

Netukulimk, T'iam, and Traditional Food Systems of the Mi'kmaq

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Abstract

Netukulimk is a conservation worldview that permeates traditional food systems and resource stewardship of the semi-nomadic Mi'kmaq, a population with a geographical area covering Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States. This concept ties resource management, conservation, stewardship and spirituality for the Mi'kmaq people, as being connected to a food system links a continuous relationship between the land and the people. The ethnobiological significance of the moose hunt in the Cape Breton Highlands of Nova Scotia will be used as an example, exploring historical traditions and customs and current approaches to hunting and gathering in Mi'kmaq communities. Hunting and gathering techniques, the sustainable use of traditional foods food security, and skill preservation will be examined in the context of community agency. Relevant legal decisions, treaty rights and community relationships will be addressed.

Introduction

First contact began along the Atlantic coast and as such the Mi'kmaq have a significant history of settler interactions. "The Mi'kmaq are Indigenous to Eastern Canada, their territory is known as Mi'kma'ki and extends across all of Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern United States. They have endured a long history of colonization in which many attempts were made to eradicate Mi'kmaq relations to their territory and resources" (Prosper, McMillan, Davis & Moffatt, 2011, p.3). In order to understand modern food systems and the cultural relevance of the Moose hunt, we must explore briefly an overview of life prior to colonization.

The Mi'kmaq lived communally and semi nomadically, their territory was divided into seven traditional districts, each with its own independent government and boundaries. Each government had a district chief and council members as part of a band, or clan, who tended to be chiefs, elders and other community leaders. (AMEC, 2013). Although there was hierarchy and a strong reliance on the experience and wisdom of the elders, "decisions were made by the family clans and communities through a bottom up democratic political process" (Milley & Charles 2001, p.2). Much of the decision making was rooted in traditional spirituality and ritual through oral traditions passed down through story, myth and song. (Whitehead, 1998). "We developed an intimate understanding of the relationships between the living and non-living so that each plant, animal, constellation, full moon or red sky tells a story that guides our people, so they can survive" (Smith, Smith, Paul & Bellmore, 2015 p,8). These stories encompassed a worldview that required aspects of governance to be integrated rather than separated.

These oral traditions carry the history and culture of the people, and there has been a resurgence in the rediscovery and preservation of these rich and multi faceted narratives. “The purposes of Mi’kmaq stories are complex and many. The People used myth to convey to their children their understanding of the way the world works, and such tales operate on several different levels at once. A single incident in a legend might give information about animal behaviours at the same time it explores social problems and their resolutions, dramatizes taboos, or provides comic relief” (Whitehead, 1998, p. 20-21). They are indeed more than stories, but connections to philosophy and ritual practice of lives lived.

There is a strong seasonality to the semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Mi’kmaq, with an emphasis during the warmer months on resources obtained from water sources, both along marine coasts, as well as estuaries and river systems. “Historically, the Mi’kmaq families who lived in this area annually migrated between hunting and fishing grounds. These seasonal migrations were heavily dependent upon riverine and coastal transportation. As a result, food resources were heavily biased toward fish and seafood” (AMEC, 2013, p.13). Game and fish were plentiful in the spring and summer, and the year followed a predictable cycle of harvest and hunt. Salmon, sturgeon, porpoises, whales, walrus, seals, lobster, squid, shellfish, eels, seabirds and their eggs were commonly eaten in warmer seasons along with berries, roots and edible plants. As the temperatures cooled, meat was considered winter food, as a large animal could feed the entire community and be preserved for later use. Caribou, beaver, porcupine, squirrel and especially moose were important food sources (Allen, 2000).

Through the late summer and fall many harvestable bird species migrated south to Nova Scotia. BY Mid September, Mi’kmaq moved inland to harvest eels. October through to March saw the hunt for game, looking for moose, caribou, bear, otter and muskrat. They fished for

salmon as they returned downstream from spawning. December ice fishing for tomcod was plentiful and in January seals were hunted as they came ashore. As the winter waned, the people moved closer to the coast and the annual cycle began again. (AMEC,2013) (McGee & Whitehead, 1983).

