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**THE ROLE OF RITUAL IN A CONTEMPORARY OJIBWA TRIBE**

**By**

**Julie Anne Pelletier**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Anthropology**

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## ABSTRACT

### THE ROLE OF RITUAL IN A CONTEMPORARY OJIBWA TRIBE

By

Julie Anne Pelletier

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has experienced tremendous changes in the political, economic, and social spheres over the past three decades. Before gaining federal recognition in 1975, the tribe shared the bleak situation of many Native American tribes: poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, loss of land and language. Being a federally recognized tribe qualified the Soo Tribe, as it is known, for federal and state monies. The Soo Tribe took advantage of the Indian Gaming Act of 1992 to open the first of several casinos. Revenues from gaming have transformed the tribe in many ways. The Soo Tribe has acquired reservation land, poured money into social programs, and diversified its business holdings. The membership of the tribe has increased as has its political and economic influence.

With all of these changes has come an interest in tribal identity. This dissertation describes the identity-building efforts of various factions and age groups in the tribe. Following the lead of Victor Turner, Barbara Myerhoff, and Catherine Bell, it analyzes the use of ritual in the creation and production of identity in the Soo Tribe. It contributes to ongoing theoretical discussions by identifying the strategies used by various factions and age groups involving ritual. In doing so, it situates ritual as a strategic practice, what Catherine Bell names

ritualization. Soo Tribe members act out ritualization in their efforts to educate others about their identity, to socialize the tribal youngsters in the tribal identity, and to express their unique status as a sovereign entity.

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In the tribal world, thanks to everyone, especially the McKecknie family, who welcomed me into their homes and lives during my fieldwork. Sally

McKecknie was always helpful and supportive. Our camping trips, with kids, dogs, and miscellaneous friends and relatives, were a lifesaving break from my work. Rosemary Gaskin was welcoming and informative, sharing her insights into the development of the tribe in her lifetime. She was lost to the ravages of diabetes during my stay in the Soo – I miss her. It can be difficult for Indians to accept the presence of an anthropologist in their midst. I know I did not win every person's trust but I was happy to share their lives to whatever extent I could. I was humbled by those who were proud of a woman very much like them doing this work for their people. I hope this dissertation does not disappoint them.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the love and support I have received during this time from my son, Zachary Firestone. I have been a student throughout his entire life. He understands more than most what it means to have a goal and never to give up on it, no matter how tempted you are by easier roads, no matter how long the road is. I thank him and love him with all my heart.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Interest in identity**

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians has experienced tremendous changes in the political, economic, and social spheres over the past three decades. Before gaining federal recognition in 1974, the tribe shared the bleak situation of many Native American tribes: poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, loss of land and language. Being a federally recognized tribe qualified the Soo Tribe, as it is known, for federal and state monies. The Soo Tribe took advantage of the Indian Gaming Act of 1992 to open the first of several casinos. Revenues from gaming have transformed the tribe in many ways. The Soo Tribe has acquired reservation land, poured money into social programs, and diversified its business holdings. The membership of the tribe has increased, as has its political and economic influence.

With all of these changes has come an interest in tribal identity. This dissertation describes the identity-building efforts of various factions and age groups in the tribe. Following the lead of Victor Turner, Barbara Myerhoff, and Catherine Bell, it analyzes the use of ritual in the creation and production of identity in the Soo Tribe. It contributes to ongoing theoretical discussions by identifying the strategies used by various factions and age groups involving ritual. In doing so, it situates ritual as a strategic practice, what Catherine Bell names ritualization. Soo Tribe members act out ritualization in their efforts to educate



others about their identity, to socialize the tribal youngsters in the tribal identity, and to express their unique status as a sovereign entity.

### **Ritual and ritualization**

I conducted fieldwork in northern Michigan over the course of about eighteen months. The broad focus of my investigation was an interest in tribal identity, research that was proposed and funded by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, informally known as the Soo Tribe. The tribe expressed an interest in applied anthropological research leading to programs and concepts they could implement to improve and enhance a sense of tribal identification.

The working definition of identity which I used, and expanded upon, was the one suggested by the tribal administration when they contracted my services. This definition was concrete in its application: the tribal administration wanted their members to identify themselves publicly as Soo Tribe members. In other words, when asked, the tribal members should name themselves as Soo Tribe members instead of the more generic terms of "Indian," "Ojibwa," "Chippewa," or even "Anishinabe." I expanded the definition somewhat to include these more generic definitions of themselves as Indians, rather than simply as members of the Soo Tribe. The primary reason for expanding the definition of identity was the lack of individuals who identified themselves primarily as Soo Tribe members.

The subgroups or categories I refer to in the dissertation, the Corporate Indians, the Boomers, the Elders, and the Youngsters, are based partly on tribal categories and partly on the theory I use to analyze the use of ritual. I will

explain each in turn. First, the use of age categories by Soo Tribe members is common. For example, when standing in line for food at a ceremonial feast, people arrange themselves from eldest to youngest. Members who are reluctant to reveal their birth date are teased and gently ridiculed. I was able to utilize this cultural concept comfortably if loosely to working with my field data.

Secondly, the analytical categories I created and used also reflected the similar use of ritual by individuals who shared characteristics, many of which were age-related characteristics. The Elders shared certain concerns with one another, as did the individual Youngsters. The Corporate Indians and the Boomers belong to the same loose-defined age group and I have placed them in their respective categories based instead on attitudinal differences, with the Corporate Indians focusing on the tribe as a corporate business entity and the Boomers focusing on the spiritual and traditionally-oriented aspects of the tribe.

The size of the Soo Tribe, more than 30,000, and its recent economic success (the largest employer in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, with gross revenues in excess of \$450 million in 2001) are two of the reasons for the tribe's concern with identity. Prior to federal recognition in 1974 and to the advent of casino gaming in the 90s, the Soo Tribe shared the same plight as many tribes in the U.S.: high rates of unemployment, poverty and disease, institutional racism and discrimination, and poor living conditions. Transformed by sudden wealth and a rapid increase in membership, due to the decision to define membership based on lineal descent, the Soo Tribe has been struggling to create or maintain a sense of tribal cohesiveness and identity.

An overview of the historical and ethnographic data revealed a lack of documentation concerning the Soo Tribe's existence in the past as a discrete group or tribe. Instead, there is ample evidence that their current home in Sault Ste. Marie was a gathering place in the summer for people from all over the upper Great Lakes and parts of southern Michigan. The Soo Tribe may very well be the descendants of individuals or families who chose to stay in the area after culture contact, most probably for economic reasons having to do with the fur trade. Having no legal land base until recently, having experienced hundreds of years of poverty and disease, being a tribe with a high percentage of mixed bloods, and having almost lost their language and spiritual beliefs, the Soo Tribe's desire to create a strong sense of unity and identity is understandable. The use of ritual and ceremony in their attempts to create this sense of identity opened an area of analysis, the concept of ritual as strategy, or ritualization.

A brief exploration of the theories of ritual should begin with the work of Durkheim (2001) who created rigid categories to separate the secular or the profane from the sacred. This type of classification system means that rituals are sacred in nature and are "fixed modes of action" based on religious beliefs. Jean and John Comaroff (1993), praxis anthropologists, urge us to "dispense with the old Eurocentric dichotomy between the sacred and the profane" (xviii). The artificial distinction of sacred and profane insists that ritual is separate from everyday life, not a useful definition when working with the Ojibwa belief system that does not make this sharp distinction but, rather, views spirituality as a part of everyday life.

Victor Turner's (1965, 1969, 1975, 1979, 1985, 1992) concept of ritual with its performance aspect is closer to the approach needed to analyze ritual activity in the Soo Tribe. Turner states that belief is an essential aspect of ritual, yet his work in performance seems to call more for the suspension of disbelief than for true faith-based belief. One of his students, Barbara Myerhoff (1977), takes ritual in this interesting direction and argues that a successful ritual is one that is good enough that the participants agree to suspend disbelief or to at least not express their discontent openly: "Not all the participants involved need to be equally convinced or equally moved" (1977:222).

Sally Moore (1975, 1977), another of Turner's students, proposes a solution to the dichotomy she sees in concepts of ritual: stability and continuity contrasted with maneuverability and interpretability. Rather than choosing one or the other concept or abandoning the concept of ritual entirely, Moore proposes viewing ritual as a social process, specifically "in terms of the interrelationship of three components: the processes of *regularization*, the processes of *situational adjustment*, and the factor of *indeterminacy* (1979:219). When we conceptualize ritual as a process, we are able to account for the variability in the practice of ritual and situate ritual practitioners and ritual innovators in a central and active role.

A model developed by Catherine Bell (1992), which she calls ritualization, allows a deeper understanding of the role of ritual in identity formation and reinforcement in the Soo Tribe. Like Moore (1975, 1977) and others, Catherine Bell seeks to refocus the discussion of ritual onto context of ritual practice and

the role of ritual in everyday life. This requires a shift from ritual to ritualization, from an analysis of the action of ritual to an analysis of the strategy of ritualization. Bell states that "ritualization is first and foremost a strategy for the construction of certain types of power relationships effective within particular social organizations" (1992:197). In keeping with this concept, my dissertation explores the contexts in which ritualization is effective and how tribal members practice ritualization to achieve particular goals.

Applying the concept of ritualization was critical to the analysis of ritual activities of various tribal actors. Ritualization conceptualizes ritual as strategy, thereby placing the Soo Tribe members in the center of the action. This approach allows the researcher to ask critical questions: "how does the actor use ritual strategically?"; and "what motivates the actor to practice ritualization?" Researchers can get at questions of interaction between actors in terms of ritualization. How does the ritualization of one actor or group of actors affect another group? What characterizes the individuals who share a mode or motivation of practicing ritualization?

In the case of the Soo Tribe, the groups of individual actors share modes of behaving strategically with ritual. As I mentioned earlier, these groups fall roughly into age categories, which I named the Corporate Indians, the Boomers, the Elders, and the Youngsters. The age groups differ in some respects but share a goal of identifying themselves with the larger tribal group. The Boomers are the most ritually active group in the tribe, taking responsibility for reviving, maintaining, and sometimes creating rituals to meet the needs of the tribe. For

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example, they have revived the naming ceremony, in which a tribal member is given an Ojibwa name. The Boomers have created a syncretic funeral ritual that combines aspects of Ojibwa and mainstream funeral practices into a ceremony with which most tribal members feel comfortable. These and other rituals promote a sense of unique identity and of belonging to the larger group. The strategic practice of ritual, or ritualization, can be an important component in identity building.

The other groups I define within the tribal practice ritualization in other settings and to achieve other goals. Briefly, I will describe the contexts and goals of the three other groups. The Youngsters are perhaps the most predictable in their strategic use of ritual. They turn to ritual or promise to become more involved in the ritual and ceremonial life of the tribe when they are in some kind of trouble. These actions and promises of action are particularly effective when their audience is the more traditionally oriented members of the tribe. Elders are expected to be more involved in spiritual and ritual matters. Many tribal members see this as a “natural” part of being an Elder. In fact, while some Elders may have some ritual knowledge, many others do not. The rewards for playing the role of the traditional Elder are great, including lots of positive attention from younger tribal members and increased opportunities for social interactions. The Corporate Indians, with their economic and political focus, are rarely involved in ritual on a personal level but are aware of the enormous potential in the strategic use of ritual to put forward their agenda. This agenda includes promoting a sense of tribal identification and solidarity among members

while stressing the unique status of the tribe to the outside world. Bell reminds us that ritualization "may be an effective way of acting in certain places at certain times, under other conditions it may be useless or counterproductive" (1992:206). I have been careful to describe the contexts in which ritualization has been an effective tool for these groups within the Soo Tribe.

### **Broader context**

Ritualization is a powerful tool for analysis in Native American and Native Canadian studies, as indigenous individuals and populations seek to assert their identity within and outside of mainstream society. The history of the relationships between indigenous peoples and federal governments in North America has been marked by changes in how indigenous peoples are defined, how they are identified. The pressures of colonization, warfare, and disease have forced indigenous populations in North America and elsewhere to reconceptualize themselves, to seek an identity that meets their needs.

Within the Soo Tribe, ritualization is a powerful tool in the hands of individuals and groups in the process of identity creation or reaffirmation. However, ritualization can be used to frame broader questions and explorations of identity in anthropology. Kertzer (1988) does not use Bell's (1992) term "ritualization" but is applying the concept in his exploration of the worldwide use of ritual by political groups. His examples of ritualization include the Soviet Union, the Ku Klux Klan, and the French Revolution. Anderson (1983) and others interested in nationalism and the creation of nation identities often refer to



the use of ritual in the “imagining of communities”, to paraphrase Anderson's term. Moore (1975) applies the concept of ritualization to more informal, even “accidental” groups or communities, such as the participants in the original gathering at Woodstock. These informal groups, like those involved in nation building, also rely on symbols and rituals to draw them together and to achieve particular goals.

In their examination of the state of anthropology, Marcus and Fischer in 1986 stated that identity, whether ethnic, regional, or national, needed a fresh look. I agree with this assessment and suggest that identity is an issue worth continued study, and that ritualization can be a valuable tool to understand how some groups and societies construct identity. The means by which people strategize, which may include the manipulation of ritual with all of its symbolic potential, have broad implications and, therefore, broad applications for further study.

The importance of the use of ritual as part of identity creation and reinforcement can be found in the anthropological literature, as I have attempted to illustrate. What is lacking, however, is the explicit analysis of ritualization as it applies to identity formation. Some of the examples given imply ritualization; what are needed are more studies like this one that examine the ritual basis for people's actions. The strategic use of ritual is found in groups and societies worldwide and, as such, deserves further development in anthropological studies.

## **Dissertation structure**

Chapter II is a discussion of the ways ritual is understood by social scientists. In Chapter III, I provide an historical context for the Soo Tribe and Chapter IV is a description of my fieldwork methodology. Chapters V and VI have some overlap: Chapter V describes the experiences and activities of tribal members I call the Corporate Indians, most of whom are 30 to 55 years old. Chapter VI covers a different segment of the same age group, which I have called the Boomers. These individuals are involved in reviving and retaining traditional tribal practices while the Corporate Indians focus on managing the tribe. Chapters VII and VIII focus on younger members (under 20 years old) and older Soo Tribe members (over 55 years old).

I have relied on practice theory to describe the Ojibwas as actors strategically using ritual to achieve individual and group goals. In this analysis, I turned to the work of Victor Turner, Pierre Bourdieu, Jeanne Comaroff, and Catherine Bell. Chapter IX is a presentation of my conclusions and ideas for further research. Finally, I have included an Afterword as a reflexive look at my fieldwork experience.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **THEORIES OF RITUAL**

#### **Introduction**

I conducted fieldwork in northern Michigan over the course of about eighteen months. The broad focus of my investigation was an interest in tribal identity. The Ojibwa tribe I was studying was also interested in this topic, requesting specific suggestions and proposed courses of action they could implement to improve and enhance a sense of tribal identification. While conducting this research, my attention was drawn to the ritual expressions of the tribe. Eventually, ritual became a sort of lens into the tribe's goals and strategies for expressing and teaching tribal identity.

In the history of anthropology as a discipline, ritual has drawn the attention of field workers, often for the exotic-seeming nature of the ritual practices. Many students of anthropology, taking that first introductory class, are introduced to rituals like the potlatch of the American Northwestern tribes, and are excited by the foreignness of it, the alien idea of giving away valuable possessions as a means to accrue status – a concept opposed to what most American students learn in mainstream society. The early days of anthropological study tended to emphasize the exotic/primitive nature of ritual, a history that initially turned me away from examining the use of ritual I observed while doing fieldwork. Michelle Rosaldo struggled with this dilemma in her work with the Ilongots: "... I had for some time been reluctant to isolate as a subject for research a single 'symbol'

which, like headhunting, appeared as an exotic fact..." (1980:19). The rituals drew my attention repeatedly, both while in the field and during the process of analyzing field notes after I left the field, and it seemed that there must be something of value to examine in this area. I realized, upon reflection, that I was not interested in the "exotic" nature of Soo Tribe rituals. I did not want simply to describe various tribal rituals I observed during my fieldwork. The rituals gained their meaning, their significance in their context and their purpose. My focus is, therefore, the use of ritualization as strategy.

First, I will give a brief history of the concept of ritual, from its beginnings as a purely religious category to one that includes the secular, referring to theorists such as Emile Durkheim and Victor Turner. I will examine the concept of invented ritual as proposed by Barbara Myerhoff. I will apply a model developed by Catherine Bell to place the various definitions and examples of ritual into specific categories of social control. Next, I will examine the concept of ritual as a part of practice/praxis, turning to Pierre Bourdieu and Jean and John Comaroff. I will then return to Bell's work to describe her concept of ritualization as strategy. Finally, I will state my intention to examine the use of ritual in the Soo Tribe through the lens of ritualization as strategy.

### **Defining ritual**

It is customary for the academic writer to spend some time defining the term or terms she will use. However, theoretical discussions concerning ritual emerge in and cross a number of disciplines, with work done in history,

philosophy, psychology, religion, literature, theatre, sociology, anthropology, and so on. The depth and breadth of material relating to ritual necessitates narrowing the focus. In this chapter, I will limit the discussion to theorists and theories more closely related to the social sciences. [I have found this type of disclaimer is common in writing about ritual. Richard Schechner expressed the sentiment in his foreword to Victor Turner's *The Anthropology of Performance*: "Even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has been so variously defined – as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, religious experience, function – that it means very little because it can mean too much" (1992:10).]

For Durkheim, an early writer on ritual and one often referred to by theorists, rites are an integral part of religion and therefore, fall into the category of sacred: "All known religious beliefs ...present a common quality: they presuppose a classification of things...into two classes, two opposite kinds, generally designated by two distinct terms effectively translated by the words *profane* and *sacred*" (2001:36). Durkheim then assures that "anything at all, can be sacred" (2001:36), not just deities or gods. Rites, however, "can have this sacred character as well; in fact, no rite exists that does not have it to some degree" (2001:36). Rites, or ritual, are sacred in nature and are "fixed modes of action" based on religious beliefs.

Over the course of his long career, Victor Turner's interest in ritual and performance was unwavering. Turner has described ritual as embedded in religion, particularly in his discussions of liminality and rites of passage (1967, 1969, 1974, 1975, 1985). Belief is an essential aspect of ritual for Turner; the

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individual undergoing a rite of passage and those assisting or observing the rite believe that the individual has been transformed. This transformation and the ritual that enables the transformation to occur is magical (1985:218); it is supernatural.

Turner's interest in performance eventually led him and his students to expand the definition of ritual beyond the religious into the secular. In defining ritual, the following illustrate how Turner's conception of ritual in terms of secular versus religious changes and is refined over time. The first quote is Durkheimian in its restrictiveness while the second quote describes Turner's application of ritual on a broader scale:

(Ritual is) prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. [1967:19]

In various publications I have suggested that ritual was "a *transformative* performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural process." [1985:251]

While his definition of ritual seems to change somewhat over the course of his career, his interest in symbolic meanings remains part of Turner's examination of ritual. Referring to Ndembu rituals, he observes, "almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other than itself" (1969:15). Some (Dirks,

Grimes) argue that Turner's emphases on religion and belief are a result of unexamined assumptions stemming directly from Durkheim's dichotomy of sacred and profane.

By no means is Turner's early Durkheimian definition of ritual universally accepted. In a volume of essays entitled *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism*, Ronald L. Grimes critiques Turner's definition of ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (Turner 1967:19)]. He argues that belief and ritual are not necessarily connected and, in reference to "technological routine", that one may find "technicians of the sacred" engaged in rituals such as making crops grow (1967:142). Also, Grimes points out that Turner's definition and theory could be inconsistent: "Turner links ritual and religion – a practice inconsistent with his having called attention to the transformative powers of secular ritual as well as his having attended to ritual in contemporary art and drama, both of which may or may not be religious in a given instance" (1967:143). Finally, he comments that "(Turner's) sense of ritual – as opposed to his definition of it – paid little attention to the secular-sacred distinction" (1967:145). Grimes fails to acknowledge, in his critique, the development over time of Turner's understanding of ritual. Eventually, Turner comes to see that the distinction between ritual as sacred or secular is important more on a descriptive level than at a categorical level. In other words, ritual is not necessarily embedded in a religious belief structure but may be an integral



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part of secular practices, such as biomedicine (for example, descriptions of the ritual of scrubbing up for surgery).

### **Ritual as symbol**

The symbolism of ritual is a focus for some ethnographers and theorists. Ortner defines ritual as a “culturally formalized event that the people themselves see as embodying in some way the essence of their culture, as dramatizing the basic myths and visions of reality, the basic values and moral truths, upon which they feel their world rests” (1978:1). She is interested in what ritual does but is dissatisfied with the purely functional approach, seeing it as limited in what it can tell the researcher. Ritual does address problems, works upon the problems, and comes up with solutions. However, Ortner is also interested in where the problem is located and uses an example from her fieldwork with the Sherpas: “the Sherpa rite of atonement, for example, utilizes symbols of the family, and we must ask why a sense of sin is culturally tied to, and takes meaning from, family organization (and vice versa)” (1978:3). For Ortner, “the symbols of the rituals, in other words, lead us toward discovery of structural conflict, contradiction, and stress in the wider social and cultural world” (1978:3). The importance of symbols and meaning is key to Ortner’s analysis of ritual. In her essay summarizing theory in anthropology, Ortner comments that Turner and symbolic anthropologists (like Geertz) had much in common, but that Turnerians added an important dimension to the field:

They investigated in much more detail than Geertz, Schneider, *et al*, the “effectiveness of symbols,” the question of how symbols actually do what all symbolic anthropologists claim they do: “operate as active forces in the social process.” [1984:131]

### **Invented ritual**

Myerhoff and Moore, students of Turner’s, are interested in secular ritual, the role of belief in ritual, and the made-up quality of some ritual activities. I will look at their work in turn. Myerhoff’s definition of ritual is similar to Turner’s: “Ritual is an act or actions intentionally conducted by a group of people employing one or more symbols in a repetitive, formal, precise, highly stylized fashion” (1977, p. 199). Like Turner (and Jean Comaroff in *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*), she describes the physiological aspects of ritual: “rituals persuade the body first” (ibid). The physical context of the ritual act and how its elements play upon the senses is a key element of ritual performance as the repetitive, predictable movements and body postures create the “set-apart” experience for the actors. The physiological aspects of ritual play out in both secular and religious ritual. Myerhoff seems unwilling to mark a sharp boundary between secular and religious ritual in her own work, instead exploring the innovative quality of made-up ritual that may have religious components, or not.

Another key element of ritual performance is the willingness of participants to suspend critical, analytical thought. The fiction of ritual, its made-up nature, is illustrated by Myerhoff in her description of a special graduation ceremony.

While doing fieldwork in a Senior Citizens Center that serves an immigrant Jewish community, she observes the creation and playing out of a ritual. Some of the elderly Jews have taken part in a Yiddish History class and the graduation ceremony will mark the completion of the course. The teacher “invented a ceremony that combined an American graduation with the traditional, Eastern European Jewish *siyum*; it was, he assured everyone, going to be ‘absolutely unique’” (1979:84). “Unique” is not a term that is typically associated with a discussion of ritual yet Myerhoff argues that a one-time, unique event can be a ritual. It is not without danger

because when we are not convinced by a ritual we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up, thence on to the paralyzing realization that we have made up all our truths; our ceremonies, our most precious conceptions and convictions...[1979:86]

Myerhoff argues that “Not all the participants involved need to be equally convinced or equally moved” (1977:222). The success of the ritual performance depends upon it being sufficiently engaging for all participants. In improvising a new ritual, the creators may draw upon older traditions and rituals, as the Yiddish History teacher did at the Senior Citizens Center. Certain aspects may be altered to fit circumstances, as the elderly graduates deciding against a formal procession for fear that someone would stumble. Myerhoff is not arguing for the necessity of belief among ritual participants, but rather for the temporary secession of disbelief. Or, at the least, a pretense of belief that is demonstrated

by not disrupting the ritual performance with expressions of disbelief or discontent.

