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Introduction

Aboriginal-State Relations

During the past 200 years, humans have been experiencing the most powerful ethnic revival ever, a revival whose strength can be gauged by the spread of the ideology of nationalism. While there have been instances of ethnically based nationalism before the French Revolution, it is this event that made nationalism

an almost irresistible and worldwide trend . . . the French example helped to spur ethnic nationalism elsewhere, notably in the lands conquered by Napoleon; and it was the success of the French fusion of popular sovereignty, national unity, and ethnic fraternity or identity that made it possible for other subordinated communities to entertain similar aspirations . . . the new doctrines of nationalism furnished a universal language in which to convey and legitimate ethnic aspirations, and once they began to emerge their success in one area of the globe [they] simply enhanced their appeal and potency in the eyes of new claimants. (Smith, 1981: 23–24)

The recent numerous global ethno-nationalist conflicts and mobilizations speak to the continued primacy of ethnicity, ethnic iden-

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tity and boundaries, and culture for collective protest and social movement activity.

The recent struggles between indigenous peoples and the state point to the fact that indigenous nations are not immune from ethnic and nationalist conflicts similar to those that have erupted during this century in the “new” states of Africa and Asia, Europe, and the former Soviet Union, to name a few. Specifically, indigenous nations both in Canada and the United States have been and continue to be subject to conditions that elsewhere have contributed to political mobilization along ethnic and nationalist lines. Indeed, nearly five centuries of systematic socio-economic and political discrimination against aboriginal peoples have generated a sustained indigenous ethno-nationalist, political discourse as a way of mobilizing solidarity across aboriginal territories (Chartrand, 1992; Jhappan, 1993; Long, 1992). This discourse is based on claims about aboriginal peoples’ right to self-determination, which includes the retaining and/or regaining of land, the right to self-government, and the recognition of their identity as nations within Canada and the United States (the latter challenges a vision of Canadian history based on “two founding peoples”). Contributing to these ethnically based nationalist claims have been the resources necessary for political mobilization—politicized ethnicity and ideology.

Aboriginal resistance to colonial domination over their land and resources has taken many forms, from the passive acts of conventional politics and legal efforts to the more aggressive acts of civil disobedience and armed uprisings. For example, the actions of members of the Mohawk nation and the Mohawk Warrior Movement exist at one end of the spectrum of political action. However, one needs to recognize that the Mohawks moved to that end because they were frustrated with the ineffectiveness of conventional channels of redress. Members of the Mohawk nation and the Mohawk Warrior Movement engaged in armed resistance in 1990 to call public attention to and garner political support for their grievances against the continued colonial domination over and seizure of their land and resources by the Canadian state.

When and how were the Mohawks motivated to accept and even embrace this “extremist” option and maintain it against such overwhelming resources and show of military force by a modern industrial nation? If anger and oppression alone led to armed uprisings, they would occur daily, as Trotsky (1965) noted. If hypocrisy incites violence, as Hannah Arendt (1970:65) argued, indigenous peoples faced with continued treaty violations would be involved in uprisings continuously. To understand these complex political and cultural processes, this book will look at the historical and contemporary conflict-relationship that exists between the Mohawk Warrior Movement and the Canadian federal and provincial state, within the context of the Mohawk nation’s struggle for national self-determination. My analysis of the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict will reveal the significant role ideology (nationalism) and politicized ethnicity (ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness) play in social movement mobilization.

ABORIGINAL-STATE RELATIONS

The reluctance of the Canadian federal and provincial governments to acknowledge and legitimize aboriginal land claims has been a consistent historical reminder of the colonial relationship that defines aboriginal-state relations within Canada. In cases where aboriginal land claims have been recognized, such land transfers have taken place only after struggles, which in many instances erupted into violent confrontations, forcing the federal and provincial governments to return tracts of traditional land to First Nations’ peoples. One such contentious land claim involved the Kanehsatake Mohawks, who in 1990 forced the Canadian federal and Quebec provincial governments to return 100 acres of traditional Mohawk land to the territory of Kanehsatake. By setting up blockades and engaging in armed confrontation, the Kanehsatake Mohawks were able to prevent the development of a golf course expansion project onto land that they have continually claimed as theirs. In an attempt to diffuse the confrontation,

the Canadian federal government purchased the land from the town of Oka, Quebec, on behalf of the Kanehsatake Mohawks. However, the situation between the Kanehsatake Mohawks and the state remains problematic at best, because the federal government has yet to actually transfer the land that they purchased to the Kanehsatake Mohawks. Ethno-political conflicts such as those between the Mohawk nation and the Canadian state must be viewed within the context of the historical record of Aboriginal-Canadian state relations.

