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The Mohawk Warrior: Reappropriating the Colonial Stereotype

I regret the fact that I did not lead as a warrior as opposed to leading as a peacemaker . . . Peace doesn't work in this country. A peaceful man gets put aside.

—Ovide Mercredi
National Chief, Assembly of First Nations

For cultural critics seeking interventionary strategies into systems of discrimination, "the stereotype" is a useful point of entry. While I am interested in how stereotypes work—how they enable "processes of subjectification" (Bhabha 1990:71) and the exercise of power—I am also curious about the ways in which stereotypes can be reappropriated by a colonial subject, the stereotyped Other, for political and/or revolutionary purposes. This paper investigates the construction of the stereotype of "the Native warrior" in Canada, particularly as manifested at the time of the "stand-off" at Kanehsatake and Kahnawake in Québec in the summer of 1990. More particularly, I will look at the use of a warrior persona by the Mohawk Warrior Society and the ambivalent effects of this persona as it indicates discourses of both colonial stereotype and cultural symbol. The warrior image has a history in Mohawk politics that exceeds, and sometimes intersects with, the stereotype of "the warrior," such that the Mohawk Warriors were by no means simply responding to a colonial representation. At the same time, the Oka conflict brought together the often contradictory valances of "the warrior," its stereotyping and resistant functions, to highlight the ways that stereotypes shape understanding. The larger project of this paper involves looking at possible political reasons behind the Mohawk mobilizing of the warrior stereotype. What kinds of critique does the Mohawks' performance of the warrior stereotype enable?
What are some of the implications for First Nations political action and for the articulation of First Nations identities, of the recirculation of a warrior icon, especially if this image seems to confirm colonial stereotypes? And what might be the discursive limitations inherent in an attempt to reinterpret a colonial stereotype?

This investigation looks at the warrior stereotype as it is constructed in a selection of English-language mainstream Canadian newspapers from different regions in Canada; although these sources are by no means exhaustive, they can be used to piece together a representation of the stereotype of “the warrior.” I argue that the stereotype of the warrior rearticulates colonial stereotypes of Native violence, treachery, and savagery and is supported by a chain of stereotypes that includes the stereotype of the Native as victim. The threat of violent confrontation that marks the stereotype of the warrior has enabled the continued use of this stereotype to criminalize and delegitimize First Nations political activity, political demands around land title and resource use, and assertions of sovereignty. However, the stereotype of the warrior also can function usefully as a stereotype. It transforms legal conflicts between First Nations groups and non-Natives (conflicts over aboriginal rights and land title) into military conflicts, in this case consolidating an image of the nationhood of the Mohawk people. The warrior stereotype also exposes Canadian racism and challenges the notion that Canada is a peaceful, liberal democracy. Chief Ovide Mercredi’s statement, from my epigraph, uses the power of the warrior stereotype to propose that, in a country where “peace doesn’t work” and where “the proper channels” do not lead to justice, warrior methods are the only option.

Stereotypes, broadly, are fixed images or beliefs about experiences and people that exceed logic or empirical evidence. Homi Bhabha’s essay “The Other Question” offers a useful model for understanding colonial or racist stereotypes. Bhabha argues that colonial discourse is ambivalent in that it operates by means of a process of “recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences” (1990:75). He explains this ambivalence with reference to fetishism, which “is always a ‘play or vacillation between the archaic affirmation of wholeness/similarity ... and the anxiety associated with lack [or] difference” (1990:79). The ambivalence of the colonial stereotype enables its repeatability over time and location, its “strategies of individuation and marginalization,” and its overdetermination, which ensure that the stereotype is always “in excess of what can be empirically proved or logically construed” (1990:71; author’s italics). The stereotype, “as a form of splitting and multiple belief,” also requires “a continual and repetitive chain of other stereotypes” (1990:81). The slipperiness of the stereotype makes it difficult to combat. However, Bhabha claims that the ambivalence itself is a way in—the ambivalence of the stereotype undermines its authority because the stereotype “is, in fact, an impossible object” (1990:84).

In the case of the warrior stereotype, the ambivalence also resides in the multiple meanings of the warrior image that exist simultaneously, even interdependently. This destabilization of stereotyping discourse, in Bhabha’s terms, happens only at the for-
mal level, however, and is not brought about through the agency of historical actors. Bhabha acknowledges that “anti-colonialist discourse requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it” (1990:75), but he offers no suggestions for the possibilities of such a counter-discourse. I argue that the ambivalence of the warrior stereotype, which makes it repeatable, can also enable its strategic use. The latter part of this paper turns to Judith Butler’s work on performative and the resignification of stereotypes as a bridging mechanism between Bhabha’s formal destabilization and a more politically active resistance.

Because this strategic use of the warrior stereotype is so problematic, and because the intentions, actions, and goals of both stereotyped and stereotyping subjects in the Oka matter are so difficult, in some cases, to unravel, I must outline what I believe are the goals and limitations of this analysis. This paper argues for an awareness of the role played by representations in struggles for political goals. The use of the warrior image by the Mohawk Warrior Society, a continuation as well as recontextualization of a long-standing tradition, is both an assertion of the cultural value of the warrior as a symbol (in some ways an internal or culture-specific goal) and an externally directed attempt to guide public perceptions of the Mohawks’ political assertions of sovereignty. The Kanehsatake and Kahnawake Warriors acted towards specific concrete political goals at Oka, such as preventing the expansion of the golf course and asserting Mohawk sovereignty and claim to the land in question. It is important to remember this practical level of analysis. However, even though I do not want to leave this discussion at an abstract level, I do not know to what extent this paper can honestly argue about intentions and effects of the use of stereotypes, particularly in terms of political or historical events. There is evidence to suggest that the Oka conflict catalyzed an increased pace and scope for negotiations in the years that followed: the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, appointed by Prime Minister Mulroney after Oka, recommended fundamental changes in the relationships between First Nations peoples and national and provincial governments, and the Delgamuukw decision, Nisga’a agreement, and creation of Nunavut, for example, are part of the post-Oka political environment. But this paper does not have the scope to investigate to what extent the image of the warrior helped to create this environment.

Gail Landsman’s Sovereignty and Symbol: Indian-White Conflict at Ganienkeh (1988) looks at how symbolic politics interact with media representations, and many of her conclusions parallel, and can add to, this paper’s study of the stereotype of the Mohawk Warrior. Landsman focuses on the 1974 seizing of a 612-acre territory in upstate New York by Kahnawake and Akwesasne Mohawks. The group asserted that they were repossessing the area of Moss Lake as part of Ganienkeh territory and intended to set up a co-operative farming community (Landsman 1988:25–26). She notes that, although the media initially focused on several shooting incidents related to the occupation, the press ultimately turned to stereotypes of “the timeless and romantic image of the American Indian” in its presentation of stories sympathetic to the Ganienkeh Mohawks (1988:81). Landsman uses ethnographic analysis to argue that the Ganienkeh Mohawks strategically “objectified their culture” (1988:91) to win public support. Landsman’s study looks at how “the supply of resources available to social movement organizations” and the “ideologies [that] may structure the catego-
ries of legitimate resources and strategies available to actors” shape political action (1988:105). She examines the “mobilizational efficacy of symbols” (1988:x), such as “symbols of sovereignty” (1988:169), for the achievement of political goals. Her emphasis on the performative manipulation of symbols in a “social drama” (1988:169) makes her book an important companion to this study of Oka, which looks at the stereotype of the warrior as a powerful symbol in a limited field of representations available during the conflict.

