

Uprising at Oka: A Place of Non-identification

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Abstract: Grounded in rhetorical theory, this paper examines the “Oka crisis” and suggests that the conflict created a place of non-identification where assumptions about the superiority of Canadian (or Québécois) values and norms became unsettled. It argues that by embodying a Mohawk political style embedded in an indigenous rhetorical culture, the protestors at Oka paved the way for the emergence of a rhetoric of listening in which partialities became visible and the conditions for new forms of judgment arose.

Keywords: Oka; Rhetorical analysis; Non-identification; Intercultural communication; Indigenous knowledge

Résumé : Appuyé par la théorie rhétorique, cet article analyse la « crise d’Oka » et propose de voir celle-ci comme un lieu de non-identification où la présomption de supériorité des valeurs et normes canadiennes (ou québécoises) a été déstabilisée. L’auteure suggère qu’en incarnant un style politique mohawk prenant forme dans le contexte d’une culture rhétorique autochtone, les manifestant-e-s à Oka ont permis l’émergence d’une rhétorique de l’écoute qui contribue à la mise en évidence de la partialité des points de vue et ouvre la voie à de nouvelles formes de jugement.

Mot clés : Oka; Analyse rhétorique; Non-identification; Savoir autochtone

Nearly 20 years after the “Oka crisis” shook Canadians, the conflict that pitted Mohawks against Canadian and Québécois authorities retains public and academic attention. After considerable critical work published in the 1990s, a congratulatory paper claiming sobriety and balance recently appeared in the *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies*, a journal dedicated to military issues in Canada. The author, P. Whitney Lackenbauer (2008), argues that the Canadian military won the media battle for the hearts and minds of Canadians during the “Oka crisis,” due to its professionalism, superior army, and savvy media strategy. He argues that the Warriors marginalized moderate voices (Lackenbauer, 2008) and

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Canadian Journal of Communication, Vol 34 (2009) 547-566

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that they used the elderly, women, and children as barriers to protect themselves against the military (Lackenbauer, 2008); he also suggests that the conflict was directed by the military and the Warriors (defined as the official members of the Warrior Society, ignoring the significant role of women) (Lackenbauer, 2008). The Canadian military avoided bloodshed because of the “personal commitment [and] calm and attentive approach to native reality” displayed by the military personnel (army Lieutenant Colonel Gagnon, quoted in Lackenbauer, 2008, p. 31). The discipline and calm that the military displayed allowed the public to develop trust in the military’s approach, Lackenbauer proposes. This was in net contrast to the internal dissensions existing within Kahnawake and Kanehsatake, which were both involved in the crisis. He points out that while the military carried out demonstrations of force in order to gain credibility, they never abused this position (Lackenbauer, 2008). Moreover, they held carefully and thoughtfully planned press conferences, keeping the public informed and driving the media agenda, and they thereby succeeded in keeping their peaceful attitude in the forefront of Canadians’ minds. For restoring order and ending the conflict peacefully, Lackenbauer presses, the military ought to be recognized for successfully “carrying the burden of peace” (Lackenbauer, p. 3).

Whether or not Lackenbauer’s argument about “winning” the battle constitutes a credible portrayal, I want to bring attention to how he raised his argument. Asserting that the Canadian armed forces “carried the burden of peace” is a surprising, if not extraordinary, statement. It refers, in fact, to the English translation of the *Kanienkeha* (Mohawk) word for “warriors” (*rotiskenhrakete*), which means “those who carry the burden of peace” (Taiaiake & Lowe, 2005, p. 5). Lackenbauer implies that the Canadian military, *not the Mohawk Warriors*, embodied the spirit of *rotiskenhrakete*, in that their actions and strategies led to the end of the conflict without loss of life or bloodshed. The parallel appears extraordinary to me because of how it serves to undermine the authority and legitimacy of the Mohawk actions and diverts our attention away from both ideological and legal powers invested in the Canadian military operation. He compares the armed forces’ actions with the human rights agenda of Canada’s peacekeeping tradition. In so doing, he suggests that the Canadian military intervention at Oka was bound by values of justice and human rights that are associated with narratives of Canadian identity. More accurately, however, it was neither human rights nor questions of justice that concerned the military; ending the conflict and “carrying the burden of peace” simply meant the restoration of order. Which order? Whose order?

Lackenbauer’s affirmations are not balanced, but are favourable to the maintenance of the status quo with regard to indigenous people’s claims to varying degrees of independence from Canadian law. Moreover, had the author sought a more balanced approach, he would have situated the parallel within the epistemological and rhetorical contexts in which this term is deployed in Indian country. By claiming a neutral position in response to the critical accounts of the crisis, he makes himself vulnerable to criticism. With the arrogance that comes with the confidence of authority, he brings his assumptions to bear on his analysis without recognizing them and, worse, claiming to be above having a position. Indeed he

adopts a clever rhetorical tactic but contributes little to improving indigenous people's experience with Canadians. Like many academics, politicians, and leaders before him, he harnesses indigenous knowledge and culture in ways that serve the status quo with regard to indigenous/Canadian relations. Commenting favourably upon the military's work in this case, he appears wholly invested in a particular way of understanding Canadian society and its relations to law and order. "Carrying the burden of peace" as an expression referring to the Canadian military appears ill advised in this case. The conflict was never resolved; the barricades were simply taken down. Under the circumstances, perhaps a more appropriate appellation for the military might be "those who carry the burden of the status quo."