The Mi'kmaq had a vast knowledge of the natural world, utilizing a large number of diverse plants and animals found around them for food and material culture. The moose is said to contain everything needed to sustain the people; hide, meat, bones for tools and knives, sinews for sewing, even the head was used to produce a medicine bag. (Whitehead, 1998). "It is now widely understood that traditional knowledge is greater than the sum of individual experiences and that traditional knowledge is a significant component of the culture and identity of indigenous peoples" (AMEC, 2013). Mi'kmaq stories detail the people's relationship with the land and the animals, containing explicit instructions for sustenance as well as cultural identity. In order to understand the concept of Netukulimk and the relationship between the people and the moose, we need to take a step back and consider the nature of Mi'kmaq spirituality and explore the people's understanding of power and how it relates to animism.

"Modern science maintains that all matter is energy, shaping itself to particular patterns. The Old Ones of the People took this a step further: they maintained that patterns of Power could be conscious, manifesting within the worlds by acts of *will*. They thought of such entities as Persons, with whom one could have a relationship" (Whitehead, 1998, p. 3).

This notion of power having will allows for the concept of reciprocity. An animal given respect in death can choose to live again, jumping out of a bone or burial site, or giving itself to

the hunter to sustain the people now and as future promise. Respect is the catalyst for the ability of the part to become whole again. “Thus, not only will the animal *wish* to re-enflesh itself in the immediate vicinity, but it will be *able* to do so, because the bone is there- a channel through which it can come once more into matter” (Whitehead, 1998, p.12).

In a traditional sense, particularly before first contact, animals and plants were the only resource for fulfilling every physical need. “Our most constant occupation was to hunt all sorts of animals so as to eat their flesh and to cover ourselves with their skins...we killed only enough animals and birds to sustain us for one day, and then, the next day, we set out again” (Lockerby, 2004, p. 408). There was preparation for winter, but also a following of natural cycles to harvest, fish and hunt what was currently in season. By maintaining and passing down knowledge of the natural world, each season presented its own opportunities for abundance.

Netukulimk is also an economic theory- a concept that rather than describing sustainable abundance, it describes the concept of just enough. It is a holistic approach, not a Western Capitalist resource management strategy leading to plenty, but rather holds the receiver of sustenance to take enough only to sustain. (Barsh, 2002).

“Historically, late springs through early winters were busy times for Mi'kmaq hunters and fishers as they prepared for the winter to ‘avoid not having enough’, a synonym for Netukulimk...the expectation was that respectful resource procurement was to be carried out by taking only enough to satisfy while avoiding waste...Care was taken to assure the hunting territories were not exhausted. Thus, through Netukulimk a human and animal relationship formed that allowed the survival of both in a sustainable manner” (Prosper et. al 2011 p7).

We must therefore adjust our conception of sustainability as reciprocal rather than uni-directional. The resource needs to be sustainable to allow multiple communities to survive; human, fauna, flora and by extension, the entire ecological system. In viewing Netukulimk as "...a complex cultural concept that encompasses Mi'kmaq sovereign law ways and guides individual and collective beliefs and behaviours in resource protection, procurement, and management to ensure and honour sustainability and prosperity for the ancestor, present and future generations" (Prosper et al, 201, p.1), we connect concepts of sustainability with community agency. This is re-iterated in oral history, narrative, and practical day to day life in the procurement and sharing of food and community. "The high degree of dependence on wild resources for food resulted in the development of spiritual understanding of the world around them, mythologies to explain natural phenomena, as well as social systems and codes of conduct to define acceptable harvesting practices and strategies" (Milly & Charles, 2001, p.2). As Mi'kmaq struggle for recognition of their right to hunt, and the ability and access to exercise that right, as a community the people are also considering the importance of exercising their right to stewardship.

The Mi'kmaq have a close and sacred relationship with the moose, Tiam. This relationship begins with the introduction of the first moose to the people, when they realized they did not have enough food to survive the winter:

"The next morning a beautiful animal appeared. Tiam was standing outside their wigwams at the edge of the forest. The hunters approached and asked, 'Are you the gift from the Creator to help our people survive the harsh winter?' 'Indeed I am' replied Tiam. 'But with this gift I bring a message'. Tiam told the people, 'I will offer my life so that you will have nourishment from my meat, clothing and utensils from my bones and

hide, and tools and crafts from my antlers.' In return Tiam asked the people to enter into a sacred trust. 'I promise to always be here for you. But you must promise to harvest me with love in your hearts. Make an offering over my body. Pray and honour my spirit. Use all parts of me and treat me with respect. If you forget your promise, I will leave you and never return.' The people agreed and this began an ancient alliance of mutual respect" (Paul & Young, 2014, p. 28-29).

