

## CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

Events happen in our lives that we sometimes feel we have no power to change. Often times these things seem incidental to our every day lives and it only seems in hindsight that, over time, we have lost something special, or that we should have done more along the way to resist. Yet certain events can make this process suddenly visible, suddenly acute, and suddenly demanding of action. The arrival of the commercial harvester on Mud Lake was a sudden event for the Ardoch Algonquin people and their neighbours. The fact that the MNR would issue a license without consultation with local peoples or authorities shocked the community, and galvanized them into action. It threw them into a dispute which would last for four years, and throughout that time change forever the geography of power in the Ardoch region.

I have illustrated, through the context chapters of this thesis, a history where European based laws were imposed upon the lands and peoples of this continent – Ontario specifically - and through which Aboriginal power and authority was circumscribed. I have also shown, through the case study chapters, a contemporary conflict, where a community of diverse peoples found itself entangled in a system of laws which excluded their interests, access and authority. They tried to find a way to work within the system and make accommodations in order to find some acceptable middle ground, but in the end found that their beliefs and concerns could not be accommodated within government structures. They found themselves pushed into taking an aggressive stand to protect their values, beliefs and interests. They ‘stepped out of the shadows’ where the imposition of European based laws, and perspectives had placed them. They stepped out of these shadows and asserted the authority which, they believed, was inherent to their identity and way of life.

Each place has its own dynamic, and Ardoch is no exception. This is not, as in many cases, simply an Aboriginal vs. non-aboriginal dispute, though it does not exclude that element. Rather, there is a strong sense of the *local* vs. the *other* in this story - whether the other is someone from down the road, or a government official. As Robert Haas states, “every particularity destroys the luminous clarity of a general idea” (in Ruzesky 1996). In fact, this story is not only about the Ardoch Algonquin community and its historical attachment to a particular bed of wild rice. It is also about regional communities and their attachment to their environments, and the great potential for unity in adversity between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in integrated communities – something that would be worth looking at in greater depth.

What have we learned? Like other conflicts that have occurred between First Nations communities and various government departments, historically, and since the Mud Lake conflict, we can see that Aboriginal and local peoples are not passive acceptors of the imposition of government policies. Rather, they first seek to reason for a place in the new system, and when that goal cannot be achieved they actively confront the system until their values, interests, and beliefs can be protected and accommodated.

What I did not do in this thesis is as relevant as what I did do. I was interested in many theoretical layers to this issue. These include ideas about resistance, conceptual landscapes, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic processes, and identity development in complex life environments – all of which find expression in this material. I was also interested in the processes of community social and cultural rejuvenation among the Algonquin families in the area, and the mobilization of an Aboriginal rights movement which has come out of the Mud Lake conflict. However,

the base research had not yet been carried out, and both could not be accommodated within the scope of this project.

The Ardoch Algonquin First Nation is currently involved in many levels of political engagement including assertive involvement in the conceptualisation, and ongoing development of the Algonquin Land Claims process. There is also an active process of community building which is seeking to reclaim the past in order to guide, and provide for future generations. Community members are still asserting a strong sense of purpose and direction, which has its roots in the Mud Lake conflict. Thus I have elected to do this background work to the development of the Ardoch Algonquin First Nation particularly because it provides the background for many further research initiatives.

What this thesis did do is to illustrate explicitly, the continuation of colonial ideology in contemporary resource policy, particularly in the context of Ontario. The uncovering of the history of resource and identity policy development, in association with the discourses present in the case study material clearly show that colonial ideologies are actively at work in contemporary resource conflicts. This thesis shows the close linkages between contemporary conflicts and historical developments in the colonial period.

Things have changed since 1982 when this conflict came to a close. For instance, the Constitutional amendments of 1984 defined 'Indians' as "Indian, Inuit and Metis", forever transforming the legal position of Metis and non-status Aboriginal peoples. It also declared that the "existing Aboriginal rights" of these people "are recognized and affirmed". Furthermore, developments brought about through a series of court cases have further transformed and empowered the position of Aboriginal Peoples (i.e. Geurin 1984; Sparrow 1990; and Delgamuukw 1997).

