

# Warrior Societies in Contemporary Indigenous Communities

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## INTRODUCTION

It is the aim of this paper to provide factual information on the development and current reality of warrior societies in indigenous communities. Providing a comprehensive explanation of every aspect of warrior societies in the context of the indigenous rights movement in the current era would be impossible in the scope and time frame of this project. Thus, in the context of the mandate of the Ipperwash Inquiry, the paper will focus on the history and contemporary features of warrior societies that are most directly related to the political engagement of indigenous peoples with Canadian state authorities.

It should be noted at the outset that the paper will focus on indigenous movements and organizations located and operating within the Canadian state's claimed territorial boundaries. Although there are many historic connections between indigenous movements, including warrior societies, across border between the United States and Canada, the situation today is such that aside from individuals' movement across the border the only relevant cross-border connections are related to expressions of ideological or philosophical solidarity. There are no relationships between warrior societies across the Canada–U.S. border that manifest in coordinated political action, save for among Kanien'kehaka (Mohawk) people, whose territory is bifurcated by the

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\* Opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Ipperwash Inquiry or the Commissioner

border itself. Thus, the paper will focus on communities, organizations, and activities that are located within the borders of Canada, and organizations within the borders of the United States are referenced only as they impact these organizations and situations.

Another important factor concerns methodology, and the fact that outside of scholarly research done on the Mohawk Warrior Society in the context of the Kanien'kehaka struggle for nationhood during the 1970s and through 1990s, there has been no focused scholarly research done on warrior societies in North American Indian communities. There are a limited number of published studies on various indigenous–state conflict situations, and many official reports prepared for legal processes or government bodies. But none of this research is capable of providing a solid analytical foundation upon which to develop defensible conclusions on the nature and impact of warrior societies. There has been no in-depth and systematic, or otherwise methodologically sound and rigorous, research done on warrior societies at all. All of the information that exists in the published record on warrior societies is journalistic in character, or is politically biased in favour of a police agency or government bias toward the criminalization of indigenous people who act against government policy or in contravention of Canadian laws.

Given the paucity of authoritative published sources, this paper will rely mainly on primary sources from warrior societies themselves, reports and communiqués from conflict situations, and interviews with individuals directly involved in the warrior society movement. The methodological approach will be to provide a comprehensive view of warrior societies' role in the movement to assert indigenous nationhood and rights in the modern era. Using a strategy of assembling facts and presenting the words of actual participants in the movement, the paper aims to provide a factual counterpoint to prevalent myths and misconceptions surrounding warrior societies. Further to this end, the paper will directly engage the main myths and misconceptions to dispel commonly held and widely circulated misinformation and untruths arising from media, police, and government agencies' political and cultural biases in favour of the established legal and political order in Canada.

To gain a true understanding and appreciation for the reality of the indigenous nationhood movement and the role of warrior societies in it, it is crucially important to understand the nature of the established legal, social, and political order itself. Comprehending warrior societies as they actually exist among indigenous people is impossible without considering them in the context of the larger struggle of indigenous peoples to survive as nations of people with their lands, cultures, and communities intact.

The situation of indigenous peoples within the borders of Canada today has two essential distinguishing features: 1) indigenous peoples have been systematically dispossessed of their lands through colonization, and the resultant economic, social, and political effects of that dispossession have created the present context for indigenous–state conflict; and 2) the psychological and social effects of colonization have created divisions within indigenous communities between those people who embrace a colonized identity and accept the legitimacy of Canadian authority and those who remain rooted in an authentic indigenous identity and assert the authority of their nation.

Government policies are designed to operate within and actively manipulate this colonial dynamic to maintain control over indigenous nations and territories. It is the sovereign imperative of states in a colonial relation with indigenous peoples to defend principles of jurisdictional and territorial supremacy founded on a counter-factual history and denigrating mythologies of the native, in spite of factual histories, and legal and moral principles which would otherwise mandate the reconciliation of state sovereignty with indigenous nationhood. Thus, the political and social conflicts that emerge in this situation are inherently *political* and should not be viewed as legal or policing issues—a legalist perspective devoid of historic and political context skews the analysis toward legitimating an exercise of power by the state that is not founded on factual or morally defensible principles.

Seeing the relation of indigenous peoples to the state in this historic and political way, government policies and the sovereign claims of the state must be problematized and considered as contributing factors to conflict situations. The rise of indigenous political movements and the conflicts that have occurred between state authorities and warrior societies are aspects of a political struggle occurring between nations (Canada and various indigenous peoples) who are each asserting competing claims of sovereignty, land ownership, and legal authority. In this struggle, Canadian federal and provincial government policies in relation to indigenous peoples are designed to maximize the strategic effect of both aforementioned features of the basic situation: ensuring the continuing alienation of indigenous nations from their lands so as to ensure dependency on the state, and promoting the divide-and-rule principle in their relations with indigenous communities so as to ensure the co-operation of segments of the indigenous population as a means of promoting acceptance of state authority.

The history of indigenous peoples in the modern era is, fundamentally, a story of struggle to overcome the effects of colonization and Canadian governments' manipulation of vulnerabilities that have been created as a result of their dispossession. The indigenous struggle has expressed itself in efforts to gain intellectual and cultural self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, spiritual freedom, health and healing, and recognition of political autonomy and rights to use and occupy unsurrendered lands. Countering the indigenous struggle to restore the strength and health of their nations, Canadian governments have sought to preserve the privileges of power and access to economic resources by promoting de-culturation, defeatism, division, social disruption, and economic deprivation through the use of legal manoeuvres obfuscating the truth, co-opting community members to serve the government authority rather than their own peoples' best interests, and in some cases, the use of police or military force to discipline indigenous people through violence into submission to Canadian laws and authority.<sup>1</sup>

The re-emergence of warrior societies among indigenous peoples in the modern era is one element of a larger struggle of indigenous peoples to survive. Warrior societies are a means by which indigenous peoples take direct action against colonization and the history of their dispossession. Colonization in effect disconnected indigenous peoples from the sources of their existence *as indigenous peoples*. In the long process of gaining control over indigenous nations, Canadian governments and other institutions of Canadian society have created false images of indigenous people to suit the imperatives of dominion—the Savage both vicious and noble, the

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<sup>1</sup> This section draws on my analysis in Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Indian, and now the Aboriginal. Warrior societies are most accurately understood as attempts to express an authentic indigenous identity in the face of these false instrumental-to-empire identities generated by Canadians. A warrior society operating in the context of an indigenous nationhood struggle is the practical expression of indigenous peoples' efforts to survive in an authentic sense by reconnecting to the sources of their strength—the land, their spirituality, their culture, and each other. In order to survive, indigenous people have been reasserting their true selves and resolving to survive in all senses of the word.

If one is to view a warrior society as in some way fundamentally different than other means of expressing an indigenous authenticity, the question must be asked as to why. Canadians accept and celebrate indigenous movements for cultural restoration; indigenous spirituality is acknowledged as an aspect of the healing process, and so on. Why is it that reconnecting to land and asserting nationhood, which are just as much a part of recovering from colonization, are criminalized by the state and disdained by the Settler population? The obvious answer is that land and nationhood assertions have political and economic implications. Culture and spirituality and the arts are tolerated by Canadian society because for the most part they are de-politicized and integrated into the social and economic institutions of Canadian society—they are non-threatening to the interests and identities of Canadians. It is important to acknowledge the basic *political* character of the perspective of the Canadian state, and of Settlers themselves, on all assertions of this one aspect of indigenous peoples' struggle to survive. With respect to warrior societies especially, special care must be taken to acknowledge the inherent prejudices within Canadian culture and to place the structure and activities of warrior societies in the context of the broader struggles of indigenous peoples to withstand the historic and continuing effects of colonization.<sup>2</sup>

With the preceding description and analysis of the relationship between indigenous peoples and Canada in mind, this paper will present a factual portrait of warrior societies in contemporary indigenous communities. The paper will answer a number of questions that are key to the mandate of the Ipperwash Inquiry, including:

- What does it mean in indigenous societies to be a “warrior”?
- When and how did warrior societies become a factor in indigenous communities?
- What is fact and what is fiction in people’s views on warrior societies?
- How are warrior societies organized and how do they operate?
- Do warrior societies cause conflict and divide indigenous communities?

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<sup>2</sup> This section draws on my analysis in Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2005).

## I. THE WARRIOR IN HISTORIC AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXTS

Contrary to the militaristic and soldierly associations of the term in European languages—and in common usage—the words translated from indigenous languages as “warrior” generally have deep and spiritual meaning. This deeper sense is exemplified, to use one example, in the English-Kanien’kehaka translation, *rotiskenhrakete*, which literally means, “carrying the burden of peace.” The construction of the word is an indicator of the philosophical framework for understanding the role of the warrior within traditional indigenous cultures. The word is made up of *roti*, connoting “he”; *sken* in relation to *skennen*, or “peace”; and *hrakete*, which is a suffix that combines the connotations of a burden and carrying.

Many people familiar with the history of conflict between the Kanien’kehaka and Canadian government agencies in the past two generations, and whose perspective is shaped by mainstream education and media, will probably find it ironic that the concepts built into the word *rotiskenhrakete* have formed the contemporary Kanien’kehaka cultural and philosophical basis for the militant assertions of nationhood in their communities. But in fact, this understanding of “warrior” was one of the founding ideas of the Mohawk Warrior Society that emerged in Kanien’kehaka communities in the 1970s and 1980s, and there remains a strong link between such traditional teachings and the motivating ideas of the contemporary indigenous movement in other nations all across the land.

There are many related words at the core of traditional indigenous cultures that, due to the relative simplicity and limitations of the English language, can only be translated using the single term “warrior.” In fact, the single English term has multiple connotations and a much broader usage in indigenous languages and in the traditional cultural life of indigenous societies. Again using the Kanien’kehaka as an example of this: in the ceremony of Condolence, in which grief is assuaged and new Chiefs are raised up by clans, young men of the nation are referred to as *Rotiskenhraketakwa*; in the traditional Thanksgiving Address, in which gratitude for our place in creation is expressed, the sun is called *Rotiskenhraketekowa*.<sup>3</sup> The complexity inherent in indigenous conceptions of being a warrior is explained by Thohahoken, a Kanien’kehaka cultural teacher:

*Rotiskenhraketakwa* are like conscript fighters, men who would normally not be fighting except when conscripted to defend the peace, *Oyenko:ohntoh* are more akin to the Japanese samurai. One of our more sacred protection medicines is tobacco, *oyenkwehonwe*, and in the old days it was cured by hanging it up in the rafters of the longhouse, *arhenton*, “in the shadows.” Thus, hanging tobacco in the longhouse rafters protects the house. *Oyenko:ohntoh* are not conscripts, but sacred protectors; they are anonymous shadow warriors in a secret society whose duty it is to protect the house.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The term “Warrior Society” is also used occasionally by First Nation (mainly in the United States) military veterans groups, and in this context—groups akin to the Royal Canadian or America Legion—it should not be confused with more authentic usages discussed in this paper.

<sup>4</sup> The entire discussion on the Kanien’kehaka notion of the warrior, and the quotes from the cultural teacher, are taken from Alfred, *Wasáse*.

This is the depth of understanding and appreciation of being a warrior missing from the notion expressed in the English term, and lacking from more modern and less culturally grounded notions held even by indigenous peoples themselves.

The great Lakota scholar Vine Deloria Jr. has written on the ancient values within indigenous societies surrounding warriors and war Chiefs:

[T]hey had a sense of personal worth, of a mission to be accomplished, and of a relationship with the life forces of the greater cosmos in a measure that we have not seen since. Fighting overwhelming odds, suffering the loneliness of knowing the situation was hopeless, and maintaining their sense of person was an achievement few of us can conceive and none of us can match.<sup>5</sup>

There is in fact great consistency in indigenous cultures on the idea of the warrior. What follows are a few illustrative examples from among the many different indigenous cultures:<sup>6</sup>

- Kuna (Central America): *napa-sapgued*, “one who protects or guards the land, or nature.”
- Dakota (Plains): *akicita* refers to those who have engaged in war combat, though linguistically the word is related to *akita*, which means “to seek.”
- Wsanec (West Coast): *stomish* means those who protect the territory and defend the names with honour and discipline.
- Pawnee (Plains): *heluska*, “the warrior, the war dance, the war, battle, struggle.”