As such a large mammal, the successful hunt of a single moose could sustain a community for a time, as well as provide additional tools and clothing to be able to hunt another day. "The moose was paramount in Mi'kmaq culture. Their bodies provided the means for shelter, clothing, tools, (handles for tools, knives, hide scrapers, spear and harpoon points), medicine, games and food." (Prosper et. al, 2011, p5). The success of the hunt and availability of the moose was dependent on the maintenance of the connection as shown by respect for the moose in life and death through sacred ritual to ensure the cycle of regeneration.

The commitment to showing respect by not wasting any parts of the animal is an important aspect of Netukulimk. "All parts of Tiam are used. Their hides have many uses, including clothing, wigwams, and moccasins. Fat is used for skin ailments and insect repellent. Antlers are used as bowls and can be cut and carved for beads, buttons, fishhooks, arrowheads, knife handles, and more. Bladders are used as water containers, like a canteen. Intestines are used as thick ropes. The stomach is used as medicine. Tiam droppings are used as fertilizers and as fire starters. Other leftover parts are given as offerings to Mother Earth and to scavengers in the forest" (Lefort, Paul, Johnson & Dennis, 2014). Using as much as possible of the harvested animal not only shows respect for the reciprocal relationship, but also connects the harvester with both their ancestors and community. One cannot use an entire moose on their own. This is

a very different worldview from the early European settlers, where early as 1853 a petition was submitted to the colonial government from Mi'kmaq leader Francis Paul: "The Woods have been cut down; the moose and the caribou, the beaver and the bear, and all the other animals, have in most places nearly disappeared. The streams no longer yield their former supplies of fish. So that is it now utterly impossible for us to obtain a livelihood in the way our creator trained us" (Allen, 2000, p. 11).

The historical and political relationships between The Mi'kmaq and the colonial powers in Atlantic Canada and the Northeastern US is very complex, however for the purposes of this paper I will cover some major historical points for context in the broadest of strokes, with a focus on treaties and decisions that relate directly to the Mik'maq's agency over their own food systems.

Points of contact began with the French colonists in the early 1500s, and treaty formation beginning with the transfer of lands from the French to the British after 1725. It is important to note that the effects of assimilation, colonization and settlement were being felt within Mi'kmaq community before the treaty making period with British between 1725 and 1794, and that territory and resources were never ceded. "Through the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Mi'kmaq had been subjected to over 150 years of French Catholic mission colonization and assimilation. This period witnessed the first assault on Mi'kmaq culture and way of being, particularly on Netukulimk as the basis and framework for their co-dependent relationship with their ecosystem" (Prosper et al, 2011, p.8). It is before the first treaty is signed that we begin to see the effects of missionaries and the dilution of Mi'kmaq spirituality and relationship with the land.

In 1763 a Royal Proclamation was issued guaranteeing Mi'kmaq unmolested possession of hunting grounds and recognise the nation status of the Mi'kmaq people (Milley & Charles, 2001) despite their partial assimilation into French Catholic culture.

“The Jesuits devised a strategy to keep the people from moving around by creating fixed settlements and churches, which supplied food and shelter and offered protection to Mi'kmaq during a time when they were being reduced and destabilized from disease. By encouraging sedentary lifestyles, the missionaries were in a better position to proselytize Catholic Christian tenets while actively disrupting Mi'kmaq belief systems, in particular the values and morality of Netukulimk and the resource procurement and distributions processes. Many of the Mi'kmaq rituals and customs were displaced and replaced by Christian ceremonies” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.8).

The facilitation of sedentary lifestyles, interrupting the cyclical nature of the semi nomadic people moving in season with animals and plants, eroded the passing of ethnobiological knowledge from one generation to the next- the complicated patterns of identifying food, effectively hunting or harvesting and how to prepare foods for consumption in the wild. “These forces of disconnection further distance indigenous peoples from their spiritual, cultural, and physical relationships with the natural world and serve to destroy the confidence and well-being of indigenous peoples.” (Corntassel, 2012, p. 152). The erosion of the passing of traditional knowledge leads directly to an erosion of the Mi'kmaqs food systems.

