Myth, Symbol, and Colonial Encounter

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CHAPTER FOUR
THE BOUNDARIES OF PURITY

Colonial Acadia posed a different problematic for the Mi'kmaq. The influx of peoples of British ancestry that began around the turn of the eighteenth century threatened, first, the native community's claim to be rightfully at home on the land desired by colonials and, subsequently, its liberty to exist at all in Acadia. For the Mi'kmaq, the problem was one of how to retain a sense of continuity of place and rootedness when these were placed in jeopardy by others' denial of the fundamental human significance of aboriginal peoples.

Like their British contemporaries, the Mi'kmaq experienced eighteenth-century Acadia in terms of ambiguity. A substantial ingress of Europeans did not begin until midway through the century, although settlers from Yorkshire, as well as the colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, had arrived prior to this. After 1750, more considerable numbers began to arrive so that, by 1765, five thousand New Englanders, four thousand Irish and Scots, and two thousand English-sponsored Germans and Swiss had settled in Acadia.

Unlike the British, however, the Mi'kmaq did not tend to find ambiguity disconcerting. From at least as early as the mid-sixteenth century, they had been involved in a trade of furs with Frenchmen in which the French had been obliged to acquiesce to established Mi'kmaq modes of negotiating human ambiguity. Trade during this period was incorporated into an intricate system of reciprocity whereby the Mi'kmaq compelled the French to coalesce economic activity with
exchanges of gifts, feasts, dancing, and mutual assertions and demon-
strations of friendship. In 1606, for example, the French writer Marc
Lescarbot described a feast attended by the Mi'kmaq chief Membertou
and a French entrepreneur by the name of Jean de Biencourt de Poutrin-
court, at which Membertou demanded that the Frenchman respect his
community's established mode of doing business:

During this gathering of people, it behoved to make presents unto
him, and gifts of corn and beans, yea, some barrel of wine, to feast
his friends. For he declared to Monsieur de Poutrincourt in these
words: "I am the Sagamos of this country, and am esteemed to be
thy friend and of all the Normans [Frenchmen] and that you make
good reckoning of me. It would be a reproach unto me if I did not
show the effects of this love."

In a similar vein, the Jesuit Pierre Biard noted in 1613 that

gifts must be presented and speeches made to them, before they
concede to trade; this done, they must have Tabagie, i.e. the Ban-
quet. Then they will dance, make speeches, and sing . . . that they
are good friends, allies, associates, confederates, and comrades.

The practice of exchange was the mode by which contact with other
human beings was mediated. It assured that an element of mutualit
would override experiences of human alterity and, so, constituted a
constructive approach to the problem of ambiguity. It has been sug-
gested that, "exchanges have a direct constraining effect: to accept a
gift is to be bound to the giver." The Mi'kmaq entered into reciprocal
relationships with others to ensure that human encounters with alter-
ity could transpire without threat of violence. As Marcel Mauss once
noted, "In order to trade, man must first lay down his spear . . . it is
only then that people can create, can satisfy their interests mutually
and define them without recourse to arms."

In this particular instance, the call for reciprocity appears to have
functioned successfully. Numerous early Acadian traders, for instance,
made native women, and chose to live alternately between their own
and their wives' communities, and records exist of a number of French
women who were fluently bilingual in French and Mi'kmac. Clearly
the Mi'kmaq were not accustomed to turn away from human diversity;
rather, they perceived in such diversity the potential for new relation-
ships that could extend the boundaries of community, so long as there
was an affirmation of the common significance of all people encoun-
tering one another.

Beginning in the late seventeenth century, they encountered a
new sort of European who refused to acknowledge their meaningful
presence and, consequently, to enter into reciprocal relationships with them. For the Mi'kmaq, the significance of this foreign influx was rendered all the more incomprehensible by the rapidly evident disparity between colonial practice and the language of treaties. On paper, the British often affirmed the legitimate presence of Acadia's aboriginal peoples, but these, as noted earlier, were employed in the service of erecting boundaries between the two peoples. The Royal Proclamation of 1763, for instance, declared:

The several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of our Dominions and Territories as... reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds... We do hereby strictly forbid, on Pain of our Displeasure, all our loving Subjects from making any Purchases or Settlements whatever, or taking Possession of any of the Lands above reserved, without our special leave and License for that Purpose first obtained.12

In the idioms of both proclamation and treaty, the Mi'kmaq were promised "favour, Friendship, and Protection from His Majesty's Government,"13 yet in the reality of the colonization process, no dictate could have been so meaningless. As one settler noted during the initial period of settlement, "our soldiers take great pains to drive the Indians away and clear the country of them."14

Attempts to "clear the country" of Mi'kmaq were varied. Throughout the 1830s until well into the 1850s, colonial administrations employed companies of Boston Rangers (comprised of white volunteers and Mohawk retainers) to hunt the Mi'kmaq. The value placed on the services of the Rangers was considerable, as Major Paul Mascarene, president of the Annapolis Council, pointed out in a letter to the Lords of Trade in 1744:

This shews how much the preservation of this place is owing to the Reinforcement we have received from the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, & how necessary it is to set Indians against Indians; for tho' our men out do them in Bravery yet being unacquainted with their sculking way of fighting and Scorning to fight under cover, expose themselves too much to the Enemy's shot.15

Among the earliest victims of the Rangers were five Mi'kmaq women, two of whom were pregnant, and their three children. They were all massacred, and the pregnant women had "their bellies ripped open."16

Aside from the work of the Rangers, the local governments also took measures toward the extermination of the Mi'kmaq. A policy of poisoning the native population, for instance, can be traced to as early
as 1712, when a group of Mi'kmaq were served poisoned food at a gathering sponsored by the British. In 1746, two hundred Mi'kmaq died as a result of disease contracted from contaminated woollen cloth they had purchased from the British, and this strategy for their extermination was at least considered once again in 1763, when General Amherst suggested to one of his colonels, "Could it not be contrived to send the Small Pox among the disaffected tribes of Indians?" The answer to Amherst's query was "I will try to inoculate [them] with some blankets that may fall into their hands, and take care not to get the disease myself." The general in turn replied, "You will do well to try to inoculate the Indians by means of blankets." Whether their plan was ever actually realized is not known.