A brief outline of some of the events in the Oka conflict should precede this discussion of the warrior stereotype. Although I am wary of offering a thumbnail sketch of the conflict, the discussion requires some background on Oka as a media event. However, such decontextualized and short-term explanations have been used to isolate the Oka conflict from larger questions of Mohawk politics. This synopsis is by no means exhaustive, and a more contextualized explanation of the issues appears in the second section of this paper. The immediate catalyst for the events at Kanehsatake was the March 1990 decision by Oka mayor Jean Ouellette and his council to expand a golf course, requiring the destruction of a Kanehsatake burial ground and a pine forest. In response, on 11 March the Kanehsatake Mohawks erected a blockade on the road leading into the forest, and Mohawk men with rifles guarded the barricade. At dawn on 11 July, the Sûreté du Québec (SQ), enforcing a court order, arrived to take down the barricade. They fired tear gas and concussion grenades, both sides fired bullets, and Corporal Marcel Lemay, an SQ officer, was shot and killed; the later investigation could not establish which side had fired the bullet.

In support of the Kanehsatake band, the Kahnawake Warrior Society blocked the Mercier Bridge used by Montréal commuters living in the suburbs on the south shore of the St. Lawrence River. Between 11 July and 20 August, Mohawk representatives and provincial and federal representatives attempted negotiations. Mohawk supporters and anti-Native protesters staged demonstrations that frequently became violent. On 20 August, the Canadian Forces replaced the SQ at the police barricades. After more negotiations and incidents between the army and the Warriors, the Warriors and remaining inhabitants at Kanehsatake walked out of the forest into custody on 26 September.

The Warriors became a potent icon in the media and were often treated as metonymic of the Kanehsatake and Kahnawake Mohawks, or even of First Nations people in general. The depiction and description of the Warriors often relied on racist stereotypes of Native people, including references to the legendary “warlike” qualities of the Iroquois people or the deceitfulness of the Mohawks (because of the Warriors’ smuggling activities). These stereotypes participate in a discursive field that includes literary representations of First Nations peoples. Terry Goldie, in Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand Literatures, suggests that stereotypical representations of Native peoples are double-sided: the stereotype of “the demonic violence of the fiendish warrior” or “the treacherous redskin” is supported by an image of “temptation by the dusky maiden,” often associated with the lure of “pastoral,” “available land” (1989:15–16). Margaret Atwood, studying the use of Native peoples as symbols in Canadian literature, also proposes a two-part ste-
reotype but focuses rather on “Indian as tormentor” and “Indian as sufferer” (1972:102).

These conceptualizations usefully illustrate Bhabha’s contention about the ambivalence of the colonial stereotype—that the stereotype operates by means of a process of fear and desire, or disavowal and recognition of difference. The image of the Native as “sufferer” joins a constellation of images that, in the context of the United States, points to “the cult of the Vanishing American,” which Lora Romero marks as contemporaneous with the nineteenth-century rise of the US government’s military campaign of Native removal by dispossession and extermination (1992:305, n. 3), and which points to both official dispossession and assimilation in Canada. Although American and Canadian treatments of First Nations peoples have been radically different—the American campaign for Native removal included extermination rather than assimilation, but Native American nations are recognized by the US Supreme Court as being “permanent, separate sovereigns” (Wilkinson 1996:31), unlike the Canadian First Nations—the processes of romanticization of the “disappearing” Native are comparable in the US and Canada. Nostalgia for “the vanished Native” or what Leslie Fiedler, writing of American frontier fiction, calls the “clean and heroic” “Noble Savage” (1992:162) accompanies gestures of commodification of Native cultures. Turn-of-the-century Canadian poet Duncan Campbell Scott represented First Nations people in his poetry as “a pathetic remnant, the dying race”; in his role as Superintendent of Indian Affairs, however, he emphasized their “child-like status” and need for assimilation (Goldie 1989:166). Terry Goldie points out that, in the effort to become “native to” Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, white newcomers have attempted a process of “indigenization” whereby white culture attempts to incorporate the Native Other symbolically into itself (1989:13). This fetishization of Native symbols, such as the naming of the Atlanta Braves or Pontiac automobiles in the US context, constitutes a disavowal of difference, to use Bhabha’s formulation, and an erasure of Native peoples that accompanies their erasure by extermination, dispossession, and assimilation.

These multiple and contradictory impulses can be read in representations of “the warrior” in the Oka confrontation. Although the Warriors prompted articulations of racist fear, the persona they have adopted in the late twentieth century—the gun-brandishing warrior in camouflage—recalls the North American popular culture hero Rambo. Many of the Mohawk Warriors are veterans of the Vietnam War and the Persian Gulf War; hence the “military mentality” of the Warriors and their wearing of fatigues (York and Pindera 1991:139). Ironically, however, Rambo’s renegade Vietnam veteran image is derived partly from stereotypes of Native warfare and the fetishization of Native symbols, for he uses guerrilla-style fighting tactics and ties a strip of cloth around his forehead. As William Warner notes, Rambo exemplifies “both the rugged individualism of the cowboy, the stealth and life in nature of the Indian” (1992:676). The warrior stereotype valorizes aggressive masculinity, a feature illustrated in Philpot’s Oka : dernier alibi du canada anglais by a photograph of Soldier of Fortune supporters of the Mohawk Warriors wearing T-shirts sporting the slogan “Be a Man Among Men—Rhodesian Army” (Philpot 1991:105). The dominant image of the warrior in the media is masculine in spite of the presence of women, often masked and sometimes armed, at the barricades. Regardless of the fact that the media focus on the violent image of
the warrior codified racial and cultural differences, non-Native protesters continued
to maintain that the validity of liberal ideologies of sameness justified the use of force
against the Mohawks—that is, there is a level playing field, so all Canadians have to follow the laws.

