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Leanne Simpson

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**Looking after Gdoo-naaganinaa:  
Precolonial Nishnaabeg Diplomatic and Treaty  
Relationships**

*Leanne Simpson*

It has long been known that Indigenous nations had their own processes for making and maintaining peaceful diplomatic relationships, such as Gdoo-naaganinaa,<sup>1</sup> with other Indigenous nations prior to colonization.<sup>2</sup> These “treaty processes” were grounded in the worldviews, language, knowledge systems, and political cultures of the nations involved, and they were governed by the common Indigenous ethics of justice, peace, respect, reciprocity, and accountability. Indigenous peoples understood these agreements in terms of relationship, and renewal processes were paramount in maintaining these international agreements. They also viewed treaties in terms of both rights and responsibilities, and they took their responsibilities in maintaining treaty relations seriously. Although these agreements were political in nature, viewed through the lens of Indigenous worldviews, values, and traditional political cultures, one can begin to appreciate that these agreements were also sacred, made in the presence of the spiritual world and solemnized in ceremony.

According to the Canadian *Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*,

When the Europeans arrived on the shores of North America they were met by Aboriginal nations with well-established diplomatic processes—in effect, their own continental treaty order. Nations made treaties with

other nations for purposes of trade, peace, neutrality, alliance, the use of territories and resources, and protection.

Since interaction between the nations was conducted orally, and the peoples involved often had different languages and dialects, elaborate systems were adopted to record and maintain these treaties. Oral traditions, ceremonies, protocols, customs and laws were used to enter into and maintain commitments made among the various nations.

Aboriginal nations formed alliances and confederacies that continued into the contact period, with treaties serving to establish and solidify the terms of the relationship. Protocols between nations were maintained conscientiously to ensure that friendly and peaceful relations prevailed.<sup>3</sup>

More specifically, Harold Johnson, a Cree, explains traditional Cree conceptualizations of treaty relationships in his territory, Kiciwamanawak, in terms of relations and relationships. He writes that when the colonizers first came to his territory, Cree law applied, the foundation of which rests in the "maintenance of harmonious relations." He sees the treaty as an adoption ceremony, where the Cree adopted the settlers as family and took them in as relatives, inviting them to live in Kiciwamanawak and live by the laws of the Cree.<sup>4</sup>

When your ancestors came to this territory,  
Kiciwamanawak, our law applied. When your ancestors  
asked to share this territory, it was in accordance with  
our law that my ancestors entered into an agreement with  
them. It was by the law of the Creator that they had the  
authority to enter treaty.<sup>5</sup>

Referring to the intersection of families, territory and treaties, Johnson states, when your family arrived here, Kiciwamanawak, we expected that you would join the families already here, and in time, learn to live like us. No one thought you would try to take everything for yourselves, and that we would have to beg for leftovers. We thought we would live as before, and that you would share your technology with us. We thought that maybe, if you watched how we lived, you might learn how to live in balance in this territory. The treaties that gave your family the right to occupy this territory were also an opportunity for you to learn how to live in this territory.<sup>6</sup>

For the past decade, I have been interested in understanding how my ancestors, the Mississauga of the Nishnaabeg Nation,<sup>7</sup> understood

and lived up to their responsibilities to the land, their families, their clans, and their nation and with neighboring nations. Through years of learning from our elders and Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers, spending time on the land, and interpreting the academic literature through an Nishnaabeg lens, I have come to understand Nishnaabeg conceptualizations of treaties and treaty relationships in a way similar to the preceding quote, and these conceptualizations exist in stark contrast to the Eurocanadian view of treaties entrenched in the colonial legal system, the historical record, and often the contemporary academy.