Moore, another of Turner's students, is interested in the paradox she sees in concepts of ritual: stability and continuity contrasted with maneuverability and interpretability. Rather than choosing one of the poles or abandoning the concept as unusable, she proposes viewing ritual as a social process, specifically "in terms of the interrelationship of three components: the processes of *regularization*, the processes of *situational adjustment*, and the factor of *indeterminacy* (1979:219). She argues that "if the assumption is made that in some underlying and basic sense social reality is fluid and indeterminate, and that it is transformed into something more fixed through regularizing processes, yet can never entirely or completely lose all of its indeterminacy, a great range of variability can be accounted for" (1979:237). Myerhoff's work on ritual would fit well into the analytical framework proposed by Moore, which attempts to account for paradox of ritual. The graduation ceremony described by Myerhoff has been 'regularized' by borrowing from accepted ritual practices, like high school graduations. There have been necessary 'situational adjustments' stemming from the age and ethnicity of the graduates and their membership in the Senior Citizens Center. The 'indeterminacy' of the entire ritual, its made-up nature, has the dual effect of causing some participants to scoff at it while allowing the ceremony to be shaped by the participants as well. Will this special graduation ceremony take place again; will it become a stable ritual for the member of the Senior Citizens Center? It is not outside the realm of possibility.

## **Ritual as social control**

According to Catherine Bell, Durkheim's model influences many writers/theorists who have an interest in ritual. According to Bell, their work with ritual usually falls into one of the following "four influential theses concerning ritual as a means of social control: the social solidarity thesis, the channeling of conflict thesis, the repression thesis, and the definition of reality thesis (1992:171).

**Social solidarity thesis:** Durkheim's work is an example of the first thesis as it emphasizes ritual and its shared symbols as tools that enhance social solidarity, what he describes as the moral community. Members of moral community can readily identify and categorize objects, places, and activities as sacred or profane as well as identifying those who share or do not share these beliefs. Belief and ritual are essentially intertwined.

**Channeling of conflict thesis:** The second thesis of ritual as social control is channeling of conflict, labeled thus by Bell to describe the idea of ritual as a safety valve in society. Victor Turner describes ritual performances as the culturally appropriate and effective means of expressing tensions and discontent (1967). Of interest are rituals that reverse the "natural order" of a group or society (rituals of inversion), with the oppressed segments of society ritually elevated about their "normal" station or being allowed to act disrespectfully to their "betters." Turner writes

structural underlings may well seek, in their liminality, deeper involvement in a structure that, though fantastic and simulacral only, nevertheless

enables them to experience for a legitimated while a different kind of 'release' from a different kind of lot. Now they can lord it, and "strut and stare and a' that," and very frequently the targets of their blows and abuse are the very persons whom they must normally defer to and obey.

[1969:201]

Kertzer also writes about "pent-up tensions that require periodic release" (1988:73) but seems to balance between the first (social solidarity) and second (channeling of conflict) theses of ritual as social control:

The very fact that people spend most of their lives in a hierarchically ordered society generates pent-up tensions that require periodic release. People must somehow express their unity with other, and this takes place through rituals. [1988:73]

Unlike Durkheim, Kertzer's understanding of ritual is not limited to religion and his discussions of nation and other political units involve secular rituals such as parades and singing anthems. The purpose of these secular rituals, however, is the same: enhancing solidarity and channeling conflict.

Repression thesis: Other theorists have developed a concept of rituals that fall into Bell's third thesis. Ritual is an aspect of culture that serves to control the violence of nature and the violence that is within people (Bell 1992:173). According to Bell, this thesis has lost favor due to its psychological basis that impoverishes an exploration of the social and cultural contexts of ritual. I was

unable to find any specific examples in my readings for this thesis but am not convinced that this thesis no longer has proponents. Perhaps the repression aspect has been subsumed into the concept of channeled aggression and violence.

Definition of reality thesis: For proponents of the fourth thesis of ritual as social control, ritual is a model of social norms being acted out to assist with the internalization of those norms. Clifford Geertz, like Turner, describes ritual as a performance but his interest is in how ritual “defines” social norms, how ritual defines reality:

But meanings can only be “stored in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent. Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it.

[1973:127]

Michelle Rosaldo’s work with the Ilongot and her analysis of the ritual of headhunting is another example of this thesis. For the Ilongot, headhunting defined their reality in many ways and the curtailing (by law) of this practice created a sense of heartsickness or “heavy heart” (*ligit*), perhaps akin to Durkheim’s anomie. Rosaldo explains:



Order in Ilongot life does not exist in “structures” bestowed mythically by ancestors or gods, in social rules or strict taboos, or in a firm sense of tradition. Nor can we say that *liget* consistently order present life, because, as Ilongots are well to well aware, it can as easily make for strain. A more appropriate sort of claim is that emotionally oriented images and themes maintain for Ilongots a sense of consistency in things that people do, thereby permitting them to see over time that people act in more or less familiar ways for more or less well-known reason. And these reasons, reflected in (as they are patterned by) the organization of their social world, lend an aura of continuity and coherence to the activities that they, in turn, explain. [1980:27]

One can see Geertz's influence on Rosaldo's interpretations and her focus on the symbolic meaning of headhunting and its rituals for the Ilongot as well as on the work referred to earlier by Ortner. I would now like to examine a different way of looking at ritual, that of looking at ritual as a strategy: ritualization.

### **Ritualization as strategy**

Almost twenty years ago, Marcus and Fischer noted that

The authority of 'grand theory' styles seem suspended for the moment in favor of a close consideration of such issues as contextuality, the meaning of social life to those who enact it, and the explanation of exceptions and indeterminants rather than regularities in phenomena observed. [1986:8]

Catherine Bell argues that it is time to put aside some of these grand theories of ritual and instead focus on the context of ritual and its role in everyday life. The focus should shift from ritual to ritualization, from an analysis of the action of ritual to an analysis of the strategy of ritualization:

...ritualization is a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship. This is not a relationship in which one social group has absolute control over another, but one that simultaneously involves both consent and resistance, misunderstanding and appropriation. [Bell 1992:8]

This is not a new theory of ritual, according to Bell:

What I have attempted to do is forge a framework for reanalyzing the types of activities usually understood as ritual.... The framework proposed here focuses, therefore, on the generation of what we call ritual as a way of acting, namely, the ritualization of activity. [1992:219]

Ritualization as a strategy does not imply total control; nor does it imply belief. "Ritualized practices, of necessity, require the external consent of participants while simultaneously tolerating a fair degree of internal resistance. As such they do not function as an instrument of heavy-handed social control" (Bell 1992:221). As to the question of belief in ritual, Bell notes that

...the traditional association of belief and ritual is also challenged by growing evidence that most symbolic action, even the basic symbols of a community's ritual life, can be very unclear to participants or interpreted by them in very dissimilar ways. [1992:183]

By putting the focus on ritual as strategy, Bell allows us to see both the ritual specialists and the participants as being active players, as being capable of manipulation and strategizing.

Dirks, in his essay "Ritual and Resistance: Subversion as a Social Fact", states, "Ritual is a term that sanctifies and marks off a space and a time of special significance. Ritual may be a part of everyday life, but it is fundamentally opposed to 'the everyday'" (1992:214). Dirks criticizes anthropology and history for making assumptions about ritual, particularly concerning forms of everyday resistance. Rather than looking for a "new arena where resistance takes place", he urges researchers to look at long-standing expressions of everyday resistance, such as rituals. The assumptions about ritual that are exposed are its role as a form of social control and nothing else. In this short essay, Dirks describes village festivals that can have significant ritual power, even if they do not occur, to illustrate: "what I might mean by the subversive nature of ritual practice and discourse" (1992:236).

Bourdieu, in developing the idea of praxis, (what Ortner refers to as "a new key symbol of theoretical orientation (1984:127), focuses on the everyday and what he calls *habitus*. Bourdieu defines *habitus* as a set of durable

predispositions that have been structured by the individual actor's lifeworld. This is not an external set of rules but rather is an unquestioned sense of what one should do. So everyday practice is made up of mostly unconscious behaviors, and similarities of lifeworld will create similarities in *habitus* among members of the same social group. This gives the impression of actors behaving like cultural automatons, yet Bourdieu argues that the actor does make choices, does express intentionality, and does use ritual strategically: "But even the most strictly ritualized exchanges, in which all the moments of the action, and their unfolding, are rigorously foreseen, have room for strategies...(1977:15). He uses examples, such as gift giving, and wedding and marriage negotiations, to illustrate the role of the individual actors in making strategic ritual decisions. For Bourdieu, ritualization is a form of everyday resistance.

Dirks defines ritual as being "fundamentally opposed to the 'everyday'". I do not believe that this contradicts Bourdieu and other theorists situating ritual in the strategizing of the everyday. Rather, I believe that Dirks is contrasting the everyday of praxis with the everyday of ordinary language. None of the theorists argues that ritual is set apart. It is this aspect of ritual that is recognized and manipulated by Bourdieu's actors, often in the context of everyday activities.

In the introduction to *Modernity and Its Malcontents*, Jean and John Comaroff are emphatic that we should treat "ritual as an integral dimension of everyday existence" and "dispense with the old Eurocentric dichotomy between the sacred and the profane" (1993:xviii). They critique Turner's approach to ritual; he is seen as falling short due to the rigidity of his definition of ritual:

“Ritual is not here conceived as something that may actively refigure meanings in line with changing perceptions of the universe” (1993:xxi). Ritual, for the Comaroffs, must be flexible and creative, responsive to change, malleable in the hands of “ritual innovators.” Jean Comaroff’s work in southern Africa illustrates ritualization: “In a study of the Tshidi of South Africa, Jean Comaroff contrasts the ritual construction of personhood in precolonial ritual life with the very different form of personhood ritually constructed in postcolonial Zionist churches” (Bell 1992:97). Postcolonial rituals are syncretic, accepting “outside” commodities while creating rituals to “reform” the goods, making them acceptable for use. The Comaroffs note the power of syncretic rituals: “(These new signs and techniques) often come to be potent...they tend to become the currency of ritual that seeks both to preserve endangered values and to give birth to new possibilities” (1993:xxii).

While conducting fieldwork among female ritual leaders in Australia, Dussart soon realized that “what mattered to them was not postfeminist theory or competing models of kin organization, but ‘business,’ the planning and performance of ritual” (2000:14). She “began to develop insights into ritual as a currency of knowledge” (2000:4), or, as Bell would put it, ritualization as strategy. Dussart describes stages of ritual activity among the Warlpiri, from male-performed private rites in the 1940s to the current female-performed public rites. Her interest piqued by the gender shift, Dussart investigated further but found this change was relatively unimportant to the Warlpiri. Male and female informants explained that men were still closely involved with the ritual activities

but could not be trusted not to let secret knowledge slip out since they tended to drink alcohol more readily and more heavily than the women did. Kinship supercedes gender in Warlpiri ritual, with kin groups in various settlements “owning” certain rituals and strategizing how to increase their group’s prestige through ritual performance. Dussart is careful to provide a context for the historic stages of Warlpiri ritual activity, and descriptions of the strategies and negotiations surrounding each stage.

The question of ritual as secular versus religious has not been of concern in my work. Like Moore and Myerhoff, I am more interested in the fluidity and indeterminacy of ritual. While I do not entirely reject the idea of ritual as social control, my fieldwork observations revealed the ineffectiveness of rituals as social control in that particular context. The Soo Tribe is made up of factions that do not necessarily have a shared belief system that would make ritual social control effective. The factions, however, make liberal use of ritual to attempt to influence others and to express aspects of their identity. Bell’s ritualization as strategy is a better fit as it allows me to examine the purpose behind the rituals rather than just describing the often made-up ceremonies and rites performed by the various factions.

Like Dussart, I am interested in what the strategies are behind ritual performances and in the role of the ritual specialist. For some factions, the strategies behind ritual activities seem more overt than in others. Does this mean that some factions are not practicing ritualization or that I was not asking

the right questions? What is the role of the ritual specialist in the Soo Tribe and who are these specialists?

The invention of tradition, an important component of ritualization, is not limited to Native American cultures. Hobsbawm and Ranger describe the invention of tradition in various eras and societies, including Great Britain in the 1930s, and western European countries at the turn of the century. Hobsbawm defines the phenomena thus:

“Invented tradition” is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. [1992:1]

The inventors of tradition do so with particular goals in mind. Perhaps they seek to inspire confidence in a new institution or maybe the goal is to enhance the prestige of a new activity or sport. Whatever the precise goal, it is clear that ritual and symbols are being used strategically in an attempt to influence others.

This dissertation is an analysis and description of ritualization in the Soo Tribe. I will examine ritualization by the various tribal factions and examine the various and sometimes opposing goals behind the strategic use of ritual.

### CHAPTER III

#### BACKGROUND OF RESEARCH POPULATION

##### Pre-contact period

What we know about the Ojibwas prior to European contact comes from a variety of sources: Ojibwa oral history and stories, archaeological research, ethnohistories, and accounts written by the first Europeans to contact them (of particular note are *The Jesuit Relations and allied documents, 1610-1791*). As is the case with many indigenous peoples, nomenclature is somewhat problematic. This same people have been called Ojibwas (spelled variously), Chippewas, and Saulteaux or Saulteurs. They refer to themselves as *Anishinabeg*, meaning “the people” or “human beings.” According to a modern Ojibwa dictionary (Rhodes 1993), the word Anishinabe has come to mean “Indian person” specifically, probably reflecting the need to differentiate oneself from non-Indians (Rhodes 1993:20). I will refer to them as the Ojibwas except when referring to a specific group.

According to Danziger, the Ojibwas were given this name by their neighbors, referring to “those who make pictographs” or *o-jib-i-weg* (1979:7). The British pronounced this name Chippewa, the French, Ojibwa. In contemporary times, Americans typically use Chippewa and Canadians prefer Ojibwa. The pictographs referred to are engraved birch bark rolls that record Ojibwa migration from the Atlantic coast to the Great Lakes. Cleland notes that



Assuming a historical migration of many, many generations, it would be logical to think that the makers of the charts, relying on the legends of the migration itself, would have more detailed knowledge of the more recent parts of the journey, that is, the western part (1992:8).

Oral tradition and stories support the sometimes vague geographic references in the migration charts, placing the Ojibwas in the east in the past and moving west to the Great Lakes area perhaps in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. The move west was not uneventful as they took over territory occupied by the Santee Sioux in Minnesota and became the largest, most influential force between the Iroquois Confederacy and the various Sioux tribes. The Ottawas (Odawas) and the Potawatomis, having traveled west with the closely related Ojibwas, went their separate ways when the group arrived in what is now Michigan. They maintained a loose relationship called “the three fires” (Danziger 1979:7), an association that exists today.

The French used the name Saulteaux, referring to the traditional gathering place of the Ojibwas, the rapids of the St. Mary's River that connects Lake Superior and Lake Huron. The French named this feature Sault (which means “falling water” in French) Ste. Marie and the cities that eventually grew on the Canadian and American sides of the river are still known by this name. Locals in both countries anglicized the pronunciation and call their cities “the Soo”, pronounced “sue”. Not surprisingly, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa

Indians is known as the Soo Tribe, which does cause some confusion since it sounds the same as the Sioux Tribe! I will refer to this group as the Soo Tribe.

Ojibwas called the rapids in the St. Mary's River *Bahweting* which means "rushing water". Many Indians gathered at Bahweting in the summer and fall for the fish harvest.

Sault Ste. Marie ...during the summer months was a gathering place for members of many groups who normally lived to the north and south, more or less close congeners of the local people. These were variously Potawatomi, Cree, and Algonquin, and perhaps the Siouan-speaking Winnebago were occasional visitors as well. Such groups, swelling the summer population of the Sault to well over 1000, came to feast on whitefish which were abundant in the rapids of the St. Mary's. They were often described as refugees from warfare, and also, as in the case of those who spent the winter in the inhospitable region of the Canadian Shield to the north, from periodic famine. [Hickerson 1970:39-40]

In addition to the abundant fish, game animals and birds could be hunted in the surrounding forests.

This gathering gave young people an opportunity to find mates (they practiced family and clan exogamy and were patrilineal, in anthropological terms). Others renewed acquaintances and visited with kinsmen. Cleland notes that "Clanship among the northern *Anishinabeg* did not extend much beyond the function of regulating marriage, although it is true that some interclan politics

were linked to clan mythology" (Cleland 1992:50). The clan structure did serve to extend greatly an individual's kin circle, an arrangement that greatly enhanced the survival of both individuals and families through sharing of resources such as food and shelter. The people of the Soo, due to this long practice of gathering at Bahweting, came to represent a mixed population, a situation that may have complicated their journey toward federal recognition as a tribe in contemporary times. Hickerson, an ethnohistorian, describes the situation:

The Saulteur themselves, from earliest proto-historic times a community that had not particular totemic or clan organization, apparently comprised an amalgam of members of many clans; they existed, perhaps in some sense, as a symbol of the unity based on common language, culture, and traditions of all of them. In socioeconomic terms, the Saulteur proper formed the nuclear settlement for annual ceremonies, trade, renewal of alliances, and, to some extent, fishing, and this status may well have reached back to aboriginal times. [1970:45]

A semi-nomadic people, the Ojibwas moved through the Great Lakes region utilizing the natural resources available seasonally. Danziger notes that

efficient transportation was vital to the survival of the Chippewa family, which, in quest of food, made a yearly circuit of its fishing and hunting grounds, wild rice field, berry patches, and sugar bush. A perfect partnership of form and function for the lake country, the graceful birch-

bark canoe could be portaged easily across the countless watersheds and was even capable of voyages on the open waters of Kitchigami. [1979:10]

Each family was self-sufficient, constructing canoes, fishnets, snowshoes, animal traps, mats, clothing and footwear, wigwams, and tanning hides, drying fish, and so on. During the winter, families went their separate ways, making camp in relatively isolated surroundings. This practice put the least strain on reduced resources available during the cold winter months. Summer camps tended to be larger and, as noted above, larger groups would gather during the warmer months for specific food gathering purposes. Private ownership of land was not practiced but families did have customary rights to certain areas, such as fishing and hunting grounds, sugar bushes, and other important food sources (Danziger 1979: 11).

Religious and spiritual beliefs and practices varied somewhat among Ojibwas. Some believed that after death one's soul remained on earth to assist relatives while others believed that the souls of worthy individuals went to a paradise while the less worthy suffered in darkness (Danziger 1979:16). The Ojibwas and several other Great Lakes tribes "celebrated an annual Feast of the Dead" during which the remains of those who died during the previous year were "resurrected" and reinterred in a common grave (Danziger 1979:16). The celebration included feasting, dancing, and games of skill but, according to Danziger, was given up by the Ojibwas under pressure from the French. My fieldwork revealed that the practice, in a modified form, still exists as the Ghost

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Supper. Informants assured me that their family has “always” held Ghost Suppers on an annual basis. The influence of Christianity is clear in the choice of All Souls’ Day (November 1) as the usual date of the ceremony. Remains are not disinterred and reinterred but rather people gather to remember those who have died in the previous year, to tell (often amusing) stories about the departed, and all who have died in the past are “fed” a ritual meal. For family members in mourning, the Ghost Supper may signal an end to the formal mourning period.

The ghosts of deceased relatives were part of a pantheon of spirits that inhabited the world of the Ojibwas. The spirits were arranged roughly in a hierarchy, with the Creator or *Gitchimanido* delegating worldly concerns to lesser *manidog*. Some *manidog* took the shape of thunderbirds that controlled the weather and kept the frightening underwater panther, *Michipishew*, from harming people on or near the Great Lakes. Another dangerous spirit was the *Windigo*, known to roam the woods searching for people to eat. Many Ojibwas sought protective spirit helpers by fasting and undergoing privation. Visions and dreams had great significance and could influence an Ojibwa’s decision-making. The sun and moon and even the seasons were anthropomorphized, with the sun being a man and the moon being his wife. Gifts to the spirits could include one or all of the four sacred plants: tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar. Ojibwas considered certain areas, such as Mackinaw Island, places of great power that may be the homes of *manidog*.

The only organized religious group among the Ojibwas, the Grand Medicine Society or *Midewiwin*, has been the object of controversy among

anthropologists, ethnohistorians, and many Great Lakes Indians. The focus of the controversy specifically revolves around the antiquity of the medicine society. Did it originate pre-contact, as Danziger and most Ojibwas argue, or is it a nativistic movement in response to contact, as Hickerson contends? While it is not the purpose of this dissertation to review the complex arguments made by both sides, I will reveal my own bias toward the pre-contact origin, based in part on evidence of ritual continuity I found among the Ojibwas. This stance is further strengthened by evidence cited in Jennifer Brown and Laura Peers in "The Chippewa and their Neighbors: A Critical Review", an afterword added to a recent reprint of Hickerson's text, *The Chippewa and their Neighbors*, originally printed in 1970. Brown and Peers comment on several of Hickerson's points and describe new evidence for pre-contact existence of the medicine society, such as a Midewiwin scroll carbon-dated to the protohistoric age (1988:142).

The Midewiwin was (and continues to be) a hierarchical organization with a Mide priesthood. Ceremonies involved the movement of initiates through the degrees of the society, an expensive process involving the sacrifice of time and material goods. Early observers described the ritual "killing" and "resurrection" of initiates, with foreign objects shot or blown into their bodies, then miraculously extracted. Cleland has a slightly different perspective on this practice and describes this as "the shooting of power into the body of the initiate" (1992:183). As a medicine society, the Midewiwin practiced curing rituals for patients and had knowledge of herbal medicine. The Grand Medicine Society was widespread, at

least during the early contact period, but not all Ojibwas participated directly in their ceremonies.

### **Early contact period**

The first contact between Europeans and Ojibwas took place in 1634 when a young French adventurer, Jean Nicolet, arrived with several Ottawa guides. The Ojibwas had heard of these mysterious people, the *Wemitiigoji* or Frenchmen, who appeared to be dead (due to their pallor). After this initial meeting, the first large-scale encounter in the Ojibwas' territories came in 1641 when a group of Jesuits ("blackrobes") was invited to visit. Cleland notes that while many nations eventually interacted with and influenced the Ojibwas,

it was the French who made the first, most profound, and most lasting impact. To this day, many native Americans bear French names, have French genes, and often greet each other with the Algonquianized French term *boo-zhoo* ("bon jour"). [1992:75]

The Jesuits and other Catholic missionaries immediately sought to repress what they considered pagan and sinful practices. They attempted to eliminate the Ojibwas' beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies, and the Midewiwin. Rapid economic change in the form of trade and exposure to European goods accompanied the imposition of the Christian hegemony. The Ojibwas more readily embraced economic changes, especially in the form of improved technologies, while they continued to resist attempts to change their belief systems.



The trade period was highly disruptive to the Ojibwas in Sault Ste. Marie. This area was attractive to the French and later the British and the Americans for many of the same reasons it was popular with the Indians. There was an abundance of food and the St. Mary's River was an important conduit for the water travel so critical during the 1600s to the early 1900s. As a traditional gathering place of Indians, the Soo was also important to traders who needed fur trappers. The concept of trade was not new to the Ojibwas; there was a long history of trade among North American peoples that moved desirable goods sometimes thousands of miles to eager consumers. The fur trade was different in a number of important ways.