In 1844, legislation was passed preventing the hunting of moose during the month of March, when it was acknowledged by the colonial government that the moose population was not able to withstand the levels of harvest. At that time, there was a petition for an exemption for the Mi'kmaq food harvest, though it was not granted (Prosper et al, 2011). While it can be

argued that this is a step forward for conservation, this may also be the first legal point where First Nations in Nova Scotia lost their agency and any status for partnership in the relationship between Mi'kmaq and colonial powers as the government took a paternalistic approach to governance, making the decision for the people.

Following the 1876 Indian Statute of the British North America Act, Mi'kmaq reserves were established with the stated intention of protecting and preserving Indigenous hunting and fishing territories, however, practically these reserves were often situated away from traditional harvesting and hunting areas by government, segregating the communities. "In the case of the Mi'kmaq, European colonialism resulted in the alienation of Mi'kmaq peoples from traditional resources and hunting, fishing and gathering territories, the marginalization of Mi'kmaq peoples, and the criminalization of Mi'kmaq spirituality and traditional subsistence activities" (McMillan, 2011). The consequences of the placement of reserves and the continual need for food forced the Mi'kmaq off reserve to hunt, as well as removed their connections as stewards of the land. The results of this were two-fold, firstly an increase in negative interaction with local law enforcement and secondly, both the risks associated with this interaction as well as distant travel increased the difficulty for Mi'kmaq hunters passing on traditional hunting knowledge to the future generations. This period of time also saw traditional philosophies of Netukulimk conflict with Western capitalist ideology, as competition for resources increased, and indigenous reliance on European foods and supplies became commonplace. (Prosper, McMillan, Davis & Moffatt (2011). As the need to engage with the new market economy increased as means for survival, the philosophies of Netukulimk needed to compete with the dominant capitalist model.

It is not within the scope of this paper to examine the effects of the residential school system on generations of Mi'kmaq in depth, however we can not consider the people's

relationship and connection to Netukulimk without acknowledging the significant loss of ethnobiological knowledge and the trauma of physical separation of a generation of children from their families, community, and identity. The Shubenacadie Residential School was opened in 1930 and children were forcibly removed from their parents and put into schools where they were abused, forbidden to speak Mi'kmaq or practice traditional spirituality, and completely removed from every aspect of their cultural history and identity. Within the 37 years the school was in operation, generations of children lost the oral traditions and ritual practices of their ancestors. This deeply affected not only the children directly impacted, but this situation exacerbated the diminishment of a culture under extreme duress. War and disease had decimated the Mi'kmaq population, European settlement and the establishment of reserve systems had interrupted the access and opportunity for hunting and greatly diminished the abundance of wildlife for Mi'kmaq traditional food systems. With several generations removed from the Traditional Indigenous knowledge of the plant and animal life around them, how to identify, harvest, hunt, prepare and preserve food, as well as being cut off from their spiritual connection to the land, European food became the norm for the Mi'kmaq people (Paul, 2006).

This had economic impact as well. European hunters and fishers began to dominate the landscape, using guns and European technologies to hunt with great accuracy and proficiency. There was no philosophy of sustainability or restraint, and there was much waste as hunters sought high rewards for pelts or choice cuts of meat. Mi'kmaq hunters and fishers were segregated onto reserves with less access to game, and were criminalized when they approached non-Indigenous hunters and fishers, or hunting methods and traditions were so opposite in philosophy that the two groups could not hunt the same areas effectively. As fewer and fewer animals were accessible to Mi'kmaq, their opportunities to compete in an unfamiliar market

economy were less and less successful, furthering an economic and social gap between the two groups.

Modern day court decisions have been a slow evolution of recognition of Indigenous rights and gradual access to exercising those rights, plagued with systemic racism, and government justification. “The Sparrow and Marshall decisions of the Supreme Court of Canada reinforced the political power of conservation as one of the only reasons the federal government can justify infringing upon the rights of indigenous peoples.” (King 2011, p. 3)

In 1990, the Sparrow decision saw the Supreme Court of Canada uphold rights of aboriginal people to fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes, and those rights has a priority over other uses of the fishery, including commercial fishing, however Indigenous peoples did not have the right to commercially fish themselves. Even these rights are subject to over riding considerations such as conservation. The Government of Canada must consult with aboriginal peoples, yet may consider conservation as justification for any infringements. (King, 2011). .