However, we need only to look to Marshall (1999) and the subsequent lobster fishery dispute at Miramichi Bay to know that fundamentally nothing really has changed. Resource disputes are still essentially about authority. Government perspectives tacitly accept that Aboriginal people (usually defined as Status Indians) have some claim to access to natural resources. However, they remain rooted in the belief that only they can decide on the fate of resources, and who should have access to them. In contrast, Aboriginal people continue to argue, not for access only, but for the authority to decide on the use and development of resources, or at least a significant voice in the process. As Notske states, “Communities want to be involved in a meaningful way in decisions over resource use. They assert a need for a truly cross-cultural process” (1994:271). While having obvious contextual differences, it is likely that this desire is not absent for local communities generally.

This thesis has sought to illustrate the link between contemporary conflicts between Aboriginal and State agencies, and the colonial past. The context chapters show the progression of events whereby Aboriginal authority was circumscribed, and then usurped. They also illustrate the ideology inherent in that development. Drawing on this contextual material, the case study documents illustrate the imbeddedness of the colonial past in contemporary disputes.

The purpose of this thesis is to make evident the meanings, values and perspectives inherent in resource conflicts between Provincial and Federal governments, and Aboriginal and local communities so we can better see ourselves, and each other. As Notske states, “different ideas of the relationship between human societies to resources plays a huge role in the absence of meaningful dialogue in resource debates” (1994:277). Thus, by seeking to understand the meanings behind

and within the events in our lives we can choose, with deeper insight, the values upon which to build our society, and learn from the errors of the past.

This thesis demonstrates the complex mechanisms through which 'colonial' strategies continue to operate in existing systems. It may be that this event - the Mud Lake Wild Rice Conflict - was a collision of blind interests, but those interests were blind for a reason. The ongoing and explicit history of ignoring Algonquin interests in the Ottawa valley was detailed in chapter 3. This history unfolds into the 1980 period where the Algonquin presence in the Ottawa valley is simply not considered, acknowledged or addressed. The Mud Lake Wild Rice Conflict is a direct effect of this condition. In fact, it is possible that without Mississauga involvement and participation, this struggle would not have been won.

This thesis details a history of exclusion regarding Algonquin peoples and rights, Aboriginal rights generally, and the rights of local communities to have an active voice in the shaping of their environments. It also draws explicit attention to the issue of authority. The fundamental issue under dispute during the Mud Lake wild rice confrontation was the issue of authority. The resolution, while ending the conflict and assuring the continuity of community traditional practice, was really only a stalemate. It did not resolve the issue of authority. Rather, it was an agreement to leave the issue for another time.

The same issues that were articulated at Mud Lake continue to be articulated in the present at sites all around the country. At root are issues of definition and authority. Increasingly, Aboriginal people are prepared to assert their authority, and challenge laws and policies which are discriminatory. They are willing to take issues to court, or challenge injustice on the ground through civil disobedience. Their

actions are increasingly adept. Increasingly, the courts are finding in favour of Aboriginal peoples.

We are in a period of change. As noted above, Canada/First Nations relations are being fundamentally altered through the courts, and through land claims agreements (see Nisga'a treaty 1999). These changes come in part from the growing assertion by Aboriginal Peoples of their presence and authority in the local spaces of their lives. These changes are about a new relationship, one which respects Aboriginal Peoples history, context and life ways.

The post WWII climate influenced changes that have drastically influenced previous attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples and rights. These changes have led to greater and greater steps toward affirming Aboriginal resource rights, especially in the court system. However, contemporary struggles continue to be entwined with our colonial heritage. We think of ourselves as no longer a colonial country – a colonial government. We believe that we are independent and democratic – serving the needs of all of the citizens of Canada. What we aspire to, we have not yet achieved. As Cottam states:

If symbolic gestures were enough, the problems would have been solved long ago. But Native people want land; they want sovereignty; they want a meaningful voice in constitutional change; they want to be separate but equal. Such demands involve much more than alterations in the relations between the dominant society and Native groups. They involve the redefinition of the legal, constitutional, political and economic structures of the entire country (Cottam 1992/3:202-3).

Contemporary conflicts between First Nations peoples and various levels of government are deeply rooted in our colonial past and will not be resolved until we re-make ourselves on new foundations.