Although the stereotype of the warrior is ambivalent and has multiple sources, for the
moment this paper will concentrate on the ways in which warrior stereotypes at Oka
rearticulated images of “the treacherous redskin.” Kenneth Deer makes this link in a
July 1995 article about Native stereotypes and tourism at Kahnawake when he writes,
“Perceptions abound about what native people are like, from school texts that
described missionaries being burned at the stake, to news reports of masked and
armed warriors entrenched in a pine forest” (1995:B2). The pine forest encouraged a
number of stereotypical associations, from a description of the “Warriors emerg[ing]
from the woods” during the advance by the SQ (Norris and King 1990:A2), to a white
Oka child’s comment, captured in Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary film Kaneb-
satake, that “they could be hidden in the forest. They could be hidden anywhere. You
don’t even see them.” This white fear of Native invisibility appears in metaphorical
form in comments such as that made by federal deputy minister of Indian Affairs
Harry Swain: “Warriors are pretty skilled at cloaking themselves in the guise of protec-
tors of Indian rights” (Di Gregorio 1990:M). The Warriors’ masked anonymity con-
tributed to this incalculable invisibility, for although a few Warriors such as “Lasagna”
(Ronald Cross) and “Noriega” (Gordon Lazore) became media characters, Warriors
were generally treated as interchangeable.

English-language newspaper accounts often distinguish between Warriors and other,
implicitly “more peaceful,” Native groups. This strategy is also used by other First
Nations groups themselves to dissociate themselves from the unpopular Mohawks.
One article describes an Algonquin protest to protect a forest near Ottawa: this group
has a “proud, practical and peace-loving” tradition, and while “they do not wear
masks nor carry weapons . . . they are every bit as committed as their armed brothers
in Oka” (Aubry 1990:A5). A band member is quoted as saying, “We do not choose to
do it the criminal way. We intend to do it the Algonquin way.” Another reporter claims
that the Mohawks had a choice: “they could choose to continue the struggle with digni-
ity, or they could choose to carry weapons, to overturn police cars, and to behave as
if violence and the use of firearms is heroic” (Hume 1990:A6). The writer compares
the Mohawk Warriors with the Haida and with Elijah Harper,9 suggesting that “dis-
play[ing] courage and dignity in the face of crisis” wins more non-Native public sup-
port. These differing tactics are certainly contested within Native groups, not just
because of the different strategic value of different forms of symbolic politics but also
because of the resentment directed towards the Warriors by some Mohawks and other
Native groups. Hume’s articulation of the two choices, however, codifies ambivalent
stereotypes about Native people: Natives as aggressors, and Natives as reticent, digni-
fied, and ever-patient. Non-Native Canadians, judging from mainstream newspaper
accounts, seem more comfortable considering “the plight of the Natives” than dealing
with Native resistance (“Go back”:A4).
These comparisons of the Warriors with Native groups that use different strategies serve to isolate the Warriors, as do representations that emphasize conflict between Warriors and other Mohawks at Kanehsatake and Kahnawake. Such conflict certainly does exist and has a long history in Mohawk politics, but the signs of this conflict become manipulated to play on the image of the Warriors as self-appointed mercenaries who intimidate other Mohawks with their weaponry. Federal Indian Affairs officials are quoted as saying that Warriors are “holding the Mohawk community in a state of armed insurrection,” and that they are “not blessed by the community” (“Criminals”:A1). An Oka resident claims, “The problem is a group of Warriors—not the Indians—who have caused all the trouble . . . The troublemakers come from outside Oka” (Hendrick, Kuitenbrower, and Fidelman 1990:A2). Newspapers quote Grand Chief George Martin remarking that the Warriors have “taken over” Kanehsatake and thereby hamper the negotiation process (Norris 1990b:A1). To concede to the Warriors’ demands about officially tolerated gambling “would mean effectively abandoning peaceful Mohawks to the lawless rule of the pseudo-traditionalist Warriors, who have been known to use their armed strength to intimidate their own people” (Macpherson 1990:B3). The suggestion that Kanehsatake residents were being held “hostage” by Warriors contributed to the rationale for using state-sanctioned military force to overcome them.

Such representations stereotype the Warriors as criminal and violent. Native and non-Native critics of the Warriors made much of the economic projects engineered by the Warrior Society—bingo, gambling casinos, and cigarette smuggling—and of the criminal records of some of the Warriors at the barricades. Indian Affairs official Harry Swain was frequently quoted when he called the Warriors “a gang of criminals” that was “militarily occupying the land behind the barricades at Oka” (“Criminals”:A1). Police and Native sources outlined the “huge arsenal” of weaponry that the Mohawk Warrior Society possessed and the millions of dollars in funds in the “coffers” of the Society, gained mostly by illegal means (“Mohawks”:A6). Diagrams and charts compared the assumed Warrior arsenal with the weaponry possessed by the SQ and the army, presumably to measure the seriousness of the threat posed by the Warriors, as well as to justify serious use of force against them. The criminalizing of the Warriors decontextualized their political concerns and focused on cigarettes and guns rather than sovereignty and land title. It fixed the conflict as an internal matter of law and order, not a matter of a nation-to-nation political dispute.

At the same time, however, the representations of the Warriors either allude to, or address directly, larger issues of terrorism and violence. Headlines and newspaper articles claimed that the Warriors tried to “hijack” talks; called the Warriors terrorists, thugs, guerrillas, extortionists, kingpins, and Mafiosi; and made comparisons with Belfast, Beirut, the FLQ, and Marc Lepine. The accusations are both overdetermined and unprovable: “No one will say how many they [the Warriors] are, or how many guns their arsenal contains” (Norris 1990a:A4). Warriors are deemed capable of sophisticated violence: they can convert semi-automatic weapons to automatics via a gunsmith, since “all you need is the money and they (the Warriors) have the money” (Marsden 1990:A2; parentheses in original). And the fact that several generations of Mohawk men have been steel-workers becomes proof that Mohawks are culturally
equipped to be terrorists, for an “explosives specialist” is quoted as saying that it would be easy for the Mohawks to blow up the Mercier Bridge: “Five or six well-placed little charges can easily bring down a bridge . . . just like in war movies. The Indians know that—they’re experts in metal structures” (King 1990:A3). Implicit in many comments made at the time is the suggestion that a display of force negates a group’s claims both to an oppressed condition and to citizenship: one editorial reads, “on the surface, we see masked gunmen waving automatic rifles, referring to themselves as native ‘warriors,’ calling up to mind not so much an oppressed and ignored minority, but terrorist factions that have crippled and held hostage too many countries of this world” (“Go back”:A4). Moreover, during the conflict, the Canadian Police Association took out an advertisement in several newspapers naming the Warriors as terrorists and pledging to “enforce the laws of Canada and protect our citizens” against the Warriors (Canadian Police Association 1990:A11).

The strategy of labelling the Warriors as criminals and terrorists permitted the state to take a strong stance against what it called offensive, rather than defensive, moves. Québec premier Robert Bourassa stated at the time, “the toughest challenge for any government in the western world, in our world, is to defend democracy against people who do not believe in democracy” (Kanehsatake 1993). It also permitted the authorities to refuse to negotiate with, or “give in to,” terrorists. Alanis Obomsawin’s documentary film shows then Prime Minister Brian Mulroney arguing that “we are not going to accede to requests from a group of Warriors, some of whom are not even Canadian citizens and whose actions have been illegal for some considerable period of time.” At the same time, critics of the Warriors, such as Bloc Québécois leader Jacques Parizeau, suggested that federal and provincial negotiators were themselves held hostage by the Warriors: “[it is] wrong that ministers ‘literally with guns to their heads’ would sign an agreement with a masked Warrior and fourteen ‘unknown’ native people” (Picard 1990:A8).