“In 1999, the Supreme Court of Canada *Marshall* decision ruled that Mi'kmaq and Maliseet peoples have the right to hunt and fish in order to maintain a moderate livelihood.” (Krause & Ramos, 2015 p.23). This decision represents another economic shift in policy by government as Mi'kmaq are allowed commercial access to the fishery, and a precedent set for hunting as well. Theoretically, this places Indigenous community in an advantageous position commercially, and also adds an element of governmental control to the process. Responses to Marshall were very positive within the aboriginal communities, yet the decision provoked anger and frustration amongst non-native commercial fisher communities, resulting in violence and retribution as well as political action between the two communities (King, 2011). “In response to the Marshall Decision, the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) insisted that

this right be expressed within the existing practice of limited entry access and effort control through allocation management policies such as licenses and quotas, otherwise resource conservation would be jeopardized” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.3). The Marshall decision was revised and there were attempts by the DFO to stop the Mi'kmaq fishery altogether. Under the justification of ecological conservation, controls were again established over the Mi'kmaq food system. In 2000, The Esgeenootitj First Nations (EFN) Fishery Act was a policy drafted to apply Mi'kmaq conservation approaches as a response to the Canadian Government, proposing effective conservation stemming from Mi'kmaq sovereignty. This approach to sovereignty as a framework would be accomplished through a holistic approach to politics, spirituality and environment. (King 2011).

Due to government efforts to allocate licenses quickly to Mi'kmaq fishers after the Marshall decision, many received government subsidized gear, resulting in some financial incentive and advantage for new Indigenous fishers over established, and mostly non-Indigenous fishers. This perceived inequity brought underlying prejudices to the fore and there was racial tension between the groups within the lobster and herring industries. As opposed to non-indigenous fishers, Mi'kmaq already working in the industry saw the new fishers as having had enormous opportunities that they would have also wanted, yet saw it as a positive step for the Mi'kmaq community overall (Krause and Ramos, 2015). Priorities were aligned in 2013 when low lobster prices had both communities rallying together. When the Settler fishers observed the Mi'kmaq fishers following DFO regulations after the revision of Marshall (Marshall 2), there was significant improvement in the relationship between two groups (Krause and Ramos, 2015), however it seems these improved relationships were only possible if Mi'kmaq fishers were willing to give up any privileges awarded them. In accepting the subsidized gear and opening

access to licensing, this created significant access points for Mi'kmaq fishers. But was there equity? Despite even the advantages of special regulations, affordable gear and expedition of licenses, there remained obstacles to equitable success. Families did not have the advantage of generations of experience in industry with modern methods. There were challenges in asking others for help and seeking out additional resources. In the examination of values surrounding attempts to reach equity amongst these populations, one has to consider the practical effects of colonial privilege. This created tensions not only between groups of commercial fishers but also between Mi'kmaq communities and DFO officers.

“As a result of this history, an uneasy state of individual conflicts has existed for a considerable time between Mi'kmaq fishers, who believed that they should not be subjected to controls outside the Mi'kmaq traditional systems, and government fisheries officers who believed that Mi'kmaq fishers should be subject to the same management rules as non- native fishers” (Milley & Charles, 2001, p.3) If there is embedded racism both within the societal paradigm within which a community has to function and within the systemic confines of the judicial system, can there be agency? In order to facilitate productive and amicable partnerships, shared values and ambitions need to be communicated.

As Mi'kmaq hunters and fishers became more empowered to exercise their treaty rights and engage in commercial fishing and hunting, this had additional consequences on traditional food systems. Canadian and international commercial markets pull from specific and more limited food resources. They capitalize on abundant stocks in season, but there is limited incentive for small scale harvesting diverse species use and maintaining strong ecological balance. The focus on commercial stocks instead of the variety of traditional local stocks harvested on a small scale acted exponentially in the diminished communal capacity to retain the

knowledge required to hunt, harvest and prepare traditional foods, further increasing the reliance on a new North American food system model. The after effects of the Marshall decision remained a top down approach of assimilation Mi'kmaq into industrialized, regulated commercial methods of harvesting.