The Pawnee saying *tu-da-he*, as explained by a Pawnee language teacher, beautifully exemplifies the traditional indigenous idea of being a warrior:

Tu-da-he, “the war, the battle, the struggle is good, sacred, right.” Life and the everyday struggles of living, good or bad, is the epitome of life. It is how you know you are living. Nothing is easy, and because it isn’t easy, one should truly value the blessings. In a warrior society the warrior ideal is how life is lived. It is what you do, it is who you are—you fight. Defeat is painful, but it is only temporary because you still live to get yourself up and see the dawn.

To link the ideas in traditional cultures with contemporary ideas and practices of people actually involved in warrior societies, I spoke with Teyowisonte, a man who has been involved with the Mohawk Warrior Society in the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory since his early teenage years. As part of my research for the book *Wasáse*, I interviewed him about his concept of a “warrior” and sought to convey to people how this modern-day warrior understood himself as such.

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<sup>5</sup> Frank Waters, *Brave are My People: Indian Heroes Not Forgotten* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1993), xiv.

<sup>6</sup> The definitions and explanations of the various indigenous words are taken from Alfred, *Wasáse*.

I began the conversation by remarking on Teyowisonte's evident, from a quick look at his bookshelf, reliance on what may be called "revolutionary" literature, in particular the work of the Argentine communist and hero of the Cuban revolution, Che Guevara.<sup>7</sup>

TA: *Che Guevara's basic message was one of armed resistance. Armed force, violence, used against the United States as the centre of empire. This is key to his idea. Is that a good message to be sending to our people?*

Teyowisonte: That's something I struggle with: the thirst for adventure. You have to keep it disciplined, that whole adventure part. It's like boxing, in a way. I have my training tips taped to my fridge to remind myself: "Never Get Mad." Because if you take off that discipline, you're leaving yourself subject to something you're not expecting.

TA: *That sounds like something from The Art of War.*<sup>8</sup>

Teyowisonte: I think it's more my boxing training, because it's something I figured out on my own. When I read *The Art of War*, it just reinforced what I already knew. It's kind of like our traditional Longhouse teachings, they reinforced what I already knew from *Star Wars!* (Laughter.) I'll tell you, my evolution as a thinker started when I was 14 years old, as a fighting person. From 1990 on, I was just waiting for the next fight. I wouldn't say I wasted my teenage years, but since then, I've dedicated my life to that cause. My weekends were spent at checkpoints, going on recon patrols, patrolling town, patrolling the perimeter, learning how and then timing ourselves on how fast we could dismantle AK-47s. That was our culture at the time. Every day was just waiting for the next war. When is it going to happen? Of course, we were all taught that the ideological basis of what we were doing was the Longhouse, and we were taught the Longhouse way of life. So, from that point on, I studied what I was going to be fighting for. That's what we did.

But over time, we became disillusioned with our leaders, after finding out that what they were fighting for was more about what was going into their own pockets rather than for the good of the Nation. Once I found that out, I left the rhetoric and I started trying to find the true meaning of our teachings: peace, power, and righteousness; the power of the good mind. From that point on, you could say I became more open-minded. I started talking to people whom I would have considered "the enemy" when I was a bit younger. I moved away from thinking that the Warriors were a secret society. I started to believe that we should be more open about what we think, and the things our teachers were talking about. That's when I felt a burden lift off of me. You know? I felt a lot more comfortable with what I was doing and with the things I was talking about.

A key part of Teyowisonte's interpretation of being a warrior is what he explained to me as the "national defence" function of the Warrior Society involving, potentially (as with the Oka Crisis

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<sup>7</sup> The interview here is extracted and adapted from the full version included in Alfred, *Wasáse*.

<sup>8</sup> *The Art of War* is a classic text of war strategy and political counsel by the ancient Chinese philosopher Sun Tzu.

in 1990), “armed resistance” to violence and aggression by non-indigenous governments. I questioned him about the implications of taking such a position on the role of the warrior today, not so much in terms of physical capacity but in terms of the social and cultural context of indigenous community life today.

TA: *Most people react with fear or skepticism when you start talking about armed resistance.*

Teyowisonte: A significant number of our people are complacent. They are stuck being too comfortable. They don't want to do anything to jeopardize their standing, you know? They don't want to lose their jobs; they don't want to rock the boat. And unfortunately, in their minds, when you bring up weapons, that is about the most boat-rocking kind of thing that you can do.

TA: *What do you mean by “armed resistance”? Are you talking about pulling some IRA or PLO kind of activity or what?*

Teyowisonte: I don't think you can justify doing things like blowing up buildings or killing innocent people. We can't justify initiating armed activity. Especially in our case, it'll just do damage to the cause. Our weapons are strictly, strictly, for defence. The only time weapons should be used is when all peaceful means have been exhausted.

TA: *What does that mean?*

Teyowisonte: That means when the leadership is at a stalemate and the only thing that is going to save us is to pick up our weapons.

TA: *So “armed resistance” is the defence of life, property, and well-being?*

Teyowisonte: I always say it like this: “The Warrior Society is in the business of defending people and territory.” You're the one who said the word “property,” but I wouldn't even include businesses myself. Us Mohawks, particularly the Warrior Society, got a bad name because we were always associated with cigarette smuggling and super bingos. I'll tell you something, when I was out there, it wasn't for cigarettes and bingo. I was defending the people and the territory.

Teyowisonte's responses clearly indicate that, in the Mohawk Warrior Society, ideological commitment to defend land and communities from physical invasion by outside forces is framed within a well-thought ethical perspective. Their perspective on the use of violence is tempered not only by the direct experience of military engagement with Canadian police, paramilitary, and army forces, but also by the effects of psychological and social stress of armed conflict upon the community itself.

Theorizing violence and armed conflict in this way has led the modern Mohawk Warrior Society toward the development of an ethically reasoned and conceptually refined idea of “revolution” that is far from the simplistic notions of raging against power most oftentimes attributed to warrior societies in the public mind.

*TA: In your mind, how will the revolution unfold, and what will be your role in it?*

Teyowisonte: First of all, I hope that my vision will be victorious here in my own community. From there, it will expand and harmonize with the rest of our nation and then with the other Iroquois nations. Once we have that, the ultimate vision is for a union of independent indigenous nations in the whole of the Western Hemisphere. That’s my ultimate vision. It’s similar to what Che had in mind for South America, but he didn’t make it because he jumped the gun and went right away to armed revolution. In my vision, I don’t think of revolution in the common contemporary sense of the word. I see “revolution” in the technical sense of the word, meaning our situation will evolve, or revolve.

*TA: That’s interesting, because the original meaning of the word, in Latin, and in early European thinking, was, as you say, “technical.” It described a cycle or something coming around again.*

Teyowisonte: I think that each indigenous society had achieved a nearly perfect utopia-like state in our social and political organization. But because of colonization, we were de-evolved: we lost what made us great. We lost our culture, we lost our freedom.

*TA: Is your vision of the future a threat to white people?*

Teyowisonte: I could see the ultimate stage of the indigenous revolution being so. But as far as our nation goes, we’re not a threat to them. As Mohawks, we’re bound by the principles of the Two Row Wampum, and we have to respect each other’s independence and each other’s way of life. Hopefully, an indigenous revolutionary movement would thirst for something similar to the guidelines of the Two Row, so that it wouldn’t look to banish white people from the continent or to storm their parliament buildings and bring them down. Although, if you think about it, that would be pretty cool! (Laughter.) Victory to me means everybody having political autonomy, economic independence, and a way of life that they choose, including white people.

It is evident in the juxtaposition of the traditional philosophical ideas with their modern interpretation by Teyowisonte that contemporary indigenous ideas on warrior societies reflect a strong cultural and spiritual basis outside of militaristic notions of being a soldier. There is in fact a culturally rooted warrior identity in indigenous cultures, and that identity manifests in the contemporary context in the form of cultural and spiritual assertions of survival. The Kanien’kehaka experience will be shown to be the same as other nations, as the following

description of the development of warrior societies among the Mi'kmaq, Ojibway, and West Coast peoples makes clear.

The ultimate goal of the warrior society is to defend indigenous lands and people from external threats, particularly state authorities, in order to achieve justice and eventually peace. To achieve this goal, the warrior society's objectives are three: 1) organize a group of indigenous people who are ready, willing, and able to physically defend the land and the people at all times; 2) maintain a presence in the community representative of a warrior ethic; and 3) develop a political, cultural, and ideological consciousness that is rooted in the territory and traditions of the community and/or nation in which it originates.

In all of these situations, warrior societies are groups of young indigenous people who both embrace the complex responsibilities of a traditional warrior and the requirements of defending their people and land against imminent and violent threats. Any discussion of the potential use of violence, or indeed of the experience of violence being used against indigenous people, are contained strictly within an ethical framework rooted in traditional cultural values and always considered within the context of self-defence in response to immediate threats of violence to communities or persons.

## **II. THE MODERN WARRIOR SOCIETY MOVEMENT**

### **DEVELOPMENTS AND ALLIANCES**

Contemporary warrior societies emerged in the late 1960s, with the rise of the Mohawk Warrior Society at Akwesasne and Kahnawake. The Mohawk Warrior Society was established by a group of young people committed to reviving traditional Kanien'kehaka teachings, language, and structures in Kanien'kehaka territories. Accordingly, the strategy and tactics employed by the Mohawk Warrior Society are community and/or land based. The overall strategy was to repossess and protect Kanien'kehaka territories according to the *Kaienerekoawa*, the Great Law of Peace. The tactics employed by the Mohawk Warrior Society included barricades and roadblocks (to prevent Canadian and U.S. authorities from entering Kanien'kehaka territories), evictions (of unwanted people living in Kanien'kehaka reserve lands), and occupations (repossession of lands within Kanien'kehaka territory).

The emergence of the Mohawk Warrior Society coincided with the emergence of what was termed the Red Power movement, an urban-based movement established in the United States to resist oppression and discrimination against indigenous people in all of North America. The overall strategy of the Red Power movement was to raise political, spiritual, and cultural awareness among indigenous people and to advocate for what at the time were called "Indian rights." This political awareness was grounded in the philosophy and tactics of the American civil rights movement: sit-ins, rallies, and marches to pressure the U.S. and Canadian governments to treat indigenous people fairly and to honour treaties. It is worth noting that contrary to the Mohawk Warrior Society's strong roots in Kanien'kehaka cultural and spiritual traditions, the Red Power movement reflected the diverse racial and national backgrounds of its

urban membership and was grounded in a pan-indigenous culture and spirituality that was not reflective of a single nation exclusively.

There were other fundamental differences between warrior societies and the Red Power movement. Warrior societies emerge from within (and remain a part of) indigenous communities; thus, like the Mohawk Warrior Society, they are grounded in the communities' indigenous traditions and are accountable to the traditional leadership. Red Power organizations emerged from within urban centres, were highly mobile, and often formed a loose network of "chapters." They focused their activities in urban centres unless called upon by people in indigenous communities during times of crisis. Once in a community, a Red Power organization was held accountable to its hosts and adjusted its approach accordingly. Whatever the differences between them, though, warrior societies and Red Power organizations did draw on the same spirit of discontent among young indigenous people and they did focus on the same fundamental problems; thus, warrior societies and Red Power organizations did ally in conflict situations.

Warrior societies and the Red Power movement expanded throughout the 1970s, often working together during episodes of crisis and mobilization. In 1973, the Mohawk Warrior Society stood in armed resistance against the Quebec Provincial Police at Kahnawake. The prominent Red Power organization, the American Indian Movement (AIM), allied with the Mohawk Warrior Society during this "siege at the Longhouse."<sup>9</sup> While AIM had received widespread attention during the siege at Wounded Knee in South Dakota earlier that year, this was the first time the Mohawk Warrior Society had drawn attention from mainstream society and from governments. Later that year, AIM adopted the term "warrior society" for its promotional poster *A Red Man's International Warrior Society*, and attributed its imagery and words to the Kahnawake Mohawk Warrior Society leader, Louis Hall (Karoniaktajeh). The text of the AIM poster is illustrative of the spirit of the times and of that movement: "Pledged to fight White Man's injustice to Indians, his oppression, persecution, discrimination and malfeasance in the handling of Indian Affairs. No area in North America is too remote when trouble impends for Indians. AIM shall be there to help the Native People regain human rights and achieve restitutions and restorations."<sup>10</sup>

The poster depicts a Mohawk man (indicated by the three upright feathers of the Rotinoshonni-style *Gustoweh*, or headdress) standing atop inverted United States and Canadian flags. This imagery gained prominence in 1974, when the Mohawk Warrior Society re-established the territory of Ganiienkeh after repossessing Kanien'kehaka lands that had been occupied privately in New York State. Karoniaktajeh himself was instrumental in the repossession of Ganiienkeh territory, and it was there that he unfurled the "Indian Flag," sometimes called the "Ganiienkeh Flag." The flag symbolized a mighty Union of Indian Nations, depicting an generic indigenous man's head with long hair and one feather (symbolizing, according to Karoniaktajeh, indigenous peoples being "all of one mind"). Since Ganiienkeh was envisioned as the staging ground for such a union, it was adopted there.

