

**Customary Food, Feasting and Legal Identities at Paq'tnkek First Nation**

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## 1.1 Introduction

Food is a part of material culture that individuals identify with, enjoy, and consume. Events are built around food. There are culturally constructed ideas about special food and everyday food, rules around preparation, presentation and consumption. Food is essential to life and a central part of living. There is a large body of research around nutrition, food and identity, but there is a significant gap in the academic research that explores the cultural relationships between First Nation's, Metis and Inuit people's relationship with food in the context of colonization. This thesis seeks to fill that gap by exploring feasting as a site of affirming identity and cultural revitalization for the Mi'kmaq people of Paq'tnkek First Nation. The federal government has influenced the way Mi'kmaq people experience customary food over a significant period of time through criminalization, economic marginalization, territory loss and the denial of treaty rights.

The context of colonial relationships had severe impacts on Indigenous people in Canada. Historically, access to culturally valuable food was heavily restricted as one of several means of facilitating assimilation. Overt assimilation tactics like criminalizing ritual practices such as potlatch on the Pacific Coast, or the Sundance on the Plains have set the tone for discriminatory policies within governing bodies, to be the norm. For example, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, through the *Indian Act* maintain paternalistic power structures and facilitate ongoing colonial processes by defining how communities can choose their leaders or who is eligible to be considered an Indian. The very use of the term "Indian" demonstrates systemic discrimination, as this label is usually perceived as a derogatory term for Aboriginal peoples. Yet, Indian is still the term used by the government. Within this context, publicly performing Aboriginal identity is

a powerful act of resistance and revitalization. Food is a part of this performance as food can be a tangible marker of culture.

## **1.2. Research Questions**

Three broad questions guide my research. 1. What is the role of food in culture? 2. What are the roles of food in cultural production and revitalization? 3. What are the relationships between food, memory and identity?

## **1.3 Thesis Statement**

Motivated by an agenda of assimilation, Mi'kmaq culture was actively oppressed by colonial processes. Access to customary land and food resources were restricted and controlled by laws and policies that damaged the cultural practices of feasting integral to Mi'kmaq identity. Mi'kmaq people have resisted absorption into hegemonic power structures by litigating their demands for rights recognition and access to customary resources. Feasting is an event celebrating culture and commemorating Mi'kmaq cultural memory. This thesis considers feasting as a site of resistance and cultural revitalization, occurring against assimilation in order to support processes of nation rebuilding and identity construction.

## **1.4 Research Context**

Archaeological findings on the East Coast of Canada place people in the region as far back as 7500 years ago (McMillan and Yellowhorn 2004: 52). Sites from as long as 2500 years ago have been connected to the distinct Mi'kmaq and Maliseet cultures, and suggest continuous inhabitancy of the areas now known as Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island (McMillan and Yellowhorn 2004: 52). The Mi'kmaq's traditional names for their lands are Mi'kma'ki and Unima'ki (Wicken 2002:31), and the people have a special, historical connection to the land they inhabit.

Paq'tnekek Mi'kmaq Community is an Aboriginal reserve located in north-eastern Nova Scotia, within Antigonish County. Paq'tnekek is affiliated with the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq (CMM). The CMM is a not-for-profit Tribal Council which was incorporated in 1986 (Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq). The objective of the CMM is "To proactively promote and assist Mi'kmaw communities' initiatives toward self determination and enhancement of community" (Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq).

As of October 2010, Paq'tnekek had a total population of 538 registered status Indians as defined by the *Indian Act* (INAC). Of these individuals, 377 live in Paq'tnekek, 26 live on different reserves and 135 individuals live off reserve. Paq'tnekek's original reserve lands were established in 1820 (INAC). Subsequent land claims have resulted in an additional 260 hectares of land being granted to Paq'tnekek between 1865 and 2006 (INAC). These are important lands for access to customary food sources such as eels as they are located within the Antigonish Harbour and James River watershed areas.

### **1.5 A Note on Terminology**

Words carry connotations that can alter or imply meanings that may not be intended. When doing research or writing about a group or nation with a history that is contentious, awareness of how language affects meaning is very important. There is real power in being able to use words or create definitions, and this is a power that colonizers exploited by appropriating and renaming places. The terminology and language in this thesis has been chosen in order to avoid participating in a legacy of ethnocentric observations of "The Other." I explain my term choices below.

## **i. Culture**

Culture is a highly contested term and even anthropologists, the people who study culture, can not agree on a common definition. For the purpose of this paper, culture is understood as being distinct, (my culture is distinct from your culture) permeable (my culture interacts with your culture), learned (or I learn my culture throughout my life). Culture can be material (art, technology, clothing) or immaterial (values and identity), in a constant state of change (the world changes, my culture changes with it or against it), and finally, culture is adaptive (it does not just change with time, but responds to change). My ideas of culture are heavily influenced by Eric Wolf, who introduced his book “Europe and the People Without History” by visualizing the ways in which static definitions of culture make the world into a kind of billiard ball table: Wolf argues that culture should not be defined in a way that creates bound, discrete “balls” of culture that bounce off of each other in this world (Wolf 1982: 4)

## **ii. Food vs Diet**

Food is a very broad term and requires some refinement. In this thesis, food will be defined as an edible item that is eaten in a specific instance. This shall be different from diet, which is understood to be eating habits, or a consistent use of food(s) in various instances of eating *over time*. Food is also complicated by culture. There are two categories of food that are important to consider, restricted food and special food. Restricted food is difficult to access because of rules, which may mean laws, customs, or beliefs. For example, the wafers and wine offered at a Catholic mass are restricted foods. Only Catholics who have gone through certain rituals are allowed to consume the wafer and wine, as they are believed to be the body and blood of Jesus Christ, whom Catholics understand to be the son of God. For the Mi’kmaq people, most

of their customary foods have been restricted at one time or another because of government policies restricting hunting and fishing and encroachment on customary lands.

Special foods are foods which are connected to an occasion, custom or tradition. Most families have some special food that they eat at Christmas, for example, my family always has marshmallow squares at Christmas, but only at Christmas. Special foods help signal events, and often serve as a way for people to connect to the place in memory.

### **iii. Colonization**

Colonization is a central concept in this thesis. Colonization comes from the root word colony, which is the satellite settlement of a nation outside that nation's borders (Bolafi et al 2003: 39). Colonization is the verb, the act of establishing a colony. In Canada's history, the establishment of colonies by Europeans meant exploitation, marginalization and racism towards the Indigenous populations. Eventually the goal of establishing the nation of Canada meant assimilating First Nations, Inuit and Métis people. Aboriginal people were seen by European settlers to be backwards, simple people who were inferior to Europeans in every way. There was no desire to see the richness of culture amongst Aboriginal people. Informed by ethnocentrism, or "the presumption that our values and behaviours are intrinsically superior to those of other societies or religions" (Warry 2007: 92), Europeans viewed Aboriginal people as childlike. This worldview facilitated colonizing and imperialist methods and created the impetus for assimilation. Rather than acknowledge Aboriginal culture as complex and worthy of respect, colonial governments sought to eradicate Aboriginal culture completely and assimilate Canada's Indigenous people 'for their own good,' and claim ownership of Aboriginal lands and people. Through assimilation, colonial governments hoped the Indian would give up his 'primitive' ways of living and become modern, cultured, and successful, just like the European man. This

benevolent characterization of ‘helping’ Aboriginal people was part of a justification mechanism that made the destructive and degrading process of attempting to deny and destroy cultures a praiseworthy undertaking.

Colonization is not just the active attempt to successfully establish a colony. Colonization includes the creation of laws and policies which remove as much power and agency from the colonized as possible. The use of law to legitimize colonization is effective because it legalizes the disempowerment of an entire group of people. The law becomes the mechanism that legitimizes the oppression and assimilation of Aboriginal people. Additionally, Canadian society is fed myths and stereotypes which systematically create a pervasive negative perception of Aboriginal people, such as the stereotype of the “lazy Indian.” In a CBC New Brunswick article looking at *R v Marshall* ten years later, the comments on the story from readers included “give a man a fish feed him for a day...teach a man to fish feed him for a life time, but they have to be willing to get off their arse and fish” (CBC, 2009). This comment was in response to an article which talked about the Native fishery and the decreased tensions between Mi’kmaq and Maliseet fishers and their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Despite the fact that the story was about Aboriginal people fishing, this individual clearly does not think Aboriginal people go out and fish. This is still colonization, it is not overt and conscious, but colonization does not have to be an official policy to be visible. Canada no longer has official policies of colonization and assimilation, though there are still discriminatory and patriarchal policies in place (*Indian Act*). After long and difficult battles responding to government actions such as the 1969 White Paper, Aboriginal rights were recognized and affirmed in section 35(1) of the 1982 Constitution Act. However Aboriginal people are still routinely and systemically marginalized (see: *First Nations Governance Act 2002*). Even the Marshall decision, which recognized the Mi’kmaq right to fish

and benefit economically, was quickly brought under DFO regulation and restriction based on concerns about resource conservation and ignored Mi'kmaq arguments that they have their own regulatory practices. While holding on to negative perceptions of Aboriginal culture and stereotyping, Canadians are at the same time proud of and support Canada's policy of multiculturalism and diversity. Minority rights, which protect the rights of minorities to maintain aspects of their culture upon immigration to Canada, are supported by the Charter of Rights of Freedoms. The Charter is a document that many Canadians take pride in, while simultaneously engaging in discourse around denying Aboriginal rights.

Aboriginal rights are significantly different than minority rights. Aboriginal rights arise out of a special relationship between Aboriginal people and the Crown that is based on Aboriginal people having inhabited North America before it was North America. Aboriginal rights are understood as rights not defined or surrendered in the treaties, and therefore Aboriginal people are still entitled to them. This understanding is based in the doctrine of "reserved right" which "holds that Indigenous peoples have rights and jurisdictions under their laws until those rights are expressly altered in treaty negotiations" (Borrows 2010: 123). Yet Aboriginal people in Canada remain oppressed under colonial policies like the *Indian Act*. Mi'kmaq people resist against these laws, policies and mainstream attitudes by asserting their cultural identity. Participating in customary practices like feasts, and procuring and consuming customary foods like eels, strengthens Mi'kmaq culture and communities against malicious and prohibitive structural forces.

#### **iv. Assimilation**

Assimilation is a term which refers to attempts by the state to create homogenous nations by encouraging or ensuring the "disappearance of cultural differences" (Bolafi et al 2003: 19).