“Hunting and harvesting moose to satisfy settler demand for meat provided one of the few opportunities to access the cash Mi'kmaq required to participate in the new economy to purchase food and other necessities, including ammunition, guns and traps. The conditions compelling Mi'kmaq participation in the economy dramatically shifted their relations with the natural environment and ecosystem” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.10). The economic system imposed on the Mi'kmaq required their participation in order for the people to have access to the means to purchase material goods.

Due to extreme hunting pressures with the development of centralized settler communities, the once abundant moose became more and more scarce until the population was extirpated by the 1920s. In an effort to repopulate the area, 18 moose were brought by Parks Canada from Elk Island, Alberta in 1947-1948. While in Alberta moose populations are controlled by wolves as the apex predator, the Cape Breton Highlands natural park's wolf population had also been decimated, becoming a refuge that led those 18 moose to become a thriving population. It is estimated that without natural predation and an intentional lack of hunting in National Park areas, the moose population in 2015 was 1800. This population was deemed hyperabundant, with a higher than sustainable density of moose per square km, and has resulted in some ecological damage, as moose grazing was turning boreal forest into grassland, with harmful ecologically effects for a number of protected forest species occurring within the park. (Smith at al, 2015).

It was identified that the moose population required some resource management, and a moose cull was proposed. Mi'kmaq leadership were upset by the possibility of moose being killed without appropriate respect and as recreational sport (Gryphon Media Productions, 2014). The Moose Management Initiative (MMI) in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park was a project that had some possibility for community empowerment and agency, and was an innovative attempt at aligning values to create a partnership between Mi'kmaq community and government management (Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources, UNIR, 2009). Being that moose is not a commercial industry in Canada, and that there was an overpopulation, the potential for political and social backlash was low. "Some stakeholders and local public have expressed concerns related to the need to remove moose, the exclusivity of Mi'kmaq harvest access, and the impacts of the proposed harvest on neighbouring land interests" (Smith et al, 2015, p. 4). Despite concerns, this was generally seen as a mutually beneficial opportunity for education and community revitalization for the Mi'kmaq communities.

The MMI took advantage of the opportunity to encourage young Mi'kmaq hunters to be trained in traditional hunting methods with more experienced elders. This took place first in philosophical teachings, based on the concept of Netukulimk. Hunters were shown how to prepare offerings before the hunt as well as once a moose was harvested, how to take down the moose with as little pain as possible, ask forgiveness, and treat both the hunt and the animal with respect. (Steigman et al, 2013).

The community aspect of the hunt moves beyond the hunt itself as the project integrates "...the spiritual and traditional rituals and practices such as sharing meat and communal feasting, which are integral to expressions of Netukulimk" (Prosper et al, 2011, p.4). The sharing of the meat with community can take three different forms; there is an annual moose feast where

various communities are invited to take part as festival and celebration. Hunters can also take the meat to a butcher and distribute it either to their community or to Feed Nova Scotia for distribution (Smith et al, 2015). The moose feast is a cause for great celebration of spirit, culture, ancestors and food. The community focus brings the essential elements of pride and connection to the land (Gryphon Media Productions, 2014).

More than a hunt, this new partnership with Parks Canada has given voice to a need not previously heard between government and Mi'kmaq peoples. The success of the project is rooted in its connections. "Traditional Tiam harvesting is about more than just Moose. It's about community...When harvesting Moose, there is value in the animal itself and there is value in relationships; with Tiam, with Unama'ki ecosystems, and with our communities. Returning to a traditional harvest brings back an appreciation for traditional ways" (Steigman et al, 2013). The need for a moose cull became an opportunity for a trial partnership with true agency. Without the pressures of a commercial industry come fewer potential political risks, and there is an alignment of shared goals between Parks Canada and the Mi'kmaq people. Parks Canada resolves an ecological issue, the Mi'kmaq gain their sense of stewardship, develop agency and empowerment with the community, and have an opportunity to reconnect youth with Netukulimk and traditional food systems with integrity and dignity.