One difference was the way the traders conducted business on credit. This was unfamiliar and the Ojibwas quickly became trapped in a system in which they never could break even, much less come out ahead. The trader controlled the both sides of the market; he set the price on his trade goods and set the price on the furs he bought from the Ojibwas. The trade goods were very attractive to the Ojibwas and included metal goods, such as knives and iron kettles, sturdy and colorful fabrics, beads that quickly replaced the use of porcupine quills for decoration, and certain foodstuffs such as flour, salt pork, and sugar. Guns were highly sought after and the need for ammunition seemed never ending. In a relatively short period, many Ojibwas were no longer part of self-sufficient family or band units but were indebted to and dependent upon traders.

Another differentiating aspect of the fur trade was the way in which it transformed the relationship between the Ojibwas and their environment. In the pre-contact period, overhunting a particular area or a particular species could mean disaster for the Ojibwas. The semi-nomadic nature of their lives was in part a response to the need to preserve their food sources over time. A balance must be preserved or all would suffer. The fur trade confounded this relationship in a number of ways. First, the Ojibwas were less willing to move away from the trading post and the new settlement. The goods they sought were there and their debt required they return to the trading post periodically. The region around the settlement was soon overhunted and the Ojibwas must travel greater distances. Eventually, they began to ignore the customary hunting ground rights of other Ojibwas, which created tension and conflict.

Secondly, the traders wanted certain species of fur-bearing animals, primarily beaver and bear. Both were traditionally food sources for the Ojibwas but they now began to harvest these species solely for their fur and to rely on traded foodstuffs instead. Over time, the important furbearing animals were all but wiped out and many Ojibwas starved. Starvation had been a periodic problem in their lives in pre-contact, but this type of famine was brought about by a major disruption in their foraging subsistence pattern. The threat of starvation led them to buy more food on credit at the trading post, which forced them to kill more fur-bearing animals to repay their debt. The cycle was relentless.

Calvin Martin argues that disease also played a role in the willingness of Ojibwas and other tribes to overexploit resources after contact with whites

(1978). Many communities were devastated by disease and demoralized by the mysterious origins of the diseases and their healers' inability to cure them.

These tribes had a history blaming animals for many illnesses and they felt betrayed when so many of their people began to die. The compact of mutual esteem and cooperation between humans and nature was undermined and the fur trade provided a mechanism for the Ojibwas and others to wage a war of revenge on their perceived enemies. This theory provides a compelling explanation for the rapid loss of traditional sanctions preventing the overexploitation and wasting of natural resources.

Another complication to the fur trade was the introduction of alcohol and its incorporation into the trading system. There is no evidence that Ojibwas produced or were familiar with intoxicating substances prior to contact with Europeans. Therefore, they had no cultural norms to guide them and the role models they might have turned to among the Europeans were probably not the best, being rough adventurers, soldiers, and traders. The effect of alcohol on the Ojibwas was profound. Their primary source was the trading post where some individuals would trade their furs for alcohol instead of food. The traditional systems of sharing and responsibility to one's kin were damaged and almost destroyed during this period and social control mechanisms broke down. White describes the effect of alcohol on the Choctaw, a southern woodland tribe also engaged in the fur trade. We can infer that alcohol had a similar effect on the Ojibwas.

Liquor not only introduced a commodity that the Choctaws could be induced to trade for in almost infinite quantities, it also reduced the chances that any order could be maintained in the hunt. The best evidence for this is indirect: the breakdown of social order in the villages. Like most woodland peoples, the Choctaws at contact had virtually no problem with violence within their towns... In 1777 one chief claimed the liquor trade had cost the lives of 1,000 Choctaws in eighteen months. If liquor could so thoroughly demolish the restraints that kept peace within the nation, if men, when drunk or seeking drink, men murdered each other and thereby sentenced themselves or their relatives to virtually certain death at the hands of their victim's *iksa*, then it is unlikely that these same men restrained themselves from overhunting when seeking deer to trade for liquor. [White 1983:85-86]

Whether the key factor was illness or alcohol, it is certain that the fur trade was unlike the trading networks that existed pre-contact and the differences were devastating.

The collapse of the fur trade left the Ojibwas impoverished. Hickerson notes that the observers in the second half of the seventeenth century recorded that "the Saulteur not only engaged in the fur trade, but had come to rely upon it for their very existence, acting both as trappers and as middlemen to tribes which had less access to trading entrepôts" (1970:39). Trading companies had come

and gone, governments had come and gone, and each was as exploitative as the last. Always the underlying goal was the “civilization” of the Ojibwas.

Unlike many other tribes, the Ojibwas of Michigan were not affected by the U.S. government’s removal policy of 1830. The government came to realize that removing groups of Indians was a very expensive and increasingly unpopular practice. It was also running out of land to warehouse the removed Indians as more and more settlers moved west. Some bands and tribes were allowed to remain in their traditional regions but were to be assimilated. This so-called “civilization policy” was based on the concept of cultural evolution. Indians could leave their “primitive” ways behind and evolve to the proper level. When this happened, they would be assimilated into mainstream society and eventually disappear as a separate people. “To nineteenth century Americans, the magic formula for transformation involved teaching Indians to read, write, believe in Christ, and use modern agricultural methods to farm land that they owned as individuals” (Cleland 1992:202).

George Manypenny, the second commissioner of the Indian Department (after its transfer from the War Department to the Department of the Interior), was deeply committed to the idea of civilizing the Indian. The key to this process was private landownership. He negotiated more than fifty treaties during his tenure, all of which stressed the allotment of communally held tribal lands to individual tribal members and families. The General Allotment Act (Dawes Severalty Act) of 1887 was the most far-reaching result of this drive to assimilate Indians by transforming them into land-owning farmers (Prucha 1994:319). Some Ojibwas

and white farmers attempted farming in the Upper Peninsula prior to the Allotment Act with little success (Danziger 1979:97). The land was rocky and poor, the growing season short, and markets for the crops were far away. In general, Ojibwa men considered working with the soil “women’s work”. Even when they were willing, lack of knowledge and equipment were serious problems. They demanded provisions to survive until the first crops matured and asked for assistance in clearing the land.

The allotment process proved to be disastrous for the Ojibwas. In some cases, people who had no right to tribal land faked their credentials or bribed the Indian agent into giving them title to plots of land. Settlers either squatted on allotted land illegitimately, or claimed the land on the basis that it was “abandoned”. Much land was lost in this manner as some Ojibwa families continued to follow the seasonal rounds of their ancestors. It also became possible for Ojibwas to sell their allotments, which many did. In some cases, they did not understand the papers they were signing; in other cases, the choice was to sell or to starve. Still others gave away their allotments for alcohol.

The clearing of the land led to the Bureau of Indian Affairs selling timber contracts to outside companies. BIA control of this important resource increased over time, as Danziger notes,

beginning in the 1890’s, because some Indians squandered their proceeds on whiskey, trinkets, and gambling, the BIA demanded that the Indians spend the money for permanent improvements on each allotment

– such as construction of a house or pulling stumps in preparation for planting. [1979:101]

The allotment policy eventually resulted in checkerboard reservations in many Ojibwa communities. In the Soo, the situation was dire as there was no reservation land set aside for the Ojibwas and they were soon pushed back from the desirable riverside locations to the swampland no one else wanted.

In the late 1600's, Jesuit missionaries had very different goals for the Ojibwas. They sought

to preserve the pine forests and native inhabitants in their rustic seventeenth century state and to Christianize the Indians. Civilization and assimilation policies always seemed to lead to debauchery with liquor and white men's vices and to exploitation by unscrupulous traders. [Danziger 1979:29]

This attitude was patronizing, of course, but their resistance to introducing the Ojibwas to French language and culture had an unexpected benefit for later scholars. In their zeal to convert the Ojibwas while preserving their "Innocence", the Jesuits paid attention to the customs of the Ojibwas and added these records to what are now *The Jesuit Relations and allied documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1760*. The Jesuits, followed later by another order, the Recollets, also began compiling a lexicon of the Indian languages of the region, in their efforts to learn the local dialects. In

1868, Frederic Baraga moved to the Soo after being appointed the first bishop for the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. He was fluent in Ottawa and Ojibwa and had already published the first Ojibwa dictionary. The second edition was published in two parts in 1878 and 1880 (Nichols 1992:ix) and continues to be an important resource for scholars.

Despite their good intentions, the missionaries were unable to protect the Ojibwas from the corrupting influences of the French, and later the British and the Americans. Many Ojibwas not only learned to speak French but English as well. They interacted freely with the newcomers and many Ojibwa women married Frenchmen or just produced children with them. The number of mixed blood people steadily grew. The missionaries tried to forbid polygynous marriages, which only the most successful Ojibwa man could afford. Premarital sex, extramarital sex, so-called "bush marriages" (unions without the blessing of the Church), all were forbidden, albeit unsuccessfully for the most part. Eventually, however, the Christian influence was powerful enough to push Ojibwa ceremonies, dances, rituals, and drumming into hiding. It is probable that much knowledge was lost during this time, both from the effects of suppression and conversion and from the loss of life incurred from unfamiliar diseases.

Catholic and Methodist missionaries competed for the souls of the Ojibwas, building churches and schools in areas that drew Indians, such as Bahweting. At the schools, the curriculum consisted of useful trades for the boys and domestic skills for the girls as well as religious indoctrination. The missionaries often despaired at the high rate of absenteeism, as parents did not



force their children to go to school and often took them along on trips to gather food or visit relatives (Danziger 1979:106). Ojibwas did not want their children to live away from home and met a shift from day schools to church-run boarding schools with great resistance.

The Treaty of Detroit, 1855, provided for the creation of a large-scale public education system for Indian children in Michigan. The church-run system was abandoned, in part because its funding was piecemeal and unreliable and the teaching staff was often inadequately trained. The federal government ran the new system in consultation with the Ojibwas and Ottawas (Cleland 1992:244). Its success can be measured by the number of non-Indian children enrolled, in preference to local public schools, and a high rate of bilingualism among Michigan Indians by 1880 (Cleland 1992:244). Public opinion eventually turned against the day schools because it was believed that the children's continued contact with their parents' "primitive" surroundings undid the civilizing influence of education. Church- and government-run boarding schools again came into vogue, with three operating in Michigan. Cleland notes that

in 1887, the government returned to the boarding school system and, thus, ushered in a program of ethnocide that had a profound impact on Indian culture. In twenty-five years, the boarding schools accomplished what armed force, starvation, disease, loss of land, and Christianity could not - a major and irreversible disruption of Indian culture. It also effectively prepared Indian young people, not for assimilation into middle-class America, but as laborers in American fields and factories. [1992:225]

In the schools, students were seldom allowed visits home, often for years on end. Their native clothing was removed, their hair was cut, and they were forbidden to speak their language or practice their religion. Some former students have surprisingly fond memories of their time in boarding school - "Many were happy for the relief the school provided from the crushing poverty of the reservations, and all remembered the sense of autonomy and self-esteem it built in the midst of oppression" (Cleland 1992:247-248).

Between 1778 and 1869, the U.S. government signed more than 350 treaties with Native American tribes (Prucha 1994). Several were signed with the Ojibwas of the Sault Ste. Marie region. According to Prucha, there is some confusion about the meaning of the word "treaty".

The current prevailing sense is a contract between two or more states, relating to peace, alliance, commerce, or other international relations, and also, the document embodying such a contract, formally signed by plenipotentiaries appointed by the government of each state. But in the colonial and early national periods of United States history the term also had an alternate meaning, now considered rare or obsolete, that was widely used; a "treaty" in that sense was the "act of negotiating," the discussion aimed at adjustment of difference or the reaching of an agreement, and by extension the meeting itself at which such negotiations took place. [1994:24-25]

This difference may explain why the U.S. government violated treaties with Indian peoples again and again, while honoring treaties with governments outside the U.S. Several treaties were entered into with the Ojibwas but it is often difficult to determine which groups of Ojibwas were specifically included in the treaties. The government tended to create political entities to negotiate with, political entities that had no traditional existence or standing in the communities. In the treaties of 1837, 1842, and 1854, Ojibwas ceded great tracts of land in the Lake Superior region. In return, they were given annuity goods and the use of carpenters, farmers and teachers for a fixed number of years while they learned to be "civilized". A large percentage of the cash payment for their land was earmarked for trader debts, whose bills were often padded. George Cornell notes

the demand for Anishnabeg lands was heightened by the fact that the British presence in Michigan was nullified after the War of 1812, and the territorial government, with the cooperation of the United States, could manipulate the Anishnabeg with no fear of military reprisals from foreign powers who would ally themselves with Great Lakes Indian populations. [1986:95]

In addition to giving up much of their land, some Ojibwa bands agreed to live on bounded reservations. The personnel provided in accordance with the treaty agreement also lived on the reservation and usually built structures to do their work. Ojibwas often demanded teachers and schools when negotiating and

these would be located nearby. The reservation land was often located in the least desirable section of their traditional territory as the government sought the best farmland and timberland for settlers. Other treaties, such as the Ottawa-Chippewa treaty of July 31, 1855, "left the Indians of western lower Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula scattered" (Cleland 1992:237). In Sault Ste. Marie, missionary-run schools were supported with treaty monies. In many treaties, Ojibwas negotiated to retain fishing and hunting rights in their traditional territories, agreements that continue to be challenged in U.S. courts today.

### **Contemporary period**

The past economic booms of fur trading, lumbering, mining, and fishing did not appreciably improve the lives of the Ojibwas living in Sault Ste. Marie. They found work during the booms but the economic effects were not long lasting since they typically were the first to lose employment when the boom went bust. Many families supplemented their meager incomes with traditional crafts such as quillwork and basketry. Fishing became difficult in the St. Mary's River with the 1855 construction of a system of locks to move boat traffic through the channel without having to portage goods (<http://huron.lre.usace.army.mil/SOO/>). Bahweting was forever changed by the massive project that also generates hydroelectric power.

Poverty, unemployment, illness, and poor living conditions marked the lives of Ojibwas living in the Soo in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Merriam Report of 1928 revealed the failure of current government policies toward Indians and the

horrific conditions on reservations triggered public outrage. The Indian Reorganization Act or the Wheeler-Howard Act of 1934 was a response to the Merriam Report and provided for an end to allotments and sales of tribal land. Also known as the Indian New Deal, the Wheeler-Howard Act set goals for tribes and bands to move toward self-governance and being chartered as federal corporations (Danziger 1979:134). Encouraged by this new philosophy, tribal elders in the Soo

decided to form a corporation known as the Sugar Island Group of Chippewa Indians and their Descendants for the purpose of establishing an organization to conserve the Tribe's common property, develop its natural resources, and promote welfare of its members and descendants, and for community achievements. This group later became the Original Bands of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and their Heirs, Inc. [<http://www.saulttribe.org>]

Eventually, the organization compiled a membership roll, relying greatly on the federal government's Durant Roll of 1908-1910, and a tribal history as well as other documentation required to apply for federal tribal status. At the same time, the city of Sault Ste. Marie was growing and prospering but no improvements were made in the Indian part of town, which centered on Marquette Avenue and Shunk Road (known as the Mar Shunk neighborhood). Tribal history describes the situation

In the late 1960's and early 1970's the Shunk Road and Marquette Avenue area in Sault Ste. Marie had no paved roads, it had no public housing, it provided virtually no public or tribal services. The roads were so bad at time school buses wouldn't drive down it to pick up children for school. The city of Sault Ste. Marie did not provide water and sewer services to the Shunk Road area. Ditches were cesspools especially in the Spring and Fall. The Tribe had no land until Mary Murray (tribal member) donated 40 acres of land on Sugar Island. Most of the Marquette Avenue and Shunk Road area was either wetlands or swamp. [<http://www.saulttribe.org>]

These squalid conditions contributed to school and work absenteeism due to illness and difficulties in transportation. Fire trucks had difficulty getting into Mar Shunk, homes burned and families suffered (Cleland 1992: 275).

In 1972, the Original Bands was accorded federal recognition by the Commission of Indian Affairs and in 1975, the tribe adopted the name "The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians" in its Constitution and Bylaws. Official status for an Indian tribe means access to governmental assistance and interference. Fortunately, in recent years the federal government has leaned more and more in the direction of self-governance so interference is not onerous as it was for other tribes in the past. For the Soo Tribe, federal recognition brought empowerment, which they exercised almost immediately. In the mid – 1970's , the first tribal chairman, Joe Lumsden, with the assistance of attorney

Jim Jannetta, successfully sued the City of Sault Ste. Marie over the administration of a Community Development Block Grant, none of which was to be spent on the Mar Shunk neighborhood (Cleland 1992:279). In 1979, the city agreed to spend close to \$6 million in the neighborhood, paving streets, putting in streetlights, improving the water supply, and building drains and sewers (Cleland 1992:279). The triumph still reverberates for tribal members, most of who can look back just twenty years and remember how poorly they lived in this community.

The most profound economic change for the Soo Tribe, as well as tribes all over the country, is the result of the Indian Gaming Regulatory Act (IGRA) of 1988. The Soo Tribe, and others, engaged in some gambling activities, such as bingo, on reservation and trust land prior to 1988. A U.S. Supreme Court decision in 1987 established the right of Indian tribes to conduct gambling on reservations "unfettered by any State or County regulation" (<http://www.nigc.gov/history.htm>.) The IGRA served to appease States' concerns that Indian gaming operations would attract organized crime. Gaming activities are classified into three categories or classes, with increasing regulations. For example, class III gaming includes slot machines and banking card games and requires a compact between tribe and State approved by the BIA.

The Soo Tribe constructed their first casino in November 1985. This establishment has expanded more than eight fold and has become the pride of many Soo Tribe members. The tribe has since purchased land, built several more casinos in other Soo Tribe population centers throughout the Upper

Peninsula, and was recently the first tribe in the U.S. to open a casino on non-tribal land. I am referring to the Detroit Greektown Casino that, unlike their other gaming establishments, is not solely owned by the tribe. In less than thirty years, the Soo Tribe has traveled from a position of great poverty to a position of great wealth. The largest employer in the Upper Peninsula, the tribe owns more than twenty non-gaming businesses, several casinos, a minor league hockey team, two sports arenas, and has an annual operating budget of approximately \$200 million. The tribe also provides a number of services for its members, such as satellite offices in outlying communities, health centers, a cultural center, a school, and tuition assistance. They also operate a comprehensive social services department, and a law enforcement department that includes police officers and judges. Finally, the tribe has negotiated for housing on an abandoned Air Force Base and has purchased or constructed additional housing for tribal members.

The development of Indian gaming is not without controversy, even among tribal members. Some of the controversy involves whether the tribe should pay so-called per capita payments to its members, as some tribes do. This would be periodic payouts of gaming revenues. The elected officials of the tribe, a Board of Directors led by the Tribal Chairman Bernard Bouschor, have opposed this idea, arguing that they do not want to replace the old welfare system so many tribal members were dependent upon with a new welfare system. They prefer to continue investing casino revenues into tribal benefits and diversified development. So far, the majority of the voting tribal members



agree. An exception to this policy is the Elderly Dividend Program, which distributes annual payments of about \$1,300 to more than 2,000 tribal elders.

Another aspect of the gaming controversy involves gambling addictions. Addictions of any kind are of great concern to Indian people, with the terrible consequences of substance abuse evident in every Native community. There has been an increase in the number of gambling addiction programs in the U.S. and the Upper Peninsula is no exception. Despite dire warnings from some tribal members, the problem among tribal members does not seem to be out of proportion with the general population. Concerning addictions, there was some pressure to have alcohol-free casinos. These are not unheard of in Indian Country but the tribe decided otherwise. Again, this does not appear to be a great problem in the Soo Tribe casinos. Overtly drunken patrons are escorted off the premises and the security manager at Kewadin Casino commented to me that the frequency is relatively insignificant. His observation is that people, Indian and otherwise, go to casinos to gamble, not to get drunk.

There were also questions about the "non-Indian", nontraditional character of casinos. This concern has diminished due to the influx of money to support traditional activities, build cultural centers and a museum, and sponsor language classes.

Finally, there was the question of casinos attracting crime and unsavory activities such as prostitution to the reservation. This concern was especially valid considering the location of the tribe's largest casino across the street from tribal housing. Officials agree that this arrangement is not ideal but they owned

so little land at the time that both had to be accommodated in close proximity. Perhaps in the future, this housing could be relocated which would open up more area for expansion near the casino. During my fieldwork, I spoke with residents on the reservation and they reported no significant incidents stemming from the casino. The security at the casinos gave patrons a feeling of security and I found I was not the only woman who felt safer going to the Kewadin Casino than meeting friends at a bar in downtown Sault Ste. Marie. The tribe has retained solo control of their casinos, with the exception of the Greektown facility, and there does not appear to be any organized crime involvement.

As mentioned above, cultural development and preservation efforts are being supported financially by the tribal government. Language classes are available to all employees, whether or not they are a tribal member. Tribal members are offered opportunities to learn or share in drumming, dancing, and traditional crafts. I will discuss this aspect of tribal life more fully in later chapters.

The influence of the Soo Tribe is evident in the frequent visits made by politicians to meet with the elected officials. In the past, they were beneath notice but now they are visited by Presidential candidates, U.S. Senators and Congressmen, and governors. In 1995, Bernard Bouschor, Tribal Chairman, was Upper Peninsula Person of the Year. The irony of all of this attention is not lost on the tribe but neither are the implications of their new wealth. One local wit noted that the tribe has become "fiscal Republicans."

Local politicians have also learned to deal differently with the Soo Tribe. They have watched in amazement as the tribe, and its fortunes have grown

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rapidly. Conversations with city officials revealed mixed reactions to the success of the tribe. There is gratitude for the increased tourism to the area and low unemployment rate. At the same time, there is concern over pressure on the existing infrastructure of the city, an issue discussed frequently with tribal officials. Some officials expressed disbelief that "those Indians" could run a multimillion-dollar business empire and predicted disaster sometime in the future. Fewer acknowledged the irony of the reversal of positions between the Mar Shunk residents and the rest of the city and thought it was time the tribe had some success.

While I did not focus on the perceptions of the nontribal townspeople, I did interact with them frequently and gathered an impression from these conversations and spontaneous comments. People expressed envy and frustration aimed at the tribe, anger at the "special" privileges the Indians seemed to have. The gossip revealed a great deal of misinformation about financial matters having to do with the tribe as well as malicious rumors about well-known tribal leaders. This latter type of rumor was also common among tribal members.

Part of the process of federal recognition for tribes is deciding how the tribe will define its membership. This is perhaps the most controversial issue inside and outside of Indian Country. A tribe may choose to determine its membership based on blood quantum. This involves determining the percentage of a person's tribal ancestry or "blood." If a tribe chooses this method, it must also set a specific blood quantum, such as full-blood, half-blood, quarter-blood, and so on. Another means of defining membership is through lineal descent.

This involves tracing a person's lineage to a known ancestor who was in some way recorded as a member of a tribe. This method is less commonly used than the blood quantum definition of membership. The Soo Tribe defines its membership based on lineal descent from the Durant Roll, a census done in the early 1900s.

In defining its membership this way, the Soo Tribe expanded its membership more quickly than could have been done through reproduction. Tribal membership in 1995 was just under 20,000. In 2002, membership has almost reached 30,000. The decision to define their descent in this way has met with disapproval from other Michigan tribes. In the competition for federal dollars, having a larger membership means a larger piece of the pie. In addition, the lack of a blood quantum requirement has left the Soo Tribe open to criticisms from Indians and non-Indians alike about being "real" Indians. Despite these tensions, Cleland notes

the federally recognized tribes have developed some excellent, cooperatively administered units, for example the Ottawa/Chippewa Treaty Fishing Management Authority and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission. [1992:293]

Enrollment issues in many tribes also revolve around who is on the tribal roll and who is not and why. It is commonplace for tribes to be accused of favoritism or revenge by those refused tribal membership or removed from the tribal roll and the Soo Tribe is no exception. I interviewed a middle-aged man

told me his children are enrolled members of the Soo Tribe but he is not because he “made the wrong people mad.” I was not allowed to inspect the tribal roll but the man’s children did indeed possess membership cards and their mother stated that she was not an Indian and their membership came through their father’s line. Enrollment scandals create a negative public image of contemporary tribes and are popular with the media.