I refer to Lackenbauer's paper because it presents us with just one of the many ways that individuals, institutions, and the state continue to shape values, meanings, embodiments, and practices in dealings with indigenous peoples in Canada. It shows how little indigenous ways of knowing, embodiments, and practices shape and define Canadian policies and perspectives. In reading Lackenbauer's paper, the figure of the warrior can be shamelessly drawn upon to serve the interests of the Canadian state. In his paper, the Warriors are presented largely as illegitimate threats to peace who place women and children on the front lines in the service of their limited interests (Lackenbauer, 2008). He focuses on the disagreements between groups of Mohawks, calling them "factions." Without citing his sources, he writes that "some commentators questioned the legitimacy of the self-proclaimed defenders of traditional Mohawk society, suggesting that the Warriors represented contemporary militant ideals with no historical precedent," despite claims to the contrary (Lackenbauer, 2008, p. 15). In borrowing the term *rotiskenhrakete*, Lackenbauer empties it of its context and historical baggage and situates it within a framework in which the military is using its power to contain the very culture usurped by the new usage. The word "warrior" is but a weak translation of a word that emphasizes the spiritual and community responsibilities assigned to the "keepers of the peace" (Alfred & Lowe, 2005). Whatever one may think of the Warriors, they emerge from a centuries-old resistance to Canadian occupation and control over Mohawk life (Alfred & Lowe, 2005). Lackenbauer's attitude is problematic in that it reeks of ethnocentrism in spite of the cloak of balance.

How can ethnocentrism occur so banally? A sense of superiority has governed Canadian-indigenous relations throughout history (Salée, 2005). Consider the *Indian Act*, residential schools, the banning of certain religious practices, the White Paper¹, et cetera. Indigenous people and their allies increasingly criticize this attitude. From an academic perspective, numerous authors have emerged who argue forcefully for the recognition of an indigenous tradition of thought (some call it the North American intellectual tradition) that is complex, meaningful, and valuable to indigenous societies in ways that influence the functioning of social, political, and legal structures and forms (Alfred, 1999; Borrows, 2002; Smith, 1999; and Turner, 2006, are just a few of the many). These traditions ought to be held to the same account as Western thought, not a higher or lower one. It ought to be recognized that indigenous intellectual traditions function similarly to

Western political thought, in that actual societies do not function in perfect harmony with the ideas and the theories. Dismissing them would be a mistake, however, for they inform, reflect, and interact with institutional practices in ways that testify to their influence. Consequently, when Warriors act in defence of Mohawk land and sovereignty, they ought not to be simply dismissed as criminals and thugs (even though some might also be just that), because their purpose finds meaning in a centuries-old political tradition.² Lackenbauer accords the Mohawk actors limited complexity and frames them within Western military terms.

This is important, because one argument used to undermine the legitimacy of the Warriors and other Mohawks is to criticize them for their involvement with casinos, cigarette-smuggling, or other illicit activities to show how irrelevant values such as respect, harmony, autonomy, and peaceful co-existence (Alfred, 1999) are to these “brigands.” Canadian institutions are steeped in the philosophical traditions of the West, regardless of whether each individual (or institution) abides by the central tenets of that tradition. When engaging in criticism, we ought to be able to apply the same standards to indigenous philosophies and actions as well. This means being attuned to the historic practices that continue to inform Mohawk political action. These actions function within a complex relationship between historical meanings and norms, not least of which are the media representations of “Indianness.” While Lackenbauer nods his head to the historical features of the crisis and to academic descriptions of the Warriors, his recognition stops there. Indeed Warriors can be effectively judged according to their behaviour, but the actions of defence at Oka require further examination from the perspective of Mohawk thought before being dismissed.

But people, particularly those in positions of privilege, find it difficult to understand experiences and claims from an alternate standpoint. For example, on indigenous claims to sovereignty, Lackenbauer writes, “Of course, the government could not concede on a point that could jeopardize the integrity of the entire Canadian state” (Lackenbauer, 2008, p. 33). Analyzing the “Oka crisis” from the perspective of the restoration of order alone—and, moreover, usurping indigenous language to make one’s claims—represents just another instance in which events are framed within the perspective of the status quo.

Daniel Salée (2005) writes a convincing paper about how the Canadian multicultural state continues to subordinate indigenous peoples to its dominant view and values, norms, and ways of knowing despite significant changes. He argues that since the White Paper, successive Canadian governments have agreed to higher degrees of indigenous autonomy (for example, the failed 2003 *First Nations Governance Act*), as long as the measures respect the fundamental principles of the Canadian state. For its part, Québec specifically stated that First Peoples’ autonomy must “tenir compte des balises que le Québec considère comme fondamentales : intégrité territoriale, souveraineté de l’Assemblée nationale, effectivité législative et réglementaire” (Secrétariat aux affaires autochtones, quoted in Salée, 2005, p. 63) [“respect the limits that Quebec considers fundamental: territorial integrity, sovereignty of the National Assembly, legislative and regulatory effectivity” (author’s translation)]. Drawing upon Goldberg’s *The Racial State* (2002), Salée argues that race informs the very core

of governance. In essence, this means respecting indigenous nations as long as they function according to Canadian or Québec laws. For her part, Elizabeth Povinelli argues that multicultural liberal democracies will only recognize indigenous peoples' difference as long as they respect the frameworks of the state, an impossible demand,

namely, that they desire and identify with their cultural traditions in a way that just so happens, in an uncanny convergence of interest, to fit the national and legal imaginary of multiculturalism; that they at once orient their sensual, emotional, and corporeal identities toward the nation's and law's image of traditional cultural forms and national reconciliation and at the same time ghost this *being for* the nation so as not to have their desires for some economic certainty in their lives appear opportunistic. (Povinelli, 2002, p. 8)

More than just respecting the laws of the land, indigenous peoples are expected to adopt fitting ways of being, right down to their dress and bodily practices. First Peoples are expected to demonstrate their timeless, uninterrupted use of lands, while also showing how they remain sufficiently traditional—but without being so traditional that the non-indigenous public might be offended by the practices. Contrary to Euro-descendants, indigenous people are expected to remain authentically Indian, but with the right dose to qualify for state-sanctioned degrees of autonomy. Euro-descendants are entitled to citizenship regardless of their relationship to historical identifications and locations.