Later, Karoniaktajeh designed a flag for the Mohawk Warrior Society that depicted a Mohawk man's head on the same background used for the "Indian Flag"—a sun on a red background.

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<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey York and Loreen Pindera, "The Psychology of Fear: The Rise of the Warrior Society," in *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the Legacy of Oka* (Toronto: MacArthur and Company, 1991), 174.

<sup>10</sup> American Indian Movement, *Red Man's International Warrior Society* (1973), poster.

However the printer made a mistake and printed one feather instead of three! This flag has since been mass produced and can be found everywhere in the world (most recently it has been seen flying at the UN Conference on the Environment in South Africa) and has been adopted by many indigenous people in their defence of land and nationhood around the world.

The Ojibway Warrior Society also gained prominence in 1974 when they occupied Anicinabe Park in Ontario. The following excerpts from a 1974 interview with Louis Cameron, the leader of the Ojibway Warrior Society, captures the spirit and intent among the Ojibway people involved with the warrior society movement at that time:

Q: How do you feel that the violence or confrontation tactics you are using differ from the violence of the government?

Louis: First of all, our war is a just war, a people's war. We are fighting oppression, we are fighting profiteers, fighting private interests. The people are justified—they've been killed in the hundreds in the last ten years.

Q: How have they been killed?

Louis: As a result of the force of that whole oppression pushing that expression inwards on the Indian people. As a direct result of that they drown, die of fire ... or sometimes they shoot each other... Whether you call it violent or not, our struggle is progressive—it fights for our people. It fights for human rights. We are fighting for brothers and sisters we have lost, for land we have lost. We're fighting for unity with a lot of other people across the country who want the same things.

We want free government, we want self-determination, we want our own land back, our own nations, our own governments. The treaties have been signed and they've been violated—they just use them for manipulation purposes.

Q: Louis, you were one of the founders of the Ojibway Warrior Society. Could you talk about why you started the Warrior Society, and what it stands for?

Louis: It began by itself; a lot of women and a lot of men started expressing that: "Where else can we go?" ... You know we've tried a lot of things and still look at our communities—the Indian communities are really sad—the Indian people are fighting each other. So these people have a lot of frustrations, a lot of anger and they are seeking justice. We looked around and the only organization that we saw that had the kind of feeling that served the people is the feeling that is connected with AIM. We saw that some Indian people really had been putting their dreams, their hopes, their frustrations together—and it's a human movement.

In Kenora they put us down if we say we believe in AIM. So for the purpose of our own people here we titled the movement—which is the same movement as the American Indian Movement across the continent—the Ojibway Warrior Society. It serves the people, it puts the aims and aspirations of our people together, especially the feeling of

being Indian people. It started from this. Throughout the reservations and in town they're always asking us: "What organization are you from?... What organization do you represent?" And finally, our people said we're the Ojibway Warrior Society. Myself, it doesn't matter what title you put on it. It's the movement that's important.

Q: Why did the Ojibway Warrior Society decide on an armed occupation of Anicinabe Park in Kenora?

Louis: This summer we planned ... a four day conference with ceremonies on behalf of our people and by our own people. In these four days we called for a discussion on the last takeover of Indian Affairs. We talked about Wounded Knee, we talked about March 1965, in Kenora—we talked about these sorts of things, about serving our people and getting it on. At the same time we looked at the Kenora situation and how we can combat the kind of violence our people face and the reservation communities. There was pretty close to a thousand people there for four days ... [a]nd we came to the decision after the fourth day that this just cannot go on another day.

So this came from the suggestions of the people that were here. It was a decision made by the people. The action that we're getting from our people on the reservations now is that they're doing a lot of thinking in a different way. A new kind of thinking, a new kind of movement is happening on the reservations right now.

Q: Do you think you have a lot of support among your people?

Louis: Well, I don't know how to say a lot—but we have a great amount of support from our people.

Q: How is this shown?

Louis: They've come down here ever since we've been here. We've occupied this place for the last 16 days now, and there has been a steady group of 150 people here but a lot of people travel in and travel out. In 16 days we've had about 2,000 people here already. They come and talk. We've had old people here and women and everybody. We have general meetings with them. A lot of people come on the weekends and sit down and talk. We also get phone calls and letters.

Q: What do you think are the chances of winning any or all of your demands?

Louis: Well, first of all, you know that we have a list of demands that you would consider impossible—a list of demands that a lot of people wouldn't comprehend. We have to have a complete changeover in the Canadian government, we have to have a complete changeover in the Canadian law system and various departments in the federal and provincial governments—there has to be a lot of drastic changes in those establishments. These are the kinds of demands we are putting forward....

If we are going to get killed here, I want to know that I've asked for everything, I want to die right. I'm not just going to ask for a piece of bread and then get shot without even

getting it. When we jeopardize our lives here, and many of our people get shot, it's not impossible for us to ask for the ultimate changes in this country.

Q: Under what conditions will you lay down your guns?

Louis: I don't think that this is a possibility at all. Hopefully the conditions will be that from now on Indian people will be armed no matter where they are.

Q: Would you lay down your guns if the police laid down their guns?

Louis: (Laughs) All the police in Canada and the army would have to be disarmed before we disarmed too. It's not just to ask Indian people at this point in time, at this stage, to put down their guns. It's very unjust because it's all they have left....

There have been hundreds of shots fired at us by vigilantes and there have been some shots fired by uniformed police officers firing in the direction of the park. We've stated that we took up guns to protect our people, to serve our people. It's the only tool we have left to serve and protect our people.

We didn't advocate any violence, and we never will advocate any violence. What we are advocating is confrontation—direct confrontation with the federal government, the provincial government and the town council. All along we've been willing to negotiate in good faith. All the violence is coming from the outside—threats from the police, from the town council, from the vigilantes. All that violence is coming from the outside—not here.

Q: During part of the time we have been talking, the drums have been playing and people [are] singing in the background. Can you tell me why?

Louis: We have sacred ceremonies all the time. We have sweat lodges, every sunrise there is a pipe ceremony where we burn tobacco, and in the evening we have the drums. Part of it is for having fun and part of it is for being serious. It's one of the things that we must go back to. We must go back to our own people, back to our land, back to the sacred things that we believe in.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear from Cameron's comments that the Ojibway Warrior Society in the 1970s was fundamentally similar in ideological orientation to the other movements that emerged during that era. The Ojibway Warrior Society appears to have been a unique combination of the urban and "revolutionary" (in outlook and strategic objective) Red Power movement with the culturally and community-rooted Mohawk Warrior Society. Perhaps the most telling of Cameron's comments is that the name "warrior society" was only chosen because of its growing currency at the time and in response to pressure from outside of the movement to label itself—it is quite evident that the Ojibway Warrior Society did not stem from an ideological struggle, but that ideology and the label of a warrior society was grafted onto a movement that developed within the Ojibway community and in northwestern Ontario in response to systemic and immediate injustices against

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<sup>11</sup> Louis Cameron and Ojibway Warrior Society, *Ojibway Warriors' Society in Occupied Anicinabe Park, Kenora, Ontario, August 1974* (Toronto: Better Read Graphics, 1974), 5–12.

indigenous peoples. In this basic way, the Ojibway Warrior Society joined AIM and the Mohawk Warrior Society in the list of organic movements expressing long-standing grievances in a vocabulary that reflected both traditional culture and contemporary political discourse.

Later that same year, in the fall of 1974, the Bonaparte Indian Band in the interior region of British Columbia set up an armed roadblock on the highway that passed through their reserve to demand better housing. Several AIM members were present at the barricade and Chief Ken Basil looked to the leaders of both AIM and the Ojibway Warrior Society for support, declaring “between 2,000 and 3,000 militant Indians might come to the reserve from Kenora, Ont., and Wounded Knee, S.D., if the blockade resumes.”<sup>12</sup>

Later that year, Louis Cameron and members of AIM led a Native People’s Caravan to Parliament Hill in Ottawa, where they were met with barricades and riot police.<sup>13</sup> Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Kahnawake-based Mohawk Warrior Society expanded to the neighbouring community of Akwesasne and was instrumental to the establishment of a lucrative cigarette trade that generated revenue for both the Warrior Society and the traditional governments in the Kanien’kehaka communities. Meanwhile, AIM intensified its activities in British Columbia and Alberta, establishing chapters in major cities and attending the roadblocks, sit-ins, and “fish-ins” that were springing up throughout western Canada and the United States. By the end of the 1980s, the Mohawk Warrior Society had strengthened their presence in Kanien’kehaka communities and drafted a Code of Conduct framed within the structures of the Great Law of Peace. They had also been embroiled in several armed conflicts with Canadian and United States’ authorities as a result of police invasion and raiding of reserve cigarette stores, casinos, and bingo halls.

In 1988, the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society emerged out of the community of Big Cove, New Brunswick. Soon after, the Assembly of First Nations’ National Chief, Georges Erasmus, warned Canadians that warrior societies were springing up on Indian reserves all over Canada and that younger indigenous people were becoming impatient with the intransigence of government in dealing with indigenous peoples’ land and governance issues: “We may be the last generation of leaders that are prepared to sit down and peacefully negotiate our concerns with you. The next generation may resort to violence if governments continue to ignore native concerns.”<sup>14</sup>

While Erasmus’ statement was an exaggeration and an ill-advised attempt by a moderate leader to leverage the young people’s political discontent to create some advantage for First Nations negotiating land claims, it nonetheless showed that there was a growing awareness of the fact and of the influence of warrior societies in indigenous communities and consciousness.

Meanwhile, AIM’s influence had all but disintegrated. The nature of the organization as a transient, urban-cultured movement had prevented any lasting connection to indigenous communities, and it failed to gain widespread support from indigenous people. AIM members were subsequently harassed, arrested, and incarcerated by American and Canadian authorities,

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<sup>12</sup> “Chiefs Turn Backs on Indians’ Armed Stand,” *The Province*, August 27, 1974.

<sup>13</sup> See James Burke, *Paper Tomahawks: From Red Tape to Red Power* (Winnipeg: Queenston House Publishing, 1976) for an interview with Louis Cameron describing the events on Parliament Hill.

<sup>14</sup> “Native Violence Threatens as Youth Grow Frustrated,” *Windsor Star*, June 2, 1988, A17.

while First Nation politicians and leaders of established political organizations, hoping to curry favour with Canadian governments in order to gain access to negotiating processes, publicly denounced the confrontational approach taken by the organization. During the mid-1980s when several indigenous communities in the interior and northern part of British Columbia took direct action to defend their territories from ongoing unsanctioned and rapacious resource extraction, AIM was nowhere to be found.

In 1990, the Mohawk Warrior Society faced off with the Quebec Provincial Police and the Canadian Army to prevent the expansion of a municipal golf course in Kanesatake, another Kanien'kehaka territory. Even for the Mohawk Warrior Society, the swell of media attention was unprecedented. Images of armed, masked men dressed in army fatigues, defending their land and the people from the full force of the Canadian state, shook mainstream Canada and galvanized indigenous people from coast to coast. By the mid-1990s, Erasmus's warning was seeming to have been proven prophetic as warrior societies emerged throughout Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, and Manitoba.