In Canada, many Indigenous scholars have argued that the "Canadian state's political relationship with Aboriginal Peoples should be renewed with respect to the early treaties."<sup>8</sup> Although this is an important decolonizing strategy, the fact remains that Canadian politicians and scholars, as well as Canadians in general, have a poor understanding of Indigenous treaty-making traditions, Indigenous political traditions, and Indigenous cultures in general. For many, the idea that Indigenous nations had their own precolonial diplomatic relations and political cultures exists in sharp contrast to the racist stereotype of "savages wandering around in the bush" still prominent in mainstream Canadian culture.<sup>9</sup> For others, it is difficult to understand that although both Indigenous and European nations engaged in treaty making before contact with each other, the traditions, beliefs, and worldviews that defined concepts such as "treaties" were extremely different. This misunderstanding is further confounded by the fact that as time passed, the colonizers' view of treaties was entrenched in the Eurocanadian legal system and the academy, and that there are few written records of treaty agreements made in the early colonial period where Indigenous perspectives were most influential. Destabilizing and decolonizing the concept of "treaty" then becomes paramount to appreciate what our ancestors intended to happen when those very first agreements and relationships were established, and to explore the relevance of Indigenous views of "treaty" and "treaty relationships" in contemporary times.

The purpose of this paper is to begin to articulate Nishnaabeg cultural perspectives on our relationships within our territory, whether those relationships were with the land, with the animal nations that form the basis of our clan system, or with neighboring Indigenous nations and confederacies. Rather than presenting a comprehensive and critical review of the academic literature or the Eurocanadian written historical record on treaty making and the Nishnaabeg, or reviewing specific written treaties made with colonial powers, this paper proceeds descriptively in a manner grounded in Indigenist theory and methodology,<sup>10</sup> using storytelling or narration, language, personal understandings of traditional Nishnaabeg knowledge,<sup>11</sup> and relying on relevant academic literature interpreted through an Nishnaabeg perspective. I begin by discussing cultural contexts within which

Nishnaabeg people maintained and nurtured relationships within their territory. I then discuss two examples of treaty relationships with the nonhuman world, concluding with a discussion of precolonial international treaty relationships with the Dakota Nation and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Although these perspectives are not new or unique to Nishnaabeg knowledge holders and our elders, they exist in contrast to mainstream academic literature regarding treaties.

### **BIMAADIZIWIN: RELATIONSHIPS AS THE CONTEXT FOR NISHNAABEG TREATY MAKING**

Our ancestors knew that maintaining good relationships as individuals, in families, in clans, and in our nation and with other Indigenous nations and confederacies was the basis for lasting peace. This was the foundation of a set of ethics, values, and practices known as Bimaadiziwin or “living the good life.”<sup>12</sup> Bimaadiziwin is a way of ensuring human beings live in balance with the natural world, their family, their clan, and their nation and it is carried out through the Seven Grandfather teachings, embedded in the social and political structures of the Nishnaabeg. There was a strong correlation made between individual behavior and the behavior of the collective in Nishnaabeg society, meaning that the ethics and values that guided individual decisions were the same ethics and values that guided the decisions of families, clans, and the nation as a whole.<sup>13</sup>

At the individual level, Nishnaabeg culture allowed for strong individual autonomy and freedom, while at the same time the needs of the collective were paramount. There was a belief that good governance and political relationships begin with individuals and how they relate to each other in families.

Haudenosaunee academic Trish Monture explains a similar concept among the Haudenosaunee:

As I have come to understand it, self-determination begins with looking at yourself and your family and deciding if and when you are living responsibly. Self-determination is principally, that is first and foremost, about relationships. Communities cannot be self-governing unless members of those communities are well and living in a responsible way.<sup>14</sup>

In a real sense for the Nishnaabeg, relating to one's immediate family, the land, the members of their clan, and their relations in the nonhuman world in a good way was the foundation of good governance in a collective sense. Promoting Bimaadiziwin in the affairs of the nations begins with practicing Bimaadiziwin in one's everyday life.