The aboriginal experience has been shaped by aboriginal struggles to survive colonial policies and practices that deliberately seek to obliterate indigenous ways of life as well as indigenous resistance to state invasions within aboriginal ancestral sovereign territories. If one maintains an understanding of the role power plays in human conflict, one is able to see that the contemporary situation of aboriginal nations is ultimately tied to the historical and socio-political reality of European (and now, Euro-Canadian and Euro-American) domination and colonialization. It is because of this reality and disparity of power that indigenous peoples continue to engage in acts of resistance to reaffirm their sovereignty and self-determination and to reclaim their sense of power. The Mohawk nation is but one of the numerous aboriginal nations struggling to survive and resist such an experience of European domination and colonization.

The struggle for aboriginal national self-determination has been a long and arduous one. For over 500 years, indigenous populations in North America have had to endure threats to their economic and political autonomy and sovereignty, the very maintenance of their cultural and political survival. Efforts by indigenous peoples to (re) gain some measure of control over their lives have been reflected in a multitude of politically significant events. Of particular importance are the politics of resistance to the encroachment of the white man, which are evident to this day. The political resistance of today has been built on the struggles of the past, placing the struggle for national self-determination in historical perspective.

Before and since the inception of the confederation of Canada, control of the land and resources within its boundaries has been the essential source of conflict between Euro-Canadians and indigenous nations. In effect, contentions over land usage and ownership have served to define the nature of Canadian-aboriginal relationships, shaping the nature of the ongoing domination and resistance to such domination.

The relationship between First Nations and the dominant society in Canada has been characterized by provincial and federal bureaucratic and administrative control over indigenous territories. This historical treatment of First Nations has greatly influenced their experiences of powerlessness and oppression. The federal and provincial governments have used policies of both annihilation and assimilation to determine the boundaries of aboriginal territories to contribute to making indigenous peoples dependent and powerless.

The most crucial element defining the powerless condition of First Nations' peoples arises from the expropriation of their lands and resources. The Canadian federal and provincial governments have controlled both aboriginal property (land) and resources and have exercised institutional power to create laws that govern the daily lives of aboriginal peoples. Native peoples have been denied traditional ritual, spiritual, and communal life and have been forced to accept an imposed government structure, replacing traditional leadership, dependence, government support, and a second-class legal status. For First Nations then, power becomes structurally grounded in relations of domination and subordination and is framed in terms of struggle between the expropriator and the expropriated. Issues of land rights as well as political sovereignty and economic self-determination thus become embedded in issues of power.

During the spring, summer, and fall of 1990, a land dispute between the Mohawk territory of Kanehsatake and the town of Oka, Quebec, Canada, emerged onto center stage of the world community, erupting into months of intense and often violent confrontation. Faced with the destruction of their ancestral burial grounds because of a proposed golf course expansion project, sovereign

Mohawk resources (land) were once more being coveted by the Canadian state for appropriation for the purpose of “economic development.” As a colonized people, the Mohawk nation serves as an example of a nation of people forced to take up arms in self-defense, as a final tactic to prevent additional state appropriation of Mohawk lands.

The explosive events of the Mohawk-Oka conflict began on March 10, 1990, when a group of Mohawks from Kanehsatake began a peaceful occupation of their ancestral burial grounds to defend their land. They were attempting to block the development of a small forest bordering the Quebec resort town of Oka. It is within this forest, known as “The Pines,” that the Mohawk ancestral burial ground lies. The Kanehsatake Mohawks erected a barricade to prevent the town of Oka, Quebec, from expanding its municipal golf course onto sovereign Mohawk land. As a result of social movement activity and the visibility and attention gained from that action, the Kanehsatake Mohawks succeeded in preventing the proposed golf course project from expanding onto their ancestral burial grounds.