Canada's policy of assimilation manifests in the *Indian Act*, which regulates how bands can run their communities, gives considerable power to the Indian Affairs minister over reserve lands and life. For example, the Indian Affairs Minister, through the *Indian Act* has the power to define who can or can not be a registered status Indian, how often elections are held, how many elected officials in each community, election appeals, and almost every other aspect of life falls under the *Indian Act*. Through the power of the *Indian Act*, residential schools came into being and relocation policies which alienated Aboriginal people from their customary territories were enacted. Assimilation is still perceived as a "solution" by mainstream Canada to improve Aboriginal peoples' quality of life (Warry 2007: 35). Assimilation is still viewed as a viable "solution" to the poverty and social problems that Aboriginal people are more susceptible to experience as a result of colonial dispossession, trauma, culture loss and ongoing discrimination. There are still challenges around cultural devaluation, internal colonization, language, knowledge and culture loss, severely crippled cultural institutions, such as customary forms of law and governance, and the health and quality of life outcomes, but generally, attempts at colonization and assimilation have failed.

Aboriginal people have resisted assimilation, in part, through adaptation. Wayne Warry writes that "not only have Aboriginal peoples embraced many values of the dominant society, but many of our mainstream values have been subtly altered by ...interaction with Aboriginal cultures...we have adopted Indigenous technology, such as snow shoes and canoes to adapt to our environment" (Warry 2007: 92). Warry's statement demonstrates several important points. Particularly important is the way Warry demonstrates how cultures interact with each other. Not only have Aboriginal people experienced change through European contact, European settlers also were affected, they also adapted their cultures in response to experiences with Aboriginal

people. I do not think anyone would argue that using snowshoes or canoes is assimilation, or losing “real” European culture, so the same argument can not hold for Aboriginal people who hunt with rifles. It is an adaptation to make doing culturally informed activities easier. Adaptation is also different from adoption. Adoption implies rejection, that by adopting European practices Aboriginal people reject Aboriginal culture. Just because Aboriginal people use European technology does not mean their actions are not informed by cultural notions related to the activity. For example, the Mi’kmaq hunters I spoke with use rifles, but their values around hunting are still culturally informed.

#### **v. Revitalization**

Cultural revitalization in the context of this thesis is understood as being a part of a reaction to colonization (Acosta-Belen 1992: 984-985). Acosta-Belen argues that “[t]he changeable nature of identity allows every cultural minority, depending on its historical specificities and structural position, to activate its own mechanisms of adaptation and accommodation, self-preservation or resistance to the pressures it endures from the dominant society” (1992:985). The reaction to colonization is a set of processes, just like colonization is. Cultural revitalization is a process by which cultures rejuvenate and assert their cultural identity against devaluing frameworks and assimilation strategies. I argue that food and feasts are part of this process for Mi’kmaq people because of the way sharing food is important to Mi’kmaq culture, socialization and knowledge transmission which was identified in ethnohistoric accounts and emphasized by the individuals I interviewed. Feasts bring people together; they are celebrations and commemorations of past events, present occurrences and often focus on a better future. Food is also important at these events and there are foods that are understood as specifically “Mi’kmaq foods,” and there are ways in which Mi’kmaq people incorporate other

food traditions in with their own. One of my participants spoke about “Indian Tacos.” The incorporation of other foods into Mi’kmaq food traditions demonstrates that Mi’kmaq culture is strong enough to not only encounter and interact with other cultures, but to also adapt to other cultures while still maintaining a distinct sense of being Mi’kmaq.

#### **vi. Customary vs Traditional**

In order to acknowledge the adaptability and variation that this paper argues is necessary to the concept of identity, this thesis will use the term customary instead of the term tradition when referring to certain foods, practices and beliefs. The word tradition in relation to Aboriginal people can imply negative and inaccurate perceptions of “authentic” and static culture, which is often related to an arbitrary historical moment. Customary avoids implicating food choices as “authentic” or “inauthentic” in terms of Mi’kmaq culture. It is important to remember that foods, relationships and the status given to foods are as dynamic as culture. An apple can become a sauce, a dessert, an entrée or a chip; it can symbolize wisdom, health, innocence or temptation. Also, tradition implies not only “authenticity,” which is also a term fraught with political meaning, but “antiquity, continuity and heritability” (Mauze 5). The term customary allows for the idea of change while it avoids the complicated meanings the word “tradition” has inherited in academic literature (see Hanson 1997; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Mauze 1997).

## 2.1 Ethical Considerations

In order to study food, feasting and the process of cultural revitalization I chose qualitative research to understand feasting in Mi'kmaq culture. However, doing research in an Aboriginal community in Canada requires serious consideration in light of an exploitative colonial history. I followed the Tri Council Policy's most recent guidelines for working with Aboriginal people to avoid participating in a problematic academic history which exoticized the "Other" and supported Eurocentric assumptions of non-Indigenous superiority. A particular focus on respect and concern for welfare is necessary within this research design. The Tri-Council Policy draws its ethical commitments from the recognition and affirmation of Aboriginal and treaty rights in the *Canada Constitution Act* (1982), stating in the introduction: "This affirmation implies an ethical duty for those involved in research to acknowledge and support the desire of Aboriginal Peoples to maintain their collective identities and the continuity of their cultures." The council encourages that "[e]ngagement between the community involved and researchers, initiated prior to recruiting participants and maintained over the course of the research, can enhance ethical practice and the quality of research (Tri Council Policy 2009: 96). By seeking formal permission from the band, guidance and input from community leaders and receiving direction and supervision from academic researchers intimately acquainted with the community, this research was designed to be a collaborative fieldwork project. Collaborative research as I understand it is working with participants who do not just answer interview questions, but have conversations and provide interpretations which are present in the paper, rather than just my analysis. By having participants, rather than research subjects, and including their interpretations and understandings, this approach foregrounds Mi'kmaq voices in Paq'tnkek. Collaboration and coordinating research rather than imposing it is identified in the

Tri-Council Policy as important when there is potential for misunderstanding based on cultural, social or linguistic differences (2009: 96).

For this project my research goals were to help address the void in academic research about Aboriginal peoples and their cultural experience with food in the colonial context. I also hoped to demonstrate how Mi'kmaq people in Paq'tnkek, both young and old, maintain and affirm distinct cultural identities through adaptation and cultural revitalization and what the role of food is in these processes. This argument is informed by structural theory, which suggests that individual and group activities are directed by overarching structures, such as the law, but the Mi'kmaq people in Paq'tnkek are not unconscious victims of colonial structures and assimilationist policies. There is agency within these structures as well as those that Mi'kmaq people have constructed and identify through, for and at feasting. These structures and activities are used to resist marginalization and oppression. I argue that feasts are places where people perform resistance against hegemonic power structures and when participating in public acts of resistance, people engage in processes of cultural conflict, production and revitalization.

## **2.2 Participants**

There were ten participants in this project, all of whom were non-vulnerable Mi'kmaq elders and youth from Paq'tnkek. The participants' time commitments fluctuated, individual interviews lasted approximately an hour. The focus group was about 45 minutes.

All the participants I interviewed were offered the option of anonymity and confidentiality; however the response I got from the participants was that they would not say anything they could not put their name to. Therefore I hold great respect and have many thanks for Joan, Kerry, Alicia and Brad for sharing their time and perspectives with me. I chose not to explicitly name the youth in the focus group because some of the youth who participated were minors. The

minors required parental permission to participate, and the youth and their parents were provided with an Invitation to Participate which gave examples of questions and explained the purpose and praxis of my research.

It is important to note that this project does not just involve those who share their time with me, but also the community at large. I gratefully acknowledge the community for allowing me the privilege of sharing their feasts and memories and copies of my final thesis will be delivered to the community upon completion.

### **2.3 Historical Data & Literature Research**

To answer questions about feasting practices and food at Paq'tnkek, historical and qualitative research methods were employed. By exploring historical sources of information such as letters written by local priests, and other early accounts of Mi'kmaq people in Nova Scotia it is possible to identify foods that held significance, and then to explore whether those foods remain significant today using field methods. The language of historical sources demonstrates ethnocentric European ideals and assimilation strategies, especially the project of conversion to Christianity. Reading historical accounts emphasizes the challenges Mi'kmaq people experienced and highlights the fortitude of Mi'kmaq people in asserting their identity and culture today, given their historical experiences. Mi'kmaq history informs the present and future. Qualitative methods provided a way to more holistically comprehend the community from an emic understanding. Conversations with participants shaped every stage of research, and I have tried to present the community viewpoint rather than an outside or etic perspective.

### **2.4 Participant Observation**

For this project, participant observation was useful as a research method because it is synchronic; it allowed me as a researcher to see what was happening in a specific time and place

(DeWalt and DeWalt 2002: 99). Participant observation does not just provide data for analysis on its own, but also serves as a base for the researcher to become more familiar in the community, to develop better rapport, better access within the community and to events, and functions as a backdrop to other research methods (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002: 93).

Participant observation was also experiential and provided an emic or community specific view that was grounded in experience rather than just library research. However, because participant observation data is experiential, it is mediated through the researcher. My theoretical positioning in political economy, my identity as a white female from Manitoba and my relative inexperience in the field creates a filter through which the data passes. This does not invalidate the data, but serves to “help understand the products of research” (DeWalt and DeWalt 2002: 94). Additionally participant observation in this project did not occur in the classic sense of living in the community for an extended period of time or becoming a fluent Mi’kmaq speaker. Financial and time constraints meant that participant observation was limited to mainly public community events to which I was invited. Attending these public events made me a familiar face, and so I have noticed an increasing sense of welcome and openness each and every time I return to Paq’tnkek.

Participant observation excursions included a variety of feasts. The feasts I participated in were: An event focused on craft knowledge transmission from elders to youth; a feast after a walk for missing Aboriginal women sponsored by Sisters in Spirit and a feast Sisters in Spirit had to kick off family violence week and I attended the 8<sup>th</sup> annual Mawiomi on campus, sponsored by the Aboriginal Students Society. The foods at each of these feasts were different. For example, the craft event was catered, and because it focused on knowledge transmission, a conscious effort was made to provide customary foods. There were soups, moose, eel, *lusnigan*,

salads, turkey and potatoes. The Mawio'mi, in comparison, was a potluck, and while there were customary foods like moose stew and *lusnigan*, there were other foods like couscous salad, chilli, and bread pudding. Having non-customary foods does not undermine the importance of customary foods, but helps bring together a community in sharing whatever it is they have. Through sharing and redistributing important food resources the community supports and strengthens itself.

