the local reserve and they were talking about the boot leggers and the drug dealers and that and I said, "You women have the power." I was teaching a moccasin class and when I teach classes I always talk about culture. And sometimes I just invite them to our culture because they don't know about the Longhouse, a lot of them, because they're Chippewa mostly around the area. And, uh, some of them know; the ones that travel off the reserve, you know. There are other, younger ones, don't. I always tell them a little bit about our culture and... they were so amazed that I know so much about their culture and they even asked me some questions and so I told them. I said, "You women" I said, you know, "have been empowered" I said, "ever since time immemorial to be the leaders of the community". I said, "You're the back bone of your reserve and your community" I said, "ya have to get together." "Oh we can't, we're too scared" and all that stuff. They've never done anything about it but, if they ask me, I tell them that they're the ones that have the power and the control but they have to get together to do it. But the majority of people on the reserve, especially the women,

> aren't very -- they're not outspoken. They don't say what's on their mind, its not their way, they never have been.

These are the words of a woman who prides herself on being outspoken and direct. But this notion is equally evident in the narratives of many of the Algonquian women with whom I spoke, although more subtly stated. When talking of their life's experiences on and off the reserve, more than one Algonquian woman claimed that leaving the reserve had made her a stronger person, stronger than she would have been had she remained. Lily notes that she wanted to leave the reserve as a teen and that leaving the reserve was good for her and made her strong. She feels that if she had stayed on the reserve she would not be as outspoken as she is today and able to contribute to political life in the community. Because she is stronger, her daughters are stronger also. Women talked about moving off the reserve and becoming empowered in the context of family and community. A woman who regained the strength that is traditional to Algonquian female identity could then instill such strength in her children. A woman who had gained a voice could then speak for her community.[9]

In their narratives, Algonquian women are constructing themselves as agents active in determining the course of their own lives. Their

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9 As Lisa Valentine has suggested to me, these women are appealing to a pan-Indian discourse of identity unique to southwestern Ontario. This discourse has been strongely influenced by Iroquoian women who pride themselves on being strong and outspoken.

understandings of the events of their lives differs from the accounts of many Euro-Canadian scholars who do not fully acknowledge that agency. Algonquian women are responding to their situation in a positive way and are creating a 'self' that can confront the conditions of their lives. In claiming that leaving the reserve made them better able to recover the strength that is traditional to Native female identity, Bill C-31 women are framing their experiences of losing status in a positive way. They are focusing on the positive aspects of their life experiences and are interpreting them as continuous with traditional ways.

In contrast to the Algonquian sense that leaving the reserve is more conducive to the rediscovery of traditional knowledge, there is the Iroquoian sense that cultural and spiritual knowledge is transmitted through contact with the reserve. On a practical, day to day level, Maude does not consider status necessary to her sense of Cayuga identity or the fulfilment of her spirituality but, rather, emphasizes the possession of knowledge, knowledge which she obtained as a child through her connections to the reserve and the Longhouse. There is also the sense that knowledge must be actively pursued,

> I can remember the one [Ojibwe] lady saying, "How come you got a name in the Longhouse?" she said, "and, you know, you go to Longhouse" she said, "and you've never lived on the reserve. How do you know so much?" And I said, "I was just taught it!" (laughs). "When I was young" I said, "and then my daughter and I went searching for it". I said, "All the knowledge you need to know is there if you just go and ask or go and listen."

Maude's daughter's experiences also indicate that status is not essential to spiritual fulfilment and that the emphasis lies more on the pursuit of knowledge. Maude says of her daughter,