In a narrow sense, the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict lasted 200 days, but this conflict was much larger than the events of those six months. Rooted in the historical reality of past injustices, the events of the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict epitomize and were quickly recognized by both sides as a reflection of the larger relationship and struggles that exist among aboriginal nations, ethno-nationalist movements, and the state. Thus, in addition to a struggle over ancient Mohawk land claims, the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict is a microcosm of both the historical realities of indigenous status in general and of the Mohawk demands for national self-determination.

Using the Mohawk-Oka conflict as the case study, this book seeks to tell a story of struggle and survival during the 1990 invasion by the Quebec provincial police and Canadian army onto Mohawk sovereign land. The story is the latest chapter in a 380-year struggle by one embattled nation fighting against violations

of Mohawk sovereignty and the right to determine its political and economic destiny.

The period from 1968 through 1974 and then again in the early 1980s was a time of renewal for the Mohawk nation. A traditional Mohawk warrior society (re)emerged, combining historical traditions with twentieth-century militant strategy. Movement leaders and members began to (re)assert their Mohawk identity and voice their grievances with state repression, addressing the need for national liberation. Mohawk Warrior Movement leaders mobilized support around two themes: politicized ethnicity and ideology. To understand the motives of and effects on Mohawk Warrior Movement participants and event developments during the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict, one needs to understand these conditions as being important interpretive frameworks that served as rallying points which facilitated social movement mobilization during that conflict. Failure to do so would leave one in the same ethno-cultural confusion and reaction that “guided” police and military action during the course of the conflict.

During the past two decades, many aboriginal nations within Canada and the United States have expressed what can only be considered a politicized ethnicity—ethnic identity and consciousness. They speak of indigenous populations as “peoples,” “nations,” and “nationalities” by right of the specific cultural, linguistic, territorial, and historical ties that bind them together and set them apart from others. And they have come to recognize that they need to engage in political efforts (within and outside) institutionalized processes so their identity will be recognized, respected, and legally assured. In fact, acts of political resistance have become an intrinsic part of ethnicity. This book will demonstrate the ways in which Mohawk Warrior Movement leaders developed interpretive frames which built upon that movement and its ideology. It also will show how Mohawk Warrior Movement leaders specifically cultivated a politicized ethnicity and framed the movement’s ideology (nationalism) in such a manner as to facilitate member recruitment and mobilization of political capacity

within the Mohawk nation and within other aboriginal nations of North America.

This idea of a “nation,” a “people” that recognizes itself as distinct on the basis of shared culture and tradition, and the political principle that each national unit should have political autonomy, are among the most potent of the European ideas which have spread globally in the context of the growth of the capitalist world economy, colonialism, and the twentieth-century struggle for independence. The Mohawk nation, as do others, claims a legitimate right to use force (including armed struggle) to defend its peoples and nation, regardless of the beliefs and sanctions of the state that has asserted established claims over its autonomy and territory. As part of a larger dispossessed indigenous population that deeply embraces a nationalist ideology, the Mohawk nation points to the fact that ethnic conflict and nationalist struggles are as significant a factor in Canada and the United States as they are in certain other areas of the world.

The emergence of ethno-nationalist rhetoric within North American native rights movements of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s represents a capacity for mobilizing the indigenous population behind nationalist goals. It is this ethno-nationalist ideology that the leaders of the Mohawk Warrior Movement framed in ways that allowed them to mobilize participants during the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict. This book will show that the principal reason they were successful in their efforts to mobilize support and maintain alliances was because they adapted their ideological agenda and discourse to the predispositions and conceptions of the larger Mohawk nation.

There has yet to be a comprehensive investigation of ethno-nationalist ideology within North American native rights movements. While there are a few studies (Hornung, 1991; Landsman, 1988; Matthiessen, 1991; Nagel, 1996; York and Pindera, 1991) that touch upon this phenomenon, they do not provide a sufficient understanding of the critical role of historical forces underlying the emergence of indigenous nationalist claims. As a result, they are not able to tell us, with any precision, how far nationalist

sentiments reach into the indigenous population as a whole. However, they do present evidence that these claims are being put forward, at least by the leadership of indigenous movements. This analysis of the Mohawk Warrior Movement and its participation in the 1990 Mohawk-Oka conflict seeks ultimately to move beyond the case study. It is an attempt to lay the conceptual and theoretical groundwork for a more extensive theoretical explanation regarding the emergence of ethnic-nationalist ideology within North American native rights movements and its potential for social movement mobilization.