Conflicts over fishing rights have become common in Indian Country as tribes go to court to assert their traditional rights as guaranteed by treaty. These cases have been met with sometimes violent opposition from local non Indians and sport fishermen, with support from state governments worried about losing tourism revenues (Prucha 1994:420). In 1979, the federal government went to court against the State of Michigan on behalf of Ottawa and Ojibwa fishing rights under the treaties of 1836 and 1855 (*United States v. Michigan* 1979). In what is known as the Fox decision, Judge Noel J. Fox decided in favor of the Ottawas and Ojibwas, stating that “the mere passage of time has not eroded, and cannot erode the rights guaranteed by solemn treaties that both sides pledged on their honor to uphold” (Fox, in Prucha 1994:420). Why the violent protests and abusive language over fishing rights? According to Cornell,

There is little doubt that the reaction to the fishing controversy hints of deeper societal problems. Charges of “special privilege” have been leveled at Native Americans and heard throughout the controversy. Yet if anyone has received “special privileges,” it has been the non-Indian. In fact, the very treaties that are now providing justice for the Anishinabeg

are the same agreements which allowed Michigan to become a state and which provided Michigan's non-Indian citizens with unlimited access to copper, iron ore, timber, and – most importantly – land. [1986:106]

The treaty fishing rights case won in Michigan is similar to other fishing rights cases in Washington and Wisconsin, for instance. The Michigan Indian Tuition Waiver, however, is a more unusual case. It is based on the closing of the Indian School at Mount Pleasant in 1934. The governor, Charles Comstock, accepted the land from the federal government in exchange for educating Indian students in state schools (Cornell 1986:103). During the 1970's, legislature was passed putting this agreement into effect for the first time, allowing Michigan Indian students to attend state colleges and universities and have the State of Michigan reimburse the schools for the cost of their tuition. (I have recently come across a similar agreement in Minnesota (Ahern 1984). The University of Minnesota branch at Morris offers free tuition to all American Indian students as the result of an agreement. The original school was a Catholic-run Indian boarding school and, when the nuns were in financial straits, they sold the school to the State of Minnesota with the agreement that Indian students be allowed to attend tuition-free.)

## **Summary**

The Ojibwas of Michigan, like all indigenous inhabitants of the U.S., have experienced radical changes in their lives over the past 350 years. Drastic

population loss coupled with the introduction of disruptive technology and conflicting belief systems further eroded the traditional patterns of Ojibwa life. War and allegiances, changes in governments, and then shifting government policies helped to destabilize band and tribal systems of control. Many, Indian and non-Indian, predicted the demise or disappearance of all Indians in the U.S.

The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians, like many other thriving tribes, has proven these predictions wrong. They are financially successful beyond even their wildest dreams. Yet their past is not erased, and is not without continued effect. Centuries of culture contact, the lack of a land base, intermarriage, language loss, poverty and oppression, all of these shape the contemporary tribal member. They are still Indians, still Ojibwas, but it seems some tribal members are more convinced of their tribal identity than are others. In the next chapters, I will examine how various factions in the tribe express their concepts of identity through ritualization.



## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FIELDWORK**

#### **Methodology**

This research was conducted over a total of sixteen months, with an eight-week stay in the summer of 1994 and a return to the field in early summer of 1995 for fourteen months. I spent the first summer becoming acquainted with the area and making contacts, many of which proved valuable when I returned. I found housing on the campus of the local university, an arrangement that was geographically convenient and inexpensive yet had some unexpected drawbacks. Being on campus kept me "out of the loop"; tribal members did not visit me there and I felt that the academic association was distancing. DeWalt and DeWalt note that "Malinowski further cautions against living in compounds apart from the people under investigation like other 'white men' do and insists on the need to live in the community" (1998:292). In this instance, the "compound" consisted of a college campus where most Indians did not feel at ease. Upon my return in 1995, I secured housing in the community.

For cultural anthropologists, gathering data typically involves participant observation, and may include informal and formal interviews, questionnaires, and document research. In my fieldwork, I primarily turned to participant observation and informal interviews, supplemented by archival research. Archival research involved doing a literature review prior to conducting fieldwork, reading past issues of local newspapers during the initial fieldwork period in 1994. I also read

a variety of tribal documents mostly related to tribal governance and business development during the primary fieldwork period.

I conducted informal interviews, usually in the person's home, on a one-on-one basis with a few exceptions. In two instances, wives insisted on remaining in the room as I interviewed their husbands and contributed unsolicited comments. I conducted several interviews with children and I asked the parents to be present. In all of these situations, the parent or parents agreed but declined to be in the room during the interview. Stated explanations for this behavior included lack of interest, the need to do other tasks, and, most frequently, concern that their presence would inhibit their child's responses.

#### **First fieldwork period 1994**

During the summer of 1994 I familiarized myself with the community and the area, attending public gatherings, visiting people informally in their homes and getting a sense of family relationships. The tribal offices and business enterprises are located in several communities in the Upper Peninsula and I spent some time driving to these. In addition, I visited the offices of the two local newspapers (one is the tribal newspaper) and read past issues to familiarize myself with local issues, attitudes and concerns. Finally, I investigated the local public school system in preparation for my son's enrollment. This last task, personal in motivation, revealed a deep division in the community. Many Indian parents expressed their beliefs that Indian children are treated unfairly in the public school system, that they are discriminated against. Adult Indians

recounted negative incidents from their school days. Several white community members, two of whom were teachers, asserted that Indian children are impossible to teach and control, probably due to their parents being absent or addicted to alcohol or drugs. These comments were spontaneous and I was especially surprised by the ease with which these white townspeople expressed these opinions to a person they knew was of Indian descent. I decided to explore this issue and these attitudes upon my return to the field and to enroll my son in the tribal school, a new option the tribe was making available to Indian students, regardless of tribal affiliation.

### **Second fieldwork period 1995-1996**

Upon my return to the field, I rented an apartment in town and renewed my acquaintances. Participant observation was still a preferred method, augmented by one-on-one interviews with tribal members. I was not allowed to see the tribal roll, a list of enrolled members. (This refusal did not surprise me – tribal membership tends to be a controversial matter for many tribes, especially in wealthy tribes). Instead, I identified tribal members through family, work, and friendship connections. I spent most of my time in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and I conducted most of the interviews with tribal members who lived in that vicinity. This is the area of greatest concentration of population for this tribe. More events that are public take place in the Soo and the tribal government's main offices and major business enterprises are located in the city. I made an effort to interview individuals who might represent different experiences as tribal

members, because of their gender, education, beliefs, employment, or age. In addition, I interviewed a small sample of white townspeople, including municipal government officials, business owners, educators, and individuals employed by the tribe.

I do not pretend to have observed or interviewed a representative sample of the Soo Tribe, which had an enrollment at that time of more than 20,000 members. Many, if not most, enrolled members of the Soo Tribe are not actively involved in tribal activities. They do not publicly identify themselves as tribal members or even as Indians. Since the Soo Tribe defines its membership based on descent rather than blood quantum and this geographic area has a long history of European and American contact, many enrolled members are not particularly "Indian" in appearance and can (and often do) "pass" for white. Jokes about blond-haired, blue-eyed Indians are common among both white and Indian townspeople. More than once, an individual revealed his or her tribal membership to me after learning that I was researching "Indian stuff." This large segment of the tribe limits its participation in tribal matters to special benefits, such as assistance with college tuition and free eyeglasses.

DeWalt and Dewalt describe various degrees of participant observation, from nonparticipation in which cultural knowledge is acquired by interacting with various media instead of actively interacting with people, to moderate participation in which the fieldworker commutes to the field or participates in only certain types of activities, to active participation (1998:262). Active participation involves living in the community and participating as fully as possible in the

activities of the community. It is essentially an "immersion" into every aspect of the community being studied. This was the approach I took during the longer field period. I lived in the community, sent my son to the tribal school and was involved with the school as a tutor and substitute teacher, attended fitness sessions sponsored by the tribe, used the tribal medical center for health care, attended tribal board meetings, participated in ceremonies, cooked food for feasts, and formed a kinship-like relation with a family in the community. This relationship involved sharing resources, such as childcare, visiting in each other's homes, taking vacations together, and celebrating holidays and birthdays together. The DeWalts also describe another degree of participant observation: complete participation in which the anthropologist is or becomes a member of the group being studied (1998:263). I did not become a member of the Soo Tribe and, while I had very close associations with some tribal members, I never became a "real" relative. I am grateful that I was not offered this opportunity as it would have involved a level of ongoing responsibility and obligation that I am unwilling and unable to accept.

As long as anthropologists have been observing the rituals and ceremonies of "the other", those others, in certain circumstances, have forbidden the recording or observation of rituals. Early in my fieldwork, an older pipe carrier (a person who has special status in ritual matters) asked me if I was at this naming ceremony as an anthropologist or as an Indian woman. This seemed like a fair question and I asked for some time to think it over. Later that evening, I suggested that he and others who might be concerned would know what my

status was by the presence or absence of my notebook, that its presence or absence would be a silent signal. He expressed his satisfaction with this solution. There was only one occasion in which I was asked to put away my notebook; I complied and was welcomed to stay now that I was, as one person put it, "off duty". Obviously, I did not attend rituals that were specifically for men, such as a men's sweat lodge. It is possible that I was excluded from attending rituals without my knowledge but I have no evidence of this. This work is not a comprehensive glossary of Ojibwa rituals; nor does it include detailed descriptions of rituals I observed. Instead, the focus is on the strategic use of ritual by the various segments of the tribe.

## **Funding**

This research was contracted and funded by the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians. The tribal Board of Directors expressed an interest in tribal identity and requested a proposal to address their concerns. As a large tribe scattered over a wide area and having experienced centuries of culture contact and intermarriage with non-Indians, their sense was of a relatively weak tribal identity among their membership. I submitted a proposal to the board and it was accepted. My task in the field, therefore, was two-fold. I gathered data for my dissertation while also focusing specifically on tribal identity and pragmatic ways of enhancing a tribal sense of cohesiveness.

I submitted a report to the Board of Directors in 1997, fulfilling the obligations of our contract. A stipulation of our agreement was that the particular

details of my report be confidential. I believe I am able to honor this agreement without negatively affecting the quality of this dissertation as my own research focus took a different direction in looking at ritualization as culture strategy. I remain deeply grateful to the tribe for funding my research into a very sensitive topic; their trust was humbling. I also received generous support through the King-Chavez-Parks Future Faculty Fellowship.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE CORPORATE INDIANS**

#### **Ritualization**

Yet another dimension of constructed tradition concerns the delineation of group identity, which is based not only on generating a shared consensus concerning an authoritative past but also on a set of distinctions, seen as rooted in the past, which differentiates this group from other groups. [Bell 1992:121]

As the official representatives of the tribe, the Corporate Indians employ ritual strategically to demonstrate publicly the authenticity of the tribe's identity. They have two audiences in mind: other tribal members and the rest of the world. In their roles as the tribe's business and political leaders, the Corporate Indians are sensitive to public perceptions of the tribe, from either within or outside the tribe. Being sensitive to public perceptions has not stopped this group from handling public relations clumsily at times. The balance between projecting a positive public image and the tendency to behave somewhat arrogantly, as an expression of sovereignty and power, is sometimes an uneasy one. The Corporate Indians regularly work closely with certain Boomers (the segment of the tribe with a more traditional and spiritual focus) to produce rituals and ceremonies that will resonate with interested tribal members while communicating the cultural distinctiveness of the tribe to outside observers.



They are otherwise uninvolved in the ceremonial life of the tribe, focusing instead on the business and political aspects of the tribe. In this chapter, I will examine how the Corporate Indians practice ritualization for specific economic and political purposes.

### **Context of interaction**

The Corporate Indians can only loosely be categorized as an age cohort. The range of ages in the group is mostly in the Baby Boomer age range but includes some individuals in their late twenties and some in their late fifties and early sixties. The identifying characteristic of the group I call the Corporate Indians is close involvement with the tribe's government, political, and business operations at the administrative level. Most Corporate Indians are either currently employed by the tribe or serve the tribe in an elected or appointed political capacity. A few are employed elsewhere, such as the local hospital, but always in a professional or managerial level job.

Corporate Indians are more likely to be formally educated and business-oriented. The elected leader of the Soo Tribe, Chairman Bernard Bouschor, has a business and accounting degree and falls into the Corporate Indian group. Corporate Indians tend to be upwardly mobile, have homes similar in quality to local Whites in the middle class, and travel more for business and pleasure. They are unlikely to send their children to Bahweting School (an exception is the chairman's children). As noted above, lifestyle choices and a business perspective characterize the Corporate Indians. There is some overlap with the

Boomer group as they work together to achieve shared goals. The Corporate Indians commissioned and approved the funding for my work and were relatively open to answering questions and providing information.

I interviewed and observed the Corporate Indians in both their work settings and at their homes. I attended open meetings of the tribal Board of Directors and meetings of the tribe's Economic Development Commission. Corporate Indians manage most of the tribe's enterprises, which include casinos and other gaming establishments, hotels and resorts, a construction company, and several light industries. I spent time in those locations. I attended social events as well as numerous dedications and other formal ceremonies organized by the Corporate Indians. I also attended private social events with members of this group.

My interactions with the Corporate Indians were influenced by a number of factors. I fit into this group in terms of age and education, although I did have more education that is formal. Many had children the same age as my son, although only a couple had children attending the tribal school with my son. When necessary, I would dress in business clothes like theirs. This point may seem trivial but most tribal members do not own business clothes, having no need for them in the context of their lives.

The Corporate Indians were familiar with anthropologists primarily in one context, that of consultant and expert witness in legal matters, such as the contesting of fishing rights. This business arrangement made sense to them and they insisted on trying to place me in that category. My seemingly aimless visits

and conversations with tribal members as well as my participation in traditional rituals and ceremonies puzzled some of the Corporate Indians, who asked me how I hoped to benefit from these activities. They questioned why I would choose to live in relative poverty while pursuing an advanced degree that did not seem to lead to great financial rewards. Unlike some of the more traditional tribal members who believed that anthropologists routinely steal Indians' knowledge and grow wealthy as a result, I found that the Corporate Indians had a much more realistic perspective of the field of anthropology, which led them to pity me!

### **Identity**

Most Corporate Indians dress in American business clothes, such as suits, when at work. Their grooming is also based on the U.S. business model: short, neat hair for the men and neatly dressed hair for the women. Some of the Corporate Indians have distinctly Indian features, such as darker skin, while others do not. This does not appear to influence their choice of apparel or hairstyle. The Boomers who work in the tribe's Corporate and governmental setting are usually distinguishable by their style of dress (ribbon shirts and jeans), which does not conform to American business standards. This is one of the ways I have chosen to distinguish these two often closely related groups within the tribe. Corporate Indians often wear a small insignia, such as a tie clip or lapel pin, featuring the tribal logo. Unlike the other groups I describe, the Corporate Indians preferred to discuss work-related topics rather than personal topics such as family and friends, even at social or family gatherings.

Having a business mentality and a political focus creates a certain distance between the Corporate Indians and the more traditional elements in the tribe. Occasionally the tribal administration has made decisions that reveal this distance. For example, they built a retirement home in the early 1990s as one of their first construction projects. Their desire to take care of tribal Elders was admirable but the Elders were unhappy at the idea of being isolated from their families and friends in a retirement home. The Corporate Indians were admonished for not having consulted with the Elders and more traditional groups in the tribe, such as the Boomers.

Another example involved the number of days a tribal employee could miss to attend a funeral. Following the typical mainstream business model, the tribal administration decreed a three-day death leave policy. Again, they were out of touch with traditional values and practices. A traditional Ojibwa funeral lasts at least four days and participants may need additional time to recover, if they have given up food or sleep during the funeral. The Corporate Indians were criticized by tribal members and revised the policy. At the same time, they took steps to prevent future faux pas and appointed a Cultural Committee, made up of Boomers and traditional Elders. The duties of this committee to examine all tribal policies, to create new policies on such matters as requests for time off to go on a vision quest, and to oversee cultural education programs.

In other ways, the Corporate Indians step outside of the mainstream business model and demonstrate an emphasis on family and tribal loyalty. Nepotism is the rule rather than the exception in the Soo Tribe. Corporate

Indians place tribal members in positions of importance, based on family relationship rather than skill or experience. They will give an unqualified person support, encouragement, and reassurance; and sometimes the results can be quite successful. When the results are not good, the Corporate Indians will quietly find another position for the individual. It may take several tries before they find the right fit but tribal members are given seemingly endless opportunities for employment. A tribal member with relatives in positions of authority will be given better opportunities than a less important tribal member but there remains a commitment to employ as many tribal members as possible, regardless of their qualifications.

Like their more traditional counterparts in the tribe, Corporate Indians also differ from the mainstream in their attitude toward teenage pregnancy and illegitimate offspring. They do not express great disapproval of teenage pregnancies, even in their own families, and express great fondness for all of the tribe's children, legitimate or otherwise. Corporate Indians were more likely to discuss the importance of marrying or at least having children within the tribal membership. As the largest tribe in Michigan, they are acutely aware of the power of membership numbers. The larger the tribal membership, the more federal dollars pour into the tribe to help support social programs. Many tribal members, including Corporate Indians, had children while they were young; those who married do so when they were young, as well. This practice has not changed appreciably and remains part of the Corporate Indians' values.

The Corporate Indians also share a commitment to sovereignty with other groups in the tribe but their approach is shaped by their business and political mindset. Where the more traditional groups will hold ceremonies and protests either to express their sovereignty or to fight to preserve it, the Corporate Indians have created institutions to implement self-governance.

The Soo Tribe has a police force that is cross-deputized with local and state police as well as its own court system. It also has its own social services department modeled on state and federal programs but guided by Ojibwa cultural values and practices. The director of the tribal social services department gave me an example of the difference between her agency and a state agency. The two agencies have different definitions of child abandonment, for example. If a child is living in a home with no parent present and an alternate legal guardian has not been appointed, the child is considered abandoned and will be removed from the home to be placed in a foster home or group home facility. The tribal social services department would not necessarily consider this a case of child abandonment. The tribe considers it normal, even traditional, for Ojibwa children to live with an auntie or grandparents, on a temporary or permanent basis. The tribal social services department will evaluate the living situation, make sure the child is being well cared for, and assist the temporary or permanent guardian with legal paperwork. If an Ojibwa child must go into foster care, the department's top priority is placing the child with a Soo Tribe family.

The role of the tribal social services department and the tribal court is especially important in reference to the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 (Sharp

1996:106-107). The goal of this law was to stop the wholesale displacement of Indian children from their homes and from their people. The Indian Child Welfare Act applies to individuals both on and off the reservation and requires that efforts be made to place a removed child be placed with an Indian family, preferably of his extended family or tribe. An adoption of Choctaw twins in Mississippi was reversed in 1986 when the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians petitioned to have its rights to the children heard: "The ruling clarified that even in cases of voluntary relinquishment of parental rights, tribal communities have a recognized interest in the welfare of tribal children and a right to retain their children..."(Davis 1996:107). Responsibility to the tribe's children is very important to the tribe and it has developed formal institutions to assure their care by interacting effectively with local, state, and federal bureaucracies.

Another project conceived and created by the Corporate Indians is the health center in Sault Ste. Marie. Opened in 1995, this is a large clinic offering a wide range of health care for tribal members, including vision and hearing, primary health care, and visiting specialists. One of the visiting specialists is an Indian healer who usually sets up in the ear/nose/throat office when that physician is absent. He and his assistant drum and sing over the patient, and he will prescribe herbal remedies as well as actions the patient must take to affect a cure or improvement. The health center is heavily utilized by tribal members and is seen as a wonderful benefit. This particular project was a public relations coup for the Corporate Indians as it has met with virtually universal approval. A strength of the Corporate Indians is their ambition and vision to do great things.

Most tribal members would not have dreamed of being able to construct their own health center, having lived in poverty for so long. However, the Corporate Indians, perhaps because they have traveled more or have more education, can see the possibilities of what determination and money can accomplish.

I mentioned earlier the Corporate Indians' sometimes clumsy efforts in public relations. One of the tribe's early projects was the creation of a newspaper, called *Winawen Nisitotung*. The newspaper is used to convey news and information concerning matters in the Soo Tribe as well as news in the mainstream community that could affect the tribe, such as legislature. The newspaper is also a venue for education and features language and culture lessons. What the newspaper lacks is any kind of critical commentary. Only positive letters to the editor are printed, as a matter of policy. The result is the airing of the tribe's dirty laundry on the pages of the local newspapers. Tribal members I interviewed disagreed with the tribal newspaper policy. They felt that it would be less embarrassing and damaging to the tribe's image to have disagreements and debates on the pages of their own newspaper. During my fieldwork, the tribal administration was firm on their policy but recent developments seem to show a softening of this attitude. The tribe's webpage features a section focused on dispelling rumors and answering members' questions and concerns. This may be an effective way to reach at least some of their constituents, allowing them to voice their complaints in a less public forum.



## **Ritual as strategy**

I have not focused on the question of ritual as secular versus religious in the analysis of my fieldwork data. My interest has instead been the use of ritual strategically, what Bell (1992) calls ritualization. Like Moore (1975, 1977) and Myerhoff (1977, 1979), I am interested in the fluidity and indeterminacy of ritual, characteristics that allow individuals and groups to use ritual in innovative ways for their purposes. In my discussion of ritual theory, I described the concept of ritual as social control. Of the various factions or groups I studied in the Soo Tribe, I thought the Corporate Indians the group most likely to try using ritual as a social control mechanism. They attempt to control public perception of the tribe and, more specifically, of them by controlling what is printed in the tribal newspaper. However, this is not the case. My fieldwork observations revealed the ineffectiveness of rituals as social control in the Soo Tribe. The Soo Tribe is made up of factions and groups that do not necessarily have a shared belief system, therefore making ritual social control ineffective. The Corporate Indians, however, do practice ritualization. As part of their ritualization strategy, the Corporate Indians also invent traditions.

As mentioned in Chapter II, the invention of tradition, an important component of ritualization, is not limited to Native American cultures, and has occurred in various eras in Great Britain, parts of Europe, and other areas. It is worth repeating Hobsbawm's definition of this phenomena:

"Invented tradition" is taken to mean a set of practices normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which

seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. [1992:1]

The inventors of tradition do so with particular goals in mind. Perhaps they seek to inspire confidence in a new institution or maybe the goal is to enhance the prestige of a new event or activity. Whatever the precise goal, it is clear that ritual and symbols are being used strategically in an attempt to influence others.

The Corporate Indians have particular goals in mind and particular means of achieving those goals. The ritualization goals of the Corporate Indians are influenced by their business and political perspective. Above all, the tribe should be presented in a positive light, in a manner that emphasizes its unique nature as a sovereign Indian entity. In the business model, this means public relations efforts that include the design and production of glossy brochures, the development of an attractive tribal logo, and the use of other media, such as video, to showcase the tribe as well as the use of ritual and ceremonies. In a way, ritualization is one of the tools in the public relations toolbox.

Tribal symbols, such as clan animals and the medicine wheel, are featured in these media representations of the tribe. The symbols have ritual significance to the tribe, although the symbols are understood by only a small percentage of the tribe's membership. The Corporate Indians consult with cooperative Boomers, who have ritual knowledge, for advice on the effective use of ritual symbols in the public relations context.

The public relations efforts I describe above are primarily aimed at an external non-Indian audience. However, members of the tribe did express their approval for the “professional” and “classy” appearance of the tribe’s PR materials, and saw these as evidence of the tribe’s financial success. Certainly, I observed many out-of-town and out-of-state tribal members gathering the PR materials for their own use when attending the tribe’s annual gathering.