Many of the people who became involved in the warrior society movements on the east and west coast have cited the 1990 Oka crisis as a turning point in their lives, and the watershed event of this generation's political life. Indeed, in terms of providing inspiration and motivation for the militant assertion of indigenous nationhood, the Mohawk Warrior Society's actions in 1990 around Kanesatake, Kahnawake, and Akwesasne stand alone in prominence in people's minds in their effect on the later development of movements across the country. This is not to say that the Mohawks consciously and directly spread their approach to other nations, but rather that there was more of a modelling effect. Young indigenous people in communities across the land saw through the Mohawks' action that it was indeed possible to defend oneself and one's community against state violence deployed by governments in support of a corporate agenda and racist local governments. Perhaps even more importantly, young indigenous people recognized the honour in what the Mohawks had done in standing up to what eventually were proven to be unjust and illegal actions on the part of the local non-indigenous government. This psychological effect, an awakening of indigenous consciousness and radicalization of the agenda, as well as the broadening of the spectrum of possible responses to injustice was the crucial impact of the Oka crisis on indigenous political life generally, and on the warrior movement in particular.

After the Mohawk stand in 1990, indigenous resistance came to be virtually defined in terms of the approach, technique, vocabulary, and style of the Mohawk Warrior Society's actions during that summer. Illustrative of the Oka crises' impact in personal terms on the later development of the warrior society movement, one member of the West Coast Warrior Society told me in 2002 that he was "born at Oka." By this he meant that in his mind and in the way of thinking common among members of warrior societies, they came into existence as warriors when they were awakened to their true indigenous selves in 1990. It was the Mohawks' action that jarred them from their confusion about being indigenous and crystallized their sense of what needed to be done to create justice in the relationship between indigenous peoples and Canada.

The Mi'kmaq Warrior Society had developed and maintained a presence in several Atlantic communities, including Big Cove, Listiguj, and Esgenoopetitj. Lawrence Bernard, co-founder of the Mi'kmaq Warrior Society, noted, "It was hard to recruit for the society at first, but that

changed after Oka.”<sup>15</sup> In 1994, the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society made headlines when they seized land once occupied by a residential school and demanded the land be returned to the Mi’kmaq people. A year later, the Mi’kmaq Warrior Society was called in to protect the community of Eel Ground as they conducted their traditional salmon fishery in the Miramichi River in defiance of Canadian regulations.

At the same time, although not involving a warrior society, in British Columbia, 400 Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officers were deployed with paramilitary force and armoured vehicles and land mines to remove 21 indigenous people from lands leased to an American rancher. Initially, the people had gathered for ceremonies; as the siege wore on, indigenous activists arrived clad in camouflage and waving the Mohawk Warrior flag. Soon, support roadblocks were erected throughout the province.

A year later, in Vancouver, second-generation AIM activists established the Native Youth Movement (NYM), an urban-based youth organization grounded in Red Power traditions, philosophies, and tactics. They too, wore camouflage and masks and carried the Mohawk Warrior flag. For three years, NYM engaged in sit-ins, rallies, and marches throughout British Columbia to protest the province’s Treaty Process.

In 1997, the Okijjida Warrior Society formed in Manitoba as an alternative to urban youth gangs such as the Manitoba Warriors and the Indian Posse.<sup>16</sup> The Okijjida Warrior Society soon affiliated with the American Indian Movement and worked to raise awareness about indigenous peoples’ relationship with the Canadian government and encourage people to pressure Canada and the United States to treat indigenous people fairly. Since 2002, the Okijjida Warrior Society has helped the Grassy Narrows community in Ontario maintain a blockade preventing logging trucks from entering their territory. The Grassy Narrows blockade continues to this day, and is actively supported by the people in the community. It is a highly visible and accessible site, both physically and psychologically, and indications from people involved are that the blockade has served a galvanizing purpose and is enabling indigenous youth to learn from Elders about the importance of land, spirituality, and the sustained connections to their heritage in an environment that is, while situated within a conflict between the community and outside interests, fundamentally positive and motivating for those involved at the community level.

In 1999, the Cheam First Nation recruited members of the Native Youth Movement to assist them as they engaged in their Fraser River salmon fishery in defiance of Canadian regulations. This marked the beginning of a close relationship between the community and members of the Native Youth Movement. In 2000, these members formed the West Coast Warrior Society. Soon, they donned their fatigues and set up a three-month roadblock to protect Cheam fishing camps. Later that year, the West Coast Warrior Society travelled to Esquimalt to assist local indigenous communities in that region in their ongoing conflict with local fishers and Canadian authorities over the conduct of traditional fisheries by the Mi’kmaq.

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<sup>15</sup> Kelly Toughill, “Warrior Society Steps to the Front,” *Toronto Star*, August 30, 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Marvin Perreault, “20th Century Warriors,” 1997, <http://www.vcircle.com/journal/showquestion.php?fldAuto=39&faq=2> (accessed January 25, 2005).

Since 1999, the Mi'kmaq people of Esgenoopetitj had been asserting their treaty rights and conducting their own lobster fishery in defiance of Canadian regulations. The regulations being imposed on the Mi'kmaq people spelled out restrictive and in their view unacceptable terms of indigenous involvement in a government-regulated fishery. Whole communities were only allowed to fish with just a few thousand traps, while the large commercial fishery consisting of non-indigenous individual licensees were granted usage of several hundred thousand traps per licence, representing several million traps collectively. Adding insult to injury, the Canadian government stated that its rationale for restricting the Mi'kmaq' traditional fishery was because of conservation concerns. It was only after the government refused to politically recognize this extreme disparity of access and application that the once uniformly co-operative indigenous community mobilized to assert and demand fair treatment and the Canadian government's conformity with international and domestic law—Canadian politicians had refused to intervene with substantive changes to the whole fishery lobster scheme.

This resulted in several clashes with Canadian authorities and citizenry. By the fall of 2000, Esgenoopetitj was under siege and the waters of Miramichi Bay became the front line. Warrior societies, activists, politicians, and media descended on the community. Members of the Mi'kmaq, Mohawk, Okijjida, and West Coast Warrior Societies all joined the Esgenoopetitj and Listiguj Rangers in defence of Mi'kmaq communities and fisheries. When the fishing season was over, the warrior societies dispersed back to their home territories. In 2001, the commander of the East Coast Warrior Society (which had emerged in Esgenoopetitj during the fall of 2000) left for British Columbia and aligned with the West Coast Warrior Society.

In 2003, the West Coast Warrior Society was summoned to help five Saanich communities in protecting the viability of the Goldstream salmon run in Saanich Inlet from a commercial fishery opening proposed by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO). Large commercial fishery interests were demanding access to salmon runs that had been restored through the indigenous community's own habitat rehabilitation projects—commercial fisheries for the particular species of salmon being proposed by DFO in the Saanich Inlet itself have been denied access by agreement of the Canadian government and the Saanich people for years. The same inequity faced by the East Coast communities and fishers was now facing these West Coast indigenous communities: large fleets and corporate interests in the commercial fishery were to be given access to fish for maximum commercial harvest while the indigenous communities would receive token access and benefit from the resource. With the basis for their cultures and survival, the salmon fishery, under such direct threat and with the federal government again failing to intervene in a principled manner, on the invitation of the five Saanich communities and supported by the communities' band councils, the West Coast Warrior Society remained in the community for five weeks preparing to block the commercial fishery. In the end, the fishery was cancelled without physical confrontation and the West Coast Warrior Society left the communities.

Most of the members of the West Coast Warrior Society belong to the neighbouring Nuuchahnulth Nation. The Society has since moved away from this approach and does not position itself as an “on-call force” for all indigenous community resistance. The Red Power–inspired strategies, philosophies, and tactics that marked its early years has given way to a “defending the

nation” approach and its members are now working to ground themselves more solidly in their own Nuu-chah-nulth communities, traditions, and structures.

What is clear through these examples is the continuing and impressive patience of indigenous peoples to resolving political matters in principled, fair, and legal (via international and national conventions) ways. In every instance where conflict has arisen between warrior societies and Canadian authorities, the violent interaction was instigated by police or other government authorities, or by local non-indigenous interests opposed to indigenous people. In all cases, it is only when overwhelming injustice is perpetrated against them in the face of possible mutually beneficial alternatives do indigenous communities consisting of normally co-operative and peaceful people, who are yet struggling to survive, rise up to demand just treatment and fairer relations with the Settler society.

The local conflicts outlined above have occurred in separate jurisdictions, but are structurally similar, especially in the case of the East and West Coast fisheries. However, whatever the conflict’s complexion and character of community mobilization, the same underlying tensions between the Settler and indigenous society are tested when just and fair relations in a situation are in order. A cursory political and economic analysis of these situations obviously shows how governments unabashedly approve, maintain, and advance lopsided and wrong-headed directives favouring non-indigenous corporate interests or the economic and political interests of the non-indigenous population. In the face of this systemic and sustained masquerade of “good governance,” each instance of indigenous resistance to the injustices of the situation are cross-referenced and validated by other indigenous people against the backdrop of continual colonial transgressions against their own communities. This has resulted in seemingly separate and distinct indigenous peoples studying, paying homage to, and adopting different elements and tactics of the principled resistances that warrior societies exemplify. This cascading of contention from one community to another happens organically based on the application of intelligence on an information base that includes direct experience and knowledge of what is happening in other communities. There is no persistent network of strategy and communication among the warrior societies involved in these actions—the collective experience and similarity of sentiment in indigenous communities when faced with unjust treatment is a powerful enough spur to collective action and solidarity.

The next section demonstrates how this cross-fertilization of the idea of resistance against injustice has led to a cascade of contentious action across indigenous communities in spite of the minimal direct contact among participants and absolutely no coordination or shared strategy or resources among warrior societies in the different territories.

## **CHRONOLOGY OF THE WARRIOR SOCIETY MOVEMENT SINCE 1968**

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|-------|--|
| 1960s | African-American civil rights movement in the United States. |
| 1960s | Colonized peoples’ struggles in Africa and Asia.             |
| 1968  | American Indian Movement (AIM) founded in Minnesota.         |

- 1968 Mohawks blockade Seaway International Bridge at Akwesasne.
- 1968 Kahnawake Singing Society begins to use the term “warrior society.”
- 1969 Red Power activists occupy Alcatraz, gaining widespread publicity.
- 1970 Inspired by the occupation of Alcatraz, Kanien’kehaka people, including members of the Warrior Society, reclaim Stanley and Loon Island in the St. Lawrence River.
- 1971 Onondagas call in Mohawk Warrior Society to reinforce blockade of highway construction site through their territory.
- 1973 Mohawk Warrior Society sanctioned by Kahnawake Longhouse.
- 1973 Siege at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. AIM gains widespread notoriety.
- 1973 Mohawk Warrior Society, backed by Longhouse and joined by AIM, evicts white trespassers on Kahnawake reserve. Mainstream media takes note of Warrior Society for the first time.
- 1973 AIM releases *Red Man's International Warrior Society*, a poster composed of imagery and words by Louis Hall (Karoniaktajeh) of Kahnawake.
- 1974 Mohawk Warrior Society, joined by members of AIM, repossess Moss Lake Camp from New York State, with widespread and active support from indigenous communities.
- 1974 Ojibway Warrior Society, led by Louis Cameron, occupies Anicinabe Park in Kenora, Ontario.
- 1974 Ken Basil, Chief of Bonaparte Indian Band, leads a series of armed blockades of roads through his reserve to demand better housing. The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC) publicly condemns blockade; Basil turns to AIM and the Ojibway Warrior Society for support.
- 1974 Native Peoples’ Caravan to Ottawa, led by Louis Cameron, is met by riot police and subject to FBI infiltration.
- 1975 Ken Basil, now an AIM Regional Director, is ordered to leave Neskonlith blockade by the band council.
- 1975 AIM occupies DIA office in Vancouver, B.C.
- 1975 “Indian Summer” in British Columbia. Roadblocks and occupations throughout the province. Media links actions to AIM.
- 1977 Negotiations between Mohawks and N.Y. State result in abandonment of the Moss Lake camp and the formation of a new settlement, *Ganienkeh*.