As noted in the previous chapter, bounties on the Mi'kmaq and their scalps were in effect from at least as early as 1749, when premiums were set at "Ten Guinea for every Indian Killed or Taken Prisoner," and were increased steadily until 1756, when Lawrence raised the bounty to "Thirty Pounds for every male Indian Prisoner, above the Age of Sixteen Years, brought in alive; for a Scalp of such Male Indians, Twenty-five Pounds." While the number of premiums actually claimed is unclear, it is certain that scalping of Mi'kmaq did occur during the period. In 1753, for instance, two whites arrived in Halifax with six scalps, and a year later, a crew of shipwrecked British privateers claimed their premiums for scalps they had removed from the Mi'kmaq who had saved their lives. Akins, in his History of Halifax City, also made a reference to the decapitation and scalping of three Mi'kmaq in the Dartmouth area during the same period.

As long as the colonial population remained limited in size, the native community attempted with some success to arrest colonial expansion. In the early part of the century, British shipping and fishing were hampered, and, to a certain extent, settlement was impeded. In 1715, a Mi'kmaq raid on the settlement of Canso resulted in the death of one Englishman, and the removal of all remaining settlers from the area. In 1732, the Mi'kmaq drove a group of New England settlers off the land near Minas, and according to an early nineteenth-century history of New Brunswick, early colonials who attempted to claim land along the St. John River were compelled by the resident native population to "retire further down the river." The Mi'kmaq were also able to substantially control the expansion of Halifax beyond its initial boundaries until 1753. Despite these early successes, however, resistance to the British incursion slowed noticeably in the 1740s as French military strength in the region waned, and, after the fall of Louisbourg in 1758, all such resistance effectively ceased because the Mi'kmaq had lost their supplier of ammunition.
Peace with Acadia’s Mi’kmaq population was a consequence of their being outnumbered and militarily overwhelmed by a colonial population that had, from earliest contact, refused the possibility of reciprocity or mutual co-existence with aboriginal peoples. To the violence of dispossession, the Mi’kmaq had responded in kind. Although they had been successful for a period of time, they were ultimately trammelled in their attempt to assert themselves as significant and autonomous agents with a corresponding prerogative to claim Acadia as home. Arresting British expansion became an impossibility. By the time the Mi’kmaq were forced to accept this fact, they had been substantially alienated from their traditional modes of subsistence and compelled to petition colonial governments for land. In addition, the native population was becoming increasingly impoverished. For example, the Mi’kmaq of Antigonish, Pomquet, and Tracadie were described as being “in a starving Condition and almost destitute of clothing.”

As the possibility of stopping the British became less of an option, withstanding colonial pressure toward extinction became a necessity. One important mode by which the threat of annihilation might have been mitigated could have been the inducement of British colonials into recognizing the diverse human composition of Acadia as a context for new relationships. For aboriginal peoples, this was a traditional option that had not disappeared despite a century of conflict. In fact, the human devastation that had accompanied conflict served to demonstrate that the colonial notion of what constituted community in the New World was fundamentally flawed. Nineteenth-century Mi’kmaq consequently sought to acquaint the British with the diversity that characterized their world, in the hope of creating an authentic community in which all peoples might be afforded freedom from alienation. To do this, it was critical that they sustain a notion of the value of their own identity, and a sense of themselves as people who belonged in Acadia in spite of the historical experiences of marginalization and extermination. The symbols that permitted such a balancing act were the land and community.

The land was a foundation upon which the Mi’kmaq could assert the primordial fact of rootedness in Acadia. They possessed a relationship with place that preceded the arrival of Europeans, and so rendered meaningless those British valuations that sanctioned Mi’kmaq dispossession. This relationship with the land not only upheld the peoples’ sense of identity, but constituted a vantage point for shaping a language about ambiguous meanings directed at the colonial population. The native community consequently availed itself—as often as was possible—of this reality of rootedness in their discourse with whites. In the
eighteenth century, the Mi'kmaq had intermittently asserted a primordial relationship with the land when confronted with initial intrusions from British colonials. A group of elders and chiefs, for example, informed the colonial government early in the century that:

The place where you are building dwellings, where you are now building a fort, as it were, to enthrone yourself, this land of which you wish to make yourself now absolute master, this land belongs to me. I have come from it as certainly as the grass, it is the very place of my birth and of my dwelling, this land belongs to me... it is God who has given it to me to be my country forever.\(^{32}\)

During the same period, a man who had been captured for his part in a raid at Minas Basin declared, "This land here that God has given us... cannot be disputed by anyone."\(^{33}\)

In the nineteenth century the Mi'kmaq became more vocal as they reminded colonials that the Mi'kmaq community possessed an intimacy with the landscape that whites did not share, and that this association derived from both the peoples' ancestors and the Creator. This continuity of place was asserted in arenas as varied as petitions to the colonial government, letters to the British Crown, and personal confrontations with settlers. In Prince Edward Island, a petition signed by five men in 1832 pleaded with the Assembly to return "a part of that land once our fathers, whereon we may raise our wigwams without disturbance."\(^{34}\) In 1840, London's Colonial Office received a letter addressed to the Queen, in which Chief Peminuit reminded her that the Acadian woods had all once belonged to the Mi'kmaq—"Our Fathers possessed them all"\(^{35}\)—and a petition from the Mi'kmaq at Burnt Church, New Brunswick, noted a few years later that "God did give [the Mi'kmaq] the land first."\(^{36}\) In 1846, a white farmer attempted to reprimand an unidentified Mi'kmaq, accusing the latter of damaging one of his trees. The man was said to have pointed to a five-hundred-year-old tree, saying,

If you raise a calf or a cabbage you may call it your own, but you can have no claim on that tree... That tree was planted by the Great Spirit for the [Mi'kmaq] before you and your fathers escaped from your murky shells and crossed the great waters.\(^{37}\)

Alongside this primordial relationship with land, commitment to the principle and actuality of community was a bulwark against extermination; it also contributed to a notion of human meaning that was quite distinct from the British tendency to marginalize human beings on the basis of their non-meaning. Ceremonies such as the celebration of St. Ann's Day consolidated resistance to British pressure for extinction and, at the same time, confirmed an identity born of human
relationships. The annual gathering of Mi'kmaq peoples to celebrate the feast of St. Ann—the Grandmother—was, throughout the colonial period, a space in which the goals and values of the native community were expressed. Leaders' opinions came under public scrutiny, and they were expected to affirm their fidelity to the peoples' aspirations. The celebration was marked by feasting and song, as well as dancing that was regarded as a link between the Mi'kmaq and their ancestors. In 1850, a white observer, Silas Rand, remarked,

Part of the ceremonies of their great annual religious festival of St. Ann's day consists of the wigubaltimk and neskouwadijik, the feast and mystic dance of the sakawachkik, the Indians of olden times. At the proper time a chief comes out of a camp, sings... dances... and is responded to by... the assembled crowd. They assert that during the ceremony the body of the dancer is impervious to a musket-ball.