In addition to producing materials promoting the tribe, the Corporate Indians also host ceremonies to commemorate individuals or events, such as groundbreaking ceremonies for construction or the inauguration of the tribal board. These ceremonies are an opportunity to express their version of the tribe’s identity on an outside and an inside audience. The identity or image they seek to portray is, again, that of a unique sovereign tribe that is progressive and successful while remaining rooted in the past and tradition. Because they view traditions as being “from the past”, and they are forward-thinking individuals who represent the progressive and successful aspect of the tribe, the Corporate Indians turn to the traditionalists, the Boomers and some Elders, for that aspect of their desired tribal image and identity.

In inventing traditions, such as the inauguration of newly elected board members, it is necessary to invest the new tradition with rituals and symbols that will cloth it in antiquity and shared meaning. A couple of Boomers typically manage this kind of event, drawing upon traditional elements for a variety of purposes. An example of an invented ritual is the ceremony created to inaugurate newly elected members of the tribe’s Board of Directors. As

hunter/gatherers, the Ojibwas typically followed the lead of influential individuals, usually men. They could be convinced by a successful warrior to follow him into battle or, more commonly, out on raiding expeditions. Similarly, a charismatic spiritual leader might wield influence in ritual and ceremonial matters. After federal tribal recognition, the Soo Tribe instituted a system of elected leadership similar to the legislative system in the United States. I was unable to discover when the ceremony commemorating the election of new board members began but was able to observe two inauguration ceremonies. The two ceremonies differed in small details but shared characteristics with the blessing ceremony I have already described. During both inaugural ceremonies, more than one spiritual leader participated in the ritual. The four sacred plants were burned and the newly elected and re-elected board members smudged themselves. The spiritual leaders called for the Creator to help the board members make good decisions for the people of the tribe. In both instances, the spiritual leaders were not as articulate in their prayers as usual, seeming to search for the appropriate words for the ritual.

In this ritual, I would interpret the actions of the spiritual leaders as an attempt to convince the traditionally oriented members of the tribe as well as outside observers of the authenticity of the ceremony and of the appropriateness of the election process. The board members did not, for the most part, participate in tribal ceremonies and rituals outside of this context. They cooperated with the spiritual leaders to achieve the same goal, the emphasis on

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authenticity and the reiteration of the tribal administration's image of a united tribe.

Myerhoff (1977, 1979) is interested in invented traditions and argues that "Not all the participants involved need to be equally convinced or equally moved" (1977:222). She describes an improvised graduation ritual for elderly Jews in which the ritual's creators drew upon older traditions and rituals. Myerhoff also states that it is unnecessary for there to be shared belief among ritual participants. All that is necessary is pretence of belief by participants demonstrated by not disrupting the ritual performance with expressions of disbelief or discontent.

The Corporate Indians are also aware of their other audience, the tribal membership. Invented traditions as described above must not only impress outside observers but must also please or at least not upset or agitate inside observers. This is where the assistance of the Boomers is especially important. For many tribal members, the Corporate Indians are either role models for the members or suspect because of their perceived degree of acculturation. For the latter group, the presence of Boomer known to be traditionalists is essential for the ritual to have legitimacy. Still others are somewhat disapproving of the Boomers who chose to participate in the invention of traditions. I will describe this dynamic more fully in the Boomer chapter. The innovative use of ritual is less controversial with traditional tribal members. Often, this type of ritualization involved using an existing ritual in a new or different setting. The following is an example.

During a ceremony designed to bless a new sports arena, a spiritual leader, to use the local term, carefully arranged his ritual paraphernalia by spreading a small red wool blanket on the floor of the arena and placing a small quantity of the four sacred plants (tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, and cedar) on the blanket along with a hand-carved pipe, a small cast iron pot, a piece of flint and a striker, and an eagle feather fan. The spiritual leader put small portions of the sacred plants into the iron pot and lit the material using the flint and striker, producing a thick and highly aromatic smoke. He bathed himself in the smoke by pulling his hands through the smoke and drawing it over his face and head, having first removed his eyeglasses. He replaced his glasses and began to pray in English, asking the Creator to bless this place. He walked the entire perimeter of the arena, spreading the smoke by waving the eagle feather fan through it. He then went to each individual at the ceremony and offered him or her the opportunity to bathe in the smoke as well, which most did. The spiritual leader said one more prayer, congratulating the tribal administration for constructing the arena and other facilities as well. At this point, the ritual part of the event was concluded and people chatted and then dispersed.

A traditionally oriented Ojibwa individual may not have been moved by the ceremony or convinced that the blessing ritual was meaningful or convincing. The ritual could be considered successful if it does not offend him to an extent that he feels he must protest. The spiritual leader has done his best to convince even traditionally oriented tribal members that this ceremony is acceptable by simply using the house blessing ceremony on a larger scale. The reverse

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situation would be equally illustrative. I have seen nontraditionally oriented tribal members struggling to stay awake during a long prayer or exhortation by an elder spiritual leader, while other, more traditionally inclined participants are engrossed in the ritual. The ritual and ceremonial practices of their brethren in the tribe do not offend the nontraditional Ojibwas but they do not necessarily share their interest and belief. Some members of the latter group, namely the Corporate Indians, are aware of the possible public relations aspects of ceremonies and work closely with certain "open-minded" Boomers to use ritual in this way.

It is possible to see the disconnect that exists between the Corporate Indians and the more traditional factions in ritual aspects. An example that occurred during my time in the field involved funerals. It is customary for the extended family and close friends of the deceased to provide a feast for the four days of an Ojibwa funeral. Since a funeral often attracts two hundred or more mourners, this obligation can present a significant burden to the deceased's family. The Corporate Indians decided to provide assistance in the form of free catering, through their casino and convention center. This generosity was met with quiet opposition that eventually became vocal and public in 1996. The Corporate Indians, for the most part, were taken by surprise. They wanted to know that the problem was. Weren't they helping in a time of need? Wasn't this an appropriate gift, of food and serving assistance?

The Boomers and involved Elders explained that the families were offended for a number of reasons. While they appreciated the generous impulse of the Corporate Indians, many were offended by the idea that their family and

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friends could not provide for a feast. They also were offended by the ubiquitous casino logo on everything from napkins to serving dishes. Finally, they were displeased with the non-traditional nature of the food choices. They wanted venison and buffalo, wild rice, fry bread and corn soup. One Elderly woman asked me, with exasperated humor, if people in my tribes serve German potato salad as a traditional dish!

The Corporate Indians were gently admonished for not consulting either with the families they wished to help or with the tribal membership as a whole. At the same time, they were thanked again for their desire to help and a discussion was opened on culturally appropriate ways to assist with funerals. There is a tribal burial fund, begun at a time when many members could not afford what they considered a proper burial. The membership reaffirmed its approval of this fund, as not all members have benefited personally by the tribe's financial success. When I left, the Cultural Committee was discussing the possibility of financial assistance for the purchase of funeral foodstuffs, an option that seemed more amenable to tribal members.

## **Analysis**

Of the several groups and factions I studied, the Corporate Indians are the least knowledgeable concerning rituals, symbols, and ceremonies. They are generally uninterested in the meanings of symbols and rituals or about the history of ceremonies. Their interest in tribal history and the past is mostly confined to information and data that can be used to further their goals, be that fighting for

fishing rights or establishing the provenance of the tribe. The lack of interest or knowledge in the arena of ritual does not, however, impede their ability to use ritual strategically.

The willingness to hire others to take on certain tasks is part of the Corporate Indians' business mentality. They have become accustomed to hiring consultants and experts, from outside the Soo Tribe membership. This strategy has been an effective one, as many tribal members lacked formal education and specialized skills.

The hiring of consultants has extended into the cultural aspects of the tribe. The Boomers most involved in the invention and production of new traditions and rituals are not Soo Tribe members. They are from a closely related tribe, the Bay Mills Indian Community, located nearby. The membership of the two neighboring tribes has sometimes been interchangeable as many Soo Tribe members are kin with the neighboring tribe. One man explained to me that he changed membership depending on what each tribe could do for him. A notoriously cranky Elder was said to change membership when someone in her current tribe made her angry. No matter how closely related the two tribes are, however, some tribal members expressed their dissatisfaction with "outsiders" performing such public ceremonies. These outsider Boomers work for the Soo Tribe in administrative capacities, and serve as cultural consultants.

Ojibwa language teachers have also been hired from outside the tribe, causing some consternation over regional dialects. A couple of teachers from Manitoulin Island, where the Ojibwa language retention is high, commented that

Soo Tribe Elders frequently challenged them concerning the pronunciation of words. They were frustrated with this response since most of the Elders who criticized them were not fluent in Ojibwa but could recall how their parents or grandparents had pronounced certain words.

I overheard one heated discussion about the pronunciation of the Ojibwa word for “bear,” commonly spelled *makwak*. The Soo Tribe woman insisted that the only correct pronunciation was “muck-wah” while a man from another dialect region (somewhere in Ontario) argued that his way of saying the word, “muck-wuck” was correct. The fluent Ojibwa speakers in the Soo Tribe appeared to welcome the outside language teachers and argued pragmatically that learning some version of Ojibwa was better than not speaking it at all.

The Corporate Indians have clear objectives involving the public and tribal image of the Soo Tribe. They see events such as the opening of a new tribal facility as an opportunity to communicate their version of the tribal image: successful, progressive, rooted in tradition. These somewhat contradictory elements are melded, sometimes awkwardly, in the ceremonies that mark the chosen events. Ritual elements are used in innovative ways, all the while the ritual specialist (the outsider Boomer) explains the “rightness” of the ceremony, its “traditional” Ojibwa character. These ritual specialists get a great deal of attention and are known widely outside as well as inside the tribe. They are frequently interviewed and photographed by the media and have collaborated on several writing projects, as cultural experts of the Ojibwas.

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One tribal member joked privately that there is not anything for which the Corporate Indians will not find a blessing. This comment reveals the ambiguity that some tribal members feel about the Corporate Indians' ritual strategies. Reactions to the Corporate Indians' practice of ritualization depend somewhat on the participant-observers. Some observers find the ceremonies moving and a fitting expression of Ojibwa beliefs. Non-Indian observers are usually government officials and politicians. Because of their roles, I feel that their reactions, when interviewed, were not necessarily frank, but the general observable reaction of these individuals was surprise and pleasure. Critique of the Corporate Indians' use of ritual was quiet and usually expressed privately, by some Elders and Boomers.

It was my sense that most traditionally oriented members are reluctant to criticize the Corporate Indians. This is expressed in their repeated praises for the many projects the Corporate Indians have chosen to fund; projects that help the traditionalists educate the tribe's membership, especially the children. The Culture Camp on Sugar Island, Bahweting School, and the Cultural Center (a place for weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, etc.) are just some of the institutions funded and built by the Corporate Indians. It was also my impression that tribal members who are deeply involved with the tribe recognize the pragmatic nature of the work the Corporate Indians do to help the tribe. This makes their use of ritual in unorthodox ways more palatable to the Boomers and interested Elders.

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The Corporate Indians do not use ritual in their private lives. They see it as another business tool and use it to achieve their goals. Their ritual activities are accepted by most in the tribe because their goals are seen as worthy and of benefit to all tribal members. It is my opinion that some of the more successful invented traditions, such as the inauguration ceremony for new board members, will become part of the tribe's culture, an expression of the changing and active nature of a society.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **THE BOOMERS**

#### **Ritualization**

The specifically “ritual” construction of tradition and communal identity may be a powerful and effective strategy for several reasons. It appears to maximize the moralism and nostalgia on the one hand, while recognizing a more flexible level of delegated authority on the other. Similarly, it appears to maximize the perception of consensus based on nonnegotiable values and precedents, while nonetheless tolerating a fair degree of latent conflict in the form of mere compliance, quiet evasion, or idiosyncratic rejection. The construction of tradition may effectively maximize a high-profile identity for a group, even while minimizing any real rift over fundamentals with the neighboring groups. [Bell 1992:122-123]

Like the Corporate Indians, the Boomers have some specific goals producing and modifying rituals. Unlike the Corporate group, the Boomers also perform rituals. Some work closely with the Corporate group, performing public ceremonies and rituals to “maximize a high-profile identity” for the tribe. In this context, the use of ritualization as strategy by the Boomers and Corporate Indians is directed primarily outward to the interested public, such as the local municipality, state and federal representatives. They also perform rituals for the

tribal community and in this context may be joined by traditional Elders and other Boomers who do not participate in the greater public ceremonies. Ritualization as strategy in this more intimate setting includes education and socialization of the young, education of less traditional tribal members, communication of the tribe's unique identity, and, in some cases, maintenance or enhancement of the ritual performer's status. In this chapter, I will examine the use of ritualization by the Boomer group.

### **Context of interaction**

Like the Corporate Indians, the Boomers are only roughly categorized as an age cohort. I am using the term to include individuals from 30 years of age to 55 years of age. There are some younger members as well who are included in this category because they are older than the young people and Youngster category and their beliefs and practices situate them in the Boomer category. Like the Corporate Indians, the Boomers are characterized not just by age but also by lifestyle and involvement in particular aspects of tribal life. Boomers are involved with the ritual, ceremonial, and spiritual aspects of the Soo Tribe. The tribe employs some Boomers; of those, a few work closely with the Corporate Indians on cultural projects while others have more routine jobs. Other Boomers chose to avoid involvement with the business and political aspects of the tribe but participate in tribal ceremonies.

During my fieldwork, interactions with the Boomers were both frustrating and rewarding. Like the Corporate Indians, Boomers are more likely than many

tribal members to have some formal education. Many have studied anthropology; some are hostile toward anthropologists. For the hostile individuals, my Indian identity was not reassuring but was, instead, a further affront as I was seen as “selling-out” by becoming an anthropologist. Some of these individuals softened their opinion of me over time but, for others, my research was perceived as a threat. The fear appeared to be that I would somehow challenge the authenticity of the tribe and of their practices. I will discuss this dynamic in more detail later in this chapter. Luckily, the majority of the Boomers were cooperative and welcoming, seeking to make me feel more at home in their community. Several expressed their approval of a “cousin” doing anthropological research and teaching anthropology.

As was usually the case, having my son with me was an advantage in my interactions. The Boomers and I are members of the same age cohort and usually had children attending the same school. My involvement with the school brought me into close contact with many Boomers, who largely ran Bahweting School. I conducted interviews and practiced participant observation in a number of settings involving the Boomers, including work places, meetings, home visits, social occasions, and ceremonies. I spent the most time with this group during my fieldwork period, as the opportunities for interaction were frequent.

## **Identity**

Boomers tend to express their identity through their dress and hair styles, often wearing ribbon shirts and other Indian-style clothing and having long hair.

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The hair is worn either loose or tied back by the men while the women often braid their long hair. Jewelry and hair ornaments are usually of Indian manufacture and quite elaborate: silver and turquoise jewelry from the Southwest, beautifully beaded hair clasps from the Great Lakes. T-shirts with powwow or tribal logos or with Indian themes and statements are also popular with Boomers, who rarely if ever wear American style business clothes. The ribbon shirts and dresses must be handmade, as must the beaded hair clasps. The manufacture of these items is a source of pride for the women and men in the community who make them. They are often given as gifts but may also be commissioned and paid for.

The Boomers see themselves as the spiritual and traditional conscience and memory of the tribe. This does not contradict their reverence for Elders, of course, who are one source of their knowledge concerning tribal traditions. They have spent many hours visiting and informally interviewing the older people in the community and often express a sense of urgency as the tribal Elders die, perhaps taking important information with them. The Boomers have initiated a number of projects to capture and preserve the memories and stories of the Elders. One project involves a series of videotaped interviews that has been met with great approval by tribal members.

The Boomers are popular among the Elders because they pay attention to them and make them feel valued. Most tribal members will verbalize this doctrine of respecting the Elders but the Boomers are the ones most likely to act upon it. They try to make sure that Elders are able to attend tribal events and ceremonies by arranging for transportation if necessary. The Boomers also visit

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Elders who are ill or dying and want traditional medicine. When one of my informants became too ill to remain in her own home, she was admitted to a local nursing home. One or more Boomers visited her every day, praying and singing and burning tobacco as an offering. She died soon after entering the nursing home but the attentions of the Boomers gave her great comfort in her final days. I expected the nursing home staff to resist the burning of tobacco but they were not only supportive and respectful but also very interested in the ritual itself. The Boomers go into nursing homes and hospitals prepared for opposition and ready to argue for the rights of their people to pray in their traditional way.

During my fieldwork, I observed a lack of opposition from hospitals and nursing homes. I was surprised and questioned the Boomers who often go to these facilities. They reported that they had met with more opposition in the past but now rarely had problems with access to patients who requested them. When asked why the change, they cited a number of possible reasons. One was their own insistence on the rights of their fellow tribal members. Another was what they perceived as a growing acceptance of alternative treatments and health beliefs. Finally, one Boomer pointed out that the growing influence of the tribe in the surrounding communities may be having an effect, as hospital administrators may be reluctant to annoy a potential donor.

The tribe's growing presence in the community seems to be a factor in another critical arena, the care of tribal members after death. The Boomers in particular play an important role when a tribal member dies. If the individual was known to have traditional beliefs (as opposed to being a devout Christian), the



Boomers will arrange an Ojibwa funeral. This involves preparing the body and the location of the funeral according to traditional beliefs. Boomers of the same gender as the deceased go to the funeral home where the body has been embalmed, bathe the body ritually, and dress it in traditional finery. Once the body has been placed in a casket, ceremonial objects are added to accompany the person's spirit into the afterlife. At the funeral location, cedar boughs surround the casket and a fire is kept burning outdoors day and night for four days. The actual burial is accompanied by singing, drumming, and prayers by Ojibwa spiritual leaders.

I interviewed a local funeral director about these practices and he described how he has come to accommodate the Boomers. He tries to obey state health codes by advising those who will handle the body about possible disease transmission and having them sign a waiver clearing him of responsibility. Otherwise, he lets them do as they please and reported his satisfaction with their care of the body and of the ceremonial funeral arrangements in general. The funeral director noted that the number of "Indian" funerals have increased since the 1980s and that, at first, he was concerned about having cedar boughs on his carpets and about the reactions of non-Indian patrons to the sound of drumming and singing. He was reassured when the Boomers cleaned up his viewing rooms after use and no one complained about the noises. He did note that most traditional Ojibwa funerals are now held at tribal facilities instead of in funeral homes like his.

The recognition and celebration of rites of passage such as death are an important part of the spiritual life of the Boomers. They organize naming ceremonies and assist young people who are ready for their vision quests. They advise young women on proper behavior upon reaching physical maturity. Boomers also celebrate seasonal ceremonies with feasts and prayers. Boomers are organizers of, and participants in the tribe's powwows. Some tribal members request a house blessing ceremony annually or when they move into a new home. A pipe carrier blessed the home I rented for my son and me soon after we arrived in the community, at my request. Pipe carriers are individuals who have a ceremonial pipe that is used during many ceremonies. Considered spiritual leaders, their presence at ceremonies and rituals is desirable. They are not paid for their efforts but are given tobacco when the request is made and are often given gifts when the ceremony is concluded.

When I asked how one becomes a pipe carrier, I was given different answers by different people. Some said that a pipe carrier is given his (very few Ojibwa pipe carriers are female) pipe by another pipe carrier when the senior pipe carrier is convinced of his spiritual knowledge and good intentions. Other pipe carriers said that they dreamed of their pipe, which gave them the right to make a pipe and the power to use it.

The power of a pipe carrier to do good was described and demonstrated to me many times during my fieldwork. I became aware of the possible use of that power to do harm in a personal way. During my fieldwork, I interviewed a pipe carrier a number of times. To my dismay, he construed the interviews as

romantic interest on my part and announced to others that he and I were in a serious relationship. When I denied this, he became angry and began to harass me. I discussed his behavior with an influential woman in the tribal community who decided to “call the veterans.” When a traditional man in the community appears to be threatening to others, a group of veterans, men who have served in the military or been a member of the American Indian Movement, will visit him and remove him to a safer, more private location if necessary. They then counsel him, praying and singing, for as long as it takes to help him “see the right path.” The problematic pipe carrier was subjected to this intervention and it seemed to be successful as he stopped troubling me. Several weeks after the veterans visited him, he called and asked me to meet him to smoke a pipe together and cement the peace between us. I was noncommittal during the conversation but would have probably agreed in the end. I decided to discuss the matter with a tribal Elder first. She was greatly alarmed and begged me not to share a pipe with this man. She explained that he could put “something bad” in the pipe that could harm me. She was satisfied only by a promise from me to never smoke a pipe with him or accept food or gifts from him in the future. When I tried to question this informant and others about the malevolent use of pipe carriers’ power, they were unwilling to discuss the matter.

Boomers participate in sweats, which cleanse individuals physically, mentally, and spiritually. A sweat involves the construction of a sweat lodge, which is a low structure often built of flexible boughs that are covered with blankets and tarps to keep in the heat and keep out the light. A pit in the middle

of the lodge is filled with rocks heated in a fire outside the lodge. Participants sit or lie on the ground and drizzle water onto the rocks, producing steam. The sweat experience is arduous and participants often dedicate their discomfort and suffering to the tribe or to a special cause, such as a sick relative or recovery from substance abuse.

Talking circles are opportunities to share your thoughts and experiences with others in a non-judgmental and supportive environment. Participants sit in a circle and pass an eagle feather from person to person. The person with the feather may speak about anything and cannot be interrupted. It is a culturally appropriate type of support group or group therapy.

Boomers also work with recovering substance abusers; many Boomers are also recovering. Twelve step programs, like Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, are modified to fit Ojibwa ideology. Sweats and talking circles are considered important parts of the recovery process. For example, many participants in talking circles describe their personal struggles with addiction, a process similar to the AA and NA programs.

Earlier I mentioned that the Boomers get part of their knowledge about traditions and beliefs from their contacts with the Elders. Some of their knowledge is derived from books about Great Lakes tribes and from college courses. The more radical Boomers are self-conscious about using these sources of information and will deny the validity of any anthropological writings done by white scholars. I walked into a meeting of Boomers when they were preparing some cultural activities for the tribal children. My appearance was a

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surprise, apparently, although my child was going to be a participant in the cultural activities and all parents were invited to attend the planning session. I noticed several classic anthropological texts dealing with the Ojibwa on the conference table before they were hurriedly whisked away by some Boomers. I did not mention what I had seen since I did not want to further antagonize this group of Boomers, who saw me as a sort of spy sent to discredit their authenticity. I do not exaggerate with this statement; several of the more radical Boomers made statements to me or in my presence to that effect.

Most Boomers reject Christianity in all its forms and describe the destructive efforts of missionary groups in their area. Their children are socialized in the Ojibwa belief system and have no formal exposure to Christianity. They quietly express embarrassment and frustration when tribal Elders say Christian prayers at tribal ceremonies. The Boomers do not openly criticize Elders or others who practice Christianity but they do describe how puzzled they are when Indians continue to be Christians despite the bad behavior of Christians toward Indians not so long ago.

The son of a Boomer couple was killed in an accident during my fieldwork and her grandparents insisted on a Catholic funeral service. Out of respect for the Elders, the couple reluctantly agreed, with some compromises. The wake was done in the traditional Ojibwa manner and the funeral ceremony was held at a Catholic church. Boomers, their families, and other tribal members filled the church almost to capacity and sat in uncharacteristic silence. The officiating priest seemed to sense the hostility when he ascended the altar and looked out

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on a sea of brown faces. During the service, he attempted to draw parallels between the symbols he was using – water, smoke, song, prayer – to the symbols of the Ojibwa tradition. It was apparent that he had done some research to prepare for this funeral. His efforts did not seem to win over those in attendance and his consistent mispronunciation of the deceased boy's Ojibwa name made many flinch or shake their heads disapprovingly. Once at the cemetery, he was pushed aside after a hurried prayer and the tribe's spiritual leaders took over the burial ceremony. Several Boomers mentioned afterwards that they stepped foot in "that church" only out of the deepest respect and affection for the bereaved parents.