- 1978 President of UBCIC warns of army of trained Indians ready to defend rights in response to new federal fishing regulations and the arrest of Indian fishers. No further reports of this “army.”
- 1979-1980 Armed internal conflict at Akwesasne to prevent construction of fence ordered by band council. U.S. State Troopers invade reserve.
- 1980s Growth of Mohawk Warrior Society, financially supported by burgeoning cigarette trade at Akwesasne and Kahnawake.
- 1987 Code of Conduct for Kahnawake Warrior Society drafted according to the Great Law of Peace.
- 1988 200 RCMP raid Kahnawake cigarette stores using helicopter and riot squad, 17 people are arrested. Warriors seize Mercier Bridge for 29 hours.
- 1988 AFN National Chief warns that warrior societies are forming all over Canada due to youth experiencing widespread poverty.
- 1988 Mi’kmaq Warrior Society forms in Cape Breton.
- 1989 N.Y. State Troopers raid Akwesasne gaming businesses and cigarette trade. Warriors establish paid, armed, territorial patrol (Mohawk Sovereign Security Force—MSSF) to guard against further raids.
- 1990 Internal conflict over gaming and cigarette trade leads to shooting death of two Mohawks at Akwesasne. U.S. and Canadian police invade reserve. MSSF disbands.
- 1990 U.S. National Guard helicopter hit by ground fire over Ganienkeh. Mohawks resist police invasion and maintain an 11-day blockade.
- 1990 In the wake of armed confrontation between Mohawk Warrior Society and Quebec police, Mohawk communities of Kahnawake and Kanesatake face 78-day siege and resist attempted invasion by Quebec police, RCMP, and Canadian Forces.
- 1992 The Mi’kmaq Warrior Society protects ceremony in Big Cove, N.B.
- 1994 Mi’kmaq Warrior Society occupies old residential school and demands land be returned to the Mi’kmaq people.
- 1994 Chief Stewart Phillip leads Penticton Indian Band road blockade to stop Apex ski resort expansion.
- 1995 Mi’kmaq Warrior Society conducts Miramichi salmon fishery in defiance of DFO regulations.

- 1996 Native Youth Movement (NYM) forms in Vancouver, B.C.
- 1997 NYM occupies B.C. Treaty Commission Office to protest the surrender of land through the B.C. Treaty Process.
- 1997 Terrance Nelson, head of the Okijjida Warrior Society, advocates traditional warrior society as an alternative to youth gangs.
- 1998 Mi'kmaq Warriors attend barricades erected by Mi'kmaq loggers and the Listiguj reserve band council.
- 1999 RCMP report released to media declaring that indigenous activists are stockpiling weapons.
- 1999 Summoned by Chief June Quipp, NYM allies with local groups to protect Sto:lo fishers assertion of Aboriginal right to fish.
- 1999 *R. v. Marshall* Supreme Court of Canada decision sparks first battle of the "lobster wars" in Esgenoopetitj. Mi'kmaq Warrior Society keeps the peace during three days of violence and vandalism by white fishers.
- 2000 Formation of the West Coast Warrior Society (WCWS) out of the Native Youth Movement. WCWS supports Cheam three-month roadblock to stop plan to develop parklands on Cheam fishing camps.
- 2000 Burnt Church band council deputizes 12 peacekeepers to protect fishers during the fall fishery at Esgenoopetitj. Warriors blockade roads into reserve and patrol the wharf. West Coast, Okijjida, and Mohawk Warrior Societies join with the Esgenoopetitj Rangers, Listiguj Rangers, and Mi'kmaq Warriors to defend fishers and traps.
- 2001 Commander of the East Coast Warrior Society (ECWS) leaves Burnt Church for British Columbia, allies with the WCWS.
- 2002 WCWS asked by Nuu-Chah-Nulth War Council to assist in negotiations on expanding on-reserve housing.
- 2002 Okijjida Warrior Society assists Grassy Narrows in blockade to prevent logging trucks from entering their territory.
- 2003 Saanich Nation band councils request WCWS assistance in training local forces to oppose a DFO commercial fishery opening. Warriors remain in community for five weeks. Planned commercial opening cancelled.

### **III. THE INDIGENOUS WARRIOR IN CANADIAN SETTLER CULTURE**

As the preceding interview with Teyowisonte, the Kanien'kehaka warrior, makes clear, indigenous people who are involved with warrior societies focus on "tending their own gardens." However, when the focus of activity does shift outward (historically, most often in the form of a blockade), the reaction of the Canadian state and citizenry reveals that persistent colonial mythologies underlie Canadian perspectives and serve to create a patterned response to indigenous resistance; to criminalize and otherwise de-legitimize indigenous resistance is the Settler instinct.

Since the warrior society first pierced Canadian consciousness in the 1970s, the indigenous warrior has been characterized as both the Noble Savage—"a heroic champion of native rights ready to die for the cause"—and the bloodthirsty renegade—a "testosterone-driven gun junkie out to die in a blaze of glory."<sup>17</sup> Falling back on hackneyed stereotypes and one-dimensional portrayals of indigenous existence, the Canadian media, governments, and citizenry invariably cast indigenous warriors, whether heroes or tyrants, as misguided and irrational malcontents who have taken Canadian law into their own hands.<sup>18</sup> Today's Noble Savage is the masked, camouflaged superhero of indigenous nationhood, glorified and romanticized during the Oka standoff. As the imagery changed in 1990, from braided Red Power rebels to authentic indigenous freedom fighters, armed and ready for battle, the Noble Savage myth grew even stronger in Canadian consciousness.<sup>19</sup> The bloodthirsty renegade, meanwhile, is cast as a terrorist, a thug, a tyrant, and a fascist, whose gun-wielding posturing instills fear and engenders condemnation in indigenous communities.<sup>20</sup>

In an attempt to further elaborate on this mythology, the RCMP recently commissioned a group of non-indigenous researchers, led by Jane Dickson-Gilmore of Carleton University, to research—without the express consent of the research "participants"—the Mohawks of Kahnawake in order to report on the community's recent mobilizations and reliance on warrior societies for defence. This report was cast in familiar terms: as organized crime. The RCMP and the non-indigenous academics worked within the prejudiced paradigm created by colonial mythologies of the indigenous warrior and sought not to objectively determine the nature of the warrior society and its role in Kanien'kehaka society, but to ascribe to it traits and characteristics

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<sup>17</sup> Joan Bryden, "Rogue Warriors: The Heroic Image of Native Warriors Is Deteriorating as Communities Struggle to Control Renegades Who Answer to No One," *Edmonton Journal*, August, 13, 1995; and Kelly Toughill, "Marie among the Mi'kmaq: Only 20, Native Warrior Marie Simon Is Already a Veteran of Blockades," *Toronto Star*, September 30, 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Aaron Derfel, "Indian Summer: Across Canada, Aboriginal Youths Are Fed up with the Slow Pace of Government Negotiations," *The Gazette*, September 16, 1995; Gillian Lindgren, "A Hot Summer? AIM Leader Spends His Time Keeping the Lid On," *Calgary Herald*, June 30, 1975, "Native Violence Threatens as Youth Grow Frustrated," *The Windsor Star*, June 2, 1988, and "'Road Block Wrong Tactic' Band Council Raps Chief," *Vancouver Sun*, August 13, 1974.

<sup>19</sup> This media review reveals that, since 1990, most news items written about warrior societies associate the indigenous warrior with camouflage or fatigues, mask or bandana, and the Mohawk Warrior flag.

<sup>20</sup> John Cummins, "Federal Jobs Fund Being Used to Train Private Armies," *News Release*, July 15, 2000; William Johnson, "'Warriors' No More Than Native Fascists," *Edmonton Journal*, August 5, 1995; Elizabeth Nickson, "'Every Blade of Grass Is Ours': A Native Warrior Speaks Out," *National Post*, March 30, 2002; Kelly Toughill, "The Angry Face of Miramichi Bay," *Toronto Star*, August 15, 2000; and Leanne Yohemas-Hayes, "Natives Deny Stockpiling Arms: RCMP Raise Alarm over Growing Arsenal of Military Weapons," *Times Colonist*, February 28, 1999.

drawn from a predetermined intellectual framework where indigenous assertiveness is invariably criminalized.

Dickson-Gilmore's activities were in clear contravention of research protocols established and maintained by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, concealing hidden research agendas under the guise of other activities is expressly forbidden by the protocols, which were developed to ensure ethical and professional research activities by university researchers in Canada. Even the mere conduct of research under such conditions by this non-indigenous academic demonstrates extreme bias against the indigenous community: covert intelligence operations are only used by law enforcement agencies when illegal activity is assumed to be taking place.

Based on this foundation, one of ingrained cultural hysteria and deep fear of indigenous peoples, the working assumption (not conclusion) of Dickson-Gilmore's research for the RCMP is that there must be large-scale organized crime within indigenous communities, which explains why warrior societies and physical resistance are more pervasive today. This report is an example of how government agencies operate within the broader colonial culture encompassing nearly all non-indigenous people in Settler society, and how all Canadian perceptions and responses to indigenous assertions are conditioned by this situation. Without a self-consciously critical perspective on one's own views and the assumptions underlying one's work (whether as an academic researcher or police officer or an attorney), Canadians naturally see the distorted reality of the colonial myth rather than the true face of indigenous people and their actions.

In the specific Dickson-Gilmore case, an RCMP report was unethically generated by a university researcher as part of the RCMP's attempt to criminalize all indigenous social mobilizations. This much is clear. But the substance of the report itself is also worth explicating, as it is a case study in the pre-judging of indigenous activism and the knee-jerk uncritical application of colonial myth onto actual situations. The report is titled *Aboriginal Organized Crime in Canada: Developing a Typology for Understanding and Strategizing Responses*, and it purports to deposit "Aboriginal" social mobilization in response to well-documented colonial oppression in the same category as outlaw motorcycle gangs, Asian triads, and other Mafioso type groups. Dickson-Gilmore states that warrior societies are profit-seeking enterprises.<sup>22</sup> She makes this claim the crux of her argument without any factual evidence or corroborating research. The logical frame is developed into four "Aboriginal organized criminal types":

1. Activist/Nationalist Type
2. Random/Opportunistic Type
3. Activist/Opportunistic Type
4. Criminal/Opportunistic Type

Basically, the researchers have proposed a continuum of activity to explain community mobilization efforts in which resistances to injustice are uncritically lumped into the "possible

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<sup>21</sup> SSHRC protocol on research with human subjects.

<sup>22</sup> E.J. Dickson-Gilmore and Chris Whitehead, *Aboriginal Organized Crime in Canada: Developing a Typology for Understanding and Strategizing Responses* (Ottawa: Royal Canadian Mountain Police Research and Evaluation Branch, 2005), 14–15.

criminal intentions” bin. By grouping Aboriginal social mobilization and the most visible face of this form of resistance, warrior societies, with notorious criminal organizations, the researchers achieve a sort of “guilt by categorization” character assassination of the indigenous warrior. This is not the more common expression of colonial prejudice or the simpler “guilt by association” charge; it is rather the intellectual’s version of the colonial mythology, reflective of the basic and unexamined prejudices that form all Canadians’ reactions and perceptions of an indigenous person standing up for his or her self-respect and dignity.

In this vacuum of observable fact and based on the assumed presence of legal dark matter, the RCMP report continues the mythological characterization of indigenous peoples with anti-human and anti-social elements in their society. Importantly, the report downplays and refuses to engage the complex and sophisticated political and historical reality from whence warrior societies have emerged in the modern context. It does however attempt to foist an untenable modification of the definition for organized crime into the debate:

Organized crime is ongoing activity motivated by political, social and/or economic conditions or ends (or some combination thereof), which is articulated through a network of both formal and informal cooperative social relationships whose structure is greater than any single member, with the potential for corruption and/or violence to facilitate the criminal process.

As is evident from this line of discussion and analysis, Canadian police agencies, in this case the RCMP, through their research contractors, continue to grasp at mythological straws in an attempt to criminalize the morally valid and politically legitimate social movements represented by indigenous warrior societies.

The Canadian population itself, as distinct from authorities, has little direct experience with indigenous peoples, and certainly not with the experience of indigenous resistances against the injustice of their situations as colonized peoples. Canadian society’s understanding of indigenous resistance and warrior societies is largely framed by the mass media. Thus there is very little basis for an informed and critical engagement on the part of the population with the instrumental characterizations developed by police and political authorities.