The Warriors, once stereotyped and criminalized in these ways, were often treated as representative of Mohawks, or even Native groups in general, and critics suggested that the Warriors’ actions invalidated Native claims for sovereignty. One journalist supports his critique of the Warriors by invoking further stereotypes of “wise elders”:

Sovereignty means the right to smuggle cigarettes and build lucrative gambling palaces whatever white neighbours think and to use the proceeds to arm and encourage groups like the Warriors. Native self-government can mean the profound wisdom of elders and clanmothers; it can also mean tyranny and corruption at the former band office. (Morton 1990:A19)

An editorial reads, “until the tyranny of the Warriors is broken, there can be no real self-government for these native people” (“Freeze”:B2). The suggestion is that Native groups are not yet “ready” for autonomy, or that they do not yet “deserve” sovereignty:

There is no justification for holding a peaceful society at gunpoint. In fact, as long as the Warriors do that, Canadian society cannot fully recognize the
Mohawks' rights... To give sovereignty to [the Warriors] is to give it to a gang of thugs. ("Less like Warriors":B2)

This last quotation has several valances: it asserts that “Canadian society” has the prerogative to decide when to grant sovereignty to the First Nations (although Native groups have always argued that their sovereignty has never been relinquished); it stereotypes the Warriors, and in criminalizing and decontextualizing their motives it permits non-Natives to dismiss the larger goals of Mohawk and First Nations political activity; and it consolidates a notion of “Canadian identity” by affirming the “peaceful” nature of Canadian society.13

The foregoing discussion suggests that representations of the Mohawk Warriors in English-language mainstream media contribute to the stereotyping of Native protesters as violent and dangerous, and the criminalization of the Warriors decontextualizes the Oka conflict, isolating it from the larger issues of Mohawk sovereignty and the history of the dispossession of First Nations people. Given the effects of this stereotyping on non-Native reception of First Nations politics, what could be the strategic reasons behind Mohawk redeployment of the image of the warrior, whether as cultural symbol or stereotype? This section does not attempt an argument about “intentional” strategies but instead examines some of the political critiques that are made possible by this use of the stereotype of “the Native warrior.” I maintain that the stereotype of the warrior can be useful as a stereotype. The hegemonic deployment of the stereotype may facilitate processes of “individualization and marginalization” (Bhabha 1990:71) by means of which the stereotype decontextualizes the colonial Other; but conversely, in this instance at least, the use of the warrior stereotype can prompt a recontextualization and historicization of the immediate Oka conflict. The associations that the warrior image called up in the mainstream media—violent Native-white encounters, white settlements vulnerable to Natives hidden in the woods—place the Oka conflict in the context of the history of Native-white relations. And the confrontational image of the Mohawk Warrior confirms the continuing history of conflictual Native-white relations (and Native-state relations) and challenges models of peaceful coexistence that underwrite the prevailing notion of “Canadian” identity.

To construct this argument, this section refers to texts that offer an oppositional reading of the warrior stereotype and the Oka conflict. These texts collectively provide an “other side” to the conflict, using written text, photographs, and film footage to challenge the mainstream media’s representation of the details of the 1990 stand-off. Each of these texts also tries to put the Warriors back into a larger historical context by referring to the larger history of colonial contact between First Nations groups and white newcomers and the forced assimilation of First Nations people and appropriation of their land. These texts also connect this larger narrative to a more specific analysis that focuses on the Catholic Sulpician order and the geographical area around Oka. Obomsawin, for example, cuts from footage of an army helicopter landing behind the Sulpician church at Oka in 1990 to a historical drawing of the church; the
film sequence supports the voice-over that points out the irony of the helicopter landing “where the trouble all began.” The juxtaposition links the present-day violence with a history of oppression. York and Pindera (1991) and Maclaine and Baxendale (1991) offer a historical narrative that analyses the history of the conflict in this way: Kanehsatake Mohawks today claim that they were using the land in question, around Lake of Two Mountains, in the early seventeenth century. During the seventeenth century, according to Gerald Alfred, Mohawks moved north from the Mohawk River for political, military, and religious reasons (Alfred 1995:26–47); many moved to settlements on the St. Lawrence River, including one at the foot of Mount Royal, run by the Catholic Sulpician order. The mission was moved to Sault-au-Récollet at the turn of the century. In 1717, the Governor of New France granted the Sulpicians a nine-square-mile tract of land (which was doubled in 1735) to hold in trusteeship for the Mohawk, Nipissing, and Algonquin people who were on the mission. The Native people were then moved to Oka. The Mohawk people viewed their relationship with European religious and political authorities according to the philosophy of the Kahnawenta, or Two-Row Wampum, as symbolizing “mutual respect for the cultural and political autonomy of each society” (Alfred 1995:185). The Kahnawenta represented the Mohawks’ title to the land, but the Sulpicians never gave them a written deed, and, starting in 1760, First Nations groups began to petition successive governments for the title. Although the terms of the original land grant specified that the land belonged to the Natives unless they vacated the mission, the Sulpicians began selling parts of the land to white settlers starting in the latter part of the nineteenth century. For the next century, Mohawks continued to claim rights to the land (York and Pindera 1991:85–88; Maclaine and Baxendale 1991:26–27). This narrative of deceit and encroachment on First Nations land explains Mohawk negotiator Loran Thompson’s 1990 comment that “[w]e have backed up and backed up and backed up. We backed up for 200 years to accommodate the settlers. Now we have nowhere else to go” (McFarlane 1990:18).