> In about the past 10 years or so, before she got her status, she just got really inquisitive about the Longhouse because we had taken our children to the Longhouse when they were young and uh, oh, she just started asking me a few questions about this, that and it's funny too because she would ask me a question and I would say, "oh, I'll have to find out or think about it" and I would be working in the house doing something and it would come to me. And I remember Elders telling me, "Don't write things down. Don't take notes when you go to conferences or gatherings or wherever". You sat there and you listened 'cause if you have to know, it's in your head and you've heard it, it'll come back to you and son of a gun it does! (laughs). It really works... it's like the first time I ever made corn soup. I remember my husband loves corn soup and he says, "Do you know what you're doing?" 'Cause no one had ever shown me and I just wanted some so I put the water on to boil, threw on some wood ashes, hard wood ashes, put in the corn and he said, "Do you know what you're doing?" I said, "I think so." So, anyway, and it's weird because someone had told me a long time ago about your senses; if you're doing something right you will know it. So, anyway, I just went over to the stove, lifted the lid and the minute the smell of that boiling corn got to me I had a mental picture of my mom and her two sisters at the wood stove, at the homestead, making corn soup. And I turned to my husband and said, "Joe! I'm doing it right." He said, "How do you know?" And I said, "When I smelled it I got this picture, I know, I just know it's right, it's right" (laughs)... But the thing is that, you know, you have a lot of knowledge that you don't really know you have until you need it, then it's there.

Through the story of making corn soup, Iroquoian understandings of epistemology are conveyed. Unlike the notion held by some Algonquian people that you must leave the reserve to pursue traditional knowledge, for Maude cultural and spiritual knowledge comes from childhood connections

to the reserve. Cultural knowledge is absorbed through contact with the reserve and through relationships with the people who live there. Traditional ways are learned through exposure, practice and participation. The difference in Algonquian and Iroquoian attitudes toward knowledge and the reserve is due to differences in perception of the level of assimilation on the reserve and also different traditional understandings of how spiritual knowledge is obtained. The Algonquian notion that spiritual knowledge is pursued on a personal level through individual experience has been noted above. For the Iroquois, spiritual knowledge is passed on at the collective level through Longhouse ceremonies and the Thanksgiving Address. There is a sense that spiritual knowledge should be uniform and canonical in form. Spiritual knowledge needs to be passed down to each generation in the same form in which it was handed down by the Creator.

Maude's notion that knowledge must be pursued is a response to the contemporary situation where government policy has interfered with traditional knowledge. Furthermore, people frequently live off the reserve and it is their responsibility to keep contact so that the younger generation learns that knowledge. Just as her parents had taken her to the Longhouse even though they did not live on the reserve, Maude took her children to the Longhouse in turn. This notion echoes Ernie's objection to C-31s turning up out of the blue and announcing that they are Mohawk people when in reality

they have not kept up with the cultural knowledge by maintaining contact with the reserve.

Another response to the contemporary situation is Maude's belief that from the foundation of knowledge obtained through contact with the reserve, one can then move on to conduct ceremonies individually. However, this does not refute the formal, collective nature of Iroquoian spirituality but rather illustrates a woman actively negotiating her identity and life's experiences, based on traditional understandings but in the context of contemporary realities.

> You don't have to be on the reserve to live a traditional life. Yeah, you can do that anywhere... It's kinda nice though, when you, when you have that, um, the traditional part of your life. It, it, um, oh, it's hard to explain, um, because I was brought up that way... And that part has given me the greatest peace and comfort and knowing that I can do my ceremonies here, I can burn tobacco, smudge. I use sage, I grow sage and that I can do everything right here without having to go back there but if I had never been taught that when I was younger I wouldn't know it.

The narratives of Iroquoian and Algonquian community members illustrate that their understandings of Bill C-31 membership differ greatly from those of the Euro-Canadian government. These understandings are based on notions of collective identity and on criteria for community membership that are not acknowledged in the legislation. Iroquoian and Algonquian criteria are not a perpetuation of discrimination based on gender or colonially imposed legal categories, as has been suggested in some

of the literature considered above. For the Iroquois, emphasis is placed on language, ceremony, religious and political systems and on the need for continued contact with the reserve. These understandings are continuous with the traditional world view of the Iroquois.

Metaphors used in Algonquian discourse illustrate the importance placed on identification with a land base to both individual and collective identity. Community membership is based on kinship and is often defined by ties to, and participation within, the community. Again, these understandings are continuous with the traditional world view of Algonquian peoples. Both Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples can be seen to be adapting contemporary situations to traditional ways and understandings. In so doing, people are preserving a valued sense cultural continuity despite government interference in the transmission of cultural knowledge or the definition of community membership.

Conclusion.
"So that was my stand": Challenging Euro-Canadian assumptions.