This reciprocity is also reflected in the qualities of traditional leadership. To reproduce the qualities prized in a traditional leader—respect, honesty, truth, wisdom, bravery, love, and humility<sup>15</sup>—our ancestors practiced relationships with children that embodied kindness, gentleness, patience, and love. Children were respected as people, they were encouraged to follow their visions and to realize their full potential while living up to the responsibilities of their families, communities, and nations.<sup>16</sup> This was the key to creating leaders with integrity, creating good governance, and teaching future leaders how to interact in a respectful manner with other human and nonhuman nations.

**NISHNAABEG DOODEM**

Traditional Nishnaabeg political culture was based on our clan system and also reflected our basic ethics and philosophy for living Bimaadiziwin, the good life. Clans connected families to particular animal nations and territories, where relationships with those animal nations were formalized, ritualized, and nurtured.<sup>17</sup> Clan members held and continue to hold specific responsibilities in terms of taking care of a particular part of the territory, and specific clans hold particular responsibilities related to governance.<sup>18</sup> Individual clans had responsibilities to a particular geographic region of the territory, and their relationship with that region was a source of knowledge, spirituality, and sustenance. They also were required to maintain and nurture a special relationship with their clan animal.

Animal clans were highly respected and were seen as self-determining, political “nations” (at least in an Indigenous sense) to whom the Nishnaabeg had negotiated, ritualized, formal relationships that required maintenance through an ongoing relationship. This was reflected in the spiritual and ceremonial life of individual clans. Animal clans were also a source of knowledge and inspiration.

**TREATY MAKING WITH ANIMAL NATIONS**

In many instances, clan leaders negotiated particular agreements with animal nations or clans to promote Bimaadiziwin and balance with the region. In Mississauga territory,<sup>19</sup> for example, the people of the fish clans, who are the intellectuals of the nation, met with the fish nations<sup>20</sup> twice a year for thousands of years at Mnjikanming,<sup>21</sup> the small narrows between Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching. The fish nations and the fish clans gathered to talk, to tend to their treaty relationships, and to renew life just as the Gizhe-mnido<sup>22</sup> had instructed them. These were important gatherings because the fish nations sustained the Nishnaabeg Nation during times when other sources of food were scarce. Fish were a staple in our traditional foodway. Our relationship with the fish nations

meant that we had to be accountable for how we used this “resource.” Nishnaabeg people only fished at particular times of the year in certain locations. They only took as much as they needed and never wasted. They shared with other members of their families and communities, and they preformed the appropriate ceremonies and rituals before beginning. To do otherwise would be to ignore their responsibilities to the fish nations and to jeopardize the health and wellness of the people.

In contemporary times, Mnjikanming remains an important place in our territory because it is the place people of the fish clans came and continue to come to renew their relationship with the fish nations. Similarly, Nishnaabeg scholar John Borrows retells one of our sacred stories in *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law*<sup>23</sup> and further illustrates the importance of these diplomatic agreements between human and animal nations. In a time long ago, all of the deer, moose, and caribou suddenly disappeared from the Nishnaabeg territory. When the people went looking for them, they discovered the animals had been captured by the crows. After some negotiation, the people learned that the crows were not holding the moose, deer, and caribou against their will. The animals had willingly left the territory because the Nishnaabeg were no longer respecting them. The Nishnaabeg had been wasting their meat and not treating their bodies with the proper reverence. The animals knew that the people could not live without them, and when the animal nations met in council, the chief deer outlined how the Nishnaabeg nation could make amends:

Honour and respect our lives and our beings, in life and in death. Cease doing what offends our spirits. Do not waste our flesh. Preserve fields and forests for our homes. To show your commitment to these things and as a remembrance of the anguish you have brought upon us, always leave tobacco leaf from where you take us. Gifts are important to build our relationship once again.<sup>24</sup>

The Nishnaabeg agreed and the animals returned to their territory. Contemporary Nishnaabeg hunters still go through the many rituals outlined that day when they kill a deer or moose, a process that honors the relationships our people have with these animals and the agreement our ancestors made with the Hoof Clan to maintain the good life. Judy DaSilva, Nishnaabeg-kwe<sup>25</sup> from Asubpeechoseewagong Netum Anishinaabek (Grassy Narrows) in northwest Ontario explains how these teachings are still relevant in her community today:

When a hunter kills a moose, there is a certain part of the moose that the hunter takes off, and leaves in the forest, and with that the hunter will say a few words to thank the

moose for providing food for his family. . . . My brother said our grandmother told him that you do not get an animal because you are a good hunter, but because the animal feels sorry for you and gives himself to you to feed your family. This is why when our people hunt, these thoughts are ingrained in their minds and their hearts and they have great respect for the animals they get.<sup>26</sup>

According to Nishnaabeg traditions, it is my understanding that our relationship with the moose nation, the deer nation, and the caribou nation is a treaty relationship like any other, and all the parties involved have both rights and responsibilities in terms of maintaining the agreement and the relationship between our nations. The treaty outlines a relationship that when practiced continually and in perpetuity, maintains peaceful coexistence, respect, and mutual benefit. These are but two examples of treaties between the Nishnaabeg Nation and the nonhuman world, but they serve to illustrate several important Nishnaabeg values regarding this process. First and foremost, treaties are about maintaining peace through healthy collective relationships. This is clearly reflected in our Nishnaabeg language, and there are two common terms in the language that refer to agreements made between two nations: "Chi-debakh-(in)-Nee-Gay-Win," which refers to an open agreement with matters to be added to it, and "Bug-in-Ee-Gay," which relates to "letting it go."<sup>27</sup> It is my understanding that "Chi-debakh-(in)-Nee-Gay-Win" is not meant to be interpreted as an unfinished agreement, rather it is an agreement that is an ongoing reciprocal and dynamic relationship to be nurtured, maintained, and respected. Treaties made by the Nishnaabeg with colonial powers in Canada as late as the Robinson–Huron Treaty of 1850, according to the oral tradition of the Nishnaabeg, was to be "added to."<sup>28</sup> This type of agreement was absolutely necessary in negotiations between nations with different languages and in the times before the written word, but it should not be viewed as an archaic or obsolete form of political culture. Oral agreements based on relationship, negotiation, and understanding required plenty of maintenance and nurturing to ensure lasting peace. That maintenance required commitment and hard work, but also encouraged understanding another point of view and when done correctly can bring about a lasting peace for all involved.

## NISHNAABEG INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY

Bimaadiziwin and the Seven Grandfather teachings were not only the basis of clan life, but also a guide to relations with other Indigenous Nations. The ethics of respect and reciprocity were reflected in international Nishnaabeg diplomatic relations through the process known as "waiting in the woods"



or "waiting at the woods' edge." Omàmìwinini<sup>29</sup> scholar Paula Sherman explains: "[I]t would have been expected that upon leaving one's own territory to cross into someone else's territory, that an individual or a group would build a fire to announce that they were 'waiting in the woods.'"<sup>30</sup>

An Omàmìwinini delegation would have been sent out with a string of white wampum to welcome them to Omàmìwinini territory. Omàmìwinini would have prepared a feast for them, and gifts would have been exchanged. Food was an important aspect of Omàmìwinini social protocols and every visit would have resulted in the preparation of food for the visitors.<sup>31</sup> Other social protocols or ceremonies might have been completed depending on the nature of the visit. Visitors to one's territory were to be treated with the utmost respect to promote peaceful diplomatic relations between nations. These relations were also formalized in treaties, and the following section discusses two examples of precolonial Nishnaabeg treaties with neighboring nations.