## **2.5 Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviewing is used to get more focused responses and comparable data than participant observation alone. DeWalt and DeWalt present semi-structured interviewing as a method in which:

the researcher typically has a plan for the interview and may have a brief interview guide...the interview guide includes a list of questions and prompts in order to increase the likelihood that all topics will be covered in each interview in more or less the same way (2002: 122).

Semi-structured interviews allow the person being interviewed to have freedom in responses and some control over the conversation, while allowing the researcher to redirect the conversation if necessary. This is particularly important since memory is fluid and requires an interview framework that is flexible. However, a certain amount of direction is also necessary to ensure that data collection can be completed. In this project using the same interview guide made it possible to identify and compare responses. I was able to ask participants why they thought opinions varied.

I interviewed two men and two women all of whom have cooked for community events, though only one currently caters as a means of generating income and another individual works in the culinary industry. Both of these individuals are younger, but have experiences at feasts across North America. The caterer shared her experiences from Ontario, and the participant

from the culinary industry shared stories from the powwow trail, experiencing feasts as far away as Florida. The other people are elders in the community. The male elder participated in protest hunts and politics during the times of the *Simon decision* and is still involved with politics and resource management today. The female elder I interviewed shared her knowledge around preparation rules, *salite* rituals and was employed as a cook on the Prairies during her youth.

Interviews were structured into categories of feasting, memory, identity, rights, and procurement. These categories were organized to coincide with the key points of my thesis statement, namely memory, feasting and identity. However, rights and procurement are also important to understanding the theoretical orientation of the argument, and so I structured the interviews in such a way that the conversations could address my research position, such as by beginning interviews with asking “what a feast is?” and “what are Mi’kmaq foods?”

## **2.6 Focus Groups**

Another qualitative method used was a focus group. David Morgan at Portland State University presents three defining characteristics of a focus group:

First... focus groups are a research method devoted to data collection. Second, it locates the interaction in a group discussion as the source of the data. Third, it acknowledges the researcher’s active role in creating the group discussion for data collection purposes (1996:130).

To understand the current context of Mi’kmaq feasting and food, a focus group with the youth at Paq’tnkek was conducted. The youth group meets once a week and organizes activities and fundraises for community youth. The participants were young individuals who take leadership roles in the youth group and in the community. The focus group was conducted during a regular meeting at the health centre. The participants were males and females between the ages of 15 and 18. The focus group was facilitated through the youth group supervisor who sat in and provided wonderful guidance.

One of the strengths of using a focus group:

...comes from the researcher's ability to ask the participants themselves for comparisons among their experiences and views, rather than aggregating individual data in order to speculate about whether or why the interviewees differ. The weaknesses of focus groups, like their strengths, are linked to the process of producing focused interactions, raising issues (Morgan 1996: 139).

This quote also identifies a particular weakness within focus groups which Morgan identifies as “producing focused interactions” (1996: 139). While I anticipated some difficulty in engaging a focused conversation with adolescents, the youth were very interested in the topic. They were engaged and eager to share their opinions.

## **2.7 Data Analysis**

The data is organized around the five main topics which structured the interview schedules: feasting, memory, identity, rights and procurement. The interviews and focus groups took place in Paq'tnkek on two separate occasions. By using the same interview guide, and a very similar guide for the focus group, I collected comparable data. The data was organized and analyzed for their relation to the categories discussed. Within categories, similarities and differences were analyzed for significance. I also applied these categories to my field notes in order to see how my observations compared to participant responses, academic literature, and historical literature.

### 3.1 The Anthropology of Food

Anthropological research has revealed that controlling access to food is a way to facilitate assimilation and culture. Food can contribute to identity construction and cultural revitalization by reinforcing shared experiences through memory, maintaining and reinforcing identity against hegemony and dominance and revitalizing and producing culture through encountering and adapting other food customs. The connection between food and culture has been studied by anthropologists since 1888 (See Garrick Mallery's *Manners and Meals*). However, until the 1980's the anthropology of food was not understood as a distinct research area in the same way as legal or medical anthropology. Food studies in anthropology are broad, deep, and illuminate many theoretical debates in the discipline (Mintz and Du Bois 2002: 100). The history of the anthropology of food includes contributions from key figures in the discipline such Margaret Mead (1997), Mary Douglas (1997), and Marvin Harris (1997). Margaret Mead, in her essay *The Problem of Changing Food Habits* (1997), discusses the disparity of food availability by class, prevailing attitudes across class and culture lines, and argues for the necessity of food studies. This study demonstrates the ways in which resource distribution are affected by structures such as class or culture. This is directly relevant to this project in that Mi'kmaq people's access to customary food resources was limited by power structures based on cultural difference. The attitude towards customary foods was devaluing; some food habits were seen as 'savage' and this was generally the attitude towards Mi'kmaq culture. A clear line can be drawn from Margaret Mead's study of disparity and food habits to Sidney Mintz's work on the political economy of sugar through the idea that food attitudes within and across class or culture lines plays into an important aspect of identity that, during Mead's time had not been explored. Margaret Mead was also a key figure in the development of cultural anthropology in the tradition

of Franz Boas, being particularly influential in the study of culture and personality in the sub-field of psychological anthropology, which has explored the phenomena of eating disorders (see DuBois 1941, 1944; Shacks 1969, 1971).

Mary Douglas describes Jewish food ritual and connects ritual to practical understandings of purity, defilement and the sacred (1997). The study of food as symbolic is common, and many studies consider the ways food operates as a symbol of class, gender or ethnicity (see O’Laughlin 1974; Barthes 1975). As a symbol of identity, food is an important part of culture and practice. Food, as a symbol or marker of identity becomes very important at Mi’kmaq feasts as a tangible, material example of group identity, rights expression, survival and cultural revitalization. Sharing and consuming these symbols during the cultural practice of feasting reinforces identity and culture in a very real and physical way. Feasting is also a way to resist the structures and cultures which attempt to define access to food.

Mintz and DuBois identify a shift in the anthropology of food, and they see this change as Jack Goody’s 1982 study *Cooking, Cuisine and Class: Studies in Comparative Sociology* (2002: 100). This work is seen as a turning point because with Goody, and after him, there was a swing in anthropology food studies. Instead of using food as an example of theory, such as the way Claude Levi Strauss used the ideas of food in *The Raw and the Cooked* (1964) to illustrate his position on mythology and structural theory the discipline moved to interdisciplinary examinations of broad social processes and theories developing around food as culturally significant in various ways (Mintz and DuBois: 2002: 100). While anthropological work on food and culture has flourished in the last thirty years, there are three important authors whose research is particularly relevant to this study: Sidney Mintz, David Sutton and Richard Wilk.

Sidney Mintz pioneered the study of food in a political economy framework in *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985), exploring the historical production and consumption of sugar. Mintz considers historical production and consumption patterns and how they have affected the value and meaning of sugar, particularly in terms of class and power (Mintz, 1996). Mintz's research describes and demonstrates the ways in which power structures affect patterns of consumption. For example, Mintz wrote about the importance of gardens and cooking to African slaves in the Caribbean based on notions of resistance and identity maintenance (Mintz, 1996). His argument is that personal gardens and cooking allowed slaves to resist slave owner dominance by eating their own food rather than consuming what the owner provided. By growing and cooking their own food, slaves were able to maintain certain aspects of their culture against a hegemonic system which did not even see slaves as human. This study shows how production, preparation and consumption of food can help maintain and reinforce identity and culture in the face of dominant devaluing hegemonies. For the Mi'kmaq, the creation of *lusnigan* is a good example of this. Mi'kmaq people in the colonial era received rations from the government, which my participants identified as flour, sugar, salt, lard, tea, and beans. *Lusnigan*, or four cents cake, as it is sometimes called, is a kind of baked quick bread made with flour, sugar or salt and baking powder. It is a point of pride in communities to be known for making the best *lusnigan*. By appropriating European food rations and making a distinctly Mi'kmaq food, which fills the belly and is still available at feasts today, the Mi'kmaq created an important cultural resource. *Lusnigan* is symbolic of process of cultural revitalization.

Phillip Vanninni (2008) connects the use of food to public performance of identity and presents eating as “a medium of communication through which social dramas, narratives, and cultural performances are practiced” (239). Vanninni's argument around the public performance

of food, in the context of Mintz's arguments concerning the structural forces that influence how we value food, makes the community feast an important theatre for performing identity. If you consider rules that attempt to control access to customary Mi'kmaq food (i.e. hunting and fishing regulations), publicly eating "restricted" food makes a strong political statement and is an act of resistance to hegemonic power.

I argue that food memories are not strictly sensual, but are also social and cultural memories. David Sutton argues this point in "Remembrance of Repasts: An Anthropology of Food and Memory" (2001). Sutton's book bridges ritual and social memory and argues that "ritual is a key site where food and memory come together, but that this should not blind us to the importance of everyday contexts of memory...in many cases ritual and everyday memory are mutually reinforcing" (Sutton 2001: 19). This argument provides a space for discussing local identity and food, as well as the rituals, both special and everyday, that define our lives and create or precede memories. By exploring food memories with young people and elders from Paq'tnkek First Nation, personal food choices and memory may demonstrate how foods uses and food meanings are changing. The literature within the anthropology of food and political economy reveals some of the structural causes for these changes.

Alison James writes that "a seemingly fixed culinary order sustains and stakes out fixed cultural identities" (James 1997:72). However, as Richard Wilk (1999) points out, there is little accounting for how "in a world of constant cultural contact, international media, and marketing, the process of changing diets seems to have accelerated, but the boundaries that separate cultures have not disappeared" (244). These definitions seem opposed in that James is discussing a fixed culinary order of "British food" as connected to British identity while Wilk is discussing the collision between global food traditions in Belize and the project of nation-building through

food. In Wilk's "Real Belizean Food": Building Local Identity in the Transnational Caribbean he argues that in the small country of Belize, nation-building and the postcolonial resurgence of "Belizean culture" is played out in a number of ways, such as hegemony versus resistance or local versus global (1999: 248, 250). Wilk's paper presents various ways of understanding how food and identity can work together in a modern context of transnational food and globalized cultures. Again, going back to example of *lusnigan*, by taking European food staples and transforming them into a food that represents Mi'kmaq culture, Mi'kmaq people perform and construct identity by making and consuming *lusnigan*. Additionally, Aboriginal people in Canada incorporate other food traditions in with their own. One of my participants spoke about "Indian Tacos," and they are the perfect example of how food and identity cooperate in a globalized context. An Indian taco is made with *lusnigan* or fry-bread. The bread is filled with seasoned meat or fish and taco toppings like lettuce, tomatoes, cheese and salsa are added and it is eaten like a taco. This is not just a Mi'kmaq phenomenon; in northern Manitoba I have had bannock pizza and bannock bison burgers at restaurants. The incorporation of other foods into Mi'kmaq food traditions demonstrates that cultural revitalization process have ensured that Mi'kmaq culture is strong enough to not only encounter and interact with other cultures, but to also adapt to other cultures while still being inherently Mi'kmaq.