The relationship with a past that foreran the arrival of Europeans was, presumably, regarded as a more powerful source of identity than that which accompanied the violent onset of the colonial period, and it was this sense of meaning that permeated the celebration and the strategies for survival that the assemblage engendered. As one writer has noted, the annual gathering of the Mi'kmaq was a forum for exercising control in a historical situation in which the people were surrounded by forces of hostility.

Integrity with respect to the welfare and values of the community was demanded always of those recognized as chiefs. It has been suggested that "only a forthright declaration of his intentions on behalf of his community's welfare could render a leader competent, in his band's estimation, to handle power." When, for instance, Chief Louis Benjamin Peminuit was given farm implements by the philanthropist Walter Bromley in 1817, his authority was called into question by his community, and he was required to publicly recite a Profession of Faith at St. Ann's Day, whereby he affirmed his loyalty to the community he served. In a similar vein, a former chief from Bouctouche, New Brunswick, was obliged to spend the money he had made in a land sale on an ox for St. Ann's Day to demonstrate that he was innocent of alleged misconduct.

The cultural weight afforded commitment to community was underscored in a great many of the peoples' stories. The primordial figure Gluskap, for instance, who will be considered at greater length below, was said to have been quite uncomfortable with human beings who were motivated by self-interest:

Three brothers came to [Gluskap], and they prayed him to make them tall, and give them great strength and long life exceeding that
of men, and [Gluskap] was vexed with them, and said, "Probably you desire great strength and size that you may help others and benefit your tribe; and long life, that you may have much opportunity to do good to men." And they said, "We care not for others, neither do we seek the good of men; long life and strength and height are what we seek." Then he said, "Will you take for these success in fight, that you may be glorious in your tribe?" And they answered, "Nay, we have told you what we seek." Then he said, "Will you have, instead thereof, knowledge, that you may know sickness and the property of herbs, and so gain repute and heal men? . . . Will you have wisdom and subtlety that you may excel in council?" And they answered him, "We have told thee what we seek. If thou wilt grant it, give. . . ." Then [Gluskap] waxed angry, and said, "Go your ways; you shall have strength, and stature and length of days." And they left him rejoicing. But before they had proceeded far, their feet became rooted to the ground, and their legs stuck together, and their necks shot up, and they were turned into three cedar-trees, strong and tall, and enduring beyond the days of men, but destitute . . . of all use.\(^45\)

In a similar story recorded by Leland in the 1880s, four men sought out Gluskap in order to have their wishes granted. The first described himself as "a wicked man," who was easily angered, and he asked to be made good. The second asked to be given wealth because, although he worked hard, his poverty was acute. The third man felt alienated from people and wished only to be loved. All three were granted their desires. The fourth man was tall, handsome, and vain, and he asked that he be made the tallest man on earth, that he be permitted to live a very long time, and that his existence would never take him from the earth. This man was transformed into the first pine tree.\(^46\)

Another story, related to the sportsman Campbell Hardy, spoke of a similar estrangement from other human beings that resulted from a concern only for one's own welfare. Michael Thom, a native guide employed by Cambell Hardy in the mid-nineteenth century, told Hardy of an old woman, the bear, who was blind and relied upon her companion, a handsome fisher, for food. He was a very astute moose-hunter, and each time he killed a moose he gave the old woman only the worst meat. One day, grandmother took a knife and cut deeply into the flesh over her eyes, restoring her sight, and subsequently discovering that Fisher had set all the fattest meat from his latest kill in a pile beside himself. She dissolved their partnership, and was shortly thereafter joined by another bear—"an able-looking man [who was] so strong he could catch anything at all." Fisher, however, was doomed to remain alone.\(^47\)

The significance afforded both the relationship with land and with community suggested a mode of valuation in absolute opposition
to the colonial values that gave rise to alienation and devaluation of human beings. For many people, the possibility of inducing the British to alter these values appeared to be contingent upon simply pointing out their failure to function reciprocally. The Mi’kmaq knew that without mutuality, human life was problematic. They also knew that, unless the British were made aware of this fact, their own existence would become increasingly precarious. Thus, they persistently called the British to confront the incongruity of their behaviour, and the flawed valuational framework from which such behaviour emerged. They pointed in some instances to the inequity of relations between the native and white communities, such that, as one man noted in 1846, “We never injure your pigs nor cows; but the other day your men frightened a bear, and prevented him from going into my trap.” At other times, the fundamental injustice of British expectations was criticized, as when Chief Peminuit told the Queen:

When I was young I had plenty; now I am old, poor, and sickly too. My people are poor. No hunting Grounds—no Beaver—no Otter—no nothing. . . . All these woods once ours. . . . Now we cannot cut a Tree to warm our Wigwam in Winter unless the White Man please.

Still in other instances, the Mi’kmaq hoped that by demonstrating their commitment to the principle of reciprocity, the British might be moved to do the same. The petitioners from Burnt Church (noted previously) did precisely this in their correspondence with the colonial government:

[The Mi’kmaq] have never broken their word, but have been true and Loyal Subjects and therefore trust that you the Representatives of their Great Mistress the Queen will never consent to break their Location or abridge their privileges in any manner whatever.