### **OUR DRUM AND OUR DISH: TREATY MAKING WITH OTHER INDIGENOUS NATIONS**

The Nishnaabeg Nation, in addition to living up to their treaty relationships with the nonhuman world, also made political agreements with their neighboring nations. I am reminded of this every time the ancient teaching of how the drum came to the Nishnaabeg is retold. In one particular version, the Nishnaabeg Nation was in conflict with the Dakota Nation. After several years of strife, a young woman dreamed or visioned the drum. She was taught several songs to share with the people. Following her vision, she constructed a drum, and taught both the Dakota and the Nishnaabeg peoples the songs. The drum became more than a symbol of peace between the two nations, and by carrying out the ceremonies given to her, and by sharing them with the people, peace between the two nations has been maintained ever since.<sup>32</sup>

All of these values and processes are reflected in the Nishnaabeg Nation's precolonial treaty-making practices, and these practices provide us with important insights into the kind of relationship our ancestors intended to have, and intended us to have with settler governments. Gdoo-naaganinaa, meaning "Our Dish,"<sup>33</sup> is one such relationship Nishnaabeg people in the southeastern portion of the territory had with the Haudenosaunee<sup>34</sup> Confederacy.

Our ancestors intended for this relationship to continue perpetually, and it is relevant today because it provides us with a model for building solidarity with our Haudenosaunee neighbors and renewing our ancient and historic friendship. It is also highly relevant in contemporary times because it sets forth the terms for taking care of a shared territory while maintaining separate, independent sovereign nations.

Gdoo-naaganinaa acknowledged that both the Nishnaabeg and the Haudenosaunee were eating out of the same dish through shared hunting territory and the ecological connections between their territories.<sup>35</sup> The dish represented the shared territory, although it is important to remember that sharing territory for hunting did not involve interfering with one another's sovereignty as nations. It represented harmony and interconnection, as both parties were to be responsible for taking care of the dish. Neither party could abuse the resource. It was designed to promote peaceful coexistence and it required regular renewal of the relationship through meeting, ritual, and ceremony. The Nishnaabeg Nation and the confederacy related to each other through the practice of Gdoo-naaganinaa, it was not just simply agreed upon, but practiced as part of the diplomatic relations between the Nishnaabeg Nation and the confederacy. All of the nations involved had particular responsibilities to live up to in order to enjoy the rights of the agreement. Part of those responsibilities was taking care of the dish.

Nishnaabeg environmental ethics<sup>36</sup> dictated that individuals could only take as much as they needed, that they must share everything following Nishnaabeg redistribution of wealth customs, and no part of the animal could be wasted. These ethics combined with their extensive knowledge of the natural environment, including its physical features, animal behavior, animal populations, weather, and ecological interactions ensured that there would be plenty of food to sustain both parties in the future. Decisions about use of resources were made for the long term. Nishnaabeg custom required decision makers to consider the impact of their decisions on all the plant and animal nations, in addition to the next seven generations of Nishnaabeg.

The Haudenosaunee refer to the treaty as the "Dish with One Spoon" and there is an associated wampum belt.<sup>37</sup> The concept behind the Dish with One Spoon Wampum reflects the principles that were given to the Haudenosaunee by the Peacemaker in the Kaienerekowa (Great Law of Peace).<sup>38</sup> Again the dish represents shared hunting grounds, but in the Haudenosaunee version there is one spoon not only to reinforce the idea of sharing and responsibility, but also to promote peace. There are no knives allowed around the dish so that no one gets hurt.<sup>39</sup> Again, Haudenosaunee people understood the treaty as a relationship with both rights and responsibilities. Haudenosaunee land ethics also ensured the health of the shared territory for generations to come.<sup>40</sup>

### OUR DISH IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES

At no time did the Haudenosaunee assume that their participation in the Dish with One Spoon treaty meant that they could fully colonize Nishnaabeg territory or assimilate Nishnaabeg people into