As Algonquian and Iroquoian women talk about their life experiences, their words often speak past the accounts of Euro-Canadian scholars. Jamieson's (1978:1) observation that

> [t]he consequences for the Indian woman of the application of... the Indian Act extend from marriage to the grave--and even beyond that. The woman, on marriage, must leave her parents' home and her reserve. She may not own property on the reserve and must dispose of any property she does hold. She may be prevented from inheriting property left to her by her parents. She cannot take any further part in band business. Her children are not recognized as Indian and are therefore denied access to cultural and social amenities of the Indian community. And most punitive of all, she may be prevented from returning to live with her family on the reserve, even if she is in dire need, very ill, a widow, divorced or separated. Finally, her body may not be buried on the reserve with those of her forebears.

can now be reevaluated in light of Algonquian and Iroquoian women's narratives. This passage is often quoted in scholarly papers concerning Bill C-31 and gender discrimination in the *Indian Act*. While this observation accurately reflected Canadian legislation prior to Bill C-31, Algonquian and Iroquoian women's narratives reveal that it is not always accurate in depicting First Nations women's day to day life or the way in which that life is organized and understood. Women's experiences, and the attitudes of community members towards these women, vary; often these variations can be understood within the context of traditional Algonquian or

Iroquoian world view and in the context of contemporary situations on the reserves.

Often the gap between scholarly accounts and the women's narratives is a reflection of the differences in Euro-Canadian and First Nations understandings of such issues as Native identities and community membership. Often the gap is a result of scholars overestimating the degree to which Canadian legislation structures the lives of First Nations women. But it is also a result of resistance on the part of the women themselves. Women can be seen to be mobilizing traditional understandings and root metaphors to negotiate their continued participation within their respective communities.

Many women were not completely cut off from their communities upon losing status but, rather, were expected to maintain ties to the community, even if it were not possible for them to reside on the reserve. Whether women were allowed to remain on the reserve or to return to the reserve after the dissolution of their marriage or the death of their partner depended on the community itself. In many Algonquian communities, women were either welcome to stay or allowed to return. As an Ojibwe man notes,

> My aunt, she actually did lose her status because she actually did marry non-Indian -- non-Indian man but has always lived down there. I guess it's that thing where it's up to the band, chief and council, whether they want to let those people stay in the community or not. It's kinda up to them I guess. So she was allowed to live there although I know that a lot of reserves, they

> wouldn't let the women live on there... I don't even know if she ever actually even left the reserve to live with -- or he was allowed to live on the reserve, because that was sometimes the case too. It actually went that someone would be allowed to come in.

This is the community which has a long history of outsiders moving on to the reserve as was noted in Chapter Two. However, a man from another Ojibwe reserve talks about his mother's experiences in a similar way,

> Her husband had died about ten years ago now and since then relatives back on the reserve are saying, "Come back here and live. Why are you still there? Why are you living in that big old city? Come back here, you have friends and relatives, and you'd be well taken care of and there's everything you need here".

Many of the Algonquian women with whom I spoke indicated that they had been invited back to the reserve, although it was usually after their spouse had died or their marriage had ended.

Community expectations had a greater role in determining community membership than did legal status conferred by the government. Algonquian communities tend to be small and familiar where each individual is related to many. Families would protect and defend their members and even if the band council was reluctant to allow the women to reside on the reserve, they did not often act against the family's wishes. Many noted that forcing the issue would be unwise in a small community as such a political move would be 'cut throat'. All in all, it was not unusual to find people without status residing on the Algonquian reserves in southwestern Ontario.

When talking to Iroquoian community members about the possibility of women who had lost their status being allowed to reside on, or return to, the reserve, often the initial response was, no, these women had married out and that was that. However, in later rethinking the issue, many exceptions could be noted. And so it was the case that people without status were living in the larger Iroquois communities as well. Again, it was often because family members would protect and defend the women's rights to live there. For example, when Ernie's aunt returned to the reserve after her marriage had dissolved, the band council initially protested but her father argued that as his daughter, living on his property, she should be allowed to remain. It was noted that this was one of the 'original' and most respected families who is politically powerful and holds many votes and that the situation might have been different for a smaller family.