Throughout the period in question, native affirmations of identity not only constituted a means of withstanding pressure for extinction, but demonstrated an astute understanding of the diverse character of Acadia. This clarity of vision ultimately pervaded all aspects of their contest with the colonial world. Indeed, their survival depended upon it. Despite frequent British disparagement to the contrary, the Mi’kmaq vigorously sought modes of subsistence that could accommodate the changes that the European presence had provoked in Acadia; they adapted as much as the British would permit to the demands of a colonial economy. From the late eighteenth century onward, entire communities often relocated near white settlements in the summers in order to sell crafted items to the white population. Women supplied whites with a variety of such items, including woven baskets, quill
boxes, and brooms. Men pursued various occupations in addition to their traditional—although vastly attenuated—practices of hunting and fishing. They constructed wooden barrels and butter tubs, as well as ax handles to supply to whites. Moses Perley noted in his *Report of 1841* that at the Eel Ground Reserve "some work as Coopers and make very good articles." In other areas, they worked in the logging and lumbering industries, and a substantial number hired themselves out as guides for European and American game hunters and tourists who began arriving in relatively substantial numbers in the 1840s. The influx of sportsmen into Acadia began largely as a result of the publication of a letter written by Moses Perley in the *London Sporting Review* in 1839, in which he extolled the region’s potential for game hunting.

Porpoise hunting was also an alternative pursued by the Mi'kmaq throughout the century, and remained a viable undertaking until the turn of the twentieth century, when petroleum oils replaced that derived from porpoise blubber as a principal industrial lubricant. This work was extremely difficult. Porpoise hunting in Digby County, for instance, lasted for about two and a half months each summer, during which time entire communities relocated themselves in areas along the coast. Each canoe brought in about six porpoises per day during the season, although adept fishermen could often bring in as many as twelve. The blubber of the animals was removed and allowed to dry before being boiled into oil and kegged. When there was sufficient oil to fill a canoe, the load would be taken either to Digby or to wholesalers in St. John.

The understanding of Acadia’s altered character extended beyond Mi'kmaq modes of subsistence. Again, despite an ineffectual colonial response, frequent expressions of a desire for access to English literacy and agricultural expertise occurred throughout the nineteenth century. As early as 1804, Edward Winslow was informed that the Mi'kmaq of New Brunswick are at present discontented and discouraged. There is a school established at Sussex Vale, but what is that, as they observe, to their numerous tribe and the distribution of their nation; they are scattered and dispersed to several parts on this river for the sake of supporting their distressed families, and if schools were to be established once more, it would . . . be the means of bettering their condition.

Legislative reports from the early 1840s onward pointed especially to the fact that many Mi'kmaq were inclined to regard an English education as a positive thing, and some communities went so far as to request the construction of schools and the provision of white teachers.
The desire to enter into agricultural production was asserted more vociferously. Early in the century, Chief André Muis (whom the missionary John West called Adelah) travelled to London to have a land grant confirmed so that his community might begin to farm extensively. In 1838, Chief Oliver Thomas Le Bone wrote to the Colonial Office from Prince Edward Island stating that, as a result of an acute shortage of game, his community was prepared to attempt agriculture as a means of supporting themselves. A few years later, Perley reported that the Mi'kmaq with whom he had recently spoken “seemed quite willing to become farmers provided they had some persons to... teach them in the first instance, and provided also, they could raise enough from the land to support them.”

In 1844, Joseph Howe's report to the Nova Scotia Legislative Assembly related how, early in the spring, two Indians from Queen's County had visited me in Halifax, representing their anxiety to settle and become farmers, if they could get land... John Jeremy informed me that he had selected a spot on the Fairy Lake, but was afraid to improve or build, unless he was assured that he would not be disturbed.

And when, in 1860, the Prince of Wales visited Charlottetown, he was met by a delegation of Mi'kmaq requesting assistance for establishing themselves as farmers.

Despite all these attempts to adjust to Acadia's settler economy, the Mi'kmaq continued to starve. The British population itself was generally uninterested in the reality of the devastation that settlement was causing, and so the Mi'kmaq tried consistently to elicit a response from governing bodies. Their petitions, worded in English and issued through proper administrative channels, were an attempt to fashion their pleas for recognition in conformity to the expectations of those who supposedly exerted some influence over the settlers. When these initiatives failed to move colonial administrators, the Mi'kmaq often circumvented colonial governments entirely, and addressed their communication to the British government or the Crown. They understood the nature of the bureaucracy they faced, and when formal channels floundered, they sought out the administrator's superiors.

The colonial British attempted from earliest contact to alienate aboriginal peoples, and to deny the possibility of a mutually created community. As a consequence of this attempt to render them invisible, the Mi'kmaq perceived the importance of visibility in respect to bringing about a British recognition of the diversity that defined the Acadian community. Thus, they appeared in public celebrations in which, as we noted earlier, they were appreciated by whites for little more than their entertainment value. Regardless of white motives for seeking their
inclusion on these occasions, visibility was still visibility; alienation of the Mi'kmaq was a dismal reality, and the native community consequently exploited all opportunities for potential discourse with the white population. When Queen Victoria's marriage was commemorated by Nova Scotia in 1840, a group of Mi'kmaq walked in procession through the streets of Halifax. One newspaper noted that they were adorned "with badges, ribbons, flowers and Indian ornaments... boys with bows and arrows and badges... female Indians with their picturesque costume of high peaked caps, and various ornaments." Following the parade, its organizers set up tables and served a meal to the aboriginal participants, who ate under the watchful eyes of interested observers.

The Mi'kmaq were impelled, in their struggle against extinction, to come face to face with the profile of colonial Acadia. In their pursuit of modes of subsistence, they exploited every niche in the settler economy that had not been closed to them. They adopted modes of formal communication that the British expected, and they recognized the authority of those who constituted the colonies' political elites. Aware that invisibility would render impossible the task of bringing the colonials to a consciousness of Acadia's diverse profile, the Mi'kmaq even exploited opportunities for public exposure that whites perceived as spectacle. Survival required of native peoples a clear understanding of the reality of a changed homeland. Acquiescing to reality, however, did not signify an acceptance of the cultural meanings that had nourished the changes.

The Mi'kmaq had to eat. Adjustment to structures of power in Acadia was consequently absolutely necessary. But these adjustments were not regarded by any stretch of the imagination as modes of becoming British or of adopting the identity of a human community that wandered about the globe wreaking cultural and physical destruction. Native peoples accommodated themselves to colonial valuations in order to live, but their accommodation always contained an element of critique that pointed to the symbols of land or community as the measure of ultimate meaning and, consequently, of being Mi'kmaq.