Haudenosaunee culture. At no time did the Haudenosaunee assume that the Nishnaabeg intended to give up their sovereignty, independence, or nationhood. Both political entities assumed that they would share the territory, that they would both take care of their shared hunting grounds, and that they would remain separate, sovereign, self-determining, and independent nations. Similarly, the Nishnaabeg did not feel the need to "ask" or "negotiate" with the Haudenosaunee Confederacy for the "right" to "self-government." They knew that Gdoo-naaganinaa did not threaten their nationhood; our dish was meant to preserve their nationhood, protect their territory, and maintain their sovereignty. At the same time, both parties knew they had a shared responsibility to take care of the territory, following their own culturally based environmental ethics to ensure that the plant and animal nations they were so dependent on them carried on in a healthy state in perpetuity. Both parties knew that they had to follow their own cultural protocols for renewing the relationship on a regular basis to promote peace, goodwill, and friendship among the Nishnaabeg and the Haudenosaunee. Both parties knew they had to follow the original instructions passed down to them from their ancestors if peace was to be maintained.

Although Gdoo-naaganinaa is a living treaty with the Haudenosaunee, the Nishnaabeg understanding of it can give us great insight into Nishnaabeg traditions governing treaty making and their expectations in their early interactions with settler governments. According to our prophecies, the Nishnaabeg knew a "light-skinned" race was coming to their territory.<sup>41</sup> They expected to have to share their territory. They expected Gdoo-naaganinaa would be taken care of so that their way of life could continue for the generations to come. They expected respect for their government, their sovereignty, and their nation. They expected a relationship of peace, mutual respect, and mutual benefit, and these were the same expectations the Nishnaabeg carried with them into the colonial period. Indeed, these are the expectations we carry with us into meetings with settler governments today.

Too often in contemporary times we are presented with a worldview that renders us incapable of visioning any alternatives to our present situation and relationship with colonial governments and settler states. Indigenist thinkers compel us to return to our own knowledge systems to find answers. For the Nishnaabeg people, Gdoo-naaganinaa does just that. It gives us an ancient template for realizing separate jurisdictions within a shared territory. It outlines the "rights" and "responsibilities" of both parties in the ongoing relationship, and it clearly demonstrates that our ancestors did not intend for our nations to be subsumed by the British crown or the Canadian state when they negotiated those original treaties. It is time to decolonize our relationships with our neighboring nations, and it is time to decolonize our relationship with the Canadian state.

- 1 Gdoo-naaganinaa means "Our Dish" and refers to a pre-colonial treaty between the Nishnaabeg and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. This is the inclusive form, as opposed to the ndoo-naaganinaa "our dish (but not yours)." Gdoo-naaganinaa is a symbol of our shared ecology and territory in southern Ontario.
- 2 For a more complete discussion see the *Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. 1 (Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Supply and Services, 1996), [http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg11\\_e.html#36](http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sg11_e.html#36).
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Harold Johnson, *Two Families: Treaties and Government* (Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Purich Publishing, 2007), 29. Referring to the intersection of families, territory and treaties, Johnson states, "When your family. . . ."
- 5 Ibid., 27.
- 6 Ibid., 21.
- 7 Nishnaabeg is translated as "the people" and refers to Ojibwe, Odawa (Ottawa), Potawatomi, Mississauga, Saulteaux, and Omàmiwinini (Algonquin) peoples. The Nishnaabeg people are also known as Nishinaabeg, Anishinaabeg, and Anishinaabek in adjacent dialects. All words in Nishnaabemwin (Ojibwe language) in this paper are in the eastern Manitoulin dialect of the language. The concept of "nation" within Nishnaabeg philosophy stands in contrast to Eurocentric meanings of the term, and in my understanding is derived from our creation stories and our migration story; see Eddie Benton Banai, *The Mishomis Book* (Hayward, Wis.: Red School House Publishing, 1988), 95–104. At different stages in our history, our peoples formed confederacies between the peoples that make up our nation. For a discussion of this see Banai, *Mishomis Book*, 98, and for an explanation of Indigenous nationhood see Kiera Lander, "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an AlterNative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance" (dissertation, Department of Political Science, Carleton University, 2001), 63–65.
- 8 Dale Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 8. This concept is known as treaty federalism in Canada.
- 9 Turner, *This Is Not a Peace Pipe*, 3–38, and for a broader discussion on this imagery in Canadian culture generally see Daniel Frances, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992).
- 10 Lester-Idrabbina Rigney, "Internationalization of an Indigenous Anticolonial Cultural Critique of Research Methodologies: A Guide to Indigenist Research Methodology and Its Principles," *Wicazo Sa Review* 14, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 109–22; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Lander, "When Buffalo Speaks," 37–38.
- 11 I have learned about Nishnaabeg knowledge and perspectives for a relatively short period of time (over the past fifteen years) from Nishnaabeg elders and traditional knowledge holders Mark Thomas, Edna Manitowabi, and Robin Greene, and Nishnaabeg knowledge keepers Garry Raven and Judy DaSilva. Elder Shirely Williams assisted with the Nishnaabeg language. Following Nishnaabeg protocols, the perspectives in this paper are my own interpretation of that knowledge.
- 12 Paula Sherman, "Indawendiwin: Spiritual Ecology as the Foundation of Omàmiwinini Relations" (PhD dissertation, Department of Indigenous Studies, Trent University, 2007), 176–86.