Since the 1970s, the media spin regarding warrior societies has changed little, adhering to several themes that build upon the colonial mythology and serve to demonize indigenous people. The spin mainly focuses on violence and armed resistance, whether or not weapons are indeed present. Armed resistance is rarely cast as an act of self-defense; rather, it is criminalized and, if possible, linked to other non-political incidents of violence, creating a perception of violent pathology and a commitment to violence for violence sake. Indigenous warriors become “gun-toting Indians” and “gun junkies” with long histories of trouble with Canadian law.<sup>23</sup> Indigenous

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<sup>23</sup> “Armed Indians,” Canadian Press Newswire Service, August 13, 1974; Bryden, “Rogue Warriors,” and “Gun-Toting Indians Blockade Road: \$5 Toll Charged to Cross Reserve,” *Vancouver Sun*, August 12, 1974; Rose, “Bonaparte Indians”; and Toughill, “Marie among the Mi’kmaq.”

people, particularly the youth, are portrayed as angry and inherently violent, prone to drug abuse, drunkenness, suicide, shootings, gang fights, assault, and murder.<sup>24</sup>

Related to this is the perception that indigenous youth are generally poor, unemployed, uneducated, with troubled pasts and bleak futures—not only are they angry and violent, they have nothing to lose.<sup>25</sup> Thus, indigenous youth are a “tinderbox” or a “powder keg” ready to explode into violence against unsuspecting Canadians.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the elected indigenous elite often adopts this spin, pointing to the existence of warrior societies and the threat of violence in hopes of having their demands met.

Finally, the media often runs stories that discredit or otherwise alienate the warrior society by showing lack of support from indigenous communities and the elected Indian leadership. In this spin, individuals who do not agree with tactics used by the warrior society are sought out and highlighted; their voice becomes the rational, legitimate voice of the community, while the indigenous warrior is described as “self-appointed” or “self-proclaimed.”<sup>27</sup>

These themes are reflected in everything that has been written on warrior societies in Canada since the 1970s. The notes included in this brief thematic summary are not an exhaustive listing of media reports on warrior societies, but they do comprise a comprehensive review of the substantial treatments of the issues in the mainstream press. An annotated listing and explication of the detailed substance of these items is hardly necessary, for none of the items falls outside of the outlined thematic frames, which themselves build on the foundation of the colonial myths discussed above. Based on the review of the literature, on the example of the RCMP’s commissioning of the Aboriginal organized crime paper, and on the survey of press items on warrior societies since the 1970s, it must be concluded that little of what is “known” of warrior societies in either the public mind or in the official record in Canada is reflective of the actual reality of indigenous warrior societies.

#### IV. THE STRUCTURE OF MODERN WARRIOR SOCIETIES

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<sup>24</sup> Derfel, “Indian Summer”; Lindgren, “A Hot Summer?”, and “Native Violence Threatens”; Sun Staff Reporter, “Rifle Shot Kills Youth at Armed Indian Camp,” *Vancouver Sun*, August 24, 1974.

<sup>25</sup> Gillian, “A Hot Summer?”, “Native Violence Threatens”; Peter O’Neil, “Owen Likens Young Natives to Palestinian Militants: B.C.’S Rookie Minister Warns of Potential Violence,” *Vancouver Sun*, February 5, 2002, A1, and “Owen Gets Official Scolding: But Several Native Leaders Back B.C. Minister,” *Vancouver Sun*, February 6, 2002, A1; Yvonne Zacharias, “‘Warriors’ Play Waiting Game at Fraser Valley Blockade Site,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 18, 2000, A9.

<sup>26</sup> Nickson, “Every Blade of Grass”; O’Neil, “Palestinian Militants,” and “Native Violence Threatens.”

<sup>27</sup> Joan Bryden, “Rouge Warriors,” and “Cariboo Blockade to Protest Conditions on Indian Reserve,” *The Province*, August 8, 1974, and “Chiefs Turn Backs on Indians’ Armed Stand,” *The Province*, August 27, 1974, and “Indians Ring Ottawa, Hold Off on Tolls,” *The Province*, August 13, 1974. Johnson, “Native Fascists”; Tom McDougall, “Micmac Militants Seize Land in Nova Scotia: A Dozen Warriors Give Government 90 Days to Comply with Their Demands,” *Edmonton Journal*, February 9, 1994, A3, and “RCMP Poised to Break Indian Barriers,” *Daily Colonist*, September 1, 1974, and “Wrong Tactic.”

What follows is an outline of the structure of warrior societies today. This information is drawn from interviews, both previously published and those conducted for this paper, with active members of various warrior societies, and it reflects the concise operational tone and vocabulary of the context from which it emanates.

## GENERAL ORGANIZATION

The warrior society is a loosely knit fraternity that is able to galvanize and mobilize a larger, peripheral membership if necessary. The core group maintains the organization and acts as central command during times of crisis. This core group is always prepared to defend the territory and to recruit and train others to do so as well. However, “the idea that there is a network of cells of militants working all over the place to agitate is not the case. Our people have a good understanding [of] when they are being wronged.”<sup>28</sup> Thus it is unnecessary for a warrior society to organize extensively. Indeed, a warrior society is a community-based organization that rarely goes outside of its territory looking to agitate, preferring instead to strengthen and develop its role within its own community, which is to maintain the peace and protect the territory.

Taking a broader view, the warrior society can be figured with reference to history, drawing on indigenous values and teachings, and from recent cultural developments that respect indigenous principles. Such a combination creates a cultural foundation for contemporary forms of resistance, making in effect new cultural practices to shape authentically indigenous movements that are both outgrowths from historic forms and organic expressions of timeless indigenous values. There are four main characteristics, both authentically indigenous and effective as a means of confronting colonial dominion, which are evident in indigenous movements:

1. They depend on the support and sanction of women in the community.
2. They are committed to protecting communities and defending land.
3. They seek to promote the autonomy and self-sufficiency of their nations.
4. They are independent but adhere to the principle of mutual support.

The theoretical framing as well as practical application of these characteristics is exemplified in the West Coast Warrior Society (WCWS). David Dennis, head of the WCWS, explains below the general organization and strategic orientation of his warrior society, and the explanation is illustrative of the basic indigenous warrior society view on structuring resistance and on the fundamental objective for engaging in political struggle.<sup>29</sup>

TA: *What is the West Coast Warrior Society all about?*

DD: There have been examples in the past of organizations that stood for our peoples' rights, but none of them, in the opinion of young Native people today, had a fine enough edge to them. They didn't clearly define things and say, “This is the way you can live. This is the way you should live.” So in our eyes, this is why we have to redefine what a warrior is today, in terms of our standards. In the 1960s, the Red Power movement, with

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<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Nickson, “Every Blade of Grass Is Ours’: A Native Warrior Speaks Out,” *National Post*, March 30, 2002.

<sup>29</sup> This interview is excerpted and adapted from a full-length version in Alfred, *Wasáse*.

their bandannas and raising their fists in the air, had their definition of what a warrior was and of resistance. Ours is completely different.

TA: *Do you see that 1960s-style activism as something that turned into a dead end for our people?*

DD: That's difficult to say. Despite the circumstances, they exercised bravery. The police harassment, in terms of the brutality, was extreme against those groups. People were killed by the police. So in terms of their bravery, it's definitely something to build upon. But the movement that they went into, with the confrontational style of politics and whatnot, that's not us. With our movement, we'd rather show people that we can live and provide for our own families and still maintain a set of principles. That's the difference between our movement and mainstream politics now too: we have principles. And our principles are the character of our lives, right? It's impossible for us to sell out; we can't. We have principles; we made our house on a strong foundation.

TA: *What are you trying to protect and to preserve?*

DD: We have to have a clear definition, and preserve a clear idea of, who our enemy is. I think most of our people have lost that idea because of our bastardized sense of identity and from always trying to get along, you know? It's important for us to maintain the belief that we live among our enemies. That's a big part of becoming a warrior.

TA: *A way of looking at the world...?*

DD: It's not the camouflage that makes the warrior, it's the person inside. To be honest, it's hard to maintain. With all these other influences in your life—and I hate to say it—but it's easy to take down your camp and just go home. To say, “Just forget it, to hell with it!” That's why you need to have the discipline of those principles; you need to be able to maintain.

TA: *It is a constant battle with oneself to maintain focus in the face of the pressures to, as you said, fold camp and go home. I think having a strong bond with other like-minded people is important in this. Is this anything like what you mean by “warrior society”?*

DD: Our relationship with the police is a hostile one. So in order for us to feel worthwhile in doing our job, and to reassure ourselves that we're going down the right path, we have to find our peers.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

Membership in a warrior society is fluid and situational. The size of the membership varies with the degree of interest the core group or an issue can arouse. Some warrior societies consist of only one or two core members, with its ranks swelling in response to an external threat or crisis, such as that experienced at Esgenoopetitj in 1999–2000, only to contract once the crisis is over. The core membership of the warrior society usually consists of a handful of young men at a local

level. These warriors are often distanced from the colonial power structures within and outside of their community.

### **STRATEGIES AND TACTICS**

The strategy and tactics employed by warrior societies are generally community and/or land based. That is, they are bound to the territory and community from which they originate and which they exist to protect. Only in times of intense crisis will a warrior society conduct its actions outside of its territory (the various warrior societies' presence at Esgenoopetitj, for example). Once outside of their territory, members will defer to the warrior society or community in which they are working. A warrior society's primary concern remains its own territory and any outside involvement is contingent upon peace in its own territory.

The overall strategy of a warrior society is to act as a security force at the blockade or front line and use any means necessary to protect the lands and people. A warrior society will take an offensive or a defensive position, as the situation warrants. For example, a warrior society might take offensive action to repossess and reassert jurisdiction over their territory, or it may erect a barricade to defend the territory from invasion. Both strategies are carried out with the intention of protecting the land and its people from external threats.

The tactics usually employed by a warrior society include: 1) barricades and roadblocks to prevent non-indigenous people from entering their territories, 2) evictions or removal of unwanted people living within their territories, 3) occupations to repossess territory and/or prevent others from use or access, and 4) physical engagement to protect indigenous people from state repression or other physical threats.

Insight into the strategic vision of contemporary warrior societies can be gained through the following conversation with Sakej Ward, the head of the East Coast Warrior Society.<sup>30</sup>

*TA: How are you preparing yourself for confrontation?*

*SW: We are rebuilding and re-empowering warrior societies. We know what the threat is, and based on that knowledge, it's clear that we have to redevelop warrior societies—build them, recruit, train, organize—so that they can be capable of conducting physical resistance against the colonizing state. That's the process we're in now.*

*TA: The kind of "empowerment" you're talking about is, well ... illegal. Does this cause you difficulties in your life?*

*SW: Sure it does. Almost everything we do is on the run. What happens is that our activities become like shadow activity—almost like a guerrilla movement. The Canadian state sees us as a threat and rightly so: we contest their sovereignty and dominion. Think about it: Is organized crime really a threat to national security? It's a threat to the social environment, for sure, but not national security. Whereas we have far less resources than the Hell's Angels, for example, but we're even more of a threat. It's not our resources*

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<sup>30</sup> This interview is excerpted and adapted from a full-length interview in Alfred, *Wasáse*.

that make us powerful—we don't have any—it's the cause that we're fighting for. We're talking about immorality and injustices at the very foundation of the Canadian state's legitimacy, and we can bring these truths out in the open. That's more threatening to the Canadian government than the Hell's Angels ever will be.

TA: *When you use the word "fighting," what exactly do you mean?*

SW: An actual physical fight. At Burnt Church, we were in the middle of a firefight with non-Native fishermen. They came into our area with the intent of cutting our traps. There were 55 of their large 50-foot boats, and we responded with seven dories—little homemade wooden boats. They immediately shot at us when we got within 100 metres of their flotilla. There were eight shots taken at the boat I was on, and the other boats were being shot at also. So we said to ourselves, "Our people are in danger here, we're being shot at, and this is going to change." So there was returned fire, and about an hour of fire exchanged back and forth—the RCMP emergency response team just sat around and watched the whole thing. Before the night was over, one of their boats had chased one of our little boats, and their boat grounded on shore. The occupants were removed from that boat, and, somehow, it ended up in flames. That type of consequence was exactly what was needed at that time.

TA: *So it seems obvious from that example that there's a direct connection between taking action and the preservation of your rights, something that's just not there in conventional forms of protest?*

SW: You know, there was a plea from some of our people that we should just pursue the politics of pity and try to get Canadian society to somehow identify with our issues so much so that they would put a stop to their government's actions against us. Obviously, it didn't work. In fact, the reason we made such a huge stand against the non-Native fishermen was because on every Sunday, right after Mass, they'd come in to try to destroy our traps. There would be no consequence for them. The idea of appealing to their morality just did not work. We tried civil disobedience and protest and arguing with them, but that didn't work. They did not stop until the day there was a consequence imposed on their actions, the day we shot back, and the day their boat ended up in flames. From that day on, there were never any non-Native boats trying to come in and cut our traps again.