They took part, for instance, in colonial exhibitions in the interest of gaining visibility, but they had no respect for the lens of exoticism through which the white population regarded them. A story told to Silas Rand in the late nineteenth century demonstrated an intensely critical analysis of the orchestrated spectacle of events such as Queen Victoria's parade.

Shortly after the country was discovered by the French, an Indian named Silmoodawa was taken to Flanchan (France) as a curiosity.
Among other curious adventures, he was prevailed upon to exhibit the Indian mode of killing and curing game. A fat ox or deer was brought out of a beautiful park and handed over to the Indian; he was provided with all the necessary implements, and placed within an enclosure of ropes, through which no person was allowed to pass, but around which multitudes were gathered to witness the butchering operations. . . . He shot the animal with a bow, bled him, skinned and dressed him, sliced up the meat, and spread it out on flakes to dry; then he cooked a portion and ate it, and in order to exhibit the whole process, and to take a mischievous revenge upon them for making an exhibition of him, he went into a corner of the yard and eased himself before them all.65

For the man in this story, the land was intricately entwined in human life; it could not be made into a backdrop for life as performance.66

In addition to public appearances, it is also true that the Mi'kmaq often expressed interest in learning the English language, as well as learning agricultural skills, from the white community, but these were pragmatic means pursued to alleviate their extreme destitution, not overtures (as some colonials like Moses Perley presumed) toward a colonial identity.67 As noted earlier, Edward Winslow was informed at the turn of the nineteenth century that New Brunswick's Mi'kmaq population was "discouraged" and "distressed," and very much desired access to British-sponsored education.68 John West noted in his Journal of a Mission to the Indians of the British Provinces that André Muis had told him he wished to begin farming in order to "see his Indians, with their families, in better circumstances."69 Despite the desire for access to some aspects of white culture (eating being a principal one), the nineteenth-century Mi'kmaq exercised extreme caution when considering the potential impact of these actions upon their sense of community. Thus, although in many cases they wished to undertake agriculture, for instance, they would not conform to a colonial style of farming in which people were no longer responsible for the welfare of any but themselves, and they persistently opposed colonial plans to subdivide their land for the use of individual families.70 Similarly, while they expressed interest in learning the English language, many resisted the notion of educating their children in white schools. The utility of a British education was regarded with skepticism, as a process that would undoubtedly echo the values of people who were adverse to acknowledging their interrelationship with others. Children inculcated with such values could well have proven to be destructive agents within their own communities. This caution was reflected in a letter received by Joseph Howe in 1842 from a colleague who had been told by a man named John Lupin that his community disapproved of their children being educated in the white man's schools, because when so educated it would break off the natural
ties of affection and association between them and their tribes, and mutual contempt and dislike would be the result.\textsuperscript{71}

This duality of meanings was also reflected in the writing of formal petitions. While acknowledging the fact that a particular form of correspondence was best suited to dealing with colonial governments, these petitions nonetheless contained calls for mutual respect and reciprocity not present in colonial European culture.

All this is to say that for aboriginal peoples, colonial Acadia was a fact; it was no longer the world the Mi'kmaq had known. Their task was to deal with the reality of a historical situation while maintaining a sense of identity that was distinct from the experience of alienation. In potential service of the world in which they lived, they not only accomplished this task but, in so doing, reimagined a colonial society that could take account of both historical experience and the fundamental value of all human beings. This world was given life in the stories they told that were constructed on a motif of cultural contact.

Rand learned, for instance, that there had once been a very poor young man who left his home in search of relief from his poverty. He made his way to a royal city where he found employment with the king's grooms. After two years of service, he introduced himself to the king who was so impressed with the young man’s aristocratic demeanour that he hired him as his personal attendant, believing the groom was of royal lineage. The king's daughter fell in love with the man the moment they met and they were subsequently married. No one in the entire city (least of all the king) ever suspected that the young man was anything but royalty.\textsuperscript{72} Mutuality, it appears, was regarded as a fundamental way of dealing with human diversity, and economic and social distinctions were clearly no more than the stuff that obscured that reality.

Rand was also told of two brothers who set out in search of a new home following the death of their parents and five siblings. When they reached a city, they were asked by passers-by from where they had come, what they did for a living, and their reason for being in the city. They explained that they were very poor, that the younger brother knew medicines and could heal, and that the elder brother was a labourer who desired only to work. The king, whose son was very ill, heard of the two brothers and summoned them to his home. The younger brother cured the child and was given half the territory ruled by the appreciative father. As his only desire was to spend the remainder of his life teaching others to heal, the young man gave his gift to his brother, and they both went on to become very rich men who used their wealth for the good of the people who resided in their new county.
The relationship between the two parts of the region was harmonious, with the elder brother ruling both segments following the death of the old king, and when the young son was sufficiently mature to bear the responsibility, the brother passed the king's half back to him. This was, in a sense, what might have been in Acadia. It was a story of encounter with alterity that led to a reciprocal relationship in which all people were recognized as significant human beings with responsibility for the welfare of all others. And all lives were consequently enriched by the encounter.

Re-imagining the world so as to concede to history its reality as well as its potential as a context for the affirmation of human significance was possible for the Mi'kmaq because they did not regard identity as self-generated. There was a primordial construction to their sense of meaning that, like the British identity, was rooted outside the colonial world, but it was structured in such a way as to remain somehow contingent upon human experience. In many respects, it was summarily framed in the figure of Gluskap—the primordial man who had been born before other human beings "knew themselves, in the light before the sun." Gluskap had come to earth from the realm of the spiritual, but his relationship with the land was of profound intimacy. His family included some of the earth's creatures (his uncle, for instance, was Turtle), his canoe was a granite island, and he enjoyed an affinity with animals that brought bears and wolves to lick his hands and moose and caribou to wander about his home like domestic animals. According to Michael Thom, Gluskap charmed the animals with his pipe. Sometimes he would go out into the stillness of a summer's evening, and play upon his shrill-toned instrument. The music could be heard at an immense distance... Charmed with the melody, all the animals within hearing would immediately set off for his dwelling.