- 13 Ladner, "When Buffalo Speaks," 69–70.
- 14 Trish Monture-Angus, *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations Independence* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood, 1999), 8.
- 15 These are known to the Nishnaabeg as the Seven Grandfather teachings, see Banai, *Mishomis Book*, 64.
- 16 Leanne Simpson, "Birthing an Indigenous Resurgence: Decolonizing Our Pregnancy and Birthing Ceremonies," in *Until Our Hearts Are on the Ground: Aboriginal Mothering, Oppression, Resistance and Rebirth*, eds. D. Memme Lavell-Harvard and Jeannette Corbiere Lavell (Toronto, Ontario: Demeter Press, 2006), 25–34.
- 17 For a discussion of the clan system based on the historical record see Darlene Johnson, "Connecting People to Place: Great Lakes Aboriginal History in Cultural Context," report prepared for the Ipperwash Inquiry, 2004, [http://www.ipperwashinquiry.ca/transcripts/pdf/P1\\_Tab\\_1.pdf](http://www.ipperwashinquiry.ca/transcripts/pdf/P1_Tab_1.pdf).
- 18 This has somewhat changed in contemporary times. While many elders and knowledge holders acknowledge that there was/is a distinct territoriality to the clan system, with specific clans holding responsibilities to particular areas as also evidenced by Johnson, "Connecting People to Place," in the Eurocanadian historical record, there are now often many different clans present (and many people who do not know their clan affiliation at all) in a single reserve community. This is in part a result of the original colonial construction of our communities.
- 19 Located in the southeastern portion of Nishnaabeg territory.
- 20 To Western scientists different species of fish gather at this location in the spring and fall to migrate and spawn. To the Nishnaabeg, these are not just "species of fish," they are nations within their own right, with political structures unto their own. This reflects a different conceptualization of "nationalism" similar to the conceptualizations in Ladner's *Women and Blackfoot Nationalism*. To be clear, fish clans represent the Nishnaabeg people, fish nations are the actual species of fish.
- 21 Mnjikanming is located near Orilla, Ontario, Canada, and has a series of ancient fish weirs reminding us of this relationship.
- 22 Creator.
- 23 John Borrows, *Recovering Canada: The Resurgence of Indigenous Law* (Toronto, Ontario: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 16–20.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 19. Borrows notes that there are many slightly different versions of this story in print and in our oral traditions.
- 25 Nishnaabeg women.
- 26 Interviewed for another project by Leanne Simpson, March 31, 2003. Judy DaSilva is a traditional knowledge holder and environmental activist.
- 27 James Morrison, *The Robinson Treaties of 1850: A Case Study*, prepared for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Ottawa, Ontario: Minister of Supply and Services, 1994). (Research reports from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples are available in digital form on "For Seven Generations: An Informational Legacy of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP] CD-ROM," Libraxus.)
- 28 *Ibid.*
- 29 This is how Algonquin people are known in their language.
- 30 Sherman, "Indawendiwin: Spiritual Ecology," 207.