There is an important distinction here between the herring fishery where Mi'kmaq fishers received subsidies and then had to follow the same rules as the settlers under DFO, and the partnership between the Mi'kmaq councils and Parks Canada over the moose cull. While there was some backlash between Mi'kmaq and non-Mi'kmaq hunters, the Mi'kmaq people in a sense regained their national pride through taking on responsibility of managing the project with traditional philosophy and ritual. Having one's own agency within the structure of the process as

opposed to required compliance with Settler rules is transformative. “The protocol demonstrates the harvest will be conducted according to high ethical and safety practices that fully reflect both Parks Canada and Mi’kmaq values and interests. It also reflects an interest in providing opportunities for non-Mi’kmaq communities to support and benefit from the harvest” (Smith et al, 2015, p. 7). This pride and celebration are welcome community builders. “Mi’kmaq communities are happy to have revitalized the traditional Moose harvest and participate in practices and events that celebrate their return” (UNIR, 2009).

As opposed to the DFO regulations overseeing the herring fishery, the moose harvest had more opportunities for agency and the Mi’kmaq community involvement. The experience of rediscovery and reconnection with Netukulimnk is a political act, an act of Nationhood to undertake Mi’kmaq leadership with such an initiative. “The Moose Management Initiative (MMI) was established with the goal of implementing Mi’kmaq treaty rights and increasing Mi’kmaq autonomy” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.14).

Working with respectful guidelines within community is seen as active stewardship and an exercising of treaty rights. This is a privilege that has been held back from the Mi’kmaq people throughout their experience with colonial governments. “By enacting these Guidelines, the Mi’kmaq of Nova Scotia are exercising their right to Nationhood, and, in so doing, have to appoint Mi’kmaq stewards to promote Mi’kmaq rules” (UNIR, 2009, p. 9).

Perhaps there is a spiritual lesson here, that Tiam once again has chosen to return to have the Mi’kmaq people of stewards, to join in once more in this reciprocal relationship of mutual love and respect. “A Mi’kmaq hunter at one of the community sessions felt a sense of honour that the moose, so important to the life and culture of the People, would be the spirit that returned Nationhood to the Mi’kmaq” (UNIR. 2009, p. 10).

In seeking to connect the next generation with Netukulimk through the opportunity of partnership with Parks Canada and the MMI, the Mi'kmaq people are connecting spiritually with their ancestors and culture, and restoring their relationship with the land.

“The revitalization by the Mi'kmaq of Netukulimk is intended to reconnect their severed spiritual relations with land, plants, water and animals and to restore respect for the responsibilities inherent in their rights. Through this, Mi'kmaq are reclaiming their customary position in relationship with moose and all other resources in order to build a sustainable future. Netukulimk offers a relationship of mutual existence and reciprocity between the human and animal world that is spiritually connected and accountable for a continued sustainable existence of all living things” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.14).

Despite a recent resurgence rediscover Mi'kmaq roots, stories, language and culture, there has been an incalculable loss in the passing on of information and continued use of traditional Indigenous knowledge since colonization that directly impact their modern food systems. Reserves are not accessible to wildlife and hunting areas, and Western food is inexpensive and easy to obtain. Beginning in the early 1700s, Mi'kmaq were physically diminished by disease and culturally diminished through assimilation and then the residential school system, the connection to the land and its use also decreased. The AMEC (2013) study demonstrated a considerable shift in Mi'kmaq use of the lands. Where historical documentation and anthropological research has shown widespread use of land for the sustenance of communities over centuries, since centralization and assimilation into a market economy, there has been decreased in harvesting and hunting for food and increases in harvesting and hunting for recreation, focused more on far away areas that have more animal abundance. It is no longer part of an everyday experience. Private ownership of lands in rural areas can also be a barrier to

access in a hunt that may require following an animal or herd of animals over a distance. These physical boundaries can interrupt or even halt a hunt entirely. While there is legal assertion of rights in Canada, conflicts of interest between economic advantage for non-Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaq communities tend to result in lack of ability to exercise those rights in practice.

“...the need to change existing resource use and socio-economic development policies and practices so that Indigenous peoples are empowered to exercise their rights within a context that enables respect for and expression of traditional knowledge (TK) and culture. In many settings there are conflicts of interest that position the expression of Indigenous rights in direct opposition with existing distributions of economic advantage and political power of non-Indigenous interests. For instance, the right to self determine socio-economic development requires access to highly valued land and resources that are already possessed and used by others such as private citizens, public agencies and industrial corporations” (Prosper et al, 2011, p.2).