### **3.2 From the Written Record: The Mi'kmaq in History**

Food can be used to reinforce and perform identities, create powerful memories or links to the past, or as tools in nation-building and resistance against hegemonic structures. Food can be used in these ways because it is ascribed meaning. Ascribing meaning to food makes it a tangible marker of culture that people literally make a part of their bodies. Colonial powers

attempted to disrupt Mi'kmaq cultural production by preventing the Mi'kmaq from procuring, producing and consuming their culture by restricting access to particular resources.

The Mi'kmaq people were a hunter-gatherer society in which small bands travelled and relied on resources that were locally and seasonally available. The Mi'kmaq hunted moose and deer in the winter and gathered resources such as fish and shellfish on the coast in the summer. As the people Indigenous to the Atlantic region, the Mi'kmaq people have an intimate connection to their lands and food resources. They have culturally imbued knowledge and understandings of how their environment is supposed to work. This knowledge is referred to as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK). IEK is “a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmission about the relationship of living beings, (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Gadgil, Berkes and Folk 1993:151). IEK is the know-how to accessing customary resources, and informs the way people interact with their environment.

The Mi'kmaq of the North Atlantic coast were one of the first Indigenous groups to come into contact with Europeans, and have experienced a longer period of occupation and marginalization than other Aboriginal groups in Canada. The most detailed historical accounts come from Jesuit missionaries who were sent by the Catholic Church to convert the Mi'kmaq to Christianity. Other accounts come from various government officials, such as those of the French colonial powers, the later English colonial powers and finally the government officials from the Dominion of Canada.

It is important to note that many of these accounts were written from an ethnocentric perspective which saw the Mi'kmaq people as inferior to Europeans. This ethnocentric attitude informed colonial attempts subjugate and assimilate the Mi'kmaq. It is against European ideals

around social organization and ways of being that Mi'kmaq resisted. Assimilation attempts also came from the missionaries, whose works focused on 'civilizing' the Mi'kmaq by converting them to Christianity.

One of the missionaries was Father Pierre Biard, who wrote letters to Rome concerning the missions in Acadia, which were documented in the Jesuit Relations in approximately 1616. Father Biard spent several years in the Port Royal region and described in his letters seasonal migrations, food procurement strategies and means of dress, transportation and shelter building. He also discusses the sexual division of labour, healing and funeral rites. In his discussion of food procurement, Father Biard goes into great detail about how weather conditions could affect hunting, and described the availability of food as providential "Never had Solomon his mansion better regulated and provided with food, than are these homes and their landlords" (Biard 83). He frequently describes banquets, feasting and ritual eating.

Father Biard also comments the importance of sharing, explaining that: "No one would dare refuse the request of another, nor to eat without giving him a part of what he has" (1897: 95). He recounts a story in which a group of Frenchmen encountered some hungry women, and offered them a kettle of fish. While cooking, the women heard some more people coming, and so took the kettle and ran, because they were very hungry and they had very few fish. The women came back later and surreptitiously told the French where to find the kettle while refusing offers to join the French's fire (Biard 1897: 95, 97). This demonstrates the manners and culturally defined rituals involved with eating: that if you have nothing to share, you should not be eating in front of others. Sharing was one of the ways Mi'kmaq people avoided risk and scarcity (Upton 1975: 4), and so eating in front of others without offering to share was rude and dangerous.

Father Biard recollected speeches and occasions, and made it clear that storytelling and praise were central to feasts. Father Biard also provided a description of the seasonal round, which was on the coast “In January [when] they have the seal hunting...upon certain islands at this time” (Biard 1897: 79). From February to mid-march the Mi’kmaq moved inland to “hunt for beavers, otter, moose, bears...and for the caribou” (Biard 1897: 79). In mid-March, with fish spawning the Mi’kmaq moved back to coast at the mouths of rivers and estuaries for “the fish begin to spawn and to come up from the sea in certain streams so abundantly that everything swarms with them...among these fish the smelt is the first...after the smelt comes the herring at the end of April” (Biard 1897: 79, 81). In the summer the Mi’kmaq stayed on the coast for “the cod are and all kinds of fish and shellfish...in the middle of September they withdraw from the sea...to the little rivers where the eels spawn...” (Father Biard 1897: 83). In October and November the Mi’kmaq moved further inland for “the second hunt for elks and beavers...and then in December...comes a fish called...*ponamo* which spawns under the ice” (Father Biard 1897: 83). The success of the seasonal round suggests that the Mi’kmaq were a highly organized and mobile society, well acquainted with their territories. Also, the Mi’kmaq had to be well acquainted with the environment to recognize when changing seasons would change the available food supply, this interaction with the environment produced and informed culture. This knowledge along with knowledge around how to use these resources most effectively is IEK, and is the kind of knowledge that is culturally embedded in language and ways of being.

Father Biard’s writings on food and medicine were similar to those written by the French explorer Nicolas Denys in 1672. Nicolas Denys writes:

...roasts were only an entrée to arouse the appetite; in another place was the kettle, which was boiling. ... To make it boil, they had big stones which they placed in the fire to become red hot. When they were red, they took hold of them with pieces of wood and placed them in the kettle, (when) they made the water boil. Whilst these were in the

kettle, others were heating. Then they removed those which were in the kettle, replacing them there by others. This was continued until the meat was cooked. They had always a supply of soup, which was their greatest drink; they drank little raw water formerly, as indeed they do at present. Their greatest task was to feed well and to go a hunting. They did not lack animals, which they killed only in proportion as they had need of them. They often ate fish, especially Seals to obtain the oil, (which they used) as much for greasing themselves as for drinking; and (they ate) the Whale which frequently came ashore on the coast, and on the blubber of which they made good cheer. Their greatest liking is for grease; they eat it as one does bread, and drink it liquid. There was formerly a much larger number of Indians than at present. They lived without care, and never ate either salt or spice. They drank only good soup, very fat. (1908: 2-3)

This quote of Denys' describes the Mi'kmaq concept of Netukulimk. Netukulimk is an example of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and is a cultural concept which mediates Mi'kmaq "use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community" (UINR 2011).

In between Nicolas Denys and Abbot Maillard, there are few first hand accounts of Mi'kmaq life. In 1755, Abbot Maillard discusses oil, soup made in large kettles, feast foods, production of hunting tools and the speech making at feasts. His accounts, similar to Father Biard, are mostly concerned with the project of conversion and continuing the missions to the Mi'kmaq. In his letter he also provides a discussion which echoes Nicolas Denys'. Maillard recounts that before European contact "it was common to see amongst them, persons of both sexes of one hundred and forty to one hundred and fifty years of age...by all accounts their population is greatly decreased" (1755: 49). Nicolas Denys suggested that the Mi'kmaq population was declining and he notes that the Mi'kmaq felt their longevity is decreasing (1908: 1). The continued presence of Jesuit missionaries, as well as an increasing French colonial presence had a noted effect on Mi'kmaq diet. These changes resulted in changing economic and subsistence strategies (i.e. sedentary living rather than the seasonal round) which were shaped by

and dependent on trading. Consequently, diets shifted away from hunting and gathering food and created an increased dependence of European staples.

Mi'kmaq longevity was connected to a lifestyle which was active, low in sugar, high in heart-healthy omega fats and high in lean, healthy protein. European encroachment limited Mi'kmaq lands and increased participation in the European economy, lifestyles and diets were radically changed. Additionally, the Mi'kmaq people were susceptible to illnesses that were brought over by the Europeans, such as influenza.

As Mi'kmaq contact with Europeans continued the descriptions of Mi'kmaq people begin to indicate a decline in health, for example in the colonial period, Walter Bromley petitioned the Governor in response to land disenfranchisement saying “the white people had not only dispossessed them of their land, but they had also driven them from their fishing ground...” (Bromley 1822: 8-9). Removing the Mi'kmaq from the familiar and successful seasonal round and forcing the Mi'kmaq into a sedentary lifestyle changed their access to land and food resources which had a profound impact on culture and health.

These accounts describe shifting settlement patterns and food procurement strategies. Although the Peace and Friendship treaties were negotiated between 1725 and 1779<sup>1</sup>, the treaties were not honoured by the British Crown (Wicken INAC: 2008). Then in 1867 the *Indian Act* came into effect and began processes of assimilation beyond those of religious conversion and incorporation into the formal economy. Through the *Indian Act* and various treaties signed in Nova Scotia, settlement and subsistence patterns changed as sedentism became more common and diet patterns became heavily dependant on European style food stuffs. Unfortunately, access to European style food products relied on money, which required participation in the formal economy. Access to the formal economy was heavily restricted by The *Indian Act*, which

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<sup>1</sup> For a further discussion of the Peace and Friendship treaties, see **Litigating Treaty Rights**

included policies of enfranchisement; part of an overall structure of discrimination. A devastating experience for Mi'kmaq people were the residential schools. The *Indian Act* created the structures and impetus for residential schools, and later for the 'sixties scoop.' Residential schools functioned to assimilate young people by hindering cultural transmission of knowledge (such as IEK, language and food memory). The trauma from residential schools, the sixties scoop and generations of racism, discrimination and oppressive colonial policies are still strongly felt and are still very powerful experiences for many communities today.

Framing the changes Mi'kmaq people experienced that are described in the history in terms of structural power that "organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves" (Wolf 1990: 586) creates an interesting setting for exploring the context of Mi'kmaq food today. The historical context is the collective memory which informs how community feasting works in relation to identity within oppressive power structures. Given the historical context and the legal context (which will be explored in the next section), it is easier to understand that community solidarity is an important aspect of feasting and contributes to cultural maintenance and revitalization.

### **3.3 Litigating Treaty Rights**

The legal context is important because it frames Mi'kmaq access to customary land and food sources. Through the law, colonial governments were able to control where Mi'kmaq people lived, who educated them and even who was identified as a Mi'kmaq person. The history of the legal context of treaty rights is a contentious history, it is the focus of this section, and it begins in 1725.

Between 1725 and 1779 the Mi'kmaq signed a series of Peace and Friendship treaties with the British (Wicken INAC: 2008). Perhaps the most important motivation for the British to

sign these treaties was removing Mi'kmaq support for the French. The treaties were designed in order to structure relationships between British and Mi'kmaq people. However, these treaties also protected British settlements (both existing and future settlements) and ensured that dispute resolution would occur in British courts (*INAC* 2008).