Salée (2005) argues that in order to move toward a dynamic based on a sense of justice, indigenous people, state actors, academics, and others ought to invest in indigenizing the state in ways that will allow for forms of citizenship and political and economic expression that provide the space for indigenous people to define their future for and by themselves. He knows that this will require a shift because the “majorité allogène doivent apprendre à se départir des a priori normatifs ancrés dans l’imaginaire occidental qui trop souvent n’ont servi qu’à dénaturer les usages et cultures des peuples autochtones et à justifier leur assujettissement” (Salée, 2005, p. 72) [“the non-indigenous majority must learn to rid itself of its *a priori* norms that are anchored in the Western imaginary and that, more often than, not serve to denature indigenous ways and cultures and to justify their subjection,” (my translation)]. He offers a radical change in perspective and provides examples of what this might imply: recognizing indigenous people as subjects of knowledge and listening to the expressions of that knowledge. However, he says little about how this might come about.

I think this is where a communications perspective is useful. In particular, I refer to rhetorical theory for its ability to take into account the conflictual, emotional, embodied, and event-oriented nature of public debates. This approach makes possible the analysis of politics as it is practised, that is, constrained by urgency and rooted in a particular time and place and thus focused on events (Hauser, 2002). By “rhetoric,” I refer to what Brummett (1999) calls “the advocacy of realities” (p. 160), which occurs through language, image events, and embodiments. Brummett is concerned with the dynamic interactions, agreements, and disagreements that produce and result from public debate. The study of rheto-

ric began with the ancient Greeks, with Aristotle, among others, arguing that when no technical answer suffices, we must turn to persuasion and deliberation. It is therefore used to study the forms and figures of public talk, performance, and styles that tend to address issues for which no right or wrong answer applies. In maintaining a connection with the early rhetorical tradition, Brummett refers to the notion of advocacy because it reflects the role of persuasion in public talk while also bringing attention to the contested and negotiated aspects of debates over what becomes understood as reality at any given time.

Oka stands as a moment during which Mohawks advocated a reality with which few Canadians and Quebeckers were familiar—a particular moment that allowed new knowledge to emerge. The Greek word *kairos* refers to the art of timing and of appropriate invention, which includes a sense of when and what to say or do in a given rhetorical situation (Hauser, 2002). Although the origins of this word refer to the transformation of controversial issues into harmonious situations, Hesford (2005) suggests that *kairos* can refer to breaks in the cycle of hostilities that allow new knowledge to emerge. Indeed, Mohawks challenged Canadian ways of knowing by performing their own rhetorical culture, demonstrating their sophisticated relationship to their past as well as to historical and contemporary media representations. Protesting Mohawks brought embodied, indigenous selves to the public's attention in ways that created a rhetoric of listening. While the focus of most rhetorical studies has been on the production and reception of talk, little has been written about the rhetorical function of listening.

Feminist and anti-racist scholar Krista Ratcliffe (2005) defines rhetorical listening as “a trope for interpretive invention and more particularly as a code of cross-cultural conduct” (Ratcliffe, 2005, p. 17) and as “a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture” (p. 1). Listening is a skill that may allow us to hear and recognize forms of identification and privilege. It is through listening that forms of identification are developed. Listening, however, is not a power-free activity; nor is being heard. Neither takes place in ideal speech situations. Moreover, relations of listening are inflected by gender and race, which shape the (im)possibilities of what can or will be heard and understood. In a Canadian context, Whiteness often comes with the privilege of speaking with the assumption that others (e.g., indigenous people) will listen. For many indigenous people, speaking may be at the price of not being heard . . . again.

Can relations of power be overcome in order for listening to occur? Ratcliffe suggests that rhetorical listening *may* occur within *gaps* of non-identification. By non-identification, Ratcliffe imagines a place of pause or reflection in which questions may arise about forms of identification and disidentification. She is careful to note that it is not a space free of ideology, but a place in which partialities may be revealed. This, she argues, is what may foster analysis about (im)possible convergences and divergences. These are gaps where the ground belongs to no one (Trinh in Ratcliffe, 2005)—or, in this case, to everyone. It is unclear from reading Ratcliffe how these gaps are created, in that she simply suggests that human communication is riddled with them. What makes one gap significant and others

irrelevant remains undefined. Nor does she address how listening functions on a broad scale. This is the gap that this article intends to fill.

In this article, I hold that the “Oka crisis” constitutes one “gap” in which norms of the Canadian state were challenged in such a way as to unsettle the Canadian (and Québec) public’s confidence in its traditional multiculturalist, liberal position of superiority. The crisis did so because it created a rhetoric of listening in which identifications came into question. The interactions and confrontations between identifications and disidentifications within a place where the ground belongs comfortably to no one led to the creation of a gap in which the witnessing publics were called upon to judge from a place of non-identification. According to José Muñoz, “Socially encoded scripts of identity are often formatted by phobic energies around race, sexuality, gender, and various other identificatory distinctions” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 6). Disidentifying with these scripts, therefore, can be one of the strategies minoritarian groups can develop to recompose “the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications” (p. 31). With the state authorities’ rhetoric seeking identification with narratives of security and order, and the Mohawks disidentifying with these narratives and re-situating their own within Mohawk nationalism, the stage was set for non-identification.