So far I have focused primarily on the image of the “warrior” as a colonial stereotype. However, the image of the “Mohawk Warrior” in the context of Mohawk political culture arises from specific historical events and cultural legacies. Some writers contextualize the Warrior image by situating it in the history of Mohawk society. Donna Goodleaf’s text, Entering the War Zone, is a collection of essays and poetry dealing with Mohawk sovereignty and the Oka crisis. She begins her discussion with a chapter entitled “Who We Are—The Kanienkehaka [Mohawk Nation]” where she outlines the oral history of the Great Law of Peace. In this oral history, a figure called the Peacemaker joined five nations (which later became six) into a peaceful confederacy, later called the Haudenosaunee Six Nation Iroquois Confederacy. In the context of this society, women and men have different roles to fulfil. The men’s society is called rotiskenerahkete, which means “those who carry the burden and responsibility of protecting the origins; or carry the burden of peace and justice” (Goodleaf 1995:189). This has been translated as “Warrior,” and all men are warriors by birth. In other words, the Warrior identity marks Mohawk men’s responsibility to safeguard peace and ensure justice. By historicizing the “Warrior,” Goodleaf complicates the image by identifying it with peacekeeping.
The present-day Warrior Society draws its identity from this history and from a number of events in the twentieth century that have accentuated the different goals of traditionalist and modernizing groups in the Mohawk community. The re-creation of a link between the Kahnawake Mohawks and the Iroquois Confederacy in 1926\(^4\) gave the Mohawks “a renewed source of authority and influence in defending their land and rights” (Alfred 1995:60). Gerald Alfred suggests that the Canadian government’s decision in the early 1950s to run the St. Lawrence Seaway through Mohawk settlements was a defining moment in the Mohawks’ political strategies: despite the Kahnawake band council’s attempts to use treaty law to work within the existing federal structure, the land was expropriated, and Kahnawake residents were forced to relocate, prompting the Mohawks’ re-evaluation of the strategy of legal action (1995:64–65). The “Seaway betrayal” led to increasing divisions between Mohawks who wished to cooperate with Canadian authorities and those who preferred “the resurrection of a traditional society and an explicit assertion of nationalist objectives” (Alfred 1995:66). Mohawks from Kahnawake, Kanesatake, and Akwesasne broke from the values of the Iroquois Confederacy and developed a political ideology that revisited older Iroquois cultural and political institutions (Alfred 1995:69). Alfred suggests that Mohawk traditionalists consolidated existing and dormant cultural values and symbols to shape an ideology characterized by three core principles: the achievement of sovereignty, the strengthening of a distinct identity, and the redress of injustices surrounding dispossession of traditional lands (Alfred 1995:75–76). The political culture that would later set the context for the Warrior Society was, according to Alfred, a “response to a functional demand,” “a thoroughly modernized political ideology derived from a solid base of Iroquois traditions” (1995:77).

Similarly, Gail Valaskakis, a Gitchedon woman from Wisconsin, notes that “if Mohawk warriors are historically situated, they are to an equal extent, [sic] products of the struggle for Native control which dominates contemporary Indian political process” (1994:66–67). Valaskakis claims that the reconstructed warrior identity emerged in the 1960s in both the US and Canada in the context of new claims to sovereignty and the formation of groups such as the National Indian Youth Council, the American Indian Movement (AIM), and the British Columbia Native Alliance for Red Power (1994:67). The Warrior Society itself, formed in the early 1970s, follows a particular interpretation of the Great Law of Peace, as explored in the writings of activist Louis Hall, a Kahnawake Mohawk. Hall argues that “the term Warrior Society was supplied by the white man” but “seems to fit nicely” (Hall 1984:35).

While other Iroquois nations rely on a more pacifist interpretation of the Great Law of Peace, the Kahnawake Mohawks tend to follow an interpretation that, according to York and Pindera, includes “a clear acceptance of violence and warfare as legitimate methods to protect peace and social harmony within the Confederacy” (1991:256). According to Hall, “Mohawks must revive their ‘fighting spirit’ to prevent themselves from being assimilated into white society” (York and Pindera 1991:259); “people with fighting spirit shall not become casualties of a psychological warfare” (Hall 1984:38). He writes,

There have been some objections by some well Meaning [sic] Indians against having a Warrior Society. “There is no war,” they say. Nothing can be farther
from the truth. There has been a constant psychological warfare waged against the natives of America right from the start of the European occupation of Red man's land and it's as deadly as the one with guns . . . Oppression is an act of war against the people. (1984:37)

The warrior image, then, involves a reclamation of a historical identity, a contemporary ideological and political stance, and, in some sense, the choice of a militant stereotype over one of its alternates, the stereotype of the Native as victim. If one stereotype always leads to another in a chain of stereotypes, as Bhabha suggests, one solution could be to recuperate a stereotype that offers a position of strength. The image of the warrior suggests a means of resistance and defence/reclamation of land and culture that goes beyond survival. Okanagan writer Lee Maracle suggests in an interview that Oka was an “awakening,” “a moment of recognition that we were not destroyed, that you cannot destroy culture, you cannot destroy the spirit of people” (Kelly 1994:77). Her novel Sundogs narrates a young Okanagan woman's alienation from her family and culture, and the process of transformation that she undergoes during the rising Native solidarity that accompanies Elijah Harper's filibuster of the Meech Lake Accord and the crisis of the Warriors at Kanehsatake and Kahnawake. The protagonist, Marianne, describes this process: “the world of our alienation . . . is disappearing like smoke in the fire of our new sense of solidarity with others like us. We are coming alive after a long period of numb existence, paralyzed survival” (Maracle 1992:134). As she learns to understand her mother's fury at the Canadian government, she notes,

the fabric of resistance and repression woven around Elijah and Oka has altered the texture of me . . . We are no longer victims, but people who have made a decision, established a direction for ourselves after what seemed a century of floundering . . . In my mind, white men have become the rootless, the lost, and the ridiculous. Maybe it isn’t upside down, maybe it has righted itself. (1992:139)

At the end of the novel, after Marianne has joined the Peace Run to Oka and her brother comes back from a roadblock, Marianne notes, “the Warriors turned us all around and made us reconsider ourselves” (1992:210). EDee O'Meara’s poem “Let's Not Negotiate!!,” printed in Goodleaf’s book, also constitutes a refusal of victimization:

I will not pass on
a life of oppression
segregation
colonization
systemization
despirtualization
to the next generation!
I will
go down fighting!

..........................
If you can kill me physically
be warned
my warrior spirit
will survive. (O’Meara qtd. in Goodleaf 1995:116)

Part of the reclamation of the warrior identity, particularly in the context of the stereotypical media representations during the Oka crisis, involves a recontextualization of the image. The historical narratives discussed above are one means of contextualizing the stereotype. Texts such as *This Land is Our Land* and Obomsawin’s *Kanehsatake* also try to show a “behind the barricades” version of the Warrior identity. I use the word “version” because I believe this recontextualization continues to take place at the level of representations. While Maclaine and Baxendale claim that they want to “provide as complete and accurate a record as possible of what happened, this time” (1991:8), I do not believe that it is possible to confront a stereotype by offering the “truth” that lies behind it. This strategy perhaps fails to recognize the way that stereotypes shape understanding and set the terms on which resistance can be based.

Alanis Obomsawin seems acutely aware of the medium of her documentary and of the fact that her documentary deals with representations. Images of televisions appear frequently in *Kanehsatake*. During the analysis of crucial moments in the crisis, the documentary shows separate groups of Warriors, journalists, and army personnel in the forest and on the roads, watching themselves on television news broadcasts. The camera shows both the televisions and the faces of the people watching the news coverage. In one brilliant scene, the camera focuses on a news story shown on a television at the Warriors’ camp; the reporter’s voice is heard on the television as he reports from on location. The camera pans back to show the Warriors and Kanehsatake people watching the television as the reporter describes the guns and people that he sees. Then, the crowd of Mohawks parts to reveal the reporter himself standing behind them, looking at the group and delivering his report into a cellphone. This scene shows the process by which the Warriors were made into representations: explicitly by means of the news media but implicitly by Obomsawin’s film itself.