These treaties also afforded protections to the Mi'kmaq. Most significantly for hunting and food access rights, article 4 of the 1752 Treaty, states:

It is agreed that the said Tribe of Indians shall not be hindered from, but have free liberty of Hunting & Fishing as usual: and that if they shall think a Truckhouse needful at the River Chibenaccadie or any other place of their resort, they shall have the same built and proper Merchandize lodged therein, to be Exchanged for what the Indians shall have to dispose of, and that in the mean time the said Indians shall have free liberty to bring for Sale to Halifax or any other Settlement within this Province, Skins, feathers, fowl, fish or any other thing they shall have to sell, where they shall have liberty to dispose thereof to the best Advantage (1752 Proclamation NS Archives).

This article does not define hunting and fishing land, indeed many of the treaties do not specify land rights, which is a major point of difference between the Peace and Friendship Treaties and the “numbered treaties” of western Canada which came much later. Many treaties in western Canada created reserve areas of land for Aboriginal use in exchange for other benefits laid out in those treaties. Reserves were developed in Atlantic Canada in response to a flood of political refugees from the American Revolution who changed the existing relationship between the British government and the Aboriginal populations “...reserves were established throughout much of Atlantic Canada ... In general, the reserves were placed in areas which by then were frequented by Maliseet and Mi'kmaq families” (*INAC*: 2008). This new population of settlers encroached on Mi'kmaq land. Wicken points out that though some reserves were situated in familiar places, regularly settlers were favored by the court in cases of land disputes, such as Mi'kmaq complaints of encroachment or settler complaints of trespassing. The results of these

disputes meant that most reserves were too small to support a large community and the land was often infertile with few resources available (INAC: 2008).

In Nova Scotia, colonial governments infringed on Mi'kmaq lands, and only having the British courts to settle land disputes, the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet were placed at an immediate disadvantage in the unfamiliar adversarial common law system. Over time, the treaties came to be less important to the colonial governments and:

Over the following two hundred years, both communities [Mi'kmaq and Maliseet] petitioned governments, attempting to force them to reconsider their policies ... They were particularly concerned that governments had failed to honour agreements regarding the protection of fishing, hunting, and planting grounds (INAC: 2008).

Eventually, Mi'kmaq rights to fish and hunt were completely neglected, and despite protection in the treaties, the Mi'kmaq were subject to the same provincial laws regarding hunting seasons, catch limits and rules around commercial licensing as they were developed.

This history of failing to acknowledge treaty rights continued until several significant decisions were handed down by the Supreme Court of Canada. In particular, *R v Sparrow* (1990), *R v Van der Peet* (1996), *Delgamuukw v BC* (1997), and *R v Marshall* (1999) were key decisions concerned with defining Aboriginal and treaty rights related to access to resources for food, social and customary purposes. It is important to note here that these cases all pertained to section 35(1) of the Canada Constitution Act of 1982. Section 35(1) concerns the protection of Aboriginal rights and states “[t]he existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed” (Government of Canada), however:

The core concepts of Aboriginal rights and treaty rights were not defined, thereby leaving the task of interpreting the meaning of this critical section to the Canadian judiciary. The redeveloped constitution greatly empowered First Nations, who saw Section 35 as recognizing both the traditional authority of old treaties and the continuing importance of Aboriginal entitlements (Coates 2003:338).

The results of such an open protection in the constitution resulted in opportunities for Aboriginal people to assert their rights and have their rights legitimated by the courts. However, to engage in rights litigation required significant resources, as the legal process is long, arduous and expensive, and the burden of proof lies with Aboriginal people, who are restricted by the rules of evidence. The following cases all center on what constitutes Aboriginal and treaty rights and how they should be interpreted by the Law and the Canadian government. These cases in particular all relate in significant ways to resource use, and have serious implications for the Mi'kmaq people's legal rights to access land and customary resources.

In *R v Sparrow*, Ronald Sparrow was charged under the Fisheries Act for fishing with a drift-net longer than permitted under the Band's license. Sparrow, a member of the Musqueam Band of British Columbia, admitted to fishing with the long drift-net, but argued that he had a right to fish and the constraint on net length was "inconsistent with s.35 (1) of the Constitution Act, 1982" (SCC 1990: 2). The Supreme Court agreed with Sparrow that s.35 provided "constitutional protection [for existing Aboriginal and treaty rights] against legislative infringement, unless the infringement can be justified by a strict test" (McNeil 1997). The Sparrow test:

...deals with constitutional claims of infringement of Aboriginal rights. This test involves three steps: (1) the assessment and definition of an existing Aboriginal right (including extinguishment); (2) the establishment of a prima facie infringement of such right; and, (3) the justification of the infringement (SCC 1996: 9).

This test requires the Crown to prove that the government has a just reason to restrict Aboriginal rights, but that the Crown must maintain and respect the "fiduciary duty the Crown owes to Aboriginal peoples" (McNeil 1997). Sparrow's case assessed whether or not the government could impose rules or restrictions on Aboriginal and treaty rights, and found that the government could, but only in certain situations and only if Aboriginal rights were considered a first priority.

*R v Sparrow* was an important court case affirming Aboriginal rights and treaty rights. However, *R v Van der Peet* elaborated on the issue, and if the Sparrow case was one step forward, then the Van der Peet case might be considered two steps back by Aboriginal people. The Van der Peet case resulted in the “Van der Peet test.” Similar to the Sparrow test which addressed exercising Aboriginal rights, the Van der Peet test dealt with defining Aboriginal rights in a more specific way. The test reads “[t]o be an Aboriginal right an activity must be an element of a practice, custom or tradition integral to the distinctive culture of the Aboriginal group claiming the right” (SCC 1996:4). While this case did result in the requirement for the court “to put oral traditions on the same footing as documentary evidence” (Borrows 2010: 69), the test creates static cultures and artificial notions of authenticity. This is one of the ways in which the law can be used as weapon of colonization. By forcing cultures to remain “backwards” and “primitive,” it is easier to justify assimilation because assimilation is necessary to “modernize” and “save” the group in question. One of the dissenting justices, L’Heureux-Dubé, observed that “[t]his approach ... crystallizes Aboriginal practice as of an arbitrary date, and imposes a heavy burden on the persons claiming an Aboriginal right even if evidentiary standards are relaxed... it embodies inappropriate and unprovable assumptions about Aboriginal culture ...” (SCC 1996: 11).

Aboriginal culture was central to *Delgamuukw v BC* (1997). This was a lands claims case on behalf of the Wet’suwet’en people and all but twelve Gitksan Houses. In an attempt to demonstrate their cultural connection to the land, Delgamuukw presented oral histories (*adaawk*) and dances (*kungax*) which the initial trial judge did not accept as sufficient evidence (SCC 1997: 3). At the Supreme Court, grounds for a new trial were found (SCC 1997:113). However, as Aboriginal legal scholar John Borrows points out, “the Court’s decision in *Delgamuukw* is

suffused with the Court's acceptance of a subsequent claimant's nonconsensual assertion of rights over a prior owner's land" (1999: 594). That is, the Court decided that (amongst other things) since the first judge had erred by not considering oral histories in the case, there was a reason to retry it. However, the courts viewed the land as British Columbia, as opposed to Gitksan and Wet'suwent'en land that had been appropriated, thus subjecting the people Indigenous to the land to enter into colonial relationships and stripping them of any kind of self-determination (Borrows 1999: 595).

This is another case in which Aboriginal rights are both protected and neglected in a way that mirrors Canadian society's relationship with Aboriginal people, which is to support Aboriginal people in word, but not in deed. For example, the government commissioned the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (RCAP), which released its final report in 1996 (Wherrett 1999), to which the government responded with *Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*. The government's response sidesteps many of RCAP's recommendations, such as "an Aboriginal Nations Recognition and Government Act" (Wherrett 1999). Instead *Gathering Strength* points to section 35(1) of the constitution and "expressed the federal government's willingness to work in partnership with Treaty First Nations to achieve self-government within the context of the treaty relationship, and to establish tripartite processes that link discussions on treaties with governance, jurisdictional and fiscal negotiations" (Wherrett 1999), which reads as providing Band Councils with more administrative power rather than true self-governance.

Based on the 1752 treaty was *R v Simon* (1985). The Simon case was a legal battle over the right to hunt. Simon was charged with having a shotgun with cartridges over the legal allowed limit outside of the province mandated hunting season. The courts found that the 1752

treaty protected Mi'kmaq rights to "free liberty of Hunting & Fishing as usual" (1752

Proclamation NS Archives). The decision was based on the fact that:

Both Governor Hopson and the Micmac had the capacity to enter into the Treaty of 1752 and did so with the intention of creating mutually binding obligations. The Treaty constitutes a positive source of protection against infringements on hunting rights and the fact that these rights existed before the Treaty as part of the general Aboriginal title did not negate or minimize the significance of the rights protected by the Treaty (SCC 1985).

This statement means that since Mi'kmaq people in the treaty were supposed to be allowed to hunt without interference from the British, the Crown had infringed on Simon's rights by subjecting him to the *Lands and Forests Act*.

In *R v Marshall* (1999), a Mi'kmaq man named Donald Marshall was charged with 3 offences: net fishing eel without a license, fishing out of season, and selling those eel commercially without a license (SCC 1999:2). Marshall challenged the charges on the basis that he was exercising his treaty rights. The courts upheld that he was permitted, under the treaties the right to fish. Significantly, the Marshall case affirmed the treaty right to fish for livelihood, though "...limited to securing "necessaries" (which should be construed in the modern context as equivalent to a moderate livelihood), and do not extend to the open-ended accumulation of wealth...they are treaty rights within...s.35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*" (SCC 1999: 5). This conclusion was reached through the reading of the Peace and Friendship Treaties.

The Simon and Marshall decisions were landmark cases for Mi'kmaq treaty rights, and resource use. The Simon and Marshall cases provided the Mi'kmaq with the right to access customary foods when they wanted, how they wanted and to use those resources however they wanted. The Marshall decisions "touched off an exuberant Aboriginal celebration and bitter non-Indigenous protests" (Coates 2003: 347-348) in Atlantic Canada. The results of these cases were both negative and positive. Some of the decisions reinforced colonial, paternalistic

relationships between the state and Aboriginals, while other decisions resulted in a legal understanding of culture based on an artificial notion of authenticity and defined Aboriginal culture in Canada only by those aspects that had some connection to pre contact life. However, these decisions also recognized the historical shortcomings of the Crown in dealing with Aboriginal people and sought to create some protection for rights and honour of treaties.