Duhaime and Godmaire (2002) highlight environmental pollution as being a significant challenge in the maintenance of traditional food systems, as toxins tend to become concentrated through the food chain in certain edible and sought after parts of game. These include fat stores, liver and other internal organs and flesh of wild fish and game. Mi'kmaq communities that are committed to preserving their traditional hunting and fishing are disproportionately affected by unsustainable forestry practices, climate change, hydro-electric projects, contaminated drinking water and industrial contamination (Collins & Murtha, 2010).

McMillan (2015) describes availability, access, utilization and stability as the four pillars of food security. This can only exist when all people within a community feel they have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet their needs for an active and healthy life, and it is

acknowledged as a basic human right. Archaeological evidence from Atlantic Canada presents an abundant picture of wildlife that was very diverse. “Traditional Indigenous economies have tended to involve the simultaneous and proximal use of multiple resources on a subsistence basis, rather than the intensive, isolated, single use resource use that characterizes industrial capitalist economies” (MacMillan, 2015, p.132). As commercial ventures concentrated on valuable resources for market, many indigenous communities were displaced by settlers along the coasts from areas of land and marine resources. Mi'kmaq hunters and fishers had no choice but to engage with these economies for survival, and gradual loss of the knowledge required to fully participate in traditional food systems as well as access to resources impacted their ability to maintain diverse food systems.

“...food security remains unobtainable for the majority of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The health of Indigenous peoples is markedly impoverished compared to most Canadians. Indigenous peoples are constrained by state regulations that continue to infringe their Aboriginal and treaty rights, their ability to trade and their access to customary, traditional, or country foods. Studies show that Indigenous people's chronic disease risk tends to increase as a result of government policies that infringe on Indigenous people's livelihoods and territories.” (MacMillan, 2015, p.139).

Imported products and food styles rather than traditional diets from hunting and fishing can lead to major food constraints within a community if there is a lack of adequate resources to purchase healthy alternatives to traditional foods (DuHaime & Godmaire, 2002). Health outcomes in Indigenous communities are poor compared with Canadian communities as a result of increasing dependence on fast and imported foods, as well as significant contamination of wildlife due to environmental pollution (Milburn, 2004, p.412).

“Indigenous People’s food systems contain treasures of knowledge from long-evolved cultures and patterns of living in local eco-systems., The dimensions of nature and culture contribute to the whole health picture of the individual and the community- not only physical health but also the emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of health, healing and protection from disease. However, these food systems which are intricately related to the complexities of social and economic circumstances are becoming increasingly more affected by the forces of globalization.” (Erasmus, Kuhnlein & Spigelski, 2009, p.15)

Governments have an opportunity to have more than one benefit when looking to models where Indigenous councils are empowered with the ability to take agency over these rights and incorporate traditional values such as Netukulimk into joint government conservation strategy. The potential benefits include effective resource management, as well as probable increased health and food security outcomes for Indigenous peoples of Canada through their connection with cultural identity and engagement with their food systems.

“...Man Who Sings to Animals says to the visitors...I do not like to see the people waste anything, any part of the animal. They should treat those things with respect. They should save everything. They should save all parts of the animals. What they cannot save and use, they should bury with respect. They should not waste any hair or anything.” He takes out a moose bone and sings over it. The moose jumps out of the bone and runs away” (UNIR, 2009, p.10).

Summary and Conclusions

Netukulimk is a Mi'kmaq concept of ecological sustainability- specific to respecting animals, using all of what you take, wasting nothing. It is more than a resource management

system, but a holistic worldview. It runs through political, spiritual and environmental aspects of community and has emerged as a focus as part of a wider campaign to educate both Mi'kmaq and non-Mi'kmaq peoples. There is an examination of the over-exploitation of resources and cultural loss as a result of colonial government policy. This is a story of being lost and found - of a culture stolen and reclaimed through a reconnection to ancestral rites in a modern context in the form of community agency and empowerment. Despite an evolution of negotiated treaties to assert Mi'kmaq rights within their territories, many rulings have been met with opposition from local communities, and have required the Mi'kmaq populations to conform to government regulations and methods. The Moose Management Initiative in the Cape Breton Highlands National Park is more than a hunt; it forms community, cultural and ancestral ties. Mi'kmaq are taking a leadership role as stewards under Netukulimk, in Tiam's respectful harvest and management looking towards the future. In so doing, the community maintains their connection with local food systems and improves food security.

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