Some Boomers have been involved in the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and the American Indian Movement. One Boomer is given great respect for his participation in the Wounded Knee occupation by AIM, and is considered to have the status of a veteran. Boomers worked closely with the Corporate Indians when the tribe was seeking federal recognition. Several serve in the highest levels of the tribal administration while most work for the tribe in some other capacity. The Cultural Committee is influential in advising the tribal chair and board of directors in cultural matters and has a hand in shaping tribal policies, especially in the human resources sector.

### **Ritual as strategy**

The Cultural Committee uses ritual strategically for educational purposes, as do other Boomers and Elders in a less formal context. They are primarily



concerned with an internal, tribal audience and only peripherally or coincidentally concerned with educating the mainstream society about Ojibwa beliefs and practices. The Cultural Committee is especially committed to language acquisition as a critical part of learning more about Ojibwa culture and rituals. They have hired language teachers, insisted on Ojibwa language instruction as a core part of the tribal school curriculum, and publish short language lessons in the tribal newspaper.

Another critical aspect of the Cultural Committee's work is to prevent the less traditionally oriented Corporate Indians from making faux pas in their dealings with both tribal members and mainstream society. One example of a serious faux pas in the human resources policy for tribal employees was the inadequate time approved for funerals. In this context, the Cultural Committee, primarily made up of Boomers, is assisting the Corporate Indians with customs, traditions, and rituals in order to maintain the appearance of a progressive yet culturally rooted tribal administration.

Some of the Cultural Committee members serve as the ritual practitioners for the Corporate Indians. The most prominent of these are a couple of men who are enrolled members of the neighboring Bay Mills tribe. As I have explained, these two tribes are closely related and have many members who have moved from one tribe to another. The Corporate Indians call upon these ritual practitioners or spiritual leaders to create or modify and perform rituals, such as inauguration of new board members or the blessing of new tribal construction.

The rituals these particular individuals perform are almost always in a public setting with non-tribal participants or observers. The goal of these rituals is to express the tribe's unique identity to the non-tribal observers, with an emphasis on the antiquity of the tribe and its deep roots in the area. The ritual practitioners tend to mention the success of the tribe in the ritual's prayers, as well. At the same time, the practitioners draw upon recognized Ojibwa symbols and ritual elements to invest the ritual performance with meaning for the Ojibwa participants and observers. I interviewed a number of non-tribal observers and most were impressed by the "real Indian ceremony" they had witnessed (in this particular instance, the ceremony was to bless the opening of the new tribal administration building). Several commented that the ritual performance surprised them, as they had previously believed that the Soo Tribe members were too assimilated to have any "Indian culture". The reactions of these outsiders were gratifying to the Corporate Indians and the ritual practitioners alike. The rituals were successful in achieving one of their goals.

The other goal, of drawing in the Ojibwa observers and performing a sufficiently convincing ritual, had mixed results. Myerhoff defines a successful ritual as one that does not meet with overt opposition or disruptive expressions of disbelief or dissatisfaction (1977:222). I interviewed a number of observers from the Soo Tribe, and tried to speak with a mixed group, including Elders, Boomers, Youngsters, and Corporate Indians. Not surprisingly, the Corporate Indians were the most satisfied with the ritual performances and the ritual practitioners. The performance was an expression of their particular strategic use of ritual and their

primary goal was to impress the non-tribal observers. In this, they have been successful in most instances that I observed. Of the other groups, the Youngsters were the least interested in discussing their reactions and probably the least interested in the issue.

Boomers and Elders had mixed reactions. Most recognized the strategic importance of presenting the tribe as a unique entity to the outside world. Most either wholeheartedly accepted the new rituals, such as the inauguration ritual for new board members and the construction blessing ritual (during which any new construction by the tribe is blessed), or saw no real harm in them while being uninterested in participating in the new rituals themselves. A few expressed concern at the role of the specific ritual practitioners. They gossiped about the appropriateness of a spiritual leader being a sort of hired gun for the Corporate Indians. There was also gossip about these spiritual leaders' relative lack of involvement in nonpublic, more tribally oriented rituals and ceremonies.

Finally, many Boomers and Elders were concerned with the public prominence of the men involved in the Corporate Indians' rituals. This sort of fame was considered suspect and inappropriate for a spiritual leader, who should be humble and dignified. I would emphasize, however, that the negative comments about the rituals and the ritual practitioners themselves were never made in the presence of outsiders and did not represent a loud and vocal opposition to either the men or the rituals. Mostly, the dissatisfied Boomers and Elders seemed to accept what the Corporate Indians were doing strategically with ritual as necessary.

Boomers, as mentioned earlier, see themselves as the keepers and teachers of ritual. They take on the responsibilities of rituals associated with life stages and seasonal cycles. As traditionalists, their goals in using ritual are to keep the rituals alive by performing them and teaching them to others, especially the Youngsters. Their rituals are used as expressions of defiance, toward Christianity, toward white mainstream society, toward the local, state, and federal governments. For Boomers, performing rituals is an expression of tribal sovereignty and the struggle of their tribe, and indeed, all Indian peoples, to regain and retain the right of self-governance. In addition to teaching the Youngsters, Boomers also educate other tribal members about Ojibwa culture. By increasing their numbers, the Boomers may also increase their influence within the tribe's political structure.

The Boomers gain the support and approval of the Elders, who also see the Boomers as the key to regaining and retaining Ojibwa cultural values in the Soo Tribe. The support of the Elders is important, even among the progressive Corporate Indians. The Elders are appreciative of the attention they get from the Boomers and the efforts the Boomers make in gaining privileges for them from the Corporate Indians. The Boomers include Elders in the ritual life of the traditionalists of the tribe, emphasizing their revered status.

The Boomers use ritual strategically in a way no other group in the tribe does – to maintain and cement bonds with other tribes. Of the groups I studied within the tribe, the Boomers are the most influenced by contact with members of other North American tribes. Many of them attended Indian colleges, meeting

and sometimes marrying individuals from other tribes. Many retain ties and actively network with Indians from Michigan and throughout North America. Some Boomers were born in urban areas, like Detroit, to parents who were part of the urban relocation program. They met many other Indians and this experience continues to influence them after their return to northern Michigan. Boomers also tend to be more aware of the historic ties between the Ojibwas, the Potawatomis, and the Ottawas (Odawas): the People of the Three Fires. They have either learned of the loose association from Elders or from books.

Boomers often include individuals from other tribes in their rituals, and tend to focus more on how “traditional” a person is as opposed to the person’s tribal enrollment. I participated in a large midsummer ritual gathering at which a Zulu man was welcomed and asked to describe his tribal traditions. Boomers are also more interested in activism than the other Soo Tribe groups, and in the lives of indigenous peoples all over the U.S. and the world. This commitment to activism and to community awareness is also expressed in their use of ritual to assist those in need, especially the sick and dying and those struggling with substance abuse.

## **Analysis**

The Boomers are the most ritually active members of the tribe. They are responsible for maintaining and reviving Ojibwa rituals, such as rites of passage and seasonal ceremonies. They practice rituals in their everyday lives, such as daily ritual purification, as well as organizing larger celebrations. As a group, the

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Boomers are the most involved with the other groups in the tribe, maintaining close contact with the Elders, the Youngsters, and the Corporate Indians. In addition, they attempt to draw in and educate the disinterested or unknowledgeable members of the tribe. The Boomers also maintain contacts in the larger Indian and indigenous communities, using these networks to further causes that may affect the Soo Tribe directly or other Indians and indigenous peoples.

Many Boomers have learned tribal lore and traditions from Elders and through formal education. Some are self-conscious about their reliance on books or college courses, becoming defensive if questioned about the source of their information. Their identity is based on the incorporation of rituals and traditional values in their everyday lives, including the importance of family, community, and tribe. As such, the Boomers are involved in most aspects of the tribe's interests, especially in cultural and spiritual matters. Their goals coincide with the goals of the Corporate Indians, although their emphases are different. While the Corporate Indians use ritual and symbols to define the tribe as progressive while being rooted in tradition, the Boomers use ritual and symbols to remind the tribe's membership of its traditional roots as it experiences material and financial success.

The Boomers use ritual to reconstruct and retain a sense of Ojibwa identity for the Soo Tribe. As Bell notes, "The specifically 'ritual' construction of tradition and communal identity may be a powerful and effective strategy..."(1992:231). Some Boomers modify or create rituals to serve specific

public relations purposes. Others recreate or modify rituals for educational and community-building purposes. Still others perform rituals in the privacy of their homes, with only close family and friends present, because this is and has been a way of life for them. Boomers go into the tribal school and shape its curriculum to reflect Ojibwa values and traditions.

By drawing together the Corporate Indians, the Youngsters, the Elders, and a gradually increasing number of previously disinterested members, the Boomers are attempting to strengthen the tribe's sense of unity. Many work closely with the Corporate Indians on efforts to present a positive image of the tribe while safeguarding the tribe's unique cultural status. At the same time, the Boomers retain their own distinct identity by choosing a particular style of dress and devoting a great deal of time to spiritual and ritual activities. The occasional tensions between the Boomers and the Corporate Indians are defused by the many projects funded by the Corporate Indians that meet the goals of the Boomers, such as the Culture Camp on Sugar Island, Bahweting School, and the Cultural Center (a place for weddings, funerals, naming ceremonies, etc.) This dynamic as well as a commitment to tribal unity to use ritual in ways that enhance a sense of tradition and community for the Soo Tribe bind most Boomers closely to the more businesslike Corporate Indians.



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## **CHAPTER VII**

### **THE YOUNGSTERS**

#### **Ritualization**

Ritualization is a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship. This is not a relationship in which one social group has absolute control over another, but one that simultaneously involves both consent and resistance, misunderstanding and appropriation. [Bell 1992:8]

In applying Bell's concept of ritualization to children and young people, it was clear to me that the power relationship between this age group and the rest of the tribe, indeed, the rest of society in general, is an uneven one. Children and young people exist in a relatively powerless situation. Parents, grandparents, teachers, tribal Elders, and adults in general can and do tell them what to do. However, my experiences as a parent and a teacher tell me that children can and do resist. My goal in this group was to determine if and how they use ritual as a strategy to resist adult authority, or to gain approval from adults.

As I will describe more fully in the chapter analysis, I discovered that a certain segment of the tribal Youngsters, whom I call the Boomer children, successfully utilized ritual in a number of contexts for a number of goals. These goals included gaining approval from others, avoiding or diminishing punishment for misdeeds, and expressing Indian identity in a tribal or larger setting.

## **Context of interaction**

I interviewed and observed a cross-section of tribal children; however, most were the children and grandchildren of the Boomers (I refer to them as Boomer children). This chapter primarily concentrates on this segment of the local population, with observations and conversations with other tribal offspring referred to primarily as comparison. Children I interacted with closely ranged in age from 5 to 15 years old. Contact with young people aged 16 to 18 years old was mostly in the context of ceremonies, powwows, school activities such as dances, special programs for Native American youth sponsored by the local university, and a couple of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. I did not conduct formal interviews with teenagers, mostly because of their lack of interest in my research.

During the course of my fieldwork, I had a great deal of interaction with school-aged tribal members, both in their family settings and through my volunteer work at Bahweting Anishinabeg Tribal School, the charter school founded by the Soo Tribe in the mid 1990's. In addition, I conducted several interviews with children, always with parental approval and presence. I was not particularly interested in interviewing children, an attitude at least partially born out of workshops I attended concerning research with human subjects and the sensitive nature of working with children and other individuals who considered especially vulnerable. It seemed safest for an inexperienced fieldworker to avoid this complication by confining any research with the tribal children to participant observation. What I had not counted on was the desire to be included by some

children who knew I had interviewed other tribal members. (One girl, aged eight, crossed her arms and stamped her foot until an interview time and location were agreed upon.) With rare exceptions, adult family members agreed that the child had something valuable to say to an anthropologist, or at least deserved the respect of being heard.

## **Identity**

An outsider might be hard-pressed to identify most of the Boomer kids by appearance alone. One identifier would be a tendency for the boys to wear their hair very long. Not all boys did so but Boomer boys were more likely to do so than mainstream tribal boys. This custom was a source of pride for the boys and their parents, as well as admiring Boomer girls and young women. Two second-grade boys, both with waist-length hair, did tell me about one difficulty they experienced. I was a volunteer at the tribal school, and was working on a reading project with the boys one day when they told me of their experience of going to a local fast food restaurant the day before and being mistaken for girls by an employee. Their disgust and anger was still vivid the next day, heightened by the “girl cooties” age phenomena. This experience did not appear to affect their desire to have long hair, however. For older boys, the decision to sport long hair is more of a conscious social statement. For those with characteristically Indian features, the braids emphasize their appearance. For those whose appearance is less Indian, this hairstyle can ascertain and advertise their Indian identity to the world.

Boomer girls and young women usually wear their hair long. If braided, the hair is elaborately done, especially for a powwow. White and occasionally Black ancestry is evident in many of the children but is rarely remarked upon, although there are occasional off-hand comments about "blond Indians." Both boys and girls wear standard American attire, tending toward a ghetto-inspired, hip-hop look. This look is complemented by an affinity for rap and hip-hop music as well as urban Black-influenced speech patterns. The source of this style is undoubtedly television and movies as these kids do not have regular contact with urban Blacks. Country music is popular as well and ice hockey is a passion for boys and girls alike. Girls play in the younger hockey leagues but are eliminated from league play, as they get older. (A women ice hockey league had recently formed in the Soo and they were determined to play despite the terrible ice times they were forced to settle for.) Attending powwows is another popular activity for Boomer kids. They are usually involved as dancers and/or as members of a drum. I will describe their powwow activities in greater detail in a later section of this chapter.

When interviewed, the young Boomers had simplistic but telling perceptions of what it meant to be an Indian. They usually could not give the full name of the tribe they belong to (an admittedly long and complex name) but accurately referred to the Soo Tribe. I did not find ready familiarity with the names "Chippewa" or "Ojibwa" but most Boomer children knew the term "Anishinabe", especially if they were students at the tribal school. Those enrolled at the tribal school were learning many Ojibwa words and could say short

phrases in the language. Language acquisition appeared more successful among the children in the lower grades. The children interviewed about Indian identity were more likely to connect this aspect of their lives with their family than with any tribal structure. They told stories about their grandparents, their aunts and uncles, their parents and cousins and described how their behavior, actions, and beliefs were what made these people and themselves Indian.

The eight-year-old girl who insisted on being interviewed noted that her grandfather is an Indian so that makes her an Indian. (I will call her Susie.) I asked Susie how she knows he is an Indian, what makes him an Indian. Without hesitation, she replied, "He just does Indian stuff, like fishing, and hunting, and growing a garden. He also plays tricks on us, like an Indian!" This grandfather is known for his practical jokes, with immediate family members often being the butt of the elaborately planned and executed trick.

The grandfather's tricks often target the myths of mainstream culture. For example, before Easter one year, Susie's grandfather killed a wild rabbit and froze it, first having painstakingly arranged it sitting on its haunches with a colored Easter egg between its front paws and tied a bow around its neck. He then told Susie and his other grandchildren that they should not expect anything from the Easter Bunny since he had shot the fabled creature. They are accustomed to his tall tales and jokes but ran screaming when he pulled the dead "Easter Bunny" out of his freezer. He also drove from house to house one Christmas Eve with a partially stuffed Santa suit protruding from his car trunk. He explained to his horrified grandchildren that he had heard an intruder on the

roof and shot him, only to find that he had killed Santa Claus. These pranks might seem harsh to some but the old man's family thought they were hilarious. So did his grandchildren, once they recovered from their shock, a process that was encouraged by teasing from their parents and other relatives. Susie related these incidents to me gleefully and was gratified by my laughter. This type of humor is common in my family as well and I appreciated the underlying message the old man was conveying to his grandchildren.

Susie does not attend the tribal school, an institution her parents (not Boomers) disapprove of for its perceived permissiveness ("They just let the kids run wild at the tribal school! How is that going to help those kids in the real world?"). She does not routinely attend tribal events or ceremonies. The family practices Christianity and is committed to upward social mobility, with some emphasis on the importance of education. Susie's father is White and her mother is a tribal member who has worked for the tribe for years. Susie's mother is engaged with the corporate segment of the tribe, its administration, but remains connected to the more traditional segment of the tribe through her father. She has mixed feelings about her Indian identity as she struggles to reconcile her experience growing up in poverty on what is now the reservation with her current level of affluence. Susie does not have this experience and sees no conflict in being Indian and being middle class. At eight, being Indian is just what her family is.

I observed a young boy at play one day with other children. Sam was about six years old, a child of a family in trouble. Abandoned by their mother, he

and his siblings were being raised by the father, a man with substance abuse problems. Eventually, the tribe's social services department placed all of the siblings into foster care. At the time of this incident, Sam was still living with his father and siblings. I never visited the home but heard from mutual friends that it was a rough environment. Sam was usually unkempt, face dirty, dressed in old clothes. He was enrolled at the tribal school and sometimes attended tribal ceremonies and events with extended family members. Participation by the little ones usually consisted of playing together and amusing themselves while the older children and adults conducted the business at hand.

I had wandered away from the ceremony I was attending, which was supposed to be a talking circle (a forum to discuss any topic of interest) but had become an informal Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. Idly watching the kids playing, I overheard a conversation between Sam and an older girl. She had picked up a small stone and tossed it across a nearby brook. Sam said to her "How do you know that rock wants to be there? Why don't you put it back where it belongs?" The girl said nothing but promptly retrieved the stone, placed it in its original location and, with a sheepish expression, quickly walked away. I did not interview Sam, due to his precarious family situation, but I would have liked to ask him about this incident. Somewhere, from someone, Sam had acquired an Ojibwa concept that he was able to express so succinctly, he managed to embarrass an older girl (see Vizenor 1984 for description of Ojibway concepts relating to the natural world).



School is where children spend most of their day and the school environment can have a tremendous impact. Many Boomer kids attended Bahweting Elementary School, which was created as a sort of safe haven for tribal children, a place where learning includes training in Ojibwa, crafts, and traditional practices, story telling and ceremonies. The school was founded on the site of an abandoned BIA elementary school in the Mar Shunk neighborhood. The tribe purchased the property and ran the school for one year, with guidance from the BIA. The following year, the Board of Directors decided to register the school with the State of Michigan as a charter school, a move that added another level of red tape but also opened up additional funding sources, such as a breakfast and lunch program.

Both the tribal and larger communities met the opening of a tribal school with mixed reactions. Some tribal members viewed the school with a sense of pride while others wondered if the tribe could run a school. Unfortunately, the school quickly acquired a reputation for lack of discipline in the Soo Tribe community as well as the larger community. A number of factors influence this reputation. One factor is the school's teaching philosophy. Boomer parents, many of whom studied anthropology while attending college, helped shape this philosophy. They are attempting to apply traditional socialization techniques. Children must not be disciplined but, rather, must be shown the correct behavior and encouraged to be respectful of others and of themselves. The idea is to foster the children's sense of Indian identity by caring for and socializing them using traditional methods. Hilger describes these traditional methods, based on

several years of fieldwork in the 1930's on nine Ojibwa reservations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan:

Methods employed in training children were those of lecturing and counseling, of listening-in, and of having ideals presented; of imitation of Elders in play or of participation with them in serious work and ceremonials. [1992:55]

In the school environment, this means that students are allowed a great deal of latitude in their behavior. Teachers and other adults in the school are to model correct behavior, to be respectful of the students, and to encourage the students to be respectful and cooperative. Respect is the mantra, reinforced in school assemblies and in the individual classrooms. Formal discipline, which involves going to detention or to the principal's office, is infrequently used.

A number of factors complicate this teaching philosophy. One factor is the lack of parental support for these methods. The "children are raised by the village" concept only works if the entire "village" is participating. This is not the case in the Soo Tribe. Some parents have removed their children from Bahweting because they feel it is chaotic and not conducive to learning. Others protest that a "true" Indian school should not discipline children at all, at least not their child. (In one case, a father threatened to sue the principal, alleging that the principal grabbed his daughter's arm.) Still others disagree with the application of traditional disciplinary methods, such as smudging (burning sacred plants and

“bathing” the student in the smoke) and praying over a particularly troublesome student. Hilger noted in her study that the Ojibwa child was to have completed the socialization process by the time he reached adulthood, approximately 12 to 16 years of age. Contemporary Ojibwa children cannot be legal adults in this society at those ages. Many are not being required to take on adult responsibilities at home, which they would in a more traditional time or setting. Finally, many of the children have reacted to the relaxed atmosphere of the school by behaving disruptively, arguing that this is OK because as Indian children and tribal members, they can do as they like in their own school.

This particular attitude of many Bahweting students may result from their experiences in the public school system. All except the very youngest of the Bahweting students are former students from the Sault Ste. Marie public schools. Many of them were not successful in the public school system. This lack of success has been at least partly due to what seems to be a pattern of pervasive discrimination against Indians in the public schools. I did not spend time in the public schools but have based my evaluation on conversations with adult tribal members who went through the school system and on interviews with two schoolteachers. Both teachers are White and married to Indian men. The intended subjects of my interviews were the men but, in both cases, the wives insisted on being present. In the course of the interviews, both wives, being elementary school teachers, wanted to discuss Bahweting School. I answered what questions I could.

Both teachers had mixed feelings about the tribal school. On one hand, they were happy to be rid of the Indian students, whom they characterized (in the presence of their Indian husbands) as unruly, unintelligent, and coming from bad homes. On the other hand, they did not like the possible loss of federal funding which the public schools receive under the Johnson-O'Malley Act of 1934, which is based on the number of Indian students in a school district (Davis 1996:281-282). This program provides supplementary funding to public school districts with a large Indian enrollment. Often, Indian parents are not paying property taxes, especially if they live on reservation. The J-OM program's funding makes up the difference.

Neither teacher believed that the tribal school would be academically successful. Both couples had heard rumors that the staff of Bahweting School allowed students to "run wild". (This phrase – "running wild" came up repeatedly, used by Whites and Indians when talking about the students at Bahweting. The inference of an uncivilized, savage state seems clear.) For some Bahweting students, going from a hostile, disapproving mainstream school environment to one that celebrates the Indian identity and stresses the empowerment of Indian people has been an intoxicating experience, one that not all have been mature enough to handle, especially in a relatively hands-off environment. As the older students graduate from Bahweting School, the situation may change as more members of the student body spend their entire academic career at Bahweting.

Bahweting School is a source of pride for many tribal members, despite its problems, and the value of the cultural knowledge and experiences the students

gain at the school should not be underestimated. Elders come in regularly to share stories and demonstrate crafts and skills that might otherwise be lost. The students participate in outings and field trips that would not be available at local public schools. They learn about the legal and political complexities of tribal matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Bahweting students learn about other tribes and meet representatives who share their own knowledge and experiences with them. They listen to a public radio news bulletin called "Native News" which gives information about native groups in Canada and the U.S. Other media, such as *News from Indian Country*, a monthly newspaper, are also available to students. Exposure to other tribes may dissipate some of the isolationist tribal tendencies that have impeded intertribal cooperation for hundreds of years.

### **Ritual as strategy**

Powwows are events that combine social, familial, ritual, and tribal aspects. Also a source of entertainment, powwows are open to the public, often attracting visitors who come to see the colorful dancers and to peruse the traders' booths for Indian crafts and more. The younger dancers choose the more rigorous and showy dance styles, twirling and leaping in their shimmering regalia. Some powwows are competitive, giving skillful participants an opportunity to win cash prizes. Some families are dedicated to the "Powwow Trail", traveling every weekend to another powwow in another town, even another state. In addition to being entertaining and a possible source of revenue for young people, powwows may also be opportunities for ceremonial activities.