## 4.1 Structural Power

In the previous chapter, the power of Canada's legal system to distinguish or disregard Aboriginal and treaty rights, regardless of constitutional recognition was demonstrated. Consider that the Canada Constitution Act recognized and affirmed Aboriginal and treaty rights in 1982. *R v Sparrow* was not before the Supreme Court until 1990, and that was the decision which confirmed that Aboriginal rights could not be infringed upon by the Crown without justification. Cases go before the Supreme Court on appeal, which means litigation occurs at every level of the judiciary, taking years and millions of dollars from resource strapped communities where poverty levels are often very high. In resource restricted communities this is a huge challenge to rights litigation. Fighting for acknowledgement and protection of Aboriginal Rights and treaty rights, particularly those rights related to natural resources is important for culture. Gaining access to customary areas allows for the cultivation and transmission of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and revitalizes ways of knowing and being that are inherently connected to these spaces. Canada's laws define the resources people can harvest, how to harvest them, when they can harvest them (and what they can do with them). This control is problematic for customary ways of understanding relationships to food resources and obtaining them. This control also complicates the idea that Aboriginal people have special rights, which reflect a special relationship with the Crown and the land. They should not have to demand rights already recognized from the courts.

To explore Paq'tnekek's feasting practices it is necessary to consider the structures that influence the ways that the community gathers and accesses food. In the important events that all cultures make food a part of, "food memories work through the mutual reinforcement of the cosmic and the mundane..." (Sutton 2001: 159). When food access is disrupted, so is the

reinforcement of the cosmic and mundane, special and everyday. This statement conveys that the way food memories are used is to differentiate events and create normalcy. The first thing I do when I go home at Christmas or in the summer is have a plate of perogies (potato filled dumplings, boiled or fried, covered in sour cream, bacon and onions), because they are what I grew up eating. I don't feel "home" until I have had a plateful. This is an example of the way food can reinforce the special (homecoming) and mundane (a food I used to eat a lot of). This disruption leads to adaptive strategies and change, such as my diet changing to accommodate the lack of perogies.

Political economy provides a framework for understanding how cultural disruption occurs and how individuals and cultures may respond. Political economy also has language for exploring local and global power relations, particularly colonial and Indigenous relations (Perry 123). Mi'kmaq political economy was communitarian in nature. The Mi'kmaq had political structures, seven districts with leaders, each of whom was a member of the Grand Council, which was presided over by a Grand Chief (Paul 1993: 5,7). The Mi'kmaq also had effective dispute resolution mechanisms, which were focused on healing and reparations, and rather than acquiring wealth and status goods or storing food to avoid risk, "the Micmacs preferred to mitigate it by sharing whatever they did have. Their society placed little value on producing a surplus, either individually or collectively" (Upton 1975: 4). There were not great disparities in wealth or power. Mi'kmaq society was well organized; it had to be to travel every few weeks as the seasonal rounds demanded

While Biard suggests power in Mi'kmaq society was ascribed via birth he also suggests that if they were bad leaders they lost their power (1897: 87). This demonstrates variable kinds of power that existed in Mi'kmaq societies. Eric Wolf argues that there are four kinds of power.

Eric Wolf suggests that individuals have personal power, like charisma, or they have influence on others (1990: 586). These are individual types of power. Wolf argues that there is a “power that controls the settings in which people may show forth their potentialities and interact with others...tactical or organizational power” (1990: 586). The fourth kind of power is structural power:

Power that not only operates within settings or domains but that also organizes and orchestrates the settings themselves, and that specifies the distribution and direction of energy flows...I want to use it as power that structures the political economy. I will refer to this kind of power as structural power. This term rephrases the older notion of "the social relations of production," and is intended to emphasize power to deploy and allocate social labour. These governing relations do not come into view when you think of power primarily in interactional terms. Structural power shapes the social field of action so as to render some kinds of behaviour possible, while making others less possible or impossible (Wolf 1990: 586-87).

Structural power in these terms clarifies the process by which populations are “engaged in continuous cultural build-up, breakdown, anabolism, catabolism, rearrangement, organization, reorganization” (Wolf 2001: 337). That is to say culture is in flux and that culture is expressed, is defined, and redefined, within and against the constraints that dominant powers impose.

For Paq’tnekek the dominant powers have been colonial, focused on the project of assimilating the Mi’kmaq people into mainstream Canada. Governments at the federal and provincial level historically made it impossible to share specific kinds of knowledge through a variety of means, such as creating dependence on government, residential schools and criminalizing cultural practices. Colonial policies which focused on assimilation resulted in alienation from culture and marginalization from mainstream society, leaving the Mi’kmaq in a neglected state of limbo, with no rights or resources. Additionally, discrimination and disempowerment means that access to resources that might help revive knowledge sharing and memory making (food related or otherwise) is limited. For example, to go hunting today

requires economic resources such as access to a vehicle. There are also imposed rules (i.e. a special license to own and transport firearms) that are not aligned with cultural ways of being on the land and Indigenous knowledge related to proper ways of hunting. For example, hunting is not customarily understood as a sport in Mi'kmaq culture, yet that is how hunting is approached by government agencies. By trying to define the ways in which individuals should think about hunting the government undermines Aboriginal knowledge and sovereignty as well as restricting the ability of people to engage in customary practices that are culturally inseparable from ways of knowing and being Mi'kmaq.

The Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources (UINR 2011), which “represent[s] Cape Breton’s Mi'kmaq voice on natural resources and environmental concerns” (UINR 2011), has developed guidelines for the Mi'kmaq moose hunt which are connected to the teaching of *Netukulimk*, which “is the use of the natural bounty provided by the Creator for the self-support and well-being of the individual and the community” (UINR 2011). The introduction to the moose hunt guide includes a narrative which describes how the relationship between the Mi'kmaq and the moose should work, that the moose should be carefully conserved and highly respected (Assembly of Nova Scotia Chiefs 2009: 3). This guide is an example of the ways in which Mi'kmaq people use agency within hegemonic systems. By providing a Mi'kmaq specific resource use guide that is based on Mi'kmaq ways of interacting with wildlife, the Mi'kmaq are demonstrating that their way, the Mi'kmaq way of using resources is just as good and valid as the government’s way.

#### **4.2 Production of History**

Given the arguments of structural power and political economy, the ways in which Mi'kmaq people claim agency and resist power structures is quite potent in that the Mi'kmaq

use, in part, the same strategy as the oppressors: the law. By turning the constitution back against the *Indian Act* and the federal government, the Mi'kmaq successfully litigated their treaty rights regarding subsistence activities in ways that dominant society could not deny. This adoption of legal practice is relevant to a way of explaining that:

When people from a victimized minority group copy the values of the dominant society, in dress, housing, or even “appropriate” behaviour, it can well be a form of quiet but insistent ethnic confrontation: I am as good as you, whatever you say, and not only as good as you but *good* (Sider 1994: 54)

This action was not just one of legal resistance, but one that affirmed a history that Mi'kmaq understood as one of neglect, where treaties were not respected and there was no way to hold the government accountable. In this situation, when “...Minority ethnic peoples are incorporated into and simultaneously marginalized by the larger society...vulnerable ethnic people are constantly forced to learn and relearn how to situate themselves historically across, rather than impossibly against the breaks that power imposes” (Sider 1994: 284). It is this production of a dominant history that Mi'kmaq identity, and Mi'kmaq history is developed against.

### **4.3 Memory, Identity**

Identity is a concept which Wayne Warry presents in terms of “individual, group and cultural identities, which are intertwined with each other...identity (and culture itself) is formed through the interaction of individuals, groups and cultures” (2007: 99-100). To elaborate further:

Identity...is the way in which culture becomes significant to individuals and the way they define themselves. Identity is also distinguished by its changeable and variable nature, especially in contact situations where there is more than one culture flowing together and interpenetrating one another (Acosta-Belen 1992: 982).

Taken together these explanations of identity are inclusive of the various levels on which individuals understand themselves as a collective and in comparison to another group, while

acknowledging the effects that cultures have on each other. This helps to prevent the concept of identity from “essentialising notions such as gender, race, ethnicity and nationality” (Caplan 1997:15). Sutton suggests that:

...the ability of food to produce memories is intimately tied to the possibility of reproducing social identities...the type of integrated memories that place an individual in a collective life, where any individual memory is in fact a memory of the whole society (Sutton 2001:61).

From Sutton’s perspective, the connection between memory and reproduction of identity are linked through food, making food operate as a mnemonic device for the formative memories that are actively recalled as a part of identity. Consider the meals shared at holidays or special events. By watching North American television commercials between October and December it is possible to identify certain foods as having important cultural and ritual significance, such as turkey, with Thanksgiving and Christmas. However, Sutton’s ethnographic work in is not only about the Grecian gastrointestinal connection to culture, it also explores an idea about how time and history plays out in changing foods, and changing relationships to food. Anne Whitehead’s very succinctly sums up this connection: “Memory, then, is historically conditioned; it is not simply handed down in a timeless form from generation to generation, but bears the impress or stamp of its own time and culture” (2008: 4).

Through these author’s related discussions of the issues of structures of power and how they are expressed in the production of history, the impacts on identity and how food and memory fit into the framework it is possible to begin exploring how these concepts play out for the Mi’kmaq of Paq’nkek First Nation in the context of the existing power structures that shape Paqtn’kek’s “social field of action,” such as the *Indian Act*, the *Wildlife Act* and the societal shifts and changes that participants identified as affecting Mi’kmaq people’s access to land and customary resources.

## 5.1 Food

Food, as I defined in chapter one is something that is consumed in a specific instance of eating. There are also special and restricted foods. For Mi'kmaq people, access to customary food has been a fight. By failing to honor the treaties, colonial governments' restricted access to customary foods. Through colonization and assimilation the dominant powers attempted to impose their own language, values, religions, law, and life ways on Mi'kmaq people. Colonial governments were able to impose rules that restricted Mi'kmaq people's ability to eat their cultural foods. Food should not be a resource that is struggled over because of culture, but the fact is that one of the fights Aboriginal people are still engaged in is access to their customary lands and food resources. However these struggles are increasing the intrinsic value of Mi'kmaq food for Mi'kmaq people: eating Mi'kmaq foods celebrates the struggle to gain access to the foods and reinforces the Mi'kmaq identity of the person consuming the food. The question I asked was: What are Mi'kmaq foods? All of the participants identified the same foods as Mi'kmaq: moose, eel, deer, salmon, and rabbits. Gathered food sources, such as berries and fiddleheads, were often considered second.