In the context of the forest, he fasted and dreamed, and in so doing, acquired a form of power not available within the realm of pure earthly existence. Charles Leland, in his interpretation of stories of Gluskap collected in the late nineteenth century, wrote that "to gain tremendous power... as man had never won," Gluskap was obliged to "dwell in the wilderness, and fast and pray and dream." In the wake of these experiences, he was able to bring his two closest companions—Grandmother and Marten—back from death. It was Gluskap who was said by many to have named everything on earth, and to have given life to human beings.

The Mi'kmaq were thus born of an intimacy between the physical and cosmic worlds. Identity was not internally generated but was a
product of the encounter of the world of the spirit with the world of experience. The latter portion of the equation situated human meaning in relation to historical processes. Consequently, for the nineteenth-century Mi’kmaq, their identity had come into existence before colonialism, but it could not exist apart from the historical reality of the colonial world. In fact, the New World itself came to be afforded a primordial basis that conceded the reality of the changes initiated by the European movement across the Atlantic.

Gluskap had spoken of the future arrival of Europeans in Acadia, and had prophesied the baptism of the Mi’kmaq. F. G. Speck was told by Chief Joe Julien and John Joe (of Sydney and Whycogamag, respectively) that Gluskap and Christ had toyed with Acadia’s landscape long before the Christians themselves left Europe:

[Christ] took Gluscap to the ocean, and told him to close his eyes. Then Christ moved close to the shore an island which lay far out to sea. When Gluscap opened his eyes, he saw it. Christ asked him if he could do as much as that. Then Gluscap told Christ to close his eyes a while. When Christ opened his eyes, he found that Gluscap had moved it back to its place again.

Gluskap’s people were firmly Mi’kmaq, but this did not preclude the historical reality of becoming also New World people.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Acadia was very much a new place for its aboriginal peoples. Unlike the British, the Mi’kmaq did not deny this fact. They did, however, recognize that the changes that had occurred had a devastating impact on a large measure of Acadia’s human profile, and so they sought new possibilities for being New World humans that would take account of the reality of change while affirming the integrity of all peoples. Where the British regarded diversity as destructive to their pattern of meaning, the Mi’kmaq saw it as a context for extending a pattern. The fundamental divergence here was between a notion of identity as something self-generated, and a recognition of power other than the human, which shaped both experience and meaning. The colonial as purely British was a construction of the imagination, an internal structuring of identity that was projected outward and imposed upon a historical reality that itself rendered such a construction an impossibility. The land, other humans, indeed history itself became incidental to the meaning of the colonial, for this person could be shaped and defined by little beyond its own conceptions. The ambiguities of experience—whether they involved the situation of the colonial on land three thousand miles removed from England or the existence of other communities of human beings who called Acadia “home”—were not permitted to enter into the arenas of
colonial definition, because these would invariably have confronted the British with an identity imposed by something other than themselves.

For aboriginal peoples, on the other hand, a relationship with land and community sustained a sense of identity that was Mi'kmaq—an identity brought to life in the meeting of the physical and spiritual worlds. A relationship with Europeans gave rise to a sense of identity that was “New World,” and this was born in the historical encounters of the post-Colombian period. For the Mi’kmaq, both identities coexisted. Being Mi’kmaq did not signify a rupture with the reality of being entrenched in a colonial world, but neither could being New World people negate the notion of humanity contained in being Mi’kmaq.85

This duality afforded aboriginal peoples a vision of themselves with which they could withstand the pressure to become extensions of the British imagination that sought to make of them either British clones or dead Mi’kmaq. It also gave rise to an understanding of the British that the colonials themselves failed to achieve. The stories of Gluskap’s prophesies, and of his primordial contest with Christ, for instance, were articulations of this understanding, for these suggested that the British did not know themselves. Their adamant contentions of cultural purity were lies that obscured their ability to recognize that they were part of a structure of meaning that was much greater than they imagined. The Mi’kmaq knew that the world of the British was not all there was. They also knew that while there might well be power in coercion and violence, there was another form of power in knowing that humans do not create themselves nor the world about them.

In ascribing names to everything, Gluskap had conferred upon the creation inhabited by the Mi’kmaq a structure of meaning not governed by the human agents within the world. To name something is to control its significance and since, for the Mi’kmaq, this power was located in the primordium, human beings who sought to exercise this sort of prerogative in Acadia were deluded in their sense of self-importance. In the latter part of the colonial period, a story was told that underlined this form of self-deception. It described the meeting of the first colonial priest and a shaman, in which the European asked,

“What name would you like to have?” “Mary.” “No, that is a woman’s name. Try again.” “God.” “No; God has charge of us all.” “Devil.” “No, he takes care of Hell.” Finally the priest left him, for he could not get any satisfaction.86

The world, for the Mi’kmaq, was not a human creation. Further, any power the human possessed was likewise not self-engendered.
Gluskap once travelled across the Atlantic and landed on an island off the coast of England.

The King ordered a man to try to find the man who was in charge there. A ship was sent out... they found a man there and asked him, "Where are you from?" "I am from out there," said Gluskap, pointing westward. "Do you intend to remain here?" "To be sure, I shall stay here..." The English began cutting wood, to put in their ship. He told them not to do so—"All the wood on the island belongs to me." The King sent the ship back to get the man. The Captain went ashore and said to him, "Come aboard, the King wishes to see you. We will put you ashore." "No, go back; tomorrow morning I shall be there." They reported his words to the King. On the following morning it was found that the island was close to the shore. The King threatened to kill Gluskap when he did come ashore... accordingly, the King built a big pile of wood and had ready for use a huge flask of oil... Two officers took him, handcuffed him, and put him on the pile of wood. Fire was placed to it. It blazed high, and finally the pile was burned to the bottom. When it had burned out, Gluskap was found sitting in the midst of it, just as they had placed him, smoking his pipe... Gluskap walked out and asked, "Where is the King?" The King was called. He went to Gluskap and wished to shake hands with him. Gluskap said, "I cannot touch your hand, for it is of no account—it is like yourself. You, too, are no good; you are a very hard-hearted man.... When you called me from out there, I thought you would accord me better treatment than I have received...." The King then knelt before him. "Get up," said Gluskap, "I don't want that. But do not treat people in such manner as you have treated me.... You may be the Master of this world, but there is another who is Master over you. I shall leave you now. If I had not shown myself more powerful than you, you would have killed me. But even I, as well as yourself, have a Master." 87

In failing to acknowledge a power greater than himself, the "King of England" existed in a world of illusion that Gluskap exposed. The Mi'kmaq shared Gluskap's experience of the destructive potential of self-generated identity.