Once the initial exception was acknowledged, numerous stories then followed. Ernie tells of how his sister married a Mohawk man from the American side but since he was not 'acknowledged', she was left on the band list and could register her children under her own name. It also sometimes happened that a woman choose not to marry her non-status partner but they would live together on the reserve and register their children under the mother's name. This is, of course, in keeping with the matrilocal and matrilineal nature of traditional Iroquois society. But, occasionally the reverse occurred. Incidents were recounted where a non-Native woman who

had gained status by marrying an Iroquoian man, kept her status and remained on the reserve after her divorce. Her next partner was a non-Native man who joined her on the reserve and their 'totally white kids' were registered under her name and given status. In any of these cases, the Indian agent could potentially step in and force the women to leave, but for the most part he was unaware of what was happening, especially when the women kept their own names. At any given time, a few disenfranchised families were living on the reserve and, unless they caused trouble, they were left alone.

Weaver (1992:167) makes a similar observation,

> Theoretically married out women were to lose by law their rights of residence and band membership, but in practice at Six Nations many remained on the reserve permanently, and held land in their own name rather than in that of their husbands. Children from these marriages, although legally not entitled to band membership, were at times placed on the band lists as were their husbands. Personal friendship and kinship ties provided positive avenues for access to band membership, and older people can still remember when 'the last' Whitemen were added to the lists by the Chiefs.

Algonquian and Iroquoian women's narratives also illustrate the means by which they negotiated their continued participation within the community. Often this participation was established through small acts of resistance, whether directed towards the (intrusion of the) Euro-Canadian government or, less frequently, towards other members of the community. However, these acts of resistance were framed as culturally continuous in that

they were based on traditional understandings of community membership and women's roles and responsibilities within the community.

One such act of resistance was the refusal of women to 'sign away their rights'. Although Winona, an Ojibwe woman, was married after the passing of Bill C-31 in 1985, she had already given much thought to what she would do if faced with the prospect of losing her status upon marriage. She says,

> Bill C-31 was in place so I never lost my rights. And even -- I was already decided at this point that if they had asked me to sign I wouldn't have signed anything anyway because I didn't think that the government, as far as I was concerned, had the right to tell me that I was not Indian anymore just because I had married a white man. So that was my stand anyway because, I thought, I'm not signing nothing anyway even if they don't change it because, you know, because who are they to tell that I'm not Native anymore and I am Native.

As Maude illustrates, this practice was common among Iroquoian women as well,

> I lost my two sisters, my older two sisters, last year and I didn't know it that neither of them had never signed off. They didn't notify them of their married name or anything. They just kept their cards and then my sister... she hadn't lost it, she just kept it under her single name and then my sister out west did the same thing. She never -- she just kept the old number and had it until the day she died. But then, I've learned since then that a lot of women did this. They said, "Well, why did you let them know that you were married?" I am so honest (laughs)! If theyda said, "Maude, did you get married?" I'da said "Oh yeah" (laughs). Give them the date and all the details! People are too honest!... Like I say, I didn't have a clue what this thing was. I didn't even know there was such a thing as -- I knew that we got paid, as my dad always called it, head money, every year but, um, I didn't know that had anything to do with getting married or whatever. It was a complete surprise to me when I got the letter through the mail saying, you know, um, we have a record of your marriage and all this sort of thing so sign at the bottom. So I

> signed it then they sent me this cheque in the mail and I didn't know even when I signed it that that meant that I was no longer classified as Native... if I hadda lived on the reserve then I would have known because the people that lived on the reserve were aware of this but the ones that were off the reserve, even the ones that just went to cities and that to find work or whatever, a lot of them I know lost it just automatically and they didn't anything about it either. Plus if you had any enemies they would have squealed on ya! (laughs). I'm sure.

And so, Maude's sisters were able to retain their legal status throughout their lifetime and were able to pass it on to their children. They were able to own and inherit property on the reserve and, had they so desired, could return to live there. Finally, their 'last wish' to come back to the reserve for a Longhouse funeral was respected and both women are now "buried in our family row at the Longhouse".