The moose, in the past, was an animal that when successfully hunted imparted status on a hunter because of the skill and bravery necessary to track and kill such a large animal (Upton 1974: 5). The historical importance of moose may contribute to it remaining significant today. Participants also talked about *lusnigan*, a baked quick bread which all the participants identified it as a Mi'kmaq feast food, however one of the youth qualified *lusnigan*, historically, connecting it to European contact and flour, "the original ration" (Youth 5, January 2011). *Lusnigan*, as discussed earlier, is a food which represents well the way food can mark identity. It is a point of pride in communities to be known for making the best *lusnigan*. By appropriating European food

staples and making a distinctly Mi'kmaq food, which fills the belly and is still available at feasts today, the Mi'kmaq created an important cultural resource which is a physical symbol of resistance.

The importance of the moose today is not just rooted in the past, but also in the present. The Nova Scotia moose population is limited to Cape Breton, and so moose meat has the potential to become a special food for Mi'kmaq people on the mainland. Also, because moose are difficult to access, individuals who are successful moose hunters are people who are respected and valued in the community. The difficulty in accessing resources may make these resources more valuable at feasts, because they are rare. It is important to understand just how difficult it is to get these resources too, as that adds to the value of them.

We can hunt and fish, but maybe there isn't enough game out there now. Because of what is going on, like we can't hunt moose on the mainland. Because there is not enough moose, they are all dying out on the mainland...they are on the endangered species list, so we aren't allowed to hunt them here. So we have to eat beef or hunt the moose in Cape Breton. But that costs money, you gotta buy a gun, gotta have an FAC [Firearms Acquisition Certificate]. So if you didn't break the law and you have a good record then you can buy a gun, but if you've broken the law then maybe you can't own a gun and that limits your hunting, your access to food...so the alternative is to hunt with traditional tools like bow and arrow...but the skills that go with using the bow and being able to stalk a moose is a little more time consuming, more refined. You got to get closer, you've got to practice a lot. (K, January 2011).

The decrease in mainland moose populations means that to hunt only on Paq'tnkek reserve lands would result in Paq'tnkek Mi'kmaq never getting moose. Thanks to the Simon decision, Mi'kmaq people can hunt off reserve, but there is now the added difficulty of Canada's gun laws. The FAC was required to purchase a gun, now you need a Possession and Acquisition License (PAL) (RCMP 2005). This license requires taking and passing the Canadian Firearms Safety Course, which costs money, and then filling out all of the necessary paperwork, which costs a minimum of sixty dollars to submit (RCMP 2008). There are some accommodations for

Aboriginal people which are supposed to alleviate factors that may otherwise prevent individuals from getting their PAL, which requires filling out all the regular paperwork, plus an additional form. For example a recommendation from an elder justifying the importance of the person taking part in “traditional hunting”, regardless of the results of their background check. If an elder does provide a recommendation, “the CFO **must** consider such recommendations from an Elder or leader before refusing or placing conditions on the licence of an Aboriginal person” (original emphasis. RCMP 2005). While you do not need a license for a cross-bow, the transmission of specialized knowledge and skills, and the time to hone them is less available in the modern context.

Given the modern context of rules and regulations which affect access to customary land and food, as well as the historical colonial context of Mi’kmaq people, change was the prevalent theme that surrounded questions of food. One of the participants, an older person said of young people at feasts:

...they were preferring the new stuff [more] than the old stuff. But the elders really appreciate loved it, they had the hardest time with the new stuff, but they yes, they remember how things tasted, and there was hardly any sickness. So they really enjoy the traditional foods. I find the younger weren’t following. You know the ones brought up by their grandparents...I’d say they seem to like it, you like the food you were brought up with (J, December 2010)

The youth identified only some Mi’kmaq food that they eat all the time, such as “lusgi” (lusinigan) or seafood from Sobeys (which they still identified as Mi’kmaq food because it is from Nova Scotia) but for the most part it is only at feasts that most of the youth encountered customary foods. One youth remarked that “it’s such a challenge to eat traditional” (January 2011).

Youth 3: “It’s more of a treat”

Youth 5: “it’s not a treat, it’s for an event”

This conversation demonstrates the way that customary foods become special. When people only experience foods in certain situations, they associate the food with that occasion. This is also connected to identity in that eating Mi'kmaq foods as a treat means at a very basic level that being Mi'kmaq is special. If the food you eat is your culture's food, and it is special food then your culture is special. This strengthens the sense of identity and combats the devaluing hegemonic frameworks which restrict access to customary foods.

The process by which foods become special distinguishes some foods from others, but the community is concerned with losing the knowledge about where to get these foods and how to prepare them. There is a clear value attached to customary foods, and they are quickly becoming special foods, foods that become associated with important events, but there is also a sense that these foods will be lost because there is a knowledge loss, and it is a concern for all, though only one participant suggested "a teaching in traditional foods, not just about them, but hands on, you know, how to get them, how to clean them, how to use them...and I don't think it's just our community I think it's every community" (A, December 2010). One participant offered an explanation for why there was a knowledge loss that considered not only changing technology, but also treaty rights:

We went through a period of time when our treaties were not recognized....during the treaty making process the....Mi'kmaq got involved in the commoditization of wild game...they started to depend on their white brothers now for whatever they could get...the treaties began and set aside the recognition that we had a right to continue hunting a fishing from the land and we wanted to continue selling to the British through these truckhouses...somehow it got a little lost...they basically forgot about the treaty rights, and 240 years go by and the only place we're allowed to hunt is on reservation land...Mi'kmaq were hunting off reserve you know, but we had to sneak around...and since we won the Simon case on the 1752 Treaty now we can hunt off reserve.

-Do you think it's made a difference in consumption of traditional food?

I think it did (K January 2011).

Treaties for the Mi'kmaq are important and sacred documents which were designed to protect Mi'kmaq ways of living while accommodating European settlers. However, the British did not honour the agreements they made and encroached on and interfered with Mi'kmaq lifestyles. However, the perception that honouring the treaties, the *Canada Constitution Act* (1982) and subsequent rights litigation has made a difference for Mi'kmaq hunting is not universal:

In my personal opinion, I don't think it [the government] has affected it any ... the only thing really that has affected our getting anything is people getting older. And what I mean by that is my mom could always guarantee a young fellow would bring her a salmon around salmon time. Then he got older, got a girlfriend, had a couple kids...now its, its ever so slight that she might get one...(A December 2010)

I don't think it made a difference, it was a way of life it wasn't something that just because we have to the right to do something now we decided to go do it. The reason it came about is cause we were doin' it...when it comes to DFO it has an impact on them (B, December 2010).

This last statement in particular is interesting because it raises the question of relevance of the courts to activities that are so culturally embedded. Individuals are not recognizing a change in hunting, or in the quantity of food because of legal rights, it was not the law that was stopping them from hunting. Instead the participants point to other structural changes, such as time, technology and disengaged youth, or they point to a change in diet. Indeed, only some of the youth had gone hunting, and only one had ever skinned a deer. One of the participants lamented what he called "the Bambi effect," because it meant kids did not want to hunt deer, or eat deer, because of the animated Disney movie, when a fawn (Bambi) is orphaned by human hunters who shoot Bambi's mom (K, January 2011). In the focus group, I found confirmation of "the Bambi effect":

Youth 1: My sister's a vegetarian, because when she was younger she seen my dad skinning a deer and she wouldn't eat it after that...it's like our dad's a bad hunter (January 2011).

The focus group laughed at this, and thought it was ridiculous that people would not eat wild meat, but they did say that wild meat tastes different, and they identified that “that other food, not our food, is really sweet, and it tastes good you know” (Focus Group, January 2011).

### **5.3 Feasting**

The themes that arose in all the discussions around feasting were the themes of community and sharing. The importance of celebrating and commemorating events together is why Mi'kmaq people feast as often as they do and most of their feasts are potlucks. The community draws on their resources and shares them, and in doing so shares in the occasion for the event. In order to learn about the event for a feast I started interviews and the focus group with the question “What is a feast?” There are some specific occasions for feasts, such as powwows, “when friends come from a far” (A, December 2010) or seasonal celebrations called *mawi'omi*, “which is more close-knit, community gathering” (A, December 2010) but it was agreed upon between all the participants that most community gatherings include feasts. Most feasts did not have foods that were specific to certain kinds of feast, although the caterer said that for:

...powwows, we try to gear the powwow feasts around like traditional foods. Like if someone has moose meat that would be great, we try to have fish, salmon, eels around the time when eel is available, deer meat when it's available. For the most part, it's um, whatever is ready and available...if we're lucky and it's around fiddlehead time we have fiddleheads (A, December 2010)

The focus group claimed that they feasted a lot in Paq'tnkek, probably more than other tribes. They based this perception that the connection between feasts and community is very

strong, and that Paq'tnkek is a close knit community. This was echoed by one of the adults I interviewed, who emphasized that "feasts are community oriented" (A, December 2010). During one feast I attended, someone made a point of telling me that Paq'tnkek was known for their eels, and their *salites*. The *Salite* mortuary ritual is perhaps the most powerful example of how feasting works in Mi'kmaq culture to draw on community resources and really bring a community together for support. A *salite*:

... its like, you would give up your prize possession, and you would try to win it back you know by bidding on it. Yah so once all the family comes home to pay their respects they would um, then they'd have the funeral depending on what day, you know, some wouldn't bury on Friday, some wouldn't bury on Sunday, so that Catholic religion did seep in... So that would happen after the funeral, you'd have the wake, then the funeral, then the feast. So that's when we would have the auction, the *Salite*. And it's to keep the minds occupied, and its fun and it's a meal you're cooking for people, family friends and that and then during the meal they have the auction, the *salite*... So yes, you'd give up whatever possessions and the money that's gathered helps with the additional cost (J, December 2010).

The *salite* creates solidarity, celebrates a life and redistributes resources after the loss of a community member and is one of the gatherings that bring communities together. Other reasons for feasting include honouring elders and women, celebrating holidays, seasons and successes and commemorating historical moments or those who have passed on. By gathering to honour, celebrate and commemorate, Mi'kmaq people share the events that are important to them, in culturally aligned ways which makes these occasions' powerful places for revitalizing culture and developing group solidarity and group identity.