In the war that was the greater part of the eighteenth century, they chose violence only after the possibility of reciprocity was rejected by the British. As human beings they imagined their identity in relation to forces beyond themselves and, consequently, possessed the power to encounter diversity without resorting to violence. This was the power to experience the freedom that originates in the extension, rather than the constraint of human meaning.

Notes

1. See MacDonald, Rebels and Royalists, 10; Moir, The Church in the British Era, 17-18; Stewart, Documents Relating to the Great Awakening, xv.
2. For references to the New England immigration, see Reid, *Six Crucial Decades*, 50. The Irish, Scottish, and German influx is considered by Guillemin, in *Urban Renegades*, 52–53; *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society* vol. 8 (1892–1894): 251; Reid, 50; MacNutt, *The Atlantic Provinces*, 55.

3. Morrison notes that trade in the region was being conducted at least as early as the 1550s from Tadoussac on the Saguenay River (see *The Embattled Northeast*, 18). However, it may well be that it began earlier than this. By the time Jacques Cartier arrived in 1534, the native population was sufficiently familiar with French commercial interests to greet the Frenchman with “frequent signs to us to come ashore, holding up to us some furs on sticks.” See Biggar, *The Voyages of Jacques Cartier*, 49. For discussion of the early trade period see Eccles, *The Canadian Frontier*, esp.16–20; Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada*, 9–12; Jennings, *The Invasion of America*, 95–96; Guillemin, *Urban Renegades*, 23; Bailey, *The Conflict of European and Eastern Algonkian Cultures*, 6ff.; Trigger, *The Indians and the Heroic Age of New France*, 9ff.; Leacock and Laurie, *North American Indians in Historical Perspective*, 350–351.

4. Lescarbot was a disillusioned French lawyer who sailed to Acadia in 1606 to satisfy his curiosity about the New World. Along with the Jesuit Relations of the period, his work, *Nova Francia*, remains the most comprehensive early European document concerning the early period of European-Mi’kmaq contact in the region. See Sauer, *Seventeenth Century North America*, 84.


7. Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 29. Marcel Mauss also suggested that this property of the gift permits it to exert a “religious hold over the recipient.” See *The Gift*, 10.


9. See Upton, *Mi’kmaq and Colonists*, 26. References to actual marriages recorded in the Quebec archives are provided in Griffiths, *The Acadians*, 3. Nash, *Red, White and Black*, suggests that intermarriage in Acadia was a particularly pervasive phenomenon, so that by the late seventeenth century almost every French family established in the region could claim lineages that included native peoples (104–105). The notion of intermarriage remained a relatively innocuous one throughout the colonial period, as the Mi’kmaq did not share the British repulsion of the practice. In fact, in the mid-nineteenth century, Michael Thom told Campbell Hardy a story that appeared to poke fun at the colonial aversion to ethnic mixing: “That rabbit queer fellow! He got married at last. He marry the Martin. He thought she very good woman at first; for he marry in winter, you know. But... when the warm weather come on, she change colour, and then he shocking angry. He find he been and married coloured woman. Poor Ablegemuch” (*Sporting Adventures*, 258).


12. The proclamation appears in Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens*, 71. Subsequent instructions to Governor Murray in December of 1763 reiterated much of this: "Whereas We have, by Our Proclamation dated the seventh day of October in the Third Year of Our Reign, strictly forbid, on Pain of Our Displeasure, all our Subjects from making any purchases or settlements whatever ... no private person, Society, Corporation, or Colony [may] be capable of acquiring any Property belonging in Lands belonging to the Indians." Instructions to Murray, December 7, 1763, printed in Smith, *Canadian Indians and the Law*, 5–11. Smith deals with the proclamation itself in the preceding pages.


15. Governor Mascarene to the Lords of Trade, September 25, 1744, cited in Akins, *Selections from the Public Documents of the Province of Nova Scotia*, 133–134. In his *History of Halifax City*, Akins claimed that "During the Indian hostilities, opposition on the part of the Colonists was altogether of a defensive nature. The regular troops, as well as the undisciplined militia, proving unfit for such warfare, it was found necessary to employ the New England Rangers. These were volunteers from the New York provinces, accustomed to Indian warfare, many of them Indians and half-breds. They ascended the rivers, penetrated into the heart of the province, and attacked the enemy in their strongholds" (35). Cf. Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*, 45–47.


29. Francis Jennings has suggested that Abenaki, Mi'kmaq, Iroquois, and Ohio violence during this stage of colonization was clearly a response to colonial encroachment (*Empire of Fortune*, 219; *The Invasion of America*, 37). Cf. Patterson, *The Canadian Indian*, 61.

30. For a discussion of the cyclical pattern of subsistence carried on by the Mi'kmaq prior to the arrival of the British, see Father Pierre Biard's account in Thwaites, *The Jesuit Relations*, vol. 3, 79–83; Denys, *The Description and Natural History of the Coasts of North America (Acadia)*, 428–435; and Upton, 2–3.


32. From a letter transcribed by Maillard from the Mi'kmaq representatives to the governor at Halifax, October 18, 1749, translated by Upton, *Micmacs and Colonists*, 201–202.


37. This was reported by the Reverend John Sprott, and printed in *The Nova Scotian*, April 6, 1846, 10, cited in Whitehead, *The Old Man Told Us*, 228.


41. Ibid., 55.

42. Walter Bromley, a British military officer who retired to Nova Scotia in 1813, was considered by his white contemporaries to be “one of the greatest philanthropists of the age.” He involved himself in initiatives intended to demonstrate the feasibility of teaching the Mi'kmaq trades, farming, the Protestant faith, and the English language. His pilot project was located at Shubenacadie and was run much like a military operation in which families were threatened with losses of rations if they failed to cultivate sufficient land. See Fingard, “English Humanitarianism and the Colonial Mind,” 127–149.