TA: *Do you see any limitations that may constrain your strategy? I'm thinking that it's one thing to take on some fishermen, and a whole other game to confront the force of the Canadian military.*

SW: Yeah, it's easy to take on a small, untrained, and not very well-equipped force. And it's easy to create fear among them too. Taking on police forces and the Canadian military is a much harder task.

TA: *Are you addressing this problem?*

SW: Obviously we're not going to have 60,000 warriors ready to go any time soon. I'm recruiting, but I just don't see it happening in the near future! So, we're looking at

quality, and we're looking at training our guys to be better than the average Canadian soldier coming out of boot camp. We can never let ourselves become psychologically defeated, no matter how small our numbers are. It's all a question of strategy and the best way to fight.

TA: *So, it's your belief that indigenous people can train and equip a fighting force to physically confront the state as a means of advancing our cause, which is forcing the colonials to recognize our nationhood and to respect our rights?*

SW: Yes it is. And to dispel the fear-mongering and the delusion that we can't take on the military, all you have to do is conduct a simple analysis of the Canadian Forces as an actual fighting force. Right now, there are 57,000 soldiers in the Canadian military, of which there are 24,000 in the army, and only 4,500 of those are infantry soldiers. At any one time, many of those infantry soldiers, roughly one-third, are deployed overseas. Another one-third is always on the rest-refit-recovery cycle. That leaves only 1,500 soldiers, a brigade size element...

TA: *That's what the Canadians used against the Mohawk Nation in 1990.*

SW: That's right. Now, think about it, if we had multiple "Okas" happening simultaneously, how are they going to handle that? That would be military overstretch. They couldn't handle it.

TA: *What's your sense of the potential for building an effective resistance movement that draws in large enough numbers of people not only to stand up to, but in the longer term take advantage of liberated spaces to transform our relationship to society as a whole, socially, politically, and culturally?*

SW: I definitely see some potential in this new generation. They've seen that all the cooperative avenues have been tried and that's it's led us nowhere. They're all starting to realize that we have a connection to each other and that we have obligations to each other and to our ancestors. You see among them an unconscious rejection of the colonial reality. I have a lot of faith in the youth. The question is how do we direct and shape all of that to create the force we need to stand as a deterrent to the colonial enterprise. I don't see us having a strong enough military power to *conquer* Canada, but I do see us having the strength to create a condition of *deterrence* where colonial domination becomes very difficult for Canada to continue. This will create the physical and political space for us to pursue our own definition of our rights and our ways of life.

TA: *So what is it going to take to organize the youth into this kind of movement?*

SW: It's just a matter of time. It's happening as we speak. We're going through a process right now of growing political awareness, of social and political organization, of making people realize that they have obligations and duties as warriors. Our ancestors are just waiting to see us re-take these roles and revitalize these obligations. The youth understand that completely. They want to take their place of honour beside their ancestors.

## V. WARRIOR SOCIETY RELATIONS WITHIN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

### BAND AND TRIBAL COUNCILS

The warrior society usually has an adversarial or tense relationship with the elected band councils, seeing them as an illegitimate form of governance imposed by state authorities that serves to undermine traditional political structures. Most warrior societies experience a turbulent relationship with the band council, such as that described in Esgenoopetitj:

The band council is an imposed political regime administering detrimental colonial policies on behalf of the Canadian government. Unfortunately, they are also our relatives, friends or community members. They also have usurped the political voice of the people so we are in a difficult position of having to deal with band council at some time, on some level as we had to in Esgenoopetitj. That makes the political situation very tense, hard to manage, hard to strike a balance, strained and at times chaotic.<sup>31</sup>

In some cases, however, the warrior society has an amicable or close relationship with the band council. The leader of the Okijida Warrior Society for example, is also the elected band council Chief. Other examples include Chiefs June Quipp and Stewart Phillip, who nurtured and supported the development of the West Coast Warrior Society.

The reflections of Joan and Stewart Philip, the Okanagan Nation couple who are the current leaders of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (UBCIC), are instructive on the complicated social, political, and psychological dynamics involved in the relationship between warrior societies and the institutions of government sanctioned by Canadian authorities within indigenous communities. I asked them to find out what drove them, as leaders, to move from working for their people in what was a very co-operative manner within the band council system to become prominent voices of contention and the rejection of negotiated accommodations of colonial power, as well as supporters and sponsors of the warrior society movement in British Columbia.<sup>32</sup>

TA: *Is being a leader the same thing as being a warrior?*

Joan: there are four sacred trusts: looking after that land, looking after the people, looking after the spirituality, and looking after the culture, which includes language. For us, being a warrior and being a leader means being a protector of the four sacred trusts. That's something the elders have told us is everybody's responsibility. It's not just a particular group of people.

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<sup>31</sup> Sakej Ward, questions about the East Coast Warrior Society, interview conducted in Vancouver, B.C., February 2005.

<sup>32</sup> This interview is excerpted and adapted from a full-length interview in Alfred, *Wasáse*.

Stewart: It's a great responsibility. I'm dressed up in a suit sitting here with you today, but when the need arises, Joan and I both wear camouflage. I've never seen any other leaders do that except us. The other thing is that you have to have a clear mind and a good heart. And you can't be carrying a lot of issues around with you.

TA: *So you have to be a clean person to be a leader and a warrior.*

Stewart: Joan and I went through terrible times in the beginning of our relationship. I was a total alcoholic since I was 15 years old, and our relationship was abusive, with me running around and whatnot all the time. It wasn't until I went into treatment in 1987, shortly after Joan went in, that we started to deal with a lot of our issues. I think that if you're going to dedicate your life to this kind of work, you have to be clean and sober. You can't...

Joan: You can't be a slave to drugs and alcohol.

Stewart: The other thing, besides having good moral character, is that you have to be prepared. And we are prepared. There are very few people who are prepared like we are.

TA: *Prepared?*

Stewart: For anything.

Joan: To protect yourself.

TA: *Is that what wearing camouflage symbolizes?*

Joan: It's not just a symbol. What really upsets me about people's thinking here in this country is that nobody questions the fact that indigenous people in Chiapas had to take up arms to protect themselves, yet, on the other hand, they question what happened in Mohawk territory and the need to take up arms there in 1990. To me, there are two kinds of war: wars of offence and wars of defence. We have every right to defend ourselves against an aggressor. This country has always been our oppressor—it's always stolen from us—and it has oppressed even its own people. When we talk about being prepared, it's being prepared to fight against that kind of oppression, because it happens right here, in Mohawk territory, in Gustafsen Lake, and at Ipperwash.

TA: *Are we prepared as a people though?*

Joan: No we're not, not collectively.

Stewart: When I think back to 1990, we weren't prepared in our community. We had our reserve sealed off, and had we been assaulted, we'd have been in big trouble. Things are different now for our community.

TA: *So for you, Oka 1990, your involvement in supporting that action, really shaped you as leaders and as indigenous people.*

Stewart: Yes. And not only that. What I gained out of it was a true understanding of leadership. Leadership is not casting a vote once every four years and putting in a band council. Although I do believe that the participation of those people who are involved in negotiations is an action as well. Whether you're sitting around a table trying to hammer out a deal, or whether you're on the barricades, that's all action. It's just a different kind of action.

TA: *Is confrontation part of your own political vision?*

Stewart: It's incumbent upon us to exhaust, absolutely, all legal avenues and options and attempt with every fibre of our being to achieve peaceful reconciliation. But in the event that we are faced with a hostile government that attacks us, we have to be prepared to defend ourselves. There is something starting these days, a new kind of movement among the youth, something that people may not think is very positive or healthy, but which has to be seen as a good thing in the long run, and that is the takeover and occupation of band council offices. We need more of this kind of activism; we need a real grassroots revolution in this country. If that means that every band council office in this country is occupied, then that's a good thing, because it's the beginnings of growth and the beginnings of people waking up, as strange as this may seem. When I was Chief of the band, our band office was taken over and occupied, and it was very difficult for me to come to terms with that, and it took me some time to agree to meet with and to try to work with the group that had taken over our office. But we did work it out, and we worked together over a period of three months to come to an agreement and to make changes in our community, because that group represented the voice of our people. We needed, and every band council in this country needs as well, to get back to being a truly representative government. The band council system as it is only divides us and creates factions within the community.

TA: *But there hasn't been much of any kind of action to speak of since 1990, compared to the amount of talking that's been going on.*

Stewart: The government exploited the situation after Oka. We were all energized and mobilized, particularly here in British Columbia, and the federal and provincial governments collaborated and sprung out this "B.C. Treaty Process" overnight. What that did was buy them 10 years. It subverted the movement, and it provided them [with] a way out. Then the more conservative communities chose to get involved in that negotiation process, saying, "We're doing something too, we're negotiating."

TA: *We all know that there are people in our communities who are conservative in their views and who don't look with much favour on the kind of things that you are saying and on the kind of associations that you have. Lots of our people, if they would walk into this room right now, wouldn't be inspired, but turned off instead to see that framed photo of the West Coast Warrior Society and that poster of the Mohawk Warrior hanging on the wall.*

Stewart: I think we need to realize that oppression creates certain psychological conditions in the group of people that are oppressed. What oppression does is

disempower people. Certainly the residential school experience and the reservation system and our whole history of colonization have greatly disempowered our people. Simply put, we lost the ability to believe in ourselves. Joan and I believe and have faith in the power of the people. There are others who don't believe in that power. And there are others who don't believe. Period. They don't really believe in our rights, our right to self-determination, and a just resolution of the land question. Many people pay lip service to all that, but when it comes right down to it, they don't believe in it strongly.

Joan: It seems that with us indigenous people, we always bring ourselves to the brink before we get motivated to do the right thing! But we'll develop as the struggle develops, and we will be prepared.

Stewart: The most highly respected Elder in our community, Louise, told us not to be afraid and to get out there because we were doing the right thing.

TA: *Do you see more confrontations happening in the future?*

Joan: There's no doubt about it. As long as white people continue, as one of our Elders, Napoleon, put it, "to be like pigs, always wanting to take, take, take everything," there won't ever be a time when we won't be protecting what we have and what we own. So long as this country will continue to oppress, things like the Mohawk Crisis will come up.

TA: *We'll always have to be warriors, no matter what happens.*

Stewart: There is no question about that. I was at an environmental meeting once, out on one of the mountains that are sacred to the Navajo and Hopi. There were all kinds of people from all over the place. They brought this Hopi Elder out. He was just this real thin person with spindly little legs and long wispy white hair. Two heavy-set guys helped him up onto the stage, and he told this old prophecy. He said that there was going to be a war to end all wars, and that it was going to happen at a point in time when on one side there will be four colours—the four races of man—and it will be the same on the other side. One side will be those who seek to exploit Mother Earth for profit, and the other side will be those who understand the need to defend Mother Earth. I believe that's where we're going. This struggle is not ours alone.

Thus, as evidenced in the interviews above, in most cases the warrior society emerges from within (and remains a part of) an indigenous community, is grounded in the community's indigenous traditions, and is accountable to the traditional leadership. In keeping with the objective of developing a political, cultural, and ideological consciousness that is rooted in the territory and traditions of the community and/or nation in which it originates, many warrior societies look to traditional governments for leadership and direction.

I asked Raronhianonha, a man who was at the centre of the warrior society movement in Kahnawake through the 1980s and 1990s, to reflect back on that ideological era in our people's history and to talk about his experience with Native nationalism and the traditionalist outgrowth

that defined our community during those days.<sup>33</sup> In particular, I wondered what the movement was about, what people believed they were doing. In response, he explained the movement that energized a generation of not only Kanien'kehaka but indigenous activists across the country in this concise statement:

It was a struggle to capture the hearts and minds of our own people, to bring them to the realization that the federal and provincial governments are not their friends, and that the only way to create the freedom that we should be enjoying is by bringing back the traditional system. The struggle that was going on prior to 1985, or thereabouts, was one of education. People were becoming more aware of their culture and learning more about it all the time. The goal is to prevent assimilation. It's resistance against assimilation. That's one end. The other goal is the ability of our people to realize self-determination. That involves the ability of our people to be self-supporting, without having to kowtow to the provincial government. That includes the expansion of our land base so that we're able to provide for ourselves. And also, to be able to deal with other people in an independent manner. We shouldn't be constrained by Canadian laws as far as our trade with other people goes, or in the recognition of our own nationality. This means the recognition of our own citizenship ... all of these things are attributes of a nation. I'm not naïve to believe that we can be totally independent as a nation without agreements with the surrounding nations. Every government has to do that, including the United States and Canada. What it amounts to is the repolishing of our treaties and bringing our present-day agreements into that traditional context, rather than accepting the supremacy of the Canadian or provincial government.