Occasionally, acts of resistance were directed towards other members of the community as Maude's story indicates,

> When I went to get my daughter her name, my cousin, the one that's a traditional Chief, he refused to help me. In fact, he delayed it one whole ceremony. We went to -- for me to get her name, right 'til it was over and he kept saying, "Yes, I'll come and help you, just go and sit down and I'll come and help you." First thing I know the whole thing is over and we were having the feast and they were passing the plate around. I was just ticked off at that time. So then, I had friends in the Longhouse and I was really upset, so was my daughter. So I spoke to one of them and, uh, I went to see -- I said, "Who's the fee keeper?" and he showed me who she was, so I went over to talk to her and, uh, I said, "I came here to get a name for my daughter" and she said, "Well, why didn't ya?" (laughs). I said, "It was because my cousin said he was going to help me, give me all the help I needed," I said, "and then it was over." So she said, "Who's your cousin?" So I told her and she said I should never have went to him because they know what his attitude is. So she said, "Bring her back," 'cause there's only twice a year you can get a

> name. So I took her back then. And they said, "You hunt for a name. Do you know your mother's name or your aunt's or somebody in your family that's passed away?" I didn't. I didn't know anybody's name and so, anyway, he knows everybody's name but he didn't want to help. So she said, "You hunt for a name, if you are to find a name, you will find a name. If you don't," she said, "you come to the cookhouse a little bit early," she said, "and they'll find a name for you." But I found one. I found one in a book and I had the correct spelling for it and everything and it had meaning of what her direction was in life, so it was really good. So I went down there and I could remember my cousin sitting there when we went in the Longhouse at winter time. My daughter and I went in and we sat where the Wolves sat, sittin' there and I looked over at him a couple of times and he was just staring at me! I thought, "You just sit there and stare." So, anyway, when it come time the Clan Mother came over, the Gate Keeper came over and took my daughter's hand and took her over to the Chief and told him what her name was to be and then they went through the ceremony and I never looked at my cousin all this time but apparently -- my uncle's being groomed to be the Chief, he said, "Did you look at your cousin's face?" I said no. "You should have, you would have been dead! If you could have seen the look on his face." So after the feast was over, he came over to me and said, "I got to talk to you, I want to talk to you right now." I said, "I'm busy I got to go get my food things." So then some other lady was calling him from the doorway so he went over to talk to her and I left. You know, I don't need this!... Well, he was angry that I got her a name 'cause he was the one in the family that's like the Elder now and he's supposed to give direction to us. But, oh no, he would not, so I just bypassed him and went to somebody else. But it worked well anyway.

Maude's cousin opposed the Naming Ceremony not necessarily because Maude's daughter did not have legal status but because she was half white. This is a government imposed criterion of Native identity that contradicts the Iroquoian understandings of membership outlined in this thesis. Like many Iroquoian people, Maude's cousin feels a threat to their unique cultural identity (Cayuga in this case), but instead of opposing

government regulations for this reason, his concern regarding white blood reflects imposed criteria of community membership. This attitude toward white blood exists on both Algonquian and Iroquoian reserves but is uncommon and is considered by most to be a 'radical' sentiment. It flies in the face of Native notions of community membership based on criteria which go beyond genetics and it counters the more common perception that white blood has been mixing with Native blood for several generations and so it is rare to find a 'full blooded Indian'.

Similarly, Maude's cousin is perceived to be 'radical' by Maude,

> How can I put it, like there's prejudice amongst all peoples and unfortunately there are really heavy prejudices amongst some of the -- oh I guess it's radical because it's like having radicals in every movement, or extremists. I have a cousin who was a traditional Chief in the Longhouse down there and he would have harassed (laughs) harassed me himself, although the rest of the Longhouse people aren't like that. But he's one of those people who's really extreme, you know,

and by others in the community who "know what his attitude is". Even as a 'radical' and an 'extremist', Maude's cousin's protest is limited to avoidance and staring. This demonstrates the indirectness and the respect for individual autonomy that underlie the interaction pattern of many First Nations. It also illustrates the consensual nature of traditional Iroquoian leadership where all individuals had to be in agreement before any action was taken.