Obomsawin seems to maintain this awareness of the constructed nature of her representations of Warriors as she recontextualizes the stereotypes. A sequence late in the film shows a Warrior talking to his young daughter on a cellphone at night while helicopters roar by and searchlights flash around him. The scene almost seems staged: the man tells his daughter that he received the painting she sent him, and says, “I’ve got it hanging up at my work right now. I showed all my friends at work.” Another scene shows a masked Warrior identified as “Wizard” sitting quietly with his gun on his lap talking to the interviewer, a vista of trees behind them. As “Wizard” describes the spiritual meaning of the Great Law of Peace and the responsibility of the *rotiskensrakakete* to protect “the people within,” scenes of the army setting up their weapons amid shouts and bustle are interposed. The documentary emphasizes the senses of humour and spirituality of the Warriors as an implicit contrast to the representations of the stiff and impersonal army personnel. “Stonecarver” and “The General,” reclining on the ground, describe the importance to the Warriors of Mohawk customs, language, and beliefs. “Stonecarver” says that the men have changed—they’re “not trying to keep up
their hard exterior anymore. They’re gentle, in their own way . . . you’re seeing more
than just a warrior. You’re seeing somebody who’s a human being.” As he speaks, the
scene switches to a Warrior playing with a group of children. This strategy of recontextualization—showing Warriors with children—appears a number of times in Obomsawin’s film. At the end of the film, a Warrior says wryly, “They thought we were going
to have records as long as your arm. It was families, husbands, wives, children.”
Maclaine and Baxendale use this same strategy: they print a full-page photograph of
“Lasagna” holding his lowered rifle in one hand and clutching a smiling little girl to
his chest (1991:89).

However, the image of the warrior and the actions of the Warriors are contested
within the Mohawk nation and by other Native groups. In a 1996 issue of This Maga-
zine, Dan David describes a present “climate of terror” at Kanehsatake in which “goon
squads and warlords rule” (1996:12). He argues that the band council uses (and used
in 1990) the cause of Mohawk sovereignty to keep control over Kanehsatake by means
of a group of “critters” whom David calls “ punks with guns” (1996:12). The “critters”
threaten the safety of “Mohawk women and children” and dismantle “the normal
checks and balances that protect the rights of people in a democracy” (David
1996:15). Gail Valaskakis similarly compares the Mohawk Warriors with the non-vio-
lent Gitchedon warriors of her nation, arguing that “these conflicting representations
of warriors blur the distinction between the activism of protecting the sovereignty of
Indian land and treaty rights and the action of initiating para-military confrontation”
(1994:70). She claims that the economic activities that the Mohawk Warriors have cho-
sen (casinos, bingo, tax-free cigarettes) “benefit individual Indians and the Mohawk
Nation or Warrior Society rather than all tribal members ... [and] both expand the gap
between the rich and the poor on the reserves and provide the guns and butter for
the work of the Warrior Society” (1994:69). However, she suggests that “growing
political struggle in Indian communities over contested ideology and identity and
their contingent closures of articulation” (1994:70) can be understood only in the
framework of the “continual formation of community” and “continuous unity in diver-
sity” (1994:71). The Mohawk Warriors have a place in First Nations’ political strate-
gies, and they have played a role that some First Nations people have described as
unifying: Elijah Harper, a staunchly non-violent activist, applauded the Warriors for
inspiring, for “the first time,” “total unity and solidarity of aboriginal people in Can-
da” (Haugeneder 1990:3).

III

The stereotype of the warrior, and its recuperation by Mohawk activists, is clearly a
site of dispute. But I believe that there is a way for the warrior stereotype to be used
politically and oppositionally that does not require intentional use or purity of
motives on the part of the Mohawk Warriors. The stereotype of the warrior, as used in
1990, contains within itself the traces of its other incarnations as “the treacherous red-
skin” or “Indian as tormentor.” These associations recall a time of more open conflict
and warfare between First Nations people and white newcomers. The warrior stereo-
type draws non-Native attention to the violent conflicts that are hidden behind the
slow process of land claims negotiations and the administrative relations of First Nations groups and the Canadian and Québécois states. As such, representations of warriors can be discussed as a political activity that exposes hidden contradictions in state power. The argument that all Canadians are equal, and that the Mohawks are subject to the same laws as “other” Canadians, conflicts with the use of the SQ and the army to protect “Canadian citizens” from “outside” terrorists. And the rhetoric that all Canadians have equal opportunities weakens upon an investigation of the reasons behind such a conflict as Oka. Richard Wagamese, an Ojibwa journalist, notes this contradiction:

For the Indians, the [Oka] warriors represent the spirit of 1300 [referring to traditional warriors] in the context of 1990. For non-Indians it is a flagrant breach of societal structure. The warriors represent a vision of Canada that just doesn’t fit the standard refrain of “the true north strong and free.” They represent a seething undercurrent of a reality that is not obvious from exclusive urban neighbourhoods. They represent the possible wrongdoing of the system and that is more comfortably ignored than confronted. (1990:4)

The confrontation between the Warriors at Oka and the SQ and Canadian Forces exposes Québec and Canadian coercive uses of military and judicial power for internal problem-solving and forces a comparison between the Warriors and the army as symbols of violence. At the same time, the armed confrontation suggests that the problem took place between two nations, which supports the sovereign status of the Mohawk Nation.

The Warriors were stereotyped by the English-language mainstream media as terrorists, one effect of which was an attempted delegitimization of their political goals. However, the image of terrorism can be a useful political tool. The Mohawk Warrior symbolizes a frustration with, or rejection of, the “usual channels” of land claims or constitutional negotiations. The masked Warrior and the brandished gun are images of violence and anonymity that negate the possibility of reasoned dialogue or political representation in the existing structures of power. As Robert Regnier notes, the warrior image “punctures the liberal ideology” of “equal opportunities” and “enlightened dialogue”; “the clandestine identity concealed behind the mask is not the result of enlightened dialogue within a society of equitable power relations” (1995:71-72). Regnier argues persuasively that the Warriors’ purpose can be seen as pedagogical, as they

declared suppressed truths about their subjugation by locating themselves politically and culturally into contradictions between dominant ideologies and apparent injustices ... [and] named and confronted [these contradictions] to reveal their oppressiveness as part of a racist system. (1995:73)

He claims that the Warriors exposed these contradictions by “‘performing' justice, by prophetically asserting the world as it should be ... by forcing the system of hegemonic control to play out its injustice in the hope that this unveiling would motivate the enlightened to transform it” (1995:73). In this way, the Warriors made it possible
for the Canadian public to theorize, question, and debate aboriginal sovereignty and land claims within forums not controlled by the federal government,” and hence “changed the politics of coercion into critical knowledge” (Regnier 1995:77, 79).

