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CHAPTER FOUR

(RE)INSCRIBING MI'KMAQ PRESENCE THROUGH PUBLIC PETITION, PERFORMANCE AND ART

LAURA-LEE KEARNS AND NANCY PETERS

Public art has been used to foster social inclusion...giving expression to multiple and shifting identities of different groups, as indicative of presence rather than absence, and of avoiding the cultural domination of particular elites or interests

– Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005, 1006

Decolonization can occur when Aboriginal people and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together

– Donald 2009, 5

Haig-Brown (2008) reminds us that Canadians are "citizens of a nation built on persisting colonial relations; we exist always already in relation to land and Aboriginal peoples" (16). However, within the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relationship there is an imbalance: there is a lack of representation and inclusion of Aboriginal people in the public realm. Two tools which continue to (re)inscribe colonial domination on traditional Aboriginal territories are public naming and public art. To begin to decolonize the public realm and redress this imbalance so that there is more inclusion of Indigenous people, we need to critically engage with the legacy and absence of historical perspectives of Indigenous people and representations in public spaces. Rooted in notions of the commons, public space is generally understood to be shared locations that individuals and groups can legally access and use (Mitchell 2003; Puwar 2004). Public spaces have been defined as venues where groups can assemble freely; squares and parks, auditoriums and libraries, but also sidewalks and even places like cafes and malls that are privately owned. In theory, public

space belongs to everyone; in practice, who is visible and who feels welcome here is controlled by a host of explicit and implicit rules (Ibid). Within this chapter, we explore problematic colonial representations in public spaces, illuminating the struggle for visibility, remembrance and recognition of Mi'kmaq[1] people, and explore efforts that are being made to (re)inscribe Mi'kmaq presence through public petition, performance and art, which contribute to a new story of Indigenous presence.

The Mi'kmaq people have considered Mi'kma'ki, or Eastern Canada, their home for thousands of years. Oral history, stories, traditional knowledge of place and Mi'kmaq resilience attest to this, as does substantial archaeological evidence found in Debert and the Mersey River, for example (Office of Aboriginal Affairs 2009). Yet, there is little public acknowledgement of Mi'kmaq presence in this territory. The Minister of Nova Scotia's Office of Aboriginal Affairs, Michael G. Baker, admits that a majority of people "have very little knowledge of Mi'kmaq culture and history and their contribution to the Province—socially, culturally and economically" (Office of Aboriginal Affairs 2009, III). In contrast, across Nova Scotia there are publicly visible commemorative plaques, memorials and historic sites that mark the struggles and celebrate the achievements of European settlers who began to arrive in the seventeenth century. So, although Mi'kma'ki was one of the first sites of contact between Aboriginal Peoples and white Europeans, it is often the latter group that is visibly represented. Indigenous scholar, David Newhouse maintains that Aboriginal people across Canada are often unrecognized or "hidden in plain sight" (2010).

In this chapter we first explore the historic roots of this erasure in the section 'Problematic Public Representations: Erasures of Canada's First People in Nova Scotia'. Here we examine public naming and art through the veneration of Sir Edward Cornwallis and an exhibit at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia: *Burying the Hatchet and the Sword*. Cornwallis was the first governor of Nova Scotia and his image and name are prominent in public spaces. However, in the eyes of some, this particular representation of identity and heritage in public spaces is not neutral, peaceful or respectful. For Mi'kmaq people and their allies, Cornwallis is seen as one of the figures responsible for the mass murder of Mi'kmaq people (Paul 2006). In 1749 Governor Cornwallis issued a public scalping proclamation that placed a "reward of 10 guineas for every Micmac Indian taken or killed" (Paul 2006, 115; Canfield 2012). This proclamation and other forms of systemic violence directed towards the Mi'kmaq continued well into this century, as residential school survivors and the intergenerational trauma created by these practices attest (Knockwood 2001; Milloy 2006).

The ramifications of not understanding history from a Mi'kmaq perspective continues to be felt in some public spaces in the province. In 2011, a prominent exhibit at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, *Burying the Hatchet and the Sword*, reinforced the notion that early relationships between settlers and Mi'kmaq were—at the very least—benign, by erasing violence from the picture of the colonial past. This is problematic because "official versions of history, which begin as cultural and contextual interpretations of events, morph into hegemonic expressions of existing value structures and worldviews of dominant groups in society" (Donald 2009, 3).