44. These have often been designated as legends or folklore by whites who recorded them, but I prefer to consider the stories under the rubric of myth, in recognition
of their primordial structures of meaning [as noted in chapter one]. In choosing to avail ourselves of the evidence they contain, we must acknowledge that much of this is undoubtedly perverted to some extent. As Sam Gill has aptly noted, "in collections of texts or in ethnographies ... the oral component is completely lost as is the original language ... the text is stripped of the tradition, separated from its cultural context. In this form it can only speak to our own sense of meaning and value." See Native American Religious Action, 51. I might also note that many of the stories to which reference will be made in the following discussion were collected after the close of the colonial period, that is, after 1866. In every case, however, the material cited was shared with those who recorded it by individuals who were living in the first generation after Confederation.

47. Hardy, Sporting Adventures, 259–262.
48. Printed in The Nova Scotian, April 6, 1846; cited in Whitehead, The Old Man Told Us, 229.
50. PANB, Rex/Px, vol. 40, 167, quoted in Hamilton and Spray, Source Documents Relating to the New Brunswick Indian, 126.
51. See Perley's Report of 1841, 3; Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 128–129; Patterson, The Canadian Indian, 117; Wien, Rebuilding the Economic Base of Indian Communities, 19.
53. Halleck, "The Restigouche," 430–431, noted that the Mi'kmaq at Mission Point, New Brunswick, were doing limited agriculture, with a more substantial emphasis on hunting, fishing, and lumbering. Cf. Patterson, The Canadian Indian, 117.
54. Wien, Rebuilding the Economic Base of Indian Communities, 18–19; Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 129.
55. See Leighton, "The Twilight of the Indian Porpoisc Hunters," 411. Leighton notes that "without further refinement [the oil] was suitable for machinery and leather." Cf. Wein, Rebuilding the Economic Base of Indian Communities, 19.
56. Thomas Costin to Edward Winslow, March 23, 1804; cited in Raymond, Winslow Papers, 514. Winslow, a direct descendant of the first governor of Plymouth by the same name, had been dispatched by the British government to supervise the demobilization of Loyalist troops in Nova Scotia after the revolutionary war. He was one of the founders of the colony of New Brunswick. Cf. Raymond, x, 5.
57. Battiste, in "Micmac Literacy and Cognitive Assimilation," 33, notes that Nova Scotia's Annual Reports of the Department of Indian Affairs between 1843 and 1873 "indicated Micmacs' growing interest in learning to read." In his 1841 report, for instance, Perley claimed that the Mi'kmaq at Burnt Church "appeared very desirous of having schools" (4).
58. The Mi'kmaq at Eskasoni, Nova Scotia, for example, made such a request in 1845. ILAMS, appendix 16, 1845, 69–71, and appendix 18, 1846, 66; cited in Ralston, "Religion, Public Policy, and Education of Micmac Indians," 186.
60. Upton, Micmacs and Colonists, 116.


65. Rand, *Legends of the Micmacs*, 279. The story was related to Rand in May of 1870.

66. Gill has suggested that, for many native Americans, food "is never isolated as a necessary but otherwise meaningless aspect of life. Food is never seen as simply 'for the body.' Whether the way of life is hunting, fishing, gathering, or farming, it is inextricably bound with a religious view of the world. . . . It is this religious foundation that makes the killing of a bear, the gathering of herbs and acorns, the corn planting activities more than simple necessities for feeding the body. This religious foundation makes such activities crucial to the ongoing creation of the world." See *Native American Religions*, 138.

67. Cardinal has pointed to this fundamental divergence in attitude toward white education between European and native American cultures. He suggests that native Americans "recognize that education is one of the major tools that will help us strike off the shackles of poverty and, incidentally, the tyranny of government direction. But the white man apparently believes that education is a tool for the implementation of his design of assimulation" (*The Unjust Society*, 51). In regard to the attitude among whites such as Perley of believing that the Mi'kmaq wanted to become "civilized," I refer to Thornton's suggestion that during the process of colonization, "many natives have accepted the detail of European civilization, but not its motive force. . . . and it is this attitude which gives Europeans the impression that the native is ready enough to mimic them." See Thornton, *For the File on Empire*, 340.


69. West, 246.


75. On the basis of what his guide, Michael Tom, told him, Campbell Hardy described Gluskap as "a denizen of heaven, who came down to examine the wonders of the earth." (*Sporting Adventures*, 248).


79. Leland and Prince, *Kuloskap the Master*, 164-165. Grim and St. John suggest that dreams have generally functioned as conduits between the physical and spiritual
worlds within northeastern American native cultures. They are "a vehicle for contacting power and thus gaining guidance for political and military decisions. New songs, dances, and customs were often received by the dreamer and were used to energize and reorder cultural life; dreams channeled power as consolation and hope during times of crisis and often initiated contact between visionary power and the shamans" ["The Northeastern Woodlands," 119].


82. Battiste, in "An Historical Investigation," has noted that in traditional Mi'kmaq epistemology, two interrelated worlds are acknowledged to exist: "beyond the immediate world of perception, memory, imagination, and feelings exists another world from which knowledge, power, or medicine is derived and which the traditional native peoples have been taught in their oral tradition will aid them in their survival. The process of knowing is thus derived first from the immediate world through personal and tribal experiences, and secondly from one's interaction with the spiritual world . . . Since both worlds have a common base, a time when they were both one, they interact with one another to provide harmony between land and the life it supports" (46-47). "The road to the spirit world was one of following tribal custom and ritual, of fasting, prayer, and suspending the physical world" (79).

83. See Speck, "Some Micmac Tales," 60.


85. This duality of meanings has been shared by many of the New World's displaced peoples. In speaking of the African American community, for instance, Charles Long has noted that the religious project of that community has generally been one of figuring "out some way by which we accepted the sheer facticity of our situation . . . but did not accept it as the definition of who we were." Jones and Hardy, "From Colonialism to Community," 583.


87. Wallis and Wallis, *The Micmac Indians of Eastern Canada*, 333-334. This story was recorded sometime between the summers of 1911 and 1912.