Some dances are dedicated to honor a special individual or a group, such as veterans. Others are for healing, such as the jingle dress dance. Being a member of a drum requires a commitment to learning special songs and their significance as well as the proper respect to show the drum, often called "grandfather." One fifteen year old girl, an excellent fancy dancer, expressed her enthusiasm for powwows: "I get to see all my friends there, even those who live far from me. And all my aunties and uncles come around and all the old people. They love to see us dance!"

During the winter of 2001, I attended a production of the American Indian Dance Theatre. The first half of the show featured a variety of traditional dances associated with various tribes and regions. The second half of the performance was described in the playbill as modern powwow dances and something about "getting ready for the powwow." I was delighted when the dancers began to stroll and strut across the stage, in various combinations of street clothes and dance regalia. This dance crystallized my perception of young powwow participants clad in the costumes and behaviors of 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian youth. The young men postured, leather jackets slung over breast plates and breechcloths while young women pranced or shuffled by, wearing oversized athletic pants and T-shirts, the same girls who would dazzle powwow goers with their light and graceful steps and twirls. The professional dancers of the AIDT captured this moment succinctly and I could hear murmurs of appreciation and amusement from experienced powwow goers and participants in the large performance hall. The ritual of transformation, from street clothes to powwow regalia may seem casual

to an onlooker. However, when you pay attention and observe this behavior over and over, there is an underlying intensity, a focus on doing things right, that can be seen whether the dancer is competitive (dancing to win a cash prize) or not.

Young people who could not seem to pay attention in class, to sit still for a story or demonstration, who continually clowned around and often behaved disrespectfully toward one and all, approached the dance circle or drum with decorum and even dignity. Being a member of a drum or being a dancer entails sacrifice, of time and money (the latter is especially the case for dancers, whose regalia can cost hundreds of dollars and hundreds of hours of handiwork.) Drummers and dancers must follow numerous rules, and there are certain taboos and restrictions that accompany their roles.

Within the context of the powwow, Boomer children and adolescents adopt a strategy of ritualization in order to succeed in this venue. By making the necessary sacrifices of time and money, and by obeying the ritual requirements of their chosen role in the powwow, the Youngsters gain acceptance and approval in their community. The monetary rewards that may come to a drummer or a competitive dancer are outside of this definition of success, but do serve to bolster their reputation on the powwow circuit. Powwow performance is also a way to attract the attention of a member of the opposite sex; I observed a great deal of flirting and posturing at these events. Finally, powwow participation is typically a family event, with several generations attending. A young dancer or drummer gains family support and approval by participating in the powwow.

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Tribal children and youth also take advantage of the Cultural Center constructed by the tribe on Sugar Island, a small island in the St. Mary's River, accessible by ferry. The Cultural Center, a large log structure with some outbuildings, is available for all tribal members and is frequently used by the school for field trips. For example, students help with sugaring in the spring, and learn to tan deer hides in the fall. They listen to stories told by Elders and learn handicrafts. There are also many opportunities to meet other young people from distant communities.

A goal among the adults is to encourage marriage within the tribe; social gatherings for tribal youth are a way to accomplish this aim. Several adults, including parents and grandparents, mentioned this to me but I never heard any adults discuss this with the teenagers or young people. While the adults try by indirect methods, such as the gatherings mentioned, to insure marriage among the youth of the tribe, they do not require it. However, if a tribal member has an unsuccessful marriage or relationship with a non-tribal member, tribal members may blame the failure of the marriage or relationship on its "mixed" nature. I did not hear the young people discussing this subtle pressure to marry within the tribe among themselves. However, they did participate in gossip about failed mixed marriages and relationships. It was also clear to the young women of the tribe, based on the reactions of their Elders, that a child born to them out of wedlock would be more acceptable if the father were a tribal member. An illegitimate child would be shunned or turned away but an Indian child was seen as a benefit to the tribe.

Participation in rituals and ceremonies among the Boomer children varies somewhat by age. Younger children attend ceremonies with their family members while it is accepted that older children may choose not to attend. I did not observe any children being forced to participate in rituals. Younger children tended to participate in an unself-conscious way, imitating their parents, older siblings, or cousins. In doing so, they were learning the proper way to make an offering, for example, or to host a feast.

Older Boomer children and adolescents seemed more conscious of the multiple meanings of participation. A desire for parental and community approval, a demonstration of Indian identity, even the effort to gain the attention of a member of the opposite sex were all part of the context of ritualization for this age group. In addition, Boomer children and adolescents are more likely to be treated leniently when they act out if they are involved in ritual activities.

## **Analysis**

Of the age groups I have focused on in this dissertation, the Youngsters were in some ways the most challenging in terms of analysis. By this, I mean that members of the adult groups tended to be more conscious of the sometimes made-up nature of tribal rituals and of their own goals in participation. While these goals or strategies were seldom articulated, being questioned often resulted in an air of self-consciousness, defensiveness, or even embarrassment as the adult described his or her reasons for ritual participation. With the Boomer children and young adults, this reaction was largely absent.

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Unlike their parents, most of who were exposed to Christian ritual and doctrine, Boomer children have a casual, taken-for-granted attitude toward Native ceremonies and rituals. For Boomers, many of whom have some college background, the role of Christianity in the attempted dissolution of Indian society is clear. For Boomer children, this history may capture them on an intellectual level but it rarely has the emotional impact that many of their parents feel. The children are non-Christian because of their cultural upbringing, rather than as a conscious political statement. This situation, at times, has elicited ambivalent reactions from Boomer parents who, while they are proud of the environment they have created for their children, may wonder if the Youngsters appreciate the sacrifices of their Elders.

This dynamic is common in social movements that have multigenerational effects, such as the Women's Movement (Ferree and Hess 1985) and the Civil Rights Movement (Mendel-Reyes 1995). Boomers in the Soo Tribe are beginning to respond in much the same ways as others have, by repeating stories of past struggles, by identifying "heroes" and role models, and with various attempts to codify the history of the tribe, as understood primarily by the Boomers. A potent tool for this last effort is the use of the Internet. Like many organizations, the Soo Tribe's use of the Internet has grown rapidly, the Internet being a powerful tool for communicating with far-flung members. It is also a way of communicating with their Youngsters, who are more likely to access the Internet and "check out" the tribal webpage than to read a book about their tribal history.

The Boomer children are using ritual strategically, with many of the same goals as other age groups in the tribe. Two of the goals of Boomer children's ritualization that may be shared with other tribal members are the desire to express one's individuality, and the desire to express one's membership in the tribe. Wanting to express one's unique individuality may be a particularly significant goal for Boomer teenagers, but may also be present for adult tribal members. One expression of individuality can be seen in the wide range of dance regalia created by dancers to express their personal tastes. This desire for individuality must be balanced with the other shared strategy in ritual participation: the affirmation of membership in the larger group of the tribe.

Of particular interest in the analysis of the Boomer children's strategic use of ritual is gaining of adult approval. Youngsters who participate in rituals receive a great deal of positive reinforcement and attention. The desire to please others, in this case, their parents and other adults, is a powerful reason to participate in rituals. This goal or incentive may be present for adult tribal members, as well, but for some adults, the decision to identify themselves publicly as tribal members results in disapproval from family members. This is not a problem for Boomer children. I did observe some non-Boomer children becoming involved in ritual activities. The children's parents are in the Corporate Indian group and do not participate in tribal rituals. These parents reacted to their children's interest with approval and support, one mother commenting "the kids should learn some of the traditional Indian knowledge."

For troublesome adolescents, participation in tribal rituals usually means being given more leeway and may receive lesser or no punishments for misdeeds. The Youngster's participation in rituals is seen as making an effort to "walk in the right path." This can be a powerful tool for an adolescent or child. I observed several students at Bahweting School who would have faced suspension or even expulsion at another school. In pleading for leniency, every one of these students promised to be "more traditional", to go to ceremonies and to participate in tribal affairs. They argued, successfully, that these activities would change them into better people, into better Indians.

I observed a similar dynamic in the community with young people, some of whom are already parents. When they act out, by drinking, fighting, or behaving in some undesirable way, the traditional faction of the tribe will be more forgiving if the young people participate regularly in rituals and ceremonies. This regular participation, in addition to distinctive manners of dress and hair styling, also serves to mark the young people's Indian identity in the larger, non-tribal setting. I would argue that young people and children in the tribe are successfully using ritual as a strategy in a number of contexts.

## **CHAPTER VIII**

### **THE ELDERS**

#### **Ritualization**

The goal of ritualization as a strategic way of acting is the ritualization of social agents. Ritualization endows these agents with some degree of ritual mastery. This mastery is an internalization of schemes with which they are capable of reinterpreting reality in such a way as to afford perceptions and experiences of a redemptive hegemonic order. [Bell 1992:141]

The image of tribal solidarity and authenticity being produced by these groups includes the concept of the wise tribal Elder. The wise tribal Elder should possess cultural and ritual knowledge as well as memories that further enhance the tribe's identity. Elders find themselves cast in the role of ritual specialist, whether they actually possess this knowledge or not. They may acquiesce, and become social agents practicing ritualization. To do so enhances their own prestige and solidifies their prominence in the tribe as they participate in the process of educating the tribal membership into the hegemonic order. The Boomer and Corporate Indian groups value ritual performance by Elders greatly. The Boomers rely on the Elders to enhance the image of the tribe as rooted in tradition and in the past. Simultaneously, the Corporate Indians rely on the

Elders to comment positively on the progress of the tribe. Elders are therefore in a central position in matters of tribal identity.

A handful of tribal Elders were involved in the creation of the tribe during the 1950s through the 1970s. Most of the Elders belong to the disinterested and uninvolved majority of the tribal membership. The Corporate Indians and the Boomers coaxed and enticed many Elders into involvement and public identification with the tribe with special privileges and programs. This large group of Elders remains uninvolved in the ritual and spiritual life of the tribe while a smaller group of Elders participates in all aspects of tribal life.

In this chapter, I will examine the involvement of Elders in the practice of ritualization. Of interest as well are the Elders' reactions to the rapid and widespread changes the tribe has experienced in the past 20 years. I will also examine the somewhat contradictory roles the Elders play in the Soo Tribe, being portrayed as the living memories of the tribe on the one hand but often being embarrassing reminders of the tribe's past on the other hand.

### **Context of interaction**

The term "Elder" can have different connotations for Native Americans. It can refer simply to an age category, much as the term "senior citizen" has come to mean in the mainstream culture. When "Elder" is used in the Indian community as a synonym for senior citizen, the age qualification is usually lower than 65, reflecting the reduced life expectancy of Native Americans. (For example, the Saginaw Chippewa Tribe of Michigan defines tribal Elders as those



over 45 years of age. I have chosen 55 years old as my lower age limit, in agreement with the Soo Tribe definition.) Another meaning of the term Elder is based on tribal cultural knowledge and experience. I am applying the term as the Soo Tribe uses it, a combination of both meanings. The Soo Tribe recognizes specific Elders as possessing tribal cultural knowledge and experience – they both recognize and honor them. However, all older tribal members qualify for special privileges and programs. These privileges encourage participation by a wide constituency of Elders, many of whom have no other contact with the tribe. Unlike the other groups I describe, the Elders represent a larger cross-section of the tribe, including the otherwise disinterested. Many Elders are retired, a few work for the tribe, some are disabled, and others are elected tribal officials. Their common denominators are age and tribal membership.

I interviewed and observed Elders in a variety of locations, including private homes and tribally owned facilities such as casinos, Bahweting School, the health center and the Cultural Center. I observed some Elders at their work, especially those who were elected officials and operated publicly. I provided transportation for Elders without cars, accompanied a couple of Elders to doctor visits, ran errands or helped decipher documents, such as insurance forms. One of my principal informants was a member of this cohort and granted many interviews covering a wide range of topics. In general, I found the Elders to be friendly and willing to talk. Often, Elders would deny having knowledge that could interest a researcher but could be coaxed into telling their life stories which were a rich source of details about life before the tribe's financial success.

## **Identity**

The Elders are usually unremarkable in appearance, in terms of dress and hairstyles. Most of the women wear their hair short and curled; some color their graying or white hair as well. The Elder men wear their hair short, as well. Both genders wear regular American style clothing that reflects their working class status. There are a few exceptions to this norm, however. Several Elders who are traditionalists wear long hair and ribbon shirts or ribbon dresses. These Elders are almost all known as spiritual leaders, and are highly regarded by many tribal members, especially the Boomers.

Almost all of the Elders I met lived at home, either on their own or with family members. It was common to find an Elderly woman living with one or more of her daughters and her grandchildren. Sometimes the home belonged to the Elder and sometimes to her offspring. Elders living with family members considered themselves an important part of the family unit. They contributed their labor, often as child caretakers, and their financial resources. They also gave advice and were usually involved in family decisions.

The tribal community considered it shameful for an Ojibwa family to place an Elder in an institutional setting unless all other options were exhausted. The Corporate Indians overlooked this particular value when they constructed a retirement/nursing home for the tribe's Elders. The Elders were outraged and shamed the Corporate Indians for having acted like "White people." When I was in the field, the retirement home was still in operation but only had a couple of residents. The tribe was making other arrangements for the residents and

examining alternative uses for the building. The retirement home residents who were there did not suffer from lack of attention, as do many nursing home residents. They received so many visitors that one complained to me that he could not get enough rest. This particular resident had moved into the facility voluntarily, stating that he did not want to burden his children. This seemed to be an unusual attitude among tribal Elders, most of whom expected to live with family members and to continue being contributing and valuable members of a household.

I interviewed an Elderly woman who lived in an independent living facility in the Soo. She appreciated the ease of caring for her efficiency apartment and the availability of staff to assist her, if necessary. She also enjoyed socializing with other Elderly people and going to church. What was missing in her life, however, was close contact with her family and she returned to this topic frequently. Her daughters are deceased and her son has substance abuse problems that keep him either incarcerated or otherwise absent from her life. Her brother and sister-in-law visit regularly and I sensed that the Elderly woman would have preferred to live with them. This situation created a certain amount of tension, as I discovered when I interviewed the brother.

The brother and his wife, who is White, prided themselves in being modern and progressive. For them, being modern and progressive specifically meant that the brother did not behave in any way that would mark him as Indian. I mentioned this couple in the chapter about the Soo Tribe Youngsters. His wife is one of the teachers who was so critical of Indian students and of the tribal

school. Her husband and his sister are of mixed Soo Tribe and White ancestry, like many Soo Tribe members. Unlike his sister, however, he denied his Indian ancestry until recently. I intended to interview this man (I will call him Bill) alone but his wife insisted on remaining in the room and actively participated in the interview as well.

Bill was a retired state employee, married for more than 20 years, and the father of two children. He explained that it would have been “a bad idea” to let his employer know that he was an Indian, although he was often questioned about his dark skin, hair and eyes. Like many Soo Tribe members in the past, he claimed Italian ancestry. (Interestingly, I did not encounter any stories of Soo Tribe members who had passed as French; Italian was the more popular choice.) Bill’s wife (“Jane”) agreed that it was not good to be known as an Indian but expanded the reasons for the subterfuge to include the common negative stereotypes about Indians: they are drunks, lazy, immoral, irresponsible, and so on. Jane did not identify these as stereotypes, however, but as truths. Bill lowered his gaze during this exchange and said nothing. Jane then stated that he is an exception who had done well in life with her guidance and assistance.

When Jane left the room to get us some refreshments, Bill regained his animation and spoke fondly of his mother and his memories of life with her and his sister. He expressed sorrow at having forgotten how to speak Ojibwa. Bill also recounted his decision to apply for tribal membership, a decision supported by Jane. Having returned to the room, Jane explained that once she learned about the benefits their children would qualify for, such as the Michigan Indian

Tuition Waiver, she convinced Bill to apply. Bill stated that the day he received his membership card was one of the happiest days of his life. He said it felt like he was closer to his deceased mother, in some way. Jane looked sour at this point and we quickly brought the interview to a close.

Bill's experience is, in many ways, representative of the experiences of Elders in the Soo Tribe. Many have passed for White, in the past, in order to gain access to economic, political and educational opportunities. They were encouraged by their parents to assimilate, to stop speaking Ojibwa, to be Christian, to try to succeed in an often-hostile world. Several Elders expressed sorrow at what they had lost by rejecting or hiding their Indian identity. These Elders usually expressed guilt as well, a feeling that was exacerbated by the expectations of younger tribal members. The Elders are expected to possess traditional knowledge about Ojibwa life, from technical skills such as curing animals to spiritual knowledge and skills. Some never learned these skills and others have forgotten what they learned in their childhood. They feel embarrassed and sad when they cannot pass on Ojibwa skills and knowledge to their children and grandchildren. Those Elders who do retain traditional skills, such as basket making, beading, and sugaring, are valued and encouraged to share their skills with younger members of the tribe.

Other Elders do not express sorrow or guilt about their lack of Ojibwa knowledge or skills and are quite pragmatic about the difficulties of the past. This pragmatic approach also extends to their current situation. Many of the disinterested and uninvolved Elders have become members of the tribe for

economic and social reasons. Tribal Elders receive an annual stipend from the tribe. Many take advantage of the tribe's health center in the Soo and the periodic free health clinics offered at other locations. Elders have qualified for tribal grants to improve their homes. The tribe's social services department also works with the Elderly to make sure they receive all the federal and state program assistance for which they qualify.

Involvement with the tribe also ensures an active social life, with many opportunities to go on trips with other Elders or to go to special parties. Many tribal Elders enjoy going to the casinos, where they can gamble, take in a free show, eat an inexpensive meal, and see their friends. Those who live near the tribe's casinos also have access to free meals offered a couple of times every week and senior citizen discounts at all tribal enterprises. The tribe usually provides free transportation for Elders or, when that is not an option, Elders can call upon family members or Boomers for a ride.

In their desire to emphasize "traditional" Ojibwa values such as a respect for Elders, the Corporate Indians and the Boomers have granted the Elders some power and authority in the tribe. At this time, the Elders have not used their influence often. Instead, they mostly express satisfaction with the operation of the tribe. Their general satisfaction is not surprising; as a group within the tribe, the Elders enjoy the most direct benefits of tribal membership.

## **Ritual as strategy**

Elders who are recognized in the community as spiritual leaders have high status. Boomers and their Youngsters go to them for guidance and advice. The Corporate Indians consider it a great honor to have an Elder spiritual leader attend one of their ceremonies. These Elders are kept busy by the many requests for their ritual skills and knowledge. The other Elders either regard them with great respect or ignore them, depending upon their beliefs.

Of all the groups I have described, the Elders are the most likely to have language skills in Ojibwa. Their knowledge may consist of a few words, such as names for common objects or Ojibwa greetings. Several are fluent in Ojibwa and teach language classes and workshops. Being able to say even a simple prayer in Ojibwa puts an Elder in the position of being called upon to do blessing ceremonies in private and public settings. Saying prayers in Ojibwa is not necessary but is desirable and Elders have an advantage.

Another characteristic of Elders is their membership in Christian churches. They are more likely to practice a mainstream religion than the other groups described. They do not express the hostility against Christianity that the Boomers do nor the indifference that Corporate Indians express. Some of the most spiritually active Elders were also devout members of the local Roman Catholic Church. When asked if they saw this as a contradiction, they said they did not. They were aware of the disapproval of the Boomers but explained that, for them, there is comfort in the rituals of the Catholic Church as there are in the Ojibwa rituals. A common statement was that there is only one Creator who is

neither Catholic nor Ojibwa but, rather, is a being beyond those human distinctions. The disinterested Elders remain Christian and express either lack of interest in or mild disapproval of the non-Christian activities of fellow tribal members.

This duality of belief systems can create tension during public tribal rituals. For example, Mary Murray is one of the oldest people in the tribe and is known for having donated 40 acres on Sugar Island to the Soo Tribe in the 1950s (<http://www.saulttribe.org>). Physically frail, she does not attend all tribal gatherings so if she is present at a ceremony, Mary is usually asked to say a prayer. She invariably prays in English and uses Christian prayers, to the annoyance of the Boomers and Corporate Indians who have organized the public ceremony. They will not openly criticize her or any other Elder who acts similarly but resort to making sarcastic comments meant to fall only on sympathetic ears.

In using Christian prayers, Mary and other Elders like her disrupt the illusion of cultural continuity and unity, an illusion created by the Boomers and the Corporate Indians particularly during ceremonies attended by non-Indians. Openly embracing Christianity challenges the hegemonic ritualization of the tribe.

During family and other private rituals, this tension either is absent or greatly reduced. Family and private ritual practices have a different purpose, one that can allow for religious and spiritual diversity. That purpose is to create a sense of unity and a sense of belonging. It would be counterproductive to alienate tribal members who continue to be Christian just as it would be counterproductive to alienate tribal members based on blood quantum. With a



high percentage of the tribe's membership being Christian and of mixed ancestry, exclusivity based on those criteria is not an issue. In the family and private settings, Elders may pray however they like without being the target of gossip. The Elders who are involved in the spiritual life of the tribe expressed gratitude for being able to practice Ojibwa rituals openly. They described having to hide their sacred plants, drums, and other paraphernalia from both religious and secular authorities. Even gathering in large groups could draw unwanted and sometimes dangerous attention. One elderly man described being chased through the swamp in the Mar-Shunk neighborhood by White men who heard him and his cousins drumming and singing. He was unsure of the exact date but was sure that it was a couple of years after World War II.

Elders rarely shared painful memories of the past unless they were asked directly to focus on some negative experience. This reserve may have created tension between the Boomers and the Elders, as the Boomers were usually eager to discuss the injustices and inequities of the past. Several Elders did tell me privately about some of their painful experiences, such as being sent away to boarding school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania or being teased and abused by Whites in town.

One man with whom I had spent a great deal of time was an infamous practical joker who rarely had anything serious to say. He surprised himself and me as well, I think, one day while telling stories. Instead of a funny story, he told me about the day his long braids were cut off. Town authorities were pressuring his parents to send him to the public school in the Soo. He and his family lived

on Sugar Island but a ferry made his attendance at school possible. He remembers being curious about school and excited by his parents' descriptions of the toys and games they assured him were at the school. What he did not realize was that his hair must be cut. Everyday, for as long as he could remember, his mother had combed out his long thick black hair and carefully braided it, binding the ends with bits of thread, yarn, or sinew. Now his father offered him a rare treat, candy, and took him to the barbershop in the Soo.

Close to sixty years later, this man could remember the unfamiliar smells of the barbershop and the fear he felt when his father lifted him onto the big leather chair. With tears in his eyes, he recalled the feeling of his heavy braids sliding down past his shoulders to the floor. He vaguely remembers his father gathering the braids and wrapping them in a cloth to take home. He described feeling betrayed by his parents and hating his new school. I asked him if he was a joker when he was a student and he said, yes, it was a way to get by. I then asked him if he had ever shared this story with his large family and he said, no. He did not want to talk about the bad times and was surprised that he had told me the story. I knew he had regained his composure when he jokingly accused me of putting some kind of Micmac-paddy-wack medicine in his tea, to make him reveal all of his secrets.

Most Elders are willing and even eager to tell pleasant or funny stories, however. Some of these are teaching stories, which may convey some sort of moral or value. Others are stories from their lives. The storytelling sessions can take on a ritual aspect. Traditionally, Ojibwas do not tell stories except in the

winter. They say that the spirits are asleep under the frozen ground then and will not hear their names being spoken. Drawing the attention of the spirits, or *manitous*, can be risky business so it is better not to take chances. Most Elders today will tell stories from their life in other seasons, as long as the stories do not involve any manitous. As such, they participate in video recording sessions sponsored by the tribe in an effort to gather the life stories of the tribe's Elders. Elders volunteer at the tribal school, where they may tell stories about their childhood or teach children how to make moccasins and other handicrafts.