- 31 Ibid.
- 32 This is a sacred story and it is not appropriate to share the entire version in this forum. What is shared is a simplistic and short sketch, which is my understanding of that story, and it is used here to illustrate my point.
- 33 According to Alan Corbiere, Project Coordinator of Kinooamaadoog at M'Chigeeng First Nation (personal communication, May 4, 2007), this treaty between the Nishnaabeg Nation and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is called "Gdoo-naaganinaa" by the Nishnaabeg in both the oral tradition and historical documents written in Nishinabemwn, and it means "Our Dish." See Victor P. Lytwyn's research into historical documents containing the concept and using the term "Kidonaganina." Victor P. Lytwyn, "A Dish with One Spoon: The Shared Hunting Grounds Agreement in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley Region," in *Papers of the 28th Algonquian Conference*, ed. David H. Pentland (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba, 1997), 210–27. Gdoo-naaganinaa is the correct spelling in the Fiero orthography eastern Ojibwe dialect. To the Haudenosaunee this treaty is known as the "Dish with One Spoon." The wampum belt for the treaty is housed in the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto, Ontario.
- 34 According to Haudenosaunee scholar Susan Hill, "The Haudenosaunee are a confederacy comprised of five original member nations—Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga and Seneca—and several 'dependent' nations, including the Tuscarora (officially the 'Sixth Nation'), Delaware, Nanticoke and Tutelo. The Haudenosaunee are also known as the Iroquois Confederacy, the Five Nations and the Six Nations," Susan Hill, "Traveling down the River of Life Together in Peace and Friendship, Forever: Haudenosaunee Land Ethics and Treaty Agreements as the Basis for Restructuring the Relationship with the British Crown," in *Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence and Protection of Indigenous Nations*, ed. Leanne Simpson (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring, forthcoming).
- 35 For a detailed historical discussion of Kidonaganina based on archival documents from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries please see Lytwyn, "A Dish with One Spoon," and Johnson, "Connecting People to Place," 11–12.
- 36 For a complete discussion see Leanne Simpson, "Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Insights, Issues and Implications," Ph.D. Diss., University of Manitoba, 1999.
- 37 The dish wampum belt is currently housed at the Royal Ontario Museum. For a Nishnaabeg historical telling of the meaning of the wampum belt see Johnson, "Connecting People to Place."
- 38 The purpose of this paper is to focus on discussing Nishnaabeg precolonial treaty-making processes. For discussions of the treaty from a Haudenosaunee perspective see Barbara Gray's "The Effects of the Fur Trade on Peace: A Haudenosaunee Woman's Perspective," in *Aboriginal People and the Fur Trade: Proceedings of the 8th North American Fur Trade Conferences*, ed. Louise Johnson (Akwasasne, Mohawk Territory: Dollco Printing, 2001), n.p.; J. A. Gibson, *Concerning the League: The Iroquois League Tradition as Dictated in Onondaga*, ed. H. Woodbury, R. Henry, and H. Webster, Algonquian and Iroquoian Linguistics Memoir 9 (1991); A. C. Parker, *Parker on the Iroquois: Iroquois Uses of Maize and Other Food Plants: The*

*Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet: The Constitution of the Five Nations* (New York: State University of New York, 1992).

39 Gray, "Effects of the Fur Trade," n.p.

40 For a complete discussion of Haudenosaunee land ethics see Susan Hill, "The Clay We Are

Made of: An Examination of Haudenosaunee Land Tenure on the Grand River Territory" (PhD dissertation, Department of Indigenous Studies, Trent University, 2006); Hill, "Traveling Down the River of Life."

41 Banai, *Mishomis Book*, 90–95.