Asked why it was that people in Kahnawake were not so radically charged today as in the 1970s and 1980s, he replied:

It is a really different situation now. At the time, the Warrior Society was more active because we were under a siege mentality. Police actions against Native communities caused the militancy to flourish at that time. It was necessary. There were a series of events that caused people, both young and old, to militarize and become active in defending the territory. That was the situation at the time.

My own study on Kahnawake politics and the rise of the militant indigenous movement among Kanien'kehaka led me to conclude too that the Mohawk Warrior Society and the strong assertion of rights by our people in the 1970s and 1980s were spurred on by, as Raronhianonha said, "a series of events."<sup>34</sup> A major factor in the rise of militancy was, and remains so today, that people became radicalized by outside forces acting on them and shaping their lives over time; patterns

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<sup>33</sup> This interview with Raronhianonha is adapted from Alfred, *Wasáse*.

<sup>34</sup> See Taiaiake Alfred, *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk Politics and the Rise of Native Nationalism* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 1995), 149–82.

of negative interaction with the state and with Settler society forges a political culture of resistance and resurgent indigenous action.

## **YOUTH**

In general, the warrior society has a symbiotic relationship with other movements organized to activate the energies of indigenous youth. In the experience of the past generation of indigenous activists, non-warrior youth movements and warrior societies have been found to have similar goals and even complementary strategies and tactics, and they have often met and worked together at protest actions. So-called “Native Youth Movements” usually emerge from within urban centres. They are like the members of the Red Power movement in that they are highly mobile, and often form a network of chapters of urban youth who wish to raise political awareness among indigenous people and advocate for indigenous rights. Similar to the warrior society, youth movements usually have an adversarial relationship with the elected band council leadership, and are often marginalized or ignored by the urban political or economic elites.

The general strategy of youth movements is to raise public awareness of injustices with the goal of forcing governments to treat indigenous people fairly. They are arts-oriented and tend to encourage public dialogue through spoken word, video and film production, and speaking engagements. Sometimes they stake a claim for media attention by occupying government buildings and staging strategic rallies and marches. Youth movements generally focus their activities in urban centres and enter indigenous communities rarely, and only when invited or granted permission. They usually respond when summoned by indigenous communities during times of crisis. Once in an indigenous community, youth movements usually defer to the community in which they are working. Often, youth movements serve as a training ground and/or recruitment pool for the warrior society.

Distinct from the organized youth movements are, of course, the largest segment of the indigenous population: young urban indigenous people. It is important to understand the perceptions of this large and increasingly powerful element of indigenous society. Their views on the politicized organizations, whether youth movements, representative political organizations, or warrior societies, will shape the future interactions between indigenous peoples and the state. In a real sense, all of the politics and all of the action of the past two generations of indigenous assertion of nationhood—within the system and against the system, by band councils and by warrior societies—has only set the stage for these young people. They will inherit a reality vastly different from the situation that resulted in the formation of warrior societies—the growth in numbers and the growing levels of education and confidence in interacting with non-indigenous institutions and societies counterbalances the persistent social and health problems within indigenous communities.

Young indigenous people are in the best position to pass judgment on whether the warrior society movement has been a positive or negative force in indigenous community life. They are the people for whom the battles were fought. They are the ones who have felt the net effect of the actions taken by this generation of leaders on both sides of the divide between co-operation and contention. And they are the people who will have the responsibility of carrying the burden, if it

is one they choose to pick up. What is the perception of what it is to be a “warrior” among young indigenous people today?

I spoke with a number of young Cree and Métis people in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and asked them directly for their assessment of the concept of an indigenous warrior as they had experienced it and as they think it should be.<sup>35</sup>

TA: *What does it mean when you hear the word “warrior?”*

Brandon: To me, being a warrior is just knowing your culture or getting to know your culture and who you are and what you want to do in life. It’s how you want to bring your Native culture into the society now and help out youth on your reserve or wherever you’re from, or to try to make change and make things better. Reserves right now, they’re home, but it’s really hard to live there. I think that being a First Nation warrior, or wherever you’re coming from would be just knowing your culture and helping our people who don’t know their culture. We need to know our culture so that we’re recognized for who we are, so that we can keep our tradition and be proud of who we are.

Chris: I think a warrior is someone who breaks down barriers. Sometimes the non-Native people, they bring you down, they make you not want to try harder. And I think that our language is the most important thing. That’s the reason why we’re not as strong as we should be, because we don’t speak our language as much as we should. Like I don’t know my language—I mean, I know some words and stuff, but I think I should learn it to be a stronger person. I agree with you when you said that to make the people stronger is for you to be strong. To not be involved with drugs and alcohol, to be involved with your community and the songs and dances, and even if you’re not doing these things, to participate somehow.

TA: *You said a warrior is someone who breaks through barriers. So it’s not just a way of thinking, but a way of doing?*

Shana: It’s not just a state of being, it’s someone who actually has the courage to stand up and break barriers and to even reject values that they’ve been socialized to accept that maybe just don’t work for them or don’t work for their families or their community. I think being a warrior involves a lot of risk, in that you might be standing alone, you might have to lead some people.

TA: *What are some of the dangers and threats or barriers that our young people are facing today?*

Chris: Well there’s lots of things that people say, and the way they are toward Native people—they don’t give you a chance. They expect the stereotype, they think that you have no education, you should be on drugs, you should be selling your body for money, you should be drinking. That’s what I face a lot: people write you off. Even our own

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<sup>35</sup> This conversation with First Nation and Métis youth in Saskatoon is excerpted and adapted from the full-length roundtable discussion in Alfred, *Wasáse*.

people, they have their own stereotypes. It just makes it harder, and when you don't do those kinds of things, you're always kind of having to be proving it to people. But you don't always want to be proving something to people, you just wanted to be treated fairly, heh?

## **VI. WARRIOR SOCIETIES AND THE INDIGENOUS–STATE CONFLICT**

In considering the role of warrior societies in indigenous–state conflict, we will address three of the most pressing questions facing both indigenous communities and state agencies. The concise answers presented here are not to be taken as authoritative or comprehensive, nor are they necessarily representative of the perspectives of members of warrior societies. The answers below represent the authors' considered opinion based on the present research and on the years of experience each of us have had in relating with members of warrior societies and in participating in the political life of indigenous communities. Thus, they represent a starting point for discussion on the future of warrior societies and of the potential for conflict as well as the prospects for peaceful coexistence in society. It is hoped that in engendering serious and respectful engagement and discussion between those who seek justice for indigenous peoples and those who are charged with defending Canadian law and state sovereignty, that the groundwork can be laid for a lasting peaceful coexistence on terms that will ensure the survival of indigenous nations and Canada.

### **WHY DO WARRIOR SOCIETIES GAIN LEGITIMACY DURING A CRISIS?**

The reason that the approach of warrior societies gains credence among indigenous people during a crisis situation is that there is a deep-rooted fear among *all* indigenous people that, in spite of recent turns toward recognition of Aboriginal rights, the Canadian government is seeking to annihilate their existence. Most indigenous people favour peaceful and non-confrontational methods of advancing their political agenda and of advancing the cause of justice. But at the same time, all indigenous people have direct experience with or second-generation memory of the genocidal intent and capacity of the Canadian state. As well, all indigenous people have direct experience with the virulent forms of racism that still exist in most rural parts of Canada, and they understand well how ordinary Canadians turn hostile and violent when indigenous peoples' demands for recognition of their land rights or political rights threaten white society's economic privilege on the land. So, in a crisis situation, facing armed paramilitary force and the hostility of white society as a whole, in a context of impending violence capable of eliminating the very existence of their communities, the raw realities of the colonial relationship between indigenous peoples and the state are laid bare. In these situations, the warrior societies' analysis of Canadian society are proven correct. The legitimacy of the warrior society agenda and approach flows from this dynamic, although it must be noted as well that people do recognize in very pragmatic terms the necessity of defending the community in physical terms from outside aggression, and that the warrior societies provide a measure of national defence.

### **WHEN DO WARRIOR SOCIETIES BECOME INVOLVED IN CONFLICT?**

It must be understood that there is broad support among traditional indigenous people across the country for action, even militant action, against the continuing unjust dispossession of indigenous peoples from their lands. The disagreement among indigenous peoples is on their capacity to effectively confront state authorities and to sustain a politics of contention, as well as on whether or not the costs (violence, further deprivation, hostility of society, and so forth) are worth the gains to be made in confronting the injustices facing indigenous communities. Thus, there is no need for a screening or filtering process whereby warrior societies would judge the merit of various conflicts and decide which ones are suitable engagements. Engagement does not need to be rationalized. The operating assumption is that all indigenous communities are facing an injustice that needs to be confronted; the main factor influencing whether a warrior society is involved in a conflict is simply the existence of a conflict in a community where there is a warrior society with the capacity to respond. The foundational mentality and operational mandate of warrior societies are rooted in the traditional *sacred protector* concept, and any threat to the land, community and culture of their Nation is reason to become involved in a conflict—beyond this, it is a responsibility of the warrior society to fulfill their duty to defend the Nation, and any avoidance of conflict would be a shirking of this role. Simply put, warrior societies will become involved in conflicts between their nation and outside forces if the people call for their help, and if they possess the capacity to respond.

### **HOW SHOULD POLICE OR GOVERNMENTS RESPOND TO WARRIOR SOCIETIES, PARTICULARLY DURING AN OCCUPATION OR PROTEST?**

Violent confrontations between warrior societies and police and other government agents have only ever occurred when the state agencies have employed violence in the first instance against indigenous people on their own lands. In the modern era, indigenous peoples, including warrior societies, have never initiated violence nor advocated armed aggression against the non-indigenous population. Neither has there been any program or strategy of terrorist violence practised or advocated by indigenous people, including warrior societies. These facts underscore the reality that the outcome of any political or land-based conflict involving indigenous peoples, in terms of whether or not violence emerges as a feature of the conflict, is entirely determined by the police and government. Aside from rare instances where communities have determined that arms are necessary to protect themselves, warrior societies operate unarmed. To the extent that warrior societies do possess and use arms, based on our personal experience, these weapons are of the type possessed by ordinary citizens throughout the country—small calibre hunting rifles that are common in any rural community and many homes in Canada. And the context of their use must be stated clearly: indigenous–state conflict inevitably occurs on either residential property, sacred spaces, or in the very homes and back yards of indigenous people. Thus, in all conflicts so far, indigenous people, including warrior societies, have merely defended their homes and properties or their sacred spaces from outside aggression using non-lethal means, or in rare and extreme situations, using commonly owned legal firearms. Therefore, there is absolutely no justification for an armed or violent response to warrior societies, much less to other assertions or defences by indigenous people.

The roots of indigenous–state conflict are the dispossession of indigenous peoples and the denial of indigenous rights in law. The vast majority of conflicts that have emerged have been due to indigenous people’s resistance to unjust appropriations of their reserve lands or traditional

territories. The other main cause of conflict is the refusal of the state to recognize and respect treaty or inherent rights possessed by indigenous peoples in law. Indigenous–state conflict has political and legal sources. A police response to indigenous–state conflict is counterproductive to maintaining order and to achieving justice if it is formulated and conducted singularly, without a complementary engagement by governments on the root political and legal issues that underlie the conflict. So, in answer to the crucial question of how police agencies should respond to warrior societies during a crisis: Police agencies should refuse to be instruments in the colonial practice of criminalizing indigenous peoples to create a smokescreen for the systemic injustices and abuses of power committed by politicians. Police agencies should recognize the historical and cultural context of indigenous rights assertions, and demand that governments pursue political solutions to the problems plaguing the relationship between indigenous people and the state.

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