The “Oka crisis”

Calling the tensions and events of the summer of 1990 a “crisis” frames the conflict as momentary, whereas it stands as the most dramatic (in recent memory) in a long-standing history of conflict between Mohawks of Kanehsatake and the authorities over land claims (Roth, 1992). For many North American indigenous people, the conflict represents the growing movement of resistance and recognition (Valaskakis, 2005). This particular manifestation of indigenous resistance actually began during the winter, when a small number of Mohawk clan mothers occupied the land in order to prevent the expansion of a golf course into what they claimed was traditional territory (Valaskakis, 2005). The media began covering the occupation when the women called in the Warriors for help after learning that the town mayor had received court support to have them removed (Valaskakis, 2005). With the arrival of the media and Warriors, what began as a local conflict became broader once the authorities threatened the women’s actions; the issues spilled over from the protection of a parcel of land into the promotion of land claims and the defence of Mohawk sovereignty. Thus began an armed defence of the land. After the provincial police raided the blockade, leaving one police officer dead, Mohawks from Kahnawake in turn blocked a major commuter bridge between the South Shore and Montréal. According to the Mohawks and their allies, they were simply asserting their right to the land and protecting the burial site of their ancestors.

For the Québécois and Canadian governments, the Mohawks were behaving unlawfully by blocking bridges, wielding firearms, and occupying land that belonged to others. The Mohawk position fundamentally contradicts Canada’s commitment to modern liberal democratic values. This commitment does not allow the

formal cohabitation of multiple nation-states within Canada's borders because of a loss of sovereign control over the territory (Young, 2000a). For its part, the Québec government appeared equally unwilling to compromise its powers in its refusal to engage in full negotiations. In fact, neither government ever engaged in negotiations with more than the intention of getting the blockades down (York & Pindera, 1991). While for the Mohawks the issue was to make considerable headway over treaties, land claims, and recognition of nationhood, for the various levels of government, the goal was a return to the pre-barricade situation and to avoid being accused of human rights violations in the international arena.

A number of non-indigenous residents of the surrounding communities, frustrated by the traffic troubles, the guns, and what they qualified as police inaction, gathered in protests in Châteauguay. A significant portion of participants expressed anti-Native sentiments and were encouraged by populist radio hosts (York & Pindera, 1991). The events regularly turned into mob confrontations with the Mohawk community of Kahnawake and the police. Racist outlooks toward indigenous people came to the fore. As the tensions mounted, First Peoples across Canada and their allies staged their own protests to show support for the Mohawks. Dozens from the six Iroquois nations, as well as other nations, descended upon Kahnawake and Kanehsatake to participate in the defence of Native land. The stand-off sparked a new round of indigenous militancy and placed indigenous demands at the forefront of public opinion for much of the 1990s.

While scholars tend to agree that the events of 1990 constitute an important moment in Canadian history—all attest to a “before and after Oka”—they agree on little more when it comes time to assessing the impact of Oka (Grenier, 1994; Roth, 1992, 1993, 1995; Salée, 2005; Trudel, 1995; Valaskakis, 2005). Indeed, all controversial historical events become the objects of lively criticism from a variety of corners. But Oka is different. The disagreements over its meanings are signs of how it shook the foundations of the public's complacency. It stands as one of those events that made listening in new ways possible. More precisely, I am suggesting that the events of Oka unsettled meanings and interpretations.

Imagine for a few moments the challenge this crisis represented for Canadians. Unaccustomed to armed conflict on Canadian soil, familiar with the language of human rights and non-violent protest, Canadians and Quebeckers probably assumed that conflict ought to be resolved peacefully in a democratic country. The indigenous protests across Canada in support of the Mohawk people would have been unsettling, for they offered a significant challenge to most peoples' conceptions of the justness of Canadian society (though this sentiment would have been more ambivalent in Québec). Similarly, seeing armed men in army fatigues would have sent chills down the backs of those who were proud of Canada's peacekeeping heritage. For those who had come of age after the October Crisis, this was an unusual sight. In fact, this event would have been so unsettling that many probably no longer knew on what grounds to arrive at a judgment. This is probably the most promising aspect of this conflict. Let me explain.

The conflict opposed two versions of the law—Canadian and Iroquois—making it difficult for people to judge what was right and wrong in this case. With no common founding principles upon which to negotiate an agreement, the con-

frontation of wills in this life-threatening challenge over which knowledge game holds most sway raises serious questions about liberal democracy and the role of communication and deliberation. In analyzing the language of the “Oka crisis” in light of indigenous and Western political philosophies and contemporary democratic theory, we might gain greater insight into the similarities and contrasts between each tradition’s procedures, political styles, and virtues. When the two traditions are confronted with one another, as in the “Oka crisis,” the experience provides insight into the gap. As a possible synecdoche for the challenges of living in postmodern pluralist democracies, the Oka crisis offers an opportunity to reflect on how real-life political conflicts play out.

Canadian laws and procedures versus *Kaienerekoawa* (The Great Binding Law)

Laws and procedures in every society become conventionalized according to the interaction of factors such as the constitution, the dominant values of the society, and the rhetorical and storytelling practices (Borrows, 2002). These conventions evolve quite differently than theories of democracy, which tend to overemphasize the rational aspects of debate and deliberation (Povinelli, 2002; Schudson, 1997; Young, 2000b). Moreover, conventions in multicultural liberal states tend to ignore the function of exclusion and forms of racism in political life (Ahmed, 2004; Fraser, 1993). Regardless, certain expectations govern how actors function within a crisis: it is generally expected that an army will perform according to the laws of the land in order to secure order and that they will do so with discipline and respect for command. Governmental leaders are expected to maintain an aura of calm while calling protestors to order. The expectations take form in words and embodiments such as the style of language and clothing as well as how events are staged. The emphasis on calm and rationality is not extraneous to Canadian culture but fitting or appropriate when considered in light of the history of Western political theory and practice from Aristotle to today. These values inhabit many of the institutions that represent the state, even if the actual practice of governance is far messier than expected. These elements constitute the rhetorical culture.