In 'Public Petition and Performance: Challenging Uncritical Colonial Representations', we examine selected efforts that have begun to unsettle taken-for-granted assumptions about a harmonious past in the province, revealing the historical "white washing" of settler-Mi'kmaq relationships. Longstanding efforts by Mi'kmaw historian and Elder Daniel Paul, author of *We Were Not Savages*, and a performance piece by Mi'kmaw artist Ursula Johnson, *Elmieit*, seek to (re)inscribe a Mi'kmaq presence in public consciousness by taking issue with the prominence of historical figures such as Cornwallis. Their petition and performance illustrate the contestation of dominant Eurocentric narratives in public spaces and the struggle for Indigenous representation. Arguably, their efforts illustrate a need to consider the ethics of representation and the continued privileging of dominant narratives that fail to take into consideration Indigenous people's history, perspectives and knowledge.

In 'A New Story: (Re)inscribing Aboriginal Presence in Public Spaces', we consider one significant new space which highlights Mi'kmaq presence: Mi'kmaw artist Alan Syliboy's *Dream Canoe* mural that is a permanent installation at the People's Place Library in Antigonish, Nova Scotia. The result of an Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal collaboration, this artwork asserts the presence of the Mi'kmaq in an important public space. This purposeful relationship, built by Chief librarian Eric Stackhouse and Syliboy, and the inclusion of public art, is, we feel, an opportunity for non-Mi'kmaq and Mi'kmaq allies to embark on new relationships with Mi'kmaq as a contemporary people and move beyond static and/or stereotypical images of Indigenous people. In exploring this public space, we show that by acknowledging and affirming Indigenous presence, a space can be created to imagine different possibilities for non-Aboriginal / Mi'kmaq relationships that may evoke awareness and respect for Mi'kmaq knowledge, culture, historical perspectives and heritage.

Problematic Public Representations: Erasures of Canada's First People in Nova Scotia

Part of the legacy of colonialism in Canada is that the histories, cultural knowledge and traditions of ethnic and racial minorities, particularly those of Aboriginal peoples, are neither seen nor known (Kanu 2011; Lischke & McNab 2005; Mackey 2002). Integral to the strategy of colonizers for conquest and control is to view the claimed land as without stories and people, and for settlers like themselves to be prominent in public spaces (Loomba 2008). As a result the people and sites chosen for public commemorations, and the types of stories that were/are told in public spaces often represent a dominant Eurocentric perspective, erasing the country's diversity and not so harmonious past. As in other locations in Canada, uncritical commemorations scattered across the province of Nova Scotia reinforce the image of colonial ancestors, and Canadians as citizens in "a nation of peacemakers" (Regan 2010, 3). For the most part, Mi'kmaq perspectives on history and historical figures do not figure either in public conversation or memory of Nova Scotians or Canadians (McKay 1993; Paul 2006).

To illustrate, the first British Governor of Nova Scotia, General Edward Cornwallis, has been revered across Mi'kmaq territory—statues, squares, public parks, streets, and schools continue to honour his name. In the provincial capital Halifax, a statue of Cornwallis is on display in a central square. Outside of the large city-centre, there are numerous other references to Cornwallis, including a former Military base, a museum, a Park, a Highway exit, bus stop routes, and even a café in Digby, Nova Scotia. There are not only a significant number of land-based Cornwallis markers, but his name extends to the water—in the ocean, there is a Canadian navy ship called the HMCS Cornwallis. Cornwallis appears to be a celebrated figure across this territory. However, he also represents a horrific side of colonialism, including the scalping proclamation he issued sanctioning the killing of Mi'kmaq men, women and children (Paul 2006). Until very recently, though, many Nova Scotians and Canadians have been largely unaware, and many still remain unaware, of this reality as it has been erased from public consciousness and memory.

The deliberate rewriting, or white-washing, of Nova Scotia's history and the continued absence of Indigenous understandings of Mi'kma'ki can be seen in the actions of government officials, business associations and local heritage groups who came together in the 1930s to create a distinctive tourism "brand" for Nova Scotia (McKay 1993, 425). The process of branding Nova Scotia entailed, in part, identifying and selecting

commemorative plaques and erecting memorials to historical figures. Integral to shaping the vision of these efforts were two popular authors and amateur historians, Thomas Raddall and William R. Bird[2], who sat on the Historic Sites Advisory Council. The history that Raddall and Bird favoured, though, was as selective as it was romanticized. Raddall wrote tales depicting "the triumph of the English-speaking Nova Scotians over their adversaries: Americans, Frenchman, Natives" (McKay 1993, 433). While, Bird spun "folksy" yarns about salty characters and quaint villages. The official account that emerged from these combined efforts was not a picture of a violent colonial past, but of a "harmonious Golden Age" (McKay 1993). When it came to Aboriginal Peoples, both Bird and Raddall openly espoused racist attitudes. Aboriginal Peoples were portrayed as physically repellent, culturally deficient and menacingly savage in their encounters with "civilized" society (McKay 1993). It is not surprising, then, that the commemorative plaques and memorials approved for funding by the Historic Advisory Council reflected the values of a white, privileged, Eurocentric heritage. Out of some 152 public commemorations approved between 1948 and 1964, there was only one single nod to "Native History": the site of a large Mi'kmaw encampment (McKay 1993, 439-49). While seven items recognized "French/English rivalry" (McKay 1993, 439), there appears to have been no acknowledgement of the protracted conflict between the Mi'kmaw and the British, or of the Peace and Friendship treaties[3], which paved the way for settlement.