I have quoted extensively from Regnier because I find his suggestion that the Warriors “performed justice” useful for this discussion. I should note, however, that Regnier seems to rely unself-consciously on the potential for “enlightenment” and “free dialogue,” a gesture that contradicts his critique of liberal ideology. Still, I would like to take up this idea of performance to suggest that the Warriors were performing the stereotype of the warrior in order to expose Canadian racism and to act out contradictions in the use of state power. An argument about the performativity of the warrior stereotype, however, necessitates an explanatory model that does not require conscious performance.

To develop a model for performativity, I borrow from some of the critical work being done in gender studies and queer theory. Judith Butler’s chapter entitled “Critically Queer” in Bodies That Matter offers some useful terms for this discussion. This move must be made advisedly, however: although there are clear parallels between Butler’s discussion of the term “queer” and this investigation of the stereotype of the “warrior,” the homophobia and racism that constitute the histories of these terms caution against treating them as interchangeable.15 As E.K. Sedgwick notes, “oppressions ... are differently structured and so must intersect in complex embodiments” (1990:33; author’s italics). With this proviso in mind, Butler’s ideas on the reclamation of the term “queer” can illuminate this project.16 Butler defines “performativity” as “a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’”; she distinguishes performativity from “performance” by suggesting that “what is ‘performed’ works to conceal, if not to disavow, what remains opaque, unconscious, unperformable” (1993:234). Butler seeks to determine the conditions of possibility of a reappropriation of the term “queer,” “for an occupation or reterritorialization of a term that has been used to abject a population can become the site of resistance, the possibility of an enabling social and political resignification” (1993:231). This is the crux of my investigation into the possibilities of the redeployment of a stereotype. The term “queer,” however, like the constellation of stereotypes that attend the word “warrior,” has a “constitutive history of injury” (1993:223) that discursively limits and enables its resignification. Butler suggests that “a performative ‘works’ to the extent that it draws on and covers over the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized” (1993:227; author’s italics). The resignification of a term like “queer” or “warrior” “will emerge as theatrical to the extent that it mimes and renders hyperbolic the discursive convention that it also reverses” (Butler 1993:232; author’s italics).

The redeployment of the stereotype of the warrior exposes the excesses practised in colonial discourse in its efforts to fix the racial “other” in a recognition and disavowal of difference. But the recontextualizing of the stereotype of the warrior and its performance for political purposes will remain constrained by the discursive history of the term and by continuing inequities of social and political power. Performativity of the
stereotype of the warrior cannot enact a new set of meanings simply by a reversal of valuation, for, as Judith Butler notes,

Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a “pure” opposition, a “transcendence” of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure. (1993:241)

I have argued that the stereotype of “the Native warrior” is ambivalent in its enunciation, for it expresses a fear of racial and cultural difference (and specifically a white fear of Native massacre and rebellion) as well as a fetishization of masculine warrior images. The ambivalence of the warrior stereotype, and its constant recycling, permits a redeployment of the stereotype for oppositional purposes—a redeployment that joins an already-constituted field of Mohawk representations of “the warrior.” The warrior stereotype offers a strong and resistant Native identity that also enables a historicization of current Native political issues. The stereotype also permitted, during the Oka conflict, an exposure of ideological contradictions in Canadian state power, for it forced the state to reveal the military and judicial forces that underlie “normal” administrative relations.

However, although I do not wish to make a false distinction between “representations” and “lived conditions” (the two mutually construct each other), I am left wondering about the relationship between what I have called a “successful” manipulation of stereotypical warrior representations and the outcome of the Oka conflict. The thirty-four Mohawks who were charged at the end of the stand-off were all found “not guilty” in July 1992. For a time, the SQ and RCMP maintained heavy surveillance around Kanehsatake and Kahnawake and harassed Mohawk people (Goodleaf 1995:164; Derfel 1995:163). As of 21 June 2000, almost ten years after the standoff, the Mohawk Council of Kanehsatake had been given control over the land but not full ownership, and the Municipality of Oka had been given $230,000 for the property that Mohawks said was never Oka’s in the first place (MacGregor 1999:A9; Berry). Kanehsatake’s council is now elected, and policing is done by Mohawks, but “the issues raised by Oka are always simmering in the background” (MacGregor 1999:A9). Subsequent confrontations across Canada between Native groups and non-Natives over land and resource use have revisited the same stereotypes circulated during Oka. The summer 1995 land occupations at Gustafson Lake by a group of Shuswap and at Ipperwash Provincial Park by Chippewa, as well as the 1999 fishing dispute between the Cheam of British Columbia and Fisheries officers, saw a recycling of stereotypes of Native “warriors”:17 the same news media sources that called the Mohawk Warriors at Oka “terrorists” and “criminals” called the protesters at Gustafson Lake, Ipperwash, and the Fraser Valley “bandits,” “militants,” “terrorists,” “renegades,” and “thugs” (see McLintock and Proctor 1995; Thompson 1995; Zanatta 1995; Collins 1999). And the legacy of Oka continues to frame disputes such as that over lobster fishing rights in Burnt Church, New Brunswick, between Mi’kmaq and non-Native fishermen (Toughill 1999: A1, A16). Stereotypes are clearly difficult to defeat; and, as this discussion has suggested, the decision to mobilize a stereotype rather than attempt to work around it
entails both risks and critical possibilities. Although it is difficult to measure the impact that the image of the “Warrior” had, and will have, on First Nations assertions of sovereignty and land reclamation, a manipulation of stereotypes can effect important political work at the level of representations.

Notes

This paper was written, and workshopped, in the context of a graduate-level course entitled “Post-Colonial Stereotypes” at the University of Alberta. I am grateful to the students and professors involved in this course for their insights, in particular Professor Heather Zwicker, Guy Beauregard, and Casey Williamson.


2. The mainstream English-language newspapers that I have worked from do not represent “Canada’s” interpretation of the event, nor can they stand in for French-language newspapers. I want to be very clear that I am speaking about an English-Canadian construction of “the Mohawk Warrior” and an English-speaking forum for the use of this stereotype (although the negotiation of the Mohawk Warrior identity also takes place in Mohawk).

3. Bhabha’s analysis of the ambivalence of stereotypes has been critiqued for its formalism and for “preclud[ing] . . . the very bases of political action” (Ahmad 1995:15). Anne McClintock suggests that “to locate agency in the internal fissures of discourse” leads Bhabha to a formulation in which “colonial authority appears to be displaced less by shifting social contradictions or the militant strategies of the colonized than by the formal ambivalence of colonial representation itself” (1995:63). My argument here is invested in an understanding of colonial discourse that permits political action and a manipulation of stereotypes to show the “shifting social contradictions” in colonial representation.

4. The *Delgamuukw* decision was handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada in December 1997 and affirmed aboriginal land title and acknowledged the legal validity of oral history in a court of law. The Nisga’a settlement (1999) transfers land, money, and powers of self-government to the Nisga’a Nation in northern British Columbia. The new Nunavut territory, with an autonomous Inuit government, was created on 1 April 1999 (Purvis 1999:18–22).