The Kanehsatake and Kahnawake Mohawks also have norms and procedures that govern the historical relations among and between various clans of the six Iroquois nations of which they are part. A number of these norms emerged in the constitution of the Confederacy of Iroquois Nations, called the Great Binding Law³—or the Great Law of Peace, as it is also known—which has its own set of orientations and procedures for deliberation. There is much debate about whether this constitution consists of a democracy or some other mode of political organization. We will not debate this issue here, for we are looking at deliberative cultures and procedures, not what does or does not constitute a democracy. Suffice it to say that the Iroquois “developed an open set of decision-making practices that relied on deliberation, public opinion, checks and balances, and consensus” (Young, 2000a, p. 240). In a sense, the Great Law ought to be understood as “represent[ing] the accumulated wisdom and experience of First Nations conflict resolution” (Borrows, 2002, p. 13). Rules were established for choosing the topics of deliberation, the order of discussion, and the means for coming to decisions.

The Great Law provides insight into the rhetorical culture of the people occupying The Pines at Oka.

Under the Great Law, deliberation had to keep the good of future generations in mind when considering an issue. The people given deliberation rights were called *sachem* or “keepers of the peace” (Lutz, 1998). They were expected to “[l]ook and listen for the welfare of the whole people and have always in view not only the present but also the coming generations, even those whose faces are yet beneath the surface of the ground—the unborn of the future Nation” (Murphy, n.d., article 28). Speakers were called upon to deliberate calmly: “Neither anger nor fury shall find lodgement in your mind and all your words and actions shall be marked with calm deliberation” (article 24). There is a clear call for calm to dominate the passions. Each *sachem* was expected to be able to withstand criticism and remain open-minded to the opinions of others; they were told that the

thickness of your skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that you shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Your heart shall be filled with peace and good will and your mind filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy. With endless patience you shall carry out your duty and your firmness shall be tempered with tenderness for your people. (Murphy, n.d., article 28)

The deliberative process included a group of people responsible for listening to the debate. Their mandate was to call attention to errors or irregularities in procedure.

There were specific roles for men and women. The *sachem* were men who were named by the women. Women were not directly involved in deliberations but could call councils aimed at deposing *sachem* who failed to respect their responsibilities. Furthermore, because women owned “the land and the soil” (Murphy, n.d., article 44), some argue that decisions over war and peace were debated by the men but approved or disapproved by the women. According to one of the participants of the Oka stand-off, Kahn-Tineta Horn, a Mohawk mother and grandmother, “it was customary for the women to make the moccasins worn by the men who were going to war. If the women did not want war, they did not make the moccasins” (Message from Mohawk Women). This was not written into the constitution, making it possible for a textual analysis to conclude that ultimately women had few decision-making powers (see Lutz, 1998).

In debate, people with a dissenting opinion were expected to rally to the majority unless their dissent was warranted (Murphy, n.d., article 8). Because different bodies deliberated among themselves, mechanisms were established to make decisions both internally and externally. If the debate was too divisive or taking too long, no decision was made. A proposal had many steps to broach before it was formally adopted within the confederacy. Within the nation, there had to be consensus among the clan and between the clans. This consensus was then brought to another nation, which deliberated according to similar procedures. Simply put, the process continued until all nations came to agreement.

Much like the procedural democratic theories, the Iroquois constitution acts as a guide to the attitude and procedures to adopt in order to arrive at decisions. Unlike laws or constitutions in Western democracies, the Great Law may not actu-

ally function as a law (as understood in the Canadian legal system). Let me turn to John Borrows to explain:

First Nations stories . . . can . . . be distinguished from common law precedent in both form and content because of the way they are recorded and applied. First Nations use an oral tradition to chronicle important information, which is stored and shared through a literacy that treasures memory and the spoken word. The oral transmission allows for a constant recreation of First Nations systems of laws. This system of law does not depend on finding the ‘authentic’ first telling of such an event, uncorrupted by subsequent developments. In fact, the reinterpretation of tradition to contemporary needs is a strength of this methodology, although it purportedly distinguishes Indigenous law from the common law. (Borrows, 2002, p. 14)

As such, the Great Law is able to adjust to contemporary situations, which might be particularly important in the context of the rapid changes indigenous people face, but also as a source of knowledge for more flexible forms of guidelines in a multicultural society faced with multiple forms of diversity. As an historical artifact, the Great Law of Peace offers a wealth of information about the political organization of the Iroquois. The Great Law of Peace is not simply an historical artifact. What I am arguing is that it actually influenced how the Mohawk protestors embodied their positions and actions and words. What I suggest is that although at the level of appearances the crisis offered none of the formal structures detailed in the constitution, this orientation to governance guided much of the political rhetoric and action undertaken by the Mohawks. Of course, in an armed conflict represented by mass media, the deliberation was far messier than in the constitution. Nevertheless, more precisely, the functioning and actions of the Mohawks in the Oka crisis resembled the spirit or the ethos of the Great Binding Law.