### **Analysis**

In my introduction to this chapter, I noted that, unlike the other age groups, I included the disinterested Elders as well as more involved Elders. The primary reason I did so was that, unlike the other age groups I analyzed, the disinterested Elders do have a great deal of contact with the tribe. That contact, however, is not in the ritualization context. The involvement of the disinterested Elders is, nonetheless, important to consider. They have publicly identified themselves, often for the first time in their lives, as Indians, as members of a tribe. Their reasons for doing so are primarily self-serving. These Elders want the free meals, the inexpensive vacations, casino coupons, and so on. Their interest in the political workings of the tribe is also based on self-interest, not on what is good for the tribe. I do not mean to imply that they are the only tribal members with their own interests at heart. However, since Elders are the group within the

tribe that receives the most direct benefits from being tribal members, the disinterested Elders have the most incentive to be involved on whatever level.

For involved Elders, the tribe's financial success and accompanying support of Ojibwa cultural events has been a great boon. These Elders participate in sweats, talking circles, cultural and language workshops, naming ceremonies, funerals and weddings, as well as powwows. Many Elders are powwow dancers, spending time and money on putting together their regalia. They are honored guests at feasts and all tribal gatherings and gain a great deal of positive attention by joining in the ritualization efforts of the tribe. They use ritual strategically to gain the approval of other members and to become or remain active players in the life of the tribe. They also practice ritualization altruistically in their efforts to share what they know with younger members of the tribe.

There is a sense of excitement and pride in this segment of the Elders. They have lived in poor housing and have struggled to find work. They and their loved ones have struggled with substance abuse. They have seen so many of their people die of disease and the effects of life-long poverty. Many of them dropped out of school, either from economic need or to escape the discrimination of the educational system. What they see happening now in the tribe seems, in their own words, "almost like a miracle". Tribal members have jobs, the children can attend their own school, and the tribal community can join together to hold ceremonies without fear of repercussions. Medical and substance abuse treatment are available for all and much of the substandard housing has been

destroyed. The future seems rosy to the Elders who still have trouble believing how well the tribe is doing.

Some Elders have struggled with the rapid pace of economic and social change in the tribe. Some do not want to leave their old homes, even those that are shacks. Their children and grandchildren beg them to move to better housing, even offering to put the new home on the same lot so their Elders will feel at home. A frustrated middle-aged daughter commented to me that her parents seemed to mistake being poor with being Indian. They were afraid that they would lose something of themselves, of their culture, by improving their economic situation.

An elderly man, "Joe", expressed his own frustration one day, after receiving a visit from a tribal housing representative who wanted permission to demolish his home and replace it with something better. The opinion of the Elder was that the tribe was more worried about its image and reputation than it was concerned about his welfare. He was aware that the Corporate Indians and some of the Boomers are embarrassed by the poor condition of some private homes owned by tribal members and located near the reservation. They see this as detracting from the overall success of the tribe.

In this particular instance, Joe's adult children purchased a pre-fabricated house for their parents and set it up on the large lot their parents own, after destroyed several shacks and lean-tos to make room. They also removed loads of wood, metal and wire pieces, and old tires from the property, items that Joe had salvaged over the years. Joe and his wife were pleased that their children

cared enough and were successful enough to purchase the new home. Joe did express dismay at his "stuff" being cleared away and hurriedly squirreled away some prized salvage material. He and Mrs. Joe refused to let their old house be torn down, however, and the children could not change their minds. The last time I visited the elderly couple, I found them continuing to live in their old, dangerously dilapidated house during the day and in the new house in the evenings.

This type of situation will probably resolve itself as the tribe's Elders die out and are replaced by Elders who have more experience with the relative prosperity of the tribe. Most Elders are pleased with the changes in the tribe and take advantage of the particular benefits that attract them. For some Elders, this simply means getting a discount at the casino restaurant. For other Elders, it means the opportunity to participate in the ritual activities of the tribe and to wield some influence, particularly in the ritual sphere, by virtue of their years.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Revisiting ritual and ritualization**

This work was an examination of the process by which certain groups in the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians are practicing ritualization in their efforts to assert a tribal identity. As a tribe that has experienced rapid changes due to the influx of gambling revenues and a great increase in membership, the Soo Tribe seeks to carve out a unique identity that expresses both the history and traditions of their people while expressing pride in their recent accomplishments. Their post-contact history has included poverty and disease, prejudice and discrimination, unemployment, and the loss of land, customs, and language skills. It is unclear whether the Soo Tribe existed as a discrete group or tribe prior to culture contact. What is clear, however, is their commitment to their contemporary identity as a tribe and the efforts of a concerned minority in the tribe to enhance a sense of tribal identity among the tribe's members. The use of ritual and ceremony in their attempts to create and strengthen this sense of identity opens an area of analysis, the concept of ritual as strategy, or ritualization.

Unlike early anthropologists who tended to emphasize the exotic nature of "primitive" rituals, I am not interested in description of ritual for its own sake or in exoticizing the ritual practices of the other. This work has focused on the means by which rituals gain their meaning within a specific context and for a specific purpose and has included descriptions of ritual as a means to convey to the

reader how certain rituals are conducted as part of the explanation of ritualization. My interest has been the analysis of the strategic uses of ritual by various groups within the Soo Tribe.

My methodology included the division of the involved members of the tribe into age groups. These groups shared both particular goals and particular characteristics. The Elders sought recognition and attention while the Youngsters sought approval from the authority figures in their lives. The Boomers' goals included preserving and reinventing tribal customs and beliefs while encouraging a sense of tribal pride. The Corporate Indians were the most outwardly focused, seeking to impress mainstream society with the unique nature of the tribe while encouraging tribal members to identify with the tribe. I identified the strategic use of ritual, or ritualization, as an important method being utilized by each of these groups.

I was interested in the effectiveness of this method. Can invented traditions and innovatively applied rituals be effective tools for achieving these varied goals? My field data suggests that, in the appropriate context, as Bell (1992) contends, ritualization is a highly effective strategy. The Elders of the Soo Tribe receive a great deal of the attention they want. Younger tribal members visit them, provide transportation for them to ceremonies and other social events, and listen to their stories of the "old days." Elders with specialized knowledge, whether about ceremonies and beliefs, or about customs and handicrafts, are especially revered and sought after. Even disinterested Elders benefit from the



high status accorded to older tribal members, both financially (in the form of an annual stipend), and socially (being eligible for special trips and events.)

Youngsters practice ritualization effectively in their interactions with authority figures such as parents and teachers. By professing or exhibiting a commitment to participate in tribal rituals and ceremonies, Youngsters gain the approval of their elders. This interpretation of their goals and strategies for achieving these goals may seem cynical to some readers and I would err if I did not note that many Youngsters are sincere in their involvement in the spiritual life of the tribe. Many of the Youngsters have not been involved with Western religions and have been exposed to the Ojibwa belief system their entire life.

The Corporate Indians practice ritualization primarily with public relations goals in mind. This application of ritualization has proven to be very effective in the contemporary context, when public interest in Indians is high and New Agers are more attracted than ever to anything "native." The Corporate Indians strive to achieve a fine balance between the "exotic other" and "reliable business partner." They wear business suits and use business and political jargon while calling upon Boomers to present the image of Indianness. Their efforts have been successful as politicians and businesses at every level seek to form alliances with the tribe. Their efforts are also successful internally as the Corporate Indians continue to enjoy a high rate of approval and support by the greater membership, as evidenced by the regular reelection of board members.

The most complex case of ritualization in the Soo Tribe can be found in the activities of the Boomers. This can be explained by this group's commitment

to the spiritual life of the tribe, to the recording of the tribe's history, and to the creation and enhancement of tribal and ethnic pride in the tribal community. By using ritual in innovative ways, such as the use of a house blessing ritual to bless a new sports arena, to the invention of a ritual and tradition, such as the inauguration of board members ceremony, the Boomers are adapting ritual to new circumstances. They are exemplifying the flexibility and malleability of ritual that, seemingly in contradiction, enhances the stability and continuity of the ceremonial life of the tribe. The Boomers are using ritual strategically and effectively, in a context of rapid social change. Their rituals adjust to changing situations while maintaining an aura of unchanging stability and tradition.

### **Applicability of ritualization**

The examples I used in Chapter II, Theories of Ritual, to illustrate ritualization included Dussart's (2000) work among female ritual leaders in Australia, Jean Comaroff's (1985) work with the Tswana in South and Rosaldo's (1980) work with the Ilongot. By drawing upon work done in outside of the U.S., I wish to illustrate the broader applicability of the concept of ritualization. Certainly, ritualization is a powerful tool for analysis in Native American and Native Canadian studies, as indigenous individuals and populations seek to assert their identity within and outside of mainstream society. The history of the relationships between indigenous peoples and federal governments in North America is marked by changes in how the indigenous are defined, how they are identified. The pressures of colonization, warfare, and disease have forced

indigenous populations in North America and elsewhere to reconceptualize themselves, to seek an identity that meets their needs.

Within the Soo Tribe, ritualization is a powerful tool in the hands of individuals and groups in the process of identity creation or reaffirmation. I believe that ritualization can be used to frame broader questions and explorations of identity in anthropology. Kertzer (1988) does not use Bell's (1992) term "ritualization" but nevertheless is applying the concept in his exploration of the worldwide use of ritual by political groups. His examples of ritualization include the Soviet Union, the Ku Klux Klan, and the French Revolution. Anderson (1983) and others interested in nationalism and the creation of nation identities often refer to the use of ritual in the "imagining of communities", to paraphrase Anderson's term. Moore (1975) applies the concept of ritualization to more informal, even "accidental" groups or communities, such as the participants in the original gathering at Woodstock. These informal groups, like those involved in nation-building, also rely on symbols and rituals to draw them together and to achieve particular goals.

Marcus and Fischer in 1986 suggest that:

A third topical area of interest which seems ripe for a revitalized and repatriated ethnography is ethnicity and regional identity. Both of these topics have stagnated into banality and repetitive simplistic questioning...

[155]

I agree with this assessment and suggest that identity as an issue within anthropology is worthy of exploration. Ritualization can be a valuable tool to understand how some groups and societies construct identity. Marcus and Fischer note that:

The 1950s elitist contempt for mass culture and fears that it would simply institutionalize a lowest-common-denominator conformity have been replaced by ethnographic explorations of how working-class, ethnic, and regional communities and youth generations can appropriate the “rubbish available within a preconstituted market: - drugs, clothing, vehicles – as well as the means of communication, in order to construct statements of their own sense of position and experience in society. [1986:153]

How individuals and groups position themselves is of critical interest in anthropological study. The means by which people strategize, which may include the manipulation of ritual, with all of its symbolic potential, have broad implications and, therefore, broad applications for further study.

### **Further inquiry**

Previously, I have suggested the broad applications of the concept of ritualization in anthropological research. In this final section, I will propose possible directions for the specific research presented in this dissertation.

A longitudinal study of the Soo Tribe designed to trace the development of new uses of ritualization or to study possible changes in ritualization as the age cohorts grow older could reveal interesting trends. Certain assumptions could be tested in this type of study. For example, of particular interest to me would be the Youngsters. I assume some will abandon the strategic use of ritual to gain approval from the authority figures in their lives. A longitudinal study could test this assumption and may reveal that the goal of the Youngsters' ritualization, to gain the approval of authority figures, has not changed but the type of ritualization has changed. Which of the Youngsters will become Corporate Indians and which will become the next generation of Boomers? How will the aging Boomers swelling the ranks of the Elder spiritual leaders affect the tribe? Will the factions remain mostly peaceful and cooperative or will conflict break out and, if it does, how will ritual be used?

Another direction for continued research would be a comparative study, looking at ritualization in another related tribe. It could be interesting to compare the Soo Tribe with a non-gaming Ojibwa tribe, to examine the differences in ritual strategies. A comparative study with another gaming tribe could also reveal interesting information concerning ritualization. Some critical factors might be how tribal membership is defined (blood quantum vs. lineal descent, for example), the comparative size of the tribes' populations, the degree of Christianity within each tribe, and the size of the tribes' land bases.

Other avenues of research could focus more closely on particular aspects of this work. An in-depth study of the ritual specialists/spiritual leaders of the

tribe might yield a level of detail not possible in this broader analysis. The rare female pipe carriers and spiritual leaders would be valuable subjects of research, perhaps from a feminist perspective. John Haskell, Roman Catholic priest, Soo Tribe member, honored spiritual leader, and acknowledged traditionalist, would be a fitting subject for an anthropological life history project. During my time in the field, Father Haskell spent some time with members of the Keweenaw Tribe who, angry with their corrupt leader, occupied the tribal administration offices for several months. I spoke with Fr. Haskell at a wedding during the siege; relatives of the bride and groom had smuggled him out of the occupied area in the trunk of a car. He was uncomfortable discussing the situation and I discovered later that his superiors in the Church were none too pleased with his involvement in this matter. They felt he was more committed to his fellow Indians than to the Church.

## **Conclusion**

This work has explored the use of ritual by segments of a contemporary Ojibwa tribe, a tribe that has faced many challenges and struggles in its quest for federal tribal recognition. As the tribe continues to grow and change, ritualization remains a prevalent and powerful strategy in the pursuit of its goals.

Clifford (1988) describes a court case involving a group of individuals who claimed to be a tribe, the Mashpee Wampanoag of Massachusetts. Their claim was complicated by several factors, including a long history of intermarriage with non-Mashpee and the loss of their native language. Clifford's description of the

court testimonies reveals the underlying assumption by the State that the Mashpee identity can somehow be situated in ritual practices, as various Mashpee are questioned as to their knowledge of Mashpee rituals. Interestingly, one point that is used against the Mashpee could have been used in their favor, had their attorneys been better versed in contemporary pan-Indian rituals. The Mashpee were active in the war against the British, siding with the colonists. The State argued that "Their enthusiastic patriotism strongly suggests that they had identified with white society, relinquishing any sense of a separate tribal political identity" (Clifford 1988:297). Military service is greatly valued and honored with rituals in contemporary Indian cultures, and there is ethnohistoric evidence (Wallace 1969, Weslager, 1972, Hallowell, 1992) that these practices have been in existence since culture contact.

The importance of the use of ritual as part of identity creation and reinforcement can be found in the anthropological literature, as I have attempted to illustrate. What is lacking, however, is the explicit analysis of ritualization as it applies to identity formation. Some of the examples given imply ritualization; what is needed is more studies like this one that examine the ritual basis for people's actions. The strategic use of ritual is found in groups and societies world-wide and, as such, deserves further development in anthropological studies.

## AFTERWORD

In the interest of reflexivity, a recent buzzword in anthropology, I am including this brief description of my fieldwork experience, from a personal perspective. As a graduate student studying various theories and reading ethnographies, I soon began to prefer theories and ethnographies that situated the researcher clearly in his or her work. Reflexivity for the purpose of self-aggrandizement, for bellybutton gazing, is not informative nor is it particularly interesting to the reader/scholar. Reflexivity that reveals the standpoint of the writer, that allows the reader to better understand the particular context this individual used to filter the fieldwork experience is useful and, hopefully, interesting. My goal in this section is to provide context for the fieldwork experience as well as an account of some of the effects conducting the research had on me and on members of my family.

When I drove to Sault Ste. Marie with one of my advisors, it was my first visit to Michigan's Upper Peninsula and my first visit to a reservation. Having grown up in northern Maine, I hoped the UP would look just like home. It does not, for the most part, although the western section of the UP is hillier and more wooded. The Indian reservation on the edge of town in Sault Ste. Marie was not what I expected. It was small and the houses were all relatively new tract houses, not attractive but functional. The casino across the street was the first I had seen and seemed subdued compared to television and movie images of Las



Vegas casinos. I toured the tribal offices, at that time located in a two story house not far from the reservation.

A Corporate Indian woman and her husband, a tribal attorney, came along and described the community, both Indian and white, for my benefit. They became my first connections to the tribe and were very helpful and welcoming to me, and later, to my son. I felt good about the project and decided to apply to the tribe for funding. Typically, anthropological research is funded by grants from organizations like the National Science Foundation or the Ford Foundation. This was an unusual, possibly unique, situation in that the Soo Tribe was willing to fund research on tribal identity and was looking for the "right" anthropologist for the job.

As such, my personal identity was a crucial factor in this research. My advisor suggested me for the research project, his suggestion was supported by the tribal chairman, and the project was funded by the tribal board of directors based primarily on my identity, my ethnic/racial categorization as an Indian woman. That I was to study questions of identity was an irony of which I never lost sight. Once the funding was set up, the rest of the arrangements went smoothly and I relocated my son and me to Sault Ste. Marie.

Being of mixed Indian and white background seemed to be relatively inconsequential, as most of the tribal members would also be considered of mixed ancestry. Canadian Indians I encountered while in the field categorized me as Métis, a formal label used in Canada for mixed bloods. UP Indians tended to recognize my phenotype and often mistook me for a local, asking if I came

from Manitoulin Island (located in Lake Huron and having a large Indian population). I was puzzled by this resemblance momentarily until I remembered that, like my people, many Great Lakes Indians married and reproduced with the French and French Canadians who came to the area as trappers, explorers, and soldiers. Even my surname was familiar and I found variations of it, even in the Soo Tribe.

My tribal connections, surname and appearance were important factors for the tribe, more important than my academic or professional qualifications. Being an anthropologist is not usually viewed positively by Indian communities and I am convinced that my Indianness helped overcome that barrier. I don't mean to imply, however, that the Soo Tribe would not allow non-Indian anthropologists into the community. Two of my advisors were White men who have worked in the community for years.

Being considered a cousin by those you are studying is like and unlike the type of fictive kinship relations that have marked many anthropologists' fieldwork experiences. My father's tribes, Maliseet and Micmac, are Algonquin tribes like the Ojibwa, Potawatomi, and Ottawa peoples of the Great Lakes. An older Potawatomi man told me that he had met Micmacs from New Brunswick and could understand the language. My kinship with the Soo Tribe was fictive to the extent that we did not trace out genealogical connections. It was "real" in the sense that our backgrounds, histories, experiences are related. Our tribes shared some early history, from a time when the three Great Lakes tribes lived in the east with the Dawn People (Micmac, Maliseet, Penobscot, and

Passamaquoddy). An Ojibwa friend and I often joked that, since the Dawn People at one time lived in the Great Lakes area before moving east, they must have gotten to know one another in passing, possibly while trying to sneak around some dangerous Iroquois people! I will not deny the advantage this relationship gave me, especially in terms of securing both permission and funding for the study, but I also believe that my kin status sometimes created a special tension and elevated levels of expectation in my work and in my everyday life.

The Ojibwa community in Sault Ste Marie can be like a village within a larger community, especially if you spend a great deal of your time with tribal members who publicly identify themselves as tribal members. Within that village, your actions are watched, judged, commented upon by anyone who has an interest. This situation is common for anthropologists and can be especially distressful to those who may have grown up in a city and are not accustomed to being the object of study. Having spent my childhood and teenage years in a town of 900, most of who were related to me through my mother, I was not surprised by the scrutiny.

The pressure I came under to conform to local norms pertaining to Indian women did surprise me. Why was I not married or at least living with a man? Why did I only have one child? These are expectations that a woman may find in mainstream society as well, but perhaps not as overtly as in this Indian community. My parenting skills were evaluated and judged acceptable – as one elderly woman told me, I was stricter than most Indian parents but had a

respectful son to whom I was devoted. My household skills, appearance, social skills, all were examined and discussed, often in my presence. If I protested, they laughed at me and reminded me that they were just watching out for their "Micmac-paddy-wack" cousin, a nickname one of the witty powwow emcees came up with and announced to several hundred people one summer day. I was asked for exhaustive details about my family, which is quite large, and reminded regularly to call them. As annoying as all of this could be, on the balance I believe that my "kinship" gave me a level of entrée that I might not otherwise have had.

How did my "real" family react to this experience? They live 1,000 miles away and did not visit during my fieldwork but I did take a two-week vacation and drove out to attend a family reunion. My immediate family, three brothers, one sister, in-laws, and nieces, were anxious to see me and my son and eager to hear about the fieldwork. My family was, for decades, the only Indian family in our small town. The only other Indians we had contact with were my father's relatives. We have no family on any of the Canadian reserves and no one in my immediate family had ever been to a gathering of Indians, other than family gatherings. They were excited about my experiences attending and dancing at powwows in Michigan and asked to see the dance regalia I was making. Several family members assisted me with sewing or by making other parts of the regalia, such as a cedar box to store my feathers.

While we worked, I described what I was doing in Michigan. The women in my family were especially interested in the menstrual taboos, and began

refusing to cook if they were “on their moon time.” The men in the family were interested in reports on hunting and fishing, topics of importance to professional hunting guides. My father was proud when I told him how impressed many Indians are upon seeing the snowshoes he made for my son and me, especially when a Cree woman correctly identified them as Micmac or Maliseet by their design.

For the most part, my family does not understand what graduate school is about and why I need more education. I am of the first generation in my immediate family to graduate from high school and I am one of two people in the immediate family to graduate from college. For my family, hearing about my research in a community that my family can identify with was more comprehensible to them and helped break down some barriers.

Causing pain to a loved one is not something most of us seek to do. Taking my son to the field caused him a great deal of pain, balanced with some wonderful experiences. The most difficult situation for Zack was his time at the tribal school. As one of the few students not enrolled in the Soo tribe and not related to any one in the community, Zack was singled out for teasing and abuse. Had he been an athlete (preferably a hockey player), it would have been easier to fit in. I did consider transferring him to a local public school but, having spoken to parents and students with experience in the public schools, we decided the tribal school was still the better option. He did enjoy the cultural activities, the numerous field trips, and attending hockey games at the local arena. Upon our return to the Lansing area, I chose to have Zack repeat that grade because,

academically, the year was a wash. His class in the Soo was far behind the classes he attended in the Lansing area. Today, Zack looks back at his time in the Soo with mixed feelings. As he puts it, he learned to fight and he had some terrific experiences and made some good friends.

It is not unusual for an anthropologist in the field to form a strong personal attachment to one or more individuals. Often, our informants also become our friends. I was introduced to Rosemary Gaskin early in my fieldwork and that first interview led to a close and warm friendship. Rosemary was blind and on dialysis when we met, the results of diabetes. A very bright woman, Rosemary played an important role in the development of the tribe, working with social service agencies to assist her people. Her illness had halted her work and, when I knew her, Rosemary spent most of her time alone, lying in bed listening to the radio or television. She was happy to talk to me and told me many stories about her past activities as well as helping me clarify my understanding of local family relationships, tribal politics, and other matters.

During our friendship, Rosemary's health declined. One of the most difficult conversations I have ever had was in her doctor's office one day. I had taken her for a routine appointment when the doctor called me in and told me Rosemary needed surgery. She was going to lose a foot and lower leg but refused to believe the doctor. He asked with me to talk to her, to describe the condition of the gangrenous foot. Her blind eyes pleaded with me and we wept together when she agreed to the surgery. Recovery was long and difficult and Rosemary began to have periods of confusion. When she was told the other foot

and lower leg must be removed, Rosemary told me that she was through with the struggle and said good-bye. She did not survive the operation. Hundreds of people, many from outside the tribal community, attended her funeral. Recently, the Soo Tribe opened a dialysis center in her memory. I was lucky to know her.

Doing anthropological fieldwork is an academic and personal rite of passage. In many ways, my fieldwork experience required me to balance the academic and the personal perception of the people I was studying. My understandings of who I am as an anthropologist and as a mixed-blood woman were tested and shaped in the field. While it has taken me some time to find a workable writing focus to organize my fieldwork data, resulting in this dissertation, I walked away from the fieldwork experience with a renewed commitment to applied anthropological research.

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