The feasts I went to were community events. The town gym is where all the feasts I attended in Paq'tnkek were held. The first feast I was at in Paq'tnkek was a powwow, a dance competition. It was before the project was fully conceived, but I remember the Grand Entry, there were numerous flags, many I had never seen before, but I now recognize two of them as the Mi'kmaq flag and the Mohawk flag. Women were being honoured at that powwow, and the

women and girls came in carrying a large banner, and did a lap of the gym while the youth stood for the elders. I remember thinking how different it was—the entrance, the colours, the designs on the regalia, it was very different from what I have seen out west.

I was present at feasts after Sisters-in-Spirit events, which advocates for Native Women and works to prevent family violence. The first gathering I attended was after an awareness march demanding action on the issue of missing Native Women and the second of their events that I attended was a feast on Valentine's Day intended to kick-off Family Violence week. For Valentines Day, the gym was gorgeously decorated with table linens and seat covers, candlelight and candy hearts. The feast began with several speeches introducing the organization and commending the Paq'tnekek community for being so supportive of Sister's in Spirit programs. They had a commemoration ceremony where ribbons with tobacco were tied on to a little tree in honour of women, victims and survivors of family violence, on behalf of organizations, such as the band council and in celebration of working against this issue. The meal was buffet style, with youth bringing soup to the tables of elders and guests. On this occasion I attended as part of a class, and so was sitting with a group of guests. In line we were also invited to the front, just behind elders.

Like the Valentine's Day feast, the craft event was catered, and because it focused on knowledge transmission, a conscious effort was made to provide customary foods. There were soups, moose, eel, *lusnigan*, salads, turkey and potatoes. The feast came after presentations on dream catcher making, leatherwork, painting and quill work and a presentation by a band councillor on doing beading and making his regalia for powwows. There were about 20 youth between the ages of ten and twenty at the event. I sat with the younger kids and the young band councillor at the feast, and the young man made fun of the kids who were eating hot dogs instead

of eel and moose, which were available. The overwhelming response from the young kids when being teased about not trying eel was “YUCK!” I asked the girl I was sitting with why she did not like eels, and she told me that she did not eat fish at all, that her favourite foods were spaghetti and pizza and that was all she really liked to eat. When I asked if she ever had eels at home, she thought about it, and then told me “I’ve only seen eels at feasts and they look gross.” The little girl’s unfamiliarity with eel was identified as decrease in the availability of eel in general described my participants. The caterer I interviewed, who cooked for this event said it was very hard to get eels for events, that she did not know how to get them or clean them, and she did not think there were many people who had this knowledge.

This was the only event I encountered eel (it was baked), and like the girl I sat with, I did not enjoy them. I do not like fish in general though, which is probably because I never had fish growing up, again like the little girl. I did have moose though, but at the craft feast the moose was cubed and served in gravy, which was a way I had never eaten moose before and was very tasty with the *lusnigan*.

I have attended several *mawi’omi* potlucks on campus during my time at StFX and the most recent one was very well received by the campus community and a large crowd participated. The focus was on “Embracing Life’s Journey” and was a celebration of life against the issue of youth suicide. Before the feast there were dances and two speakers. The dances were beautiful, and the origins of the jingle dress dance, a healing dance, was told to the audience. The Aboriginal Student Society, which hosted the event, taught round and two step dances to the community after eating. I even cooked for this event—I brought a blueberry dessert. This potluck had lots of food which served by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal young people who were at the event. There was *lusnigan*, fry-bread, buns, biscuits, moose stew, fried

rice, a couple of different salads, chilli, turkey, mashed potatoes and tons of desserts, from cookies to a whipped cream dessert, bread pudding, brownies and fruit. Some of these foods are Mi'kmaq and some are not considered customary foods, though it is complicated. The food at potlucks depends on many things, such as available resources, not just what is in season, but what people can afford, as well as what people have in their cupboards and what they are comfortable cooking. This is why it is not uncommon to see pastas or hot dogs at feasts, they are quick, easy, and cheap and most people have them on hand. When I asked what Mi'kmaq foods were during the focus group one youth jokingly said Kraft Dinner, Mr. Noodles and bologna were Mi'kmaq foods, which resulted in a laugh, but then sparked a serious note:

Youth 1: "that's our contemporary diet"

Youth 2: "our modern Mi'kmaq food, our "now" food"

Me: "why?"

Youth 1: "you wanna delve into that one-into why we eat Kraft Dinner and hot dogs?"

Me: "yeah, sure"

Youth 3: It's cheaper!

Youth 1: its cause we're poor, our traditional foods were taken from us

Youth 4: I think we don't know how really, to harvest our own food... that's probably why we eat KD and hotdogs, we are assimilated now (January 2011)

The youth created a very clear separation between what "traditional" food is, and "modern Mi'kmaq food." Modern Mi'kmaq food is seen as everyday food, and there is a real sense of loss in these words. One of the youths identifies the loss of knowledge in how to go get these resources, but also the comment that the foods were taken from them--the sense that they would still have knowledge and traditional foods if historical circumstances had been different. I was struck by how well the youth connected their contemporary diet to issues such as social change and lifestyle change, which they understood as being connected to assimilation. It is also frustrating to see the perception that just because they eat Kraft Dinner, hot dogs or Mr. Noodles they have been assimilated. Being aware of the ways in which a different culture has forced Mi'kmaq

people to participate in a society that imposes certain legal, economic, time and resource constraints on their ability to access customary foods is far from being assimilated. Quite the opposite really, as there is clearly resistance against the idea of assimilation which can be heard in the frustrated way the youth engaged in this part of the conversation.

With all of the participants a change from ‘how it used to be’ to ‘how it is now’ was discussed within a framework of time constraints and money. In the modern economy, people need jobs and you can not get time off to go hunting or fishing for your family. Hunting itself has become a restraint. As one participant described, there are now costs associated with acquiring customary food and structures that make it very difficult to access resources.

The decrease in customary food, and subsequent increase in consuming “new Mi’kmaq food” is seen as adaptation to “urbanization and industrialization” (Youth 5, January 2011), “we go fishing at Sobeys...we grew lazy” (Youth 4, January 2011). One of the women I interviewed said that “I think technology ruined us” (A, December 2010). Quite straightforwardly, she discussed how boys do not hunt because they are playing Xbox or are on the computer, but said about hunting and fishing “even if I could, I don’t know that I would either...I don’t like the cold” (A, December 2010).

Gerald Sider provides an interesting way to think about what Youth 5 said, rather than just adapting to social change, or as Youth 4 suggested, being assimilated. Sider argues that adopting values or lifestyles is not necessarily assimilation, but quiet and subversive ethnic confrontation (1994: 54). From Sider’s point of view, the Mi’kmaq are not assimilated, rather they are trying to “beat the colonizer at his own games” by being as successful in the dominant society, if not more successful. This confrontation is a part of the process of cultural revitalization which affirms and produces a distinct identity against the structures which imposed

social changes urbanization and industrialization. Additionally, feasts which include both customary and non-customary foods, where customary foods are understood to be better or more important demonstrates that Mi'kmaq people are consciously or subconsciously engaging with dominant society and asserting their culture and identity based on their own understandings.

## 6.1 Summary and Discussion

The most basic understanding of food is that it is something we eat to live. Food is often more complex though, it is ascribed meaning through experience and culture. When I asked one of my participants to tell me about Mi'kmaq food he began with the idea of something that is eaten, but he then explained how for him food is much more:

It's all living...to me food, I look at it as part of me, as part of all creation. For me it sustains my life, my health, and I exist on the earth with food. ...An animal as a deer or a moose, I look at it as a living thing, a living being. It has a family, a home, a language...same with fish...they have to live...same with plants it's a living thing. When I look at the whole process of nourishment and life and death cycle of transfer of nutrients...or maybe things are not dying they are just changing their physical form and we're a part of that. And if you are an Indigenous person to a piece of land for thousands and thousands of years you are caught in that cycle of life and death...So I'm related to all that's here being an Indigenous person. So I'm related to the food I eat because my ancestors thousands of years ago died and their bodies are in the earth and are part of the cycle of nutrient exchange...That's the way I look at it, maybe we don't all look at it that way, but I think we did. And it only makes sense, if you're Indigenous to a piece of land; people say you have a spiritual or cultural connection to it (K, January 2011)

This statement demonstrates why access to customary land and customary food is critically important for identity, why food is so significant to culture. This statement emphasizes the need to celebrate the legal victories which Mi'kmaq people have won concerning hunting, fishing and land use, because those victories are bound up in gaining access to a significant part of culture. Consider this account of the importance of customary foods and land in the context of colonization, and the brutality of colonization and assimilation becomes clear. Restricting access to customary foods is an effective way to begin tearing at the roots of a culture when land and resources are embedded at the individual level.

A desire to incorporate more customary foods reflects an understanding of customary foods to be healthier than non-customary foods. However, there is also a concern for knowledge

loss and it has been part of the focus of the youth co-ordinator and some of my participants to try and facilitate the transmission of knowledge.

Also, participants strongly identified feasting as being an integral part of the community. At every community gathering, people bring food, whatever they have on hand, and these gatherings are seen as ways to bring people together. There was a comment, made by the focus group and echoed in all the other interviews, that eating as a community was why Paq'tnkek did not suffer so many social issues, everyone is connected to everyone else, and they support each other. It is in this context that the revitalization of culture can be seen, especially through the involvement of the youth. Through feasting, whether it is on moose and eel, or Kraft dinner and hot dogs, the community of Paq'tnkek redefines and reaffirms the strong identity of Mi'kmaq today, since the principles of the feast reflect the values of the culture. The strong sense of community described by the participants reflects Mi'kmaq values of sharing, such as the woman who could always count on a young man to bring her some salmon to have.

The changes in what Mi'kmaq people are eating can be tied back to legal decisions and government policies, but it is quite clear that those policies have in fact changed the value of customary foods, in fact, they may have even enhanced the intrinsic and political value of foods like moose and lusnigan, because they are special occasion foods, associated with important moments in the community's memory, and so carry a special significance and will create strong memories which contribute to a strong identity.

## **6.2 Limitations**

There are numerous limitations to be considered with this study. The number of individuals I could speak to was relatively few compared to the community size, and so there is always the question of representation: is this research a fair reflection of the community? Also

due to sample size it is not possible to draw fair comparisons between gender, age and other demographic variables or to make generalizations that extend to other Aboriginal people in Canada.

Additionally, because qualitative methods are mediated through the researcher, other conclusions may be drawn from the data that are different from my conclusions. On a related note, the research questions pursued in this project are very broad, and so it was difficult to explore many of the themes or topics to the depth possible. However this research does provide a base for further exploring the relationships between food, identity and culture.

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