Unlike her cousin, Maude is not letting Euro-Canadian government 'official' status or criteria of membership interfere with the Iroquoian

matrilineal tradition. She creates room to negotiate her own, and her daughter's, role in the community by mobilizing traditional understandings. She notes, "he was the one in the family that's like the Elder now and he's supposed to give direction to us" but she feels he is not behaving appropriately for an Elder and not fulfilling his responsibility and so she bypasses him. By framing his behaviour as inappropriate, she is able to favour the tradition of matrilineality over the traditional responsibility of respecting the guidance of an Elder. And, interestingly, others in the community agreed, because they facilitated the by-pass. Her actions also reflect the tradition that women, as a collective, were able, and responsible, to depose a Chief who was not behaving appropriately or fulfilling his role or responsibility.

This thesis rejects the dated notion that narratives are static objects; transparencies through which a researcher can see the 'facts' and realities of a culture transmitted by the narrator in a passive and neutral manner. Instead, I have approached narrative as a structured production in which the narrator is an agent active in determining the course of her/his own life. Narratives are considered to be interpretations of life experience in which the events recounted are a symbolic way of knowing life through imagination. These symbols are not merely imagined but are chosen and arranged. A First Nations woman's narrative reflects her attempts to respond to the

circumstances of her life in a positive way. Potentially, a narrative can be the articulation of a woman seeking to make sense of events that are beyond her control, but ultimately, she establishes a place for herself in terms of the things that are within her control, doing so not only through her actions but also through her representation of those actions through language.

By approaching narratives in this manner, I have illustrated how Iroquoian and Algonquian women are taking traditional understandings and using them to interpret events from their own experience in the construction of their identity. They are mobilizing traditional understandings of women's roles and responsibilities to negotiate their continued participation in the community. I have also illustrated the ways in which Algonquian and Iroquoian women's experiences differ from Euro-Canadian accounts which tend to focus on the ways in which women were isolated from their communities and denied access to their culture. Women's words indicate that they were not as isolated as has been assumed. In part, this discrepancy is due to Euro-Canadian scholars overestimating the extent to which Euro-Canadian legislation determined First Nations women's life experiences. However, it must be noted that Iroquoian and Algonquian women tend to downplay the uniqueness of their life experiences in keeping with the narrative convention observed by Darnell: in First Nations narrative, events are less important than the systematic linking of life experience with cultural interpretation and the generic, transcendent body of narrative. Women tend

to downplay their distance from the community and emphasize their own, and their children's, continued participation within it. They emphasize the ways in which their lives are culturally continuous. Their narratives reveal them to be adapting contemporary situations to traditional understandings to maintain this sense of continuity. Placing new information or circumstances in the context of that which is familiar and established is an important aspect of narrative in First Nations cultures.

The narratives of Algonquian and Iroquoian peoples illustrate that the issue is much more complex than it is normally acknowledged as being. A criterion crucial to the collective identity of both Algonquian and Iroquoian people is sustained contact with the community. This thesis has focused on women who did maintain such contact to illustrate the ways in which Algonquian and Iroquoian criteria of collective identity and community membership differ from Euro-Canadian legislation. I also wanted to address the ways in which community members' responses to reinstated women have been misinterpreted in the literature. Many of the women with whom I spoke who did not keep contact with the reserve did not intend to return to the reserve. In this way, they were not a concern to community members, the majority of whom felt that these women deserved recognition of some sort from the government as long as it did not involve band membership. It would be interesting to analyze the narratives of these women who had neither status nor contact with their ancestral communities. The

effectiveness of Bill C-31 as a piece of legislation has been called into question (an issue addressed in Chapter Two) but it has served to acknowledge and provide a discourse for these women. Bill C-31 provides both a way for these women to talk about their experiences and a sense of collectivity and community for themselves and their children.

By way of an epilogue, I will recount an interesting conversation of a few months ago. I had completed my field work and was well underway in the writing of this thesis when I had chance to visit with one of my consultants. He is a Mohawk man who was a strong opponent to the attempt of C-31s (those who had not keep up ties to the community) to return to the reserve. We originally spoke on the issue more than a year ago. Today, his stance has softened somewhat. His original fear that Mohawk identity is threatened by C-31s is starting to abate. He is beginning to acknowledge some of the more positive aspects of the situation, the most important of which is the increased cultural awareness of community members in response to the threat of the 'other'. The large influx of people returning to the reserve has forced community members to become more aware of their cultural distinctness and more conscious, and indeed proud, of their Mohawk identity. Today, he is optimistic that the next generation will be more homogeneous in their Mohawk identity.

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