5. Fleras and Elliott argue that “Oka represents a textbook study of symbolic politics,” and, to the extent that the Mohawk leaders’ and Warriors’ goals were “to publicize aboriginal grievances, heighten public awareness, foster public sympathy, and increase public pressure for reshaping the discourse over aboriginal-government relations,” “the strategy has paid off” (1992:96). Fleras and Elliott point to increased “public sympathy” for Native issues (1992:97), as well as a number of post-Oka initiatives to address Aboriginal concerns at the federal and provincial levels, as evidence of the success of the Warriors’ strategies. They acknowledge, however, that many Native groups view these “apparent gains” as “illusory,” not signs of real change but rather “publicity-seeking tactics that do little to address the real issues of poverty, land claims, and self-government” (1992:99).

6. One of the most mythologized examples of Native dispossession in Canada, the crushing of the Métis Rebellion, was invoked during the Oka crisis: critics said that Prime Minister Mulroney’s use of the army against the Mohawk Warriors echoed the actions of Sir John A. Mac—
Donald, who in 1885 sent in the North West Mounted Police and the Canadian Army against Louis Riel and a small group of Métis fighters.

7. Mohawk women appeared in newspaper photographs and television footage in masks and fatigues, and one of the key events of the crisis, the confrontation between Mohawks and the SQ at dawn before the shooting on 11 July, involved Mohawk women. According to Maclaine and Baxendale, the women were the first to speak to the SQ, and when asked by an officer to “bring forward their spokesman,” they said, “You are talking to our spokesman” (1991:14). After the women walked to the police line and burned sweetgrass, the police moved forward and fired tear gas and concussion grenades at the group of primarily women and children (Maclaine and Baxendale 1991:18–19). Women were also key personalities in the negotiating process. Some of the most public figures include Ellen Gabriel, main spokesperson for the Kanehsatake Mohawks; Mavis Etienne, a member of the Mohawk negotiating team; and Jennie Jack, a Tlinkit woman from British Columbia who went to Kanehsatake to support the Mohawk and acted as press liaison (Maclaine and Baxendale 1991:42, 58, 72).

8. Landsman cites a similar association in media reports on the Ganienkeh dispute in 1975: she notes that the term “renegade,” used to stereotype the Ganienkeh Mohawks, has “a Janus-like quality . . . it looks back to the past and forward at the same time, recalling past Indian battles and thereby ennobling the present fight against Ganienkeh” (1988:126).

9. In June 1990, Elijah Harper, a Cree New Democratic Party member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, refused to give the unanimous consent necessary for the Legislature to vote on the Meech Lake Constitutional Accord. His filibuster contributed to the defeat of the Accord. First Nations groups rejected the Accord because it did not include definitions of, or provisions for, Aboriginal rights and self-determination.

10. Gerald Alfred points out the split in Kahnawake between traditionalists, who follow the Longhouse system of government, and band council supporters, who continue to work within the parameters of the Indian Act. The two groups disagree on who has authority to speak for the community, particularly around issues of local government and policing. The split resulted in a confrontation in 1973 when Longhouse supporters and the Warrior Society attempted to evict non-Natives from Kahnawake (Alfred 1995:130–35). The 1973 confrontation, according to Alfred, resulted in an ideological victory for the traditionalists, for their rejection of the legitimacy of the Indian Act became a “guiding principle” (1995:134) for institutional reform in the community. The division between the two groups remains, however, and this struggle for authority accounts for some of the dissent expressed during the Oka conflict by non-Warrior Mohawks.

11. The concept of a “nation-to-nation” dispute is complicated in this case, especially considering how ideas of Québec nationhood (as well as regional identities) destabilize Canadian “identity.”

12. On 6 December 1989, Marc Lepine shot and killed fourteen female engineering students at L’École Polytechnique in Montréal.

13. It is striking how often in Obomsawin’s film Mohawk people and their supporters express outrage that such a fiasco could happen in Canada. These exclamations range from remarks such as one man’s comment that “This is not Russia. This is not Nazi Germany. This is Canada”; a woman’s frustrated statement at an SQ roadblock, “Where can we go? This is
Canada. A free country. For everyone”; and journalist Geoffrey York’s statement upon leaving Kanehsatake that it is “unbelievable that in a country like Canada we’re allowing the army to tell us what can be published.” Although these comments express a belief that Canada is supposed to be democratic, the remarks implicitly ironize the self-congratulation of the official “peaceful” Canadian identity.

14. The resurgence of the Longhouse was prompted by the arrest of Kahnawake Mohawk Paul Diabo in Philadelphia as an illegal alien. The larger Iroquois community supported Diabo, arguing that the arrest violated the Jay Treaty of 1794, which recognized Native sovereignty and guaranteed free travel between Native territories (Alfred 1995:59).

15. For convenience, I have associated the term “queer” with homophobia and the “warrior” stereotype with racism because of the forms of oppression that are most apparent in each case, but clearly both of these terms can at different times be imbricated in systems of racism, sexism, and homophobia such that it would be problematic to suggest that the “warrior” stereotype, for example, is “only” a racist stereotype.

16. However, it is important to note that the use of the term “queer” for both derogatory and reclamatory purposes is culturally specific to a Euro-American context. While Native American and Canadian First Nations groups are not “outside” of these systems of signification, these groups will often have a history of different terms for (which represent different attitudes towards) same-sex desire. The term “two-spirited” is one example of a Native term designating gay or lesbian identity. (I thank Rick Lee for this observation.) Hertha Dawn Wong also notes that Terry Tafoya, a Warm Springs-Taos healer and psychologist, suggests that “many traditional native peoples may have acknowledged ‘a third gender’ in the form of a berdache, or man-woman” (Wong 1992:22).

17. At Gustafsen Lake, British Columbia, a spiritual leader, Percy Rosette, declared the land unceded by Shuswap and sacred as a historical site of sundances; during the occupation of the land, there was a series of gunfights between the RCMP and the Shuswap, with injury to one Native woman and one soldier assisting police. Shuswap and non-Native protesters were convicted on 20 May 1997 of charges including mischief, possession of dangerous weapons, and obstruction of property in a trial that “led to some stunning revelations about the way police conducted the operation” (Henton 1997:A2).

Chippewa activists occupied lpperwash Provincial Park, near Sarnia, Ontario, on Labour Day 1995 and declared it sacred burial ground; this claim was later confirmed by the minister of Indian Affairs, Ron Irwin. During the conflict, Dudley George, a Chippewa man, was killed. Sergeant Kenneth Deane of the Ontario Provincial Police was convicted on 28 April 1997 of criminal negligence causing death and was sentenced on 3 July 1997 to a conditional sentence of two years to be served in the community.

On the Fraser River in British Columbia, the Cheam defied an order by Fisheries and Oceans Canada closing the river to all fishing in the summer of 1999 due to conservation concerns over spawning fish. Conflicts ensued when Fisheries officials attempted to seize nets, boats, and fish from the Cheam (Collins 1999:D3).
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