Mohawk political styles

Two figures embodied the Mohawk political spirit manifested at Kanehsatake. By “figures,” I mean what Haraway (2007) refers to as “the material-semiotic nodes or knots in which diverse bodies and meanings co-shape one another” (p. 4). A figure is the meeting place between discourse, embodiment, and artistry. In the case at hand, the figures are the Warriors and the clan mothers. When taken together, they ought to be understood as embodying a Mohawk style of politics, a style that is embedded in the spirit of the Great Binding Law and fostered only in this event a rhetoric of listening. This spirit exists far beyond the Warrior Society, as demonstrated by a Kahnawake Mohawk: “Nous sommes tous des Guerriers, à l’exception de ceux qui occupent un poste de fonctionnaire ou d’élus, tels les chefs traditionnels. . . . [D]ans notre tradition, chaque homme sain faisait tout en son pouvoir pour aider la communauté, non seulement en temps de guerre mais en tout temps” (Kanataktta, quoted in Trudel & Chartrand, 1991, p. 122). [We are all Warriors, with the exception of those who occupy an elected or public service position, such as the traditional chiefs. . . . [I]n our tradition, each healthy man did everything he could to help his community, not only in times of war but at all

times, (my translation)]. According to some Mohawks, everyone is a warrior, in that the responsibility for peace belongs to all members of the community.

Rhetorical theorist Robert Hariman (1995) developed a vocabulary with which to interpret political events that are deemed inexplicable or irrational. In so doing, he effectively argues that politics is intimately connected to an aesthetic sensibility. More specifically, he demonstrates how political movements and organizations find expression in styles that reflect the character of the organization. "Style becomes an analytical category for understanding a social reality; in order to understand the social reality of politics, we can consider how a political action involves acting according to a particular political style" (Hariman, 1995, p. 8). He defines political style as

(1) a set of rules for speech and conduct guiding the alignment of signs and situations, or texts and acts, or behavior and place; (2) informing practices of communication and display; (3) operating through a repertoire of rhetorical conventions depending on aesthetic reactions; and (4) determining individual identity, providing social cohesion, and distributing power. (Hariman, 1995, p. 187)

Hariman develops the category of style by showing how the actions of four public historical figures embody and enact the political style they represent. As it is rare to find one person who embodies a particular style, it is worth exploring the possibility that performative fragments of various members of a collectivity may combine dynamically to create or reflect a political style. This is the argument I wish to make here. The enactment of a Mohawk or Iroquois style can be attributed to no one Mohawk actor. Yet, taken together, the actions of the Mohawk participants in the stand-off, either at Oka or at the Mercier Bridge, manifested a Mohawk style that is grounded in the ethos of the Great Binding Law. It makes sense that no one person embodied this style, for it is a libertarian communitarian approach that the Iroquois developed, meaning that "artistry of power" was distributed among its members, without one person having a hold on it. In fact, it may be the tension between various aspects of the style that makes it the style what it is. In other words, because the constitution figures a particular distribution of power and roles, the associated style should also reflect this tension.

Rules for speech and conduct

Political style, according to Hariman, should be analyzed in light of "a set of rules for speech and conduct guiding the alignment of signs and situations, or texts and acts, or behavior and place" (Hariman, 1995, p. 187). Because the goal of the Great Binding Law constitution was to foster peace within and among the Iroquois nations, tremendous emphasis was placed on consensus decision-making. There were pressures and conditions to be fulfilled in order to withhold agreement with the majority, although there was no notion of blind obedience to authority (York & Pindera, 1991). Only in warranted situations was it possible to dissent. It was an attitude toward co-habitation aimed at keeping the peace.

Behind the Mohawk barricades at Oka, this type of practice was present throughout the stand-off. York and Pindera (1991) recount how one of the infa-

mous Warriors, Ronald Cross, known as Lasagna, almost withheld his consent to lay down arms despite the community consensus. In the final ceremony before leaving The Pines, Lasagna finally appeared, adding his weapon to the fires that were destroying the evidence. "The warriors burst into spontaneous applause and came over to hug him. Tears rolled down Lasagna's face" (York & Pindera, 1991, p. 396). This shows the power of the will to consensus and its force on those who accept it and submit to its rule. It was probably also what avoided a bloodbath with the army.

Practices of communication and display

Political style informs "practices of communication and display," Hariman (1995) argues. Among the memorable displays of the crisis were the images of the Mohawk Warriors who wore army fatigues, carried AK-47s, covered their faces with masks, acted provocatively, and often developed psychological tactics to intimidate their opponents. This is part of a long history of war and resistance for the Mohawk nation. The Great Binding Law states: "His [the chief warrior's] aim shall be to impress upon them the necessity of good behavior and strict obedience to all the commands of the War Chiefs. He shall deliver an oration exhorting them with great zeal to be brave and courageous and never to be guilty of cowardice" (Murphy, n.d., article 82). York & Pindera (1991) explain the long tradition of war that has constituted, in part, Mohawk identity. Once the peace agreement between the five (and later six) Iroquois nations had taken place, warriors had time and support from the constitution to engage in war with other nations that were unwilling to accept the Great Binding Law. In recent years, however, the warrior spirit has been activated in defence of what they consider to be Mohawk land and sovereignty. Among their tactics, the Warriors gave the police the impression that they possessed weapons that in fact they did not have; they purposely made it appear as though dynamite was attached to the Mercier Bridge, when it was actually painted shoeboxes that were wired to the structure. The reputation of being fearless and dangerous warriors has been consciously maintained as part of the psychological weaponry available to a united but small group (see chapters 7 and 8 in York & Pindera, 1991). In discussing Romantic representations of Mohawks, Tim Fulford (2006) explains how the fear surrounding the Mohawk warrior found an echo among the British:

And so Indians became fascinating and Romantic because they offered a tantalizing glimpse of the kind of heroic warrior, full of courage, passion, coolness under fire, and physical power, that Britons might again become. But they simultaneously became dangerous since it seemed that what naturally accompanied Indians' martial virtues were cruelty, blood-thirstiness, and savagery. (p. 24)

Part of the Mohawk style is to use the fear inspired by historical representations present to all through historical textbooks to benefit them in today's struggles. First Peoples' performance, embodiments, and discourses are the result of 400 years of interaction with Euro-descendants and other Canadians (Valaskakis, 2005); the Warriors ought to be understood in this context.

Power and social cohesion

Each political style, according to Hariman (1995), has attendant sets of rules and practices regarding social cohesion and the distribution of power. The constitution provides women with powers over questions of war and peace because of their constitutional responsibility for the land and the soil (Murphy, n.d.), and the clan mothers represent the primary group regarding decisions over the designation and demotion of spokespeople and warriors. Throughout the crisis, it was the women who reminded the Warriors to remain calm, not engaging in battle unless attacked. There are also media images of women holding back men from inciting violence (see Radio-Canada, n.d.). It was the women who organized meetings to discuss the behaviour of some of the men, who were later asked or compelled to leave (see York & Pindera, 1991). On what grounds did they come to such judgments? The constitution is clear about the attitude that was expected of warriors and *sachem* with its summons to act with respect for future generations and with tenderness (Murphy, n.d., article 28).

The women are explicitly given the function of correcting or admonishing the *sachem* should they not live up to the expectations on character (Murphy, n.d.). This was part of the distribution of powers and the orientation of the constitution, which ensured a collection of checks and balances designed to avoid abuse of power. It was also aimed at keeping harmonious relations between the men and women whose survival depended upon co-operation.

Among the other aspects of the Mohawk political style, one must consider the somewhat lengthy meetings aimed at arriving at consensus (York & Pindera, 1991). Because the stakes of the stand-off were so high after the police raid, the meetings were an essential feature of Mohawk social cohesion. People would divide into clans to deliberate and come to consensus over a given issue, following which all the clans would gather in a group meeting to arrive at a set of agreements on the course of action. Their goal was "to act in concert," as Hannah Arendt (1969) would describe it, while maintaining a high level of solidarity and social control over undisciplined members. A participatory form of deliberation was well elaborated in the constitution. In this style of politics, no actual leader was named. In the early days of the stand-off, a Mohawk woman behind the lines responded to a request to meet with the leadership by yelling, "There is no leader here. You are looking at the leaders. Everyone's the leader. The people are the leaders" (York & Pindera, 1991, p. 24). This repeated itself when the Québec and federal negotiators discovered that the Mohawk negotiating team was composed of more than 50 people (Charland, 1998). Part of the Mohawk political style is to share power. Of course, this has its drawbacks, one of which is the hectic nature of decision-making and the creation of many different groups that are not always recognized, but are present and influential nevertheless (for more on this, read York & Pindera, 1991, regarding the relationship between band councils, their allies, and the followers of the Longhouse).

Repertoire of rhetorical conventions

Finally, in this elaboration of Mohawk style, I will again refer to Hariman (1995), who says that a political style will draw upon a repertoire of rhetorical conventions. Perhaps the most known call of the constitution, and arguably

among the most powerful, is to act in the interests of future generations. I would call this an ethics, or an orientation to the future, that frames how a good Mohawk is to behave. It also has an impact on how people speak. Kahenttiosta, a Mohawk woman who spent the summer behind the barricades, argues like many others that they defended The Pines for the next generations (Obomsawin, 2006). Mohawks, as part of the political style, are expected to draw upon the wisdom of ceremonies in times of crisis. Part of the attitude expected from the *sachem* is that they express their gratitude to the earth and all its creatures by extending greetings and thanks to the trees, the sun, the animals, et cetera (Murphy, n.d.). As such, the Warriors and other defenders of the land participated regularly in ceremonies of thanks (York & Pindera, 1991). Every morning began with a tobacco ceremony, and most meetings began or closed with the intervention of the medicine man. The rhetorical conventions include references to the ancestors and to the trees and the integration of spiritual practices that provide guidance on the daily practices of defending the land. In the political style of the Mohawks, signs that appear in certain situations offer guidance. The eagle offers one such sign, which has a role in the constitution. "We place at the top of the Tree of the Long Leaves an Eagle who is able to see afar. If he sees in the distance any evil approaching or any danger threatening he will at once warn the people of the Confederacy" (Murphy, n.d., article 2). Toward the end of the conflict, the Warriors spotted an eagle and anxiously listened for a sign. Because it remained silent, all judged that it was a good omen; no immediate danger was in sight (York & Pindera, 1991). The eagle represents a sign that may appear when there is danger. In official Euro-Canadian settings, this type of reflection may be considered odd, but as part of an orientation to the world, it fits well with the overall framework of Mohawk philosophy.

The profound differences between Mohawk and government representatives in their orientation to the land and the government, however romanticized, were palpable. One of these differences was visible in the political style of the Mohawks, which certainly clashed with that of the army officers and the distant rationality of the government representatives. Although it may be interesting to develop and discuss this style further in its own right and develop a proper vocabulary for it, in developing the idea, I have aimed to show how a set of attitudes written in a constitution can be performed.

The *pagus* or the non-identified place

When thinking about democracy, we need to move beyond procedural deliberation and turn to other categories that allow us to think about democracy as a complex, noisy, and untameable space. As the Oka crisis shows, the issues of import are not necessarily discussed at a round table. To illustrate, consider Michael Schudson's words: "[D]emocracy may sometimes require that your interlocutor does not wait politely for you to finish but shakes you by the collar and cries 'Listen! Listen for God's sake!'" (Schudson, 1997, p. 308). Or in this case, as a Mohawk woman explained when asked about her motivations for blocking the roads to protect their land, "We treat the land and the trees like our mother. These people are raping our mother. What would you do if people raped your mother?" (See CBC News report, 1999.)

The events at Oka functioned to open Canadians' ears to a reality that was rarely presented to them. Roth (1992) discussed the poverty of media knowledge and coverage of indigenous issues in Canada, which leaves the public with little information to help them to understand the realities of indigenous peoples' lives. Hearing and seeing such an extraordinary series of events awoke Canadians to a degree of listening through the construction and enactment of the uncanny. The routine of Canadian-oriented news was modified to represent images of Canadian soldiers toting guns while armed, masked men acted belligerently, and clan women spoke on behalf of their people in terms of the seven generations. All of these signs upset the regular order of things, making the familiar unfamiliar (McEachern, 2002). McEachern argues, in fact, that the uncanny fosters reflexivity—or in this case a rhetoric of listening in which an ethic of invention across cultural lines is possible.

What is the relationship between the interactions of political styles and the constitution of the uncanny? In the case of the "Oka crisis," the uncanny unsettled the public enough to enable them to step into the gap, or the place of non-identification where new possibilities emerge. In this conflict about jurisdiction, the public no longer felt certain which laws or whose order ought to apply. While each party possessed its own norms, based on practice or on constitutions, no commonly agreed-upon norms existed. In other words, a certain number of norms of procedure were familiar and functional (if not always fair, just, or the result of community participation) for members of each community, but they no longer held in the meeting place in The Pines. In this mediated place, neither the Mohawks, nor Quebeckers, nor Canadians knew which rules ought to govern the conflict. This place is what Jean-François Lyotard called a *pagus*, that is, a place without norms or rules, where fear, tactics, and tricks collide (in Charland, 1998). The *pagus* is a place where people with varying degrees of power seek to assert or even impose their own juridical, procedural, and ethical norms in ways that suit the non-normative place.

While it is fairly common for groups to clash with the authorities, few clashes lead to a place of non-identification. There was something different about Oka that made possible the *pagus*, a place where non-identified forms of listening could emerge among those who watched the events unfold. The conditions of the emergence of this place lay largely in the hands of the Mohawks setting up and defending the barricades—in particular, the clan mothers and the Warriors. These two groups behind the lines embodied political styles that were unfamiliar and challenging for the public to interpret. Incomprehension and confusion characterized much of the early presentations of the events.

In the context of the "Oka crisis," there were at least two ideas of justice that confronted one another in a particularly visible manner. This confrontation between meta-narratives of justice brings forth the possibility of deconstructing the dominant meta-narrative. Given its marginal status, the Mohawk meta-narrative was unlikely to take up the position of master narrative, but it did offer an alternate way of seeing the world.⁴ People lose their bearings when confronted with the contrast of these narrations (Terrill, 2003).

This was not about one meta-narrative overtaking the other, but one way in which the idea of Truth is undermined. With what results? Not an ironic position

taken up by either party in the conflict, but an ironic situation in which a possibility of judgment is created in the awkward space created by having no foundations upon which to judge. Maurice Charland (2003) would argue that this situation requires postmodern prudence. Postmodern prudence means being willing to give up the comforts of modernity, the meta-narratives, and the totalities, and making contingent decisions.⁵ Ultimately, the clash of images, styles, and constitutions undermines Canada's position as a unified, impervious state. The "one multicultural nation" meta-narrative of Canadian liberal discourse rang false as the Mohawks claimed legitimate defence of their ancestral territory according to the style and spirit of the Iroquois constitution. This play of wor(l)ds left Canadians with the responsibility to come to a judgment without a common set of understandings. This is what is possible when a place of non-identification through a rhetoric of listening develops.

Notes

1. The White Paper (or Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy) was introduced in 1969 by Jean Chrétien, then minister of Indian Affairs, as a Liberal government policy paper on Indian affairs. The paper proposed the abolition of the Indian Act and argued for the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples into the Canadian fold as equal members of society. The policy, based on liberal ideals of equality, was wholeheartedly rejected by Aboriginal peoples across Canada, for while they disliked the colonialism of the Indian Act, they did not seek assimilation into Canadian society, but the recognition of Aboriginal nations.
2. I am referring here to the orientations found in the Great Law of Peace. Many versions of this constitution of the Iroquois Confederacy exist. More on the constitution and the relationship between warrior societies is discussed further on in this paper.
3. It is not known when the constitution was adopted. The debate includes references that range from the early 1000s to the 1500s. Furthermore, it was not written down until the early 1900s. According to Lutz, the oral version, still recounted today, can take a week to recite (Lutz, 1998). In print form, the constitution is up to 700 pages long and can be found in English in *Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga* by John Arthur Gibson, Hanni Woodbury, Reginald Henry, Harry Webster, and Alexander Goldenweiser (1992). This paper uses a shorter document with 117 articles, prepared by Gerald Murphy of the National Public Telecomputing Network (Murphy, n.d.). As the product of an oral culture, the constitution may be found in different versions. Despite claims to authenticity, none can ultimately adopt the status as "the one" in that as a product of oral culture, the Great Binding Law is always subject to adjustments according to the storyteller and the audience listening.
4. The Oka land belongs to the Mohawks and has done since time immemorial. The Mohawks never surrendered the land. As part of their constitution, the Mohawk people are standing up to defend their rightful territory against a foreign government.
5. Thanks to Antonin Serpereau for his thoughts on the relationship between irony and postmodern prudence, which have influenced this reading.

Website

Message from the Mohawk Women. URL: <http://www.peace.ca/mohawkwomen.htm> [April 17, 2007].

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