What remains troubling is that these early erasures and selective one-sided narratives continue to be disseminated by museums and art galleries, institutions charged with responsibility for our collective memory (Alfred 2005; Bolton 2009; Crean 2009; Lischke & McNab 2005; Mackey 2002). Ostensibly marking the Peace and Friendship Treaty of 1761, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia mounted an exhibit in 2011 called *Burying the Hatchet and the Sword* (Art Gallery of Nova Scotia 2012). The exhibit featured works created by white European settlers from the 18th to the early 20th century: delicately coloured prints and line drawings portrayed Mi'kmaq People, their encampments, dress and livelihood activities. The images depict a peaceful time. The only indication that colonization may have been injurious to Mi'kmaq people was a single sentence acknowledging a "rapacious demand of new settlers for more land" (Exhibit prospectus, 2). The exhibit provided no indication that European colonization and colonial government policies had brought the Mi'kmaw almost to the point of extinction by the end of the 19th century (Paul 2006; Reid 1995; Reid 2009). The perspectives of those who still benefit from colonialism, therefore, remained undisturbed by any contrary or unsettling Mi'kmaw

interpretations. In acknowledging the legacy of colonialism, Haig-Brown asks us to consider: "[h]ow often do either our institutions or we personally benefit economically [or otherwise] from…the historical and contemporary relations between government and Indigenous people…and from our studied amnesia or refusal to engage with the historical relations underpinning all of what we do?" (2008, 18).

Public Petition and Performance: Challenging Uncritical Colonial Representations

More often than not, the right to be appropriately represented in public spaces is contested and may often be a struggle to obtain[4]. Public spaces are seldom neutral. Instead, they are often invisibly racialized (Mitchell 2003; Puwar, 2004). Consider the case in Halifax in April 2010, when four white models posed in front of a statue of Cornwallis holding packages of human hair extensions for an advertisement for a hairdressing salon. For Mi'kmaq and non-Mi'kmaq allies, this act was seen as offensive as it brought forth the memory of the scalping proclamation issued by Cornwallis that sanctioned the death of Mi'kmaq people some two and half centuries ago. In response, Elder Daniel Paul contacted the salon owner to see if this act was done out of "ignorance or racism" (Tattrie 2010). Paul was convinced it was lack of awareness. The salon owner stated: "Who would suspect? It's a public park. If there's such an offensive connection to it, why's it there?" (Tattrie 2010). Paul concluded that incidents like this speak to the larger issue of "ignorance of Nova Scotia's history" (Tattrie 2010). It also points to larger issues of power, and the lack of inclusion and representation of Indigenous perspectives in the public realm. In considering Indigenous and non-indigenous perspectives and relationships, we "cannot separate history from power…those who have power are able to write their version of the story and have it accepted as 'truth'" (Newhouse 2010, 6).

Indeed, those whose interests are served by dominant historical narratives seldom recognize their unearned privileges as they do not have to consider the perspectives of those who are marginalized (McIntosh 1990). Hence, some people may plead ignorance of the harm dominant symbols represent in public spaces; whereas those harmed by such symbols continue to experience their effects. In this case, from a Mi'kmaq perspective, the on-going reverence of Cornwallis as a symbol is an act of psychological violence (Paul 2006; Johnson 2010). The Nova Scotia government did not issue a formal apology and remove the scalping

proclamations until 2000, but these acts still remain officially on the books federally, with the Canadian government (Flinn 2010).

In response to this ongoing legacy of colonization, Mi'kmaq artist Ursula Johnson, whose grandmother and aunties survived residential schools, created a public performance piece in 2010 aimed at drawing attention to Mi'kmaq memories and history. Johnson wanted the public to acknowledge that Cornwallis is a symbol of genocide for Mi'kmaq people. Johnson said "a lot of First Nation people are really affected by [and] upset by it [the proclamation and its legacy]" (Flinn 2010). As a reminder of the harm caused by the Cornwallis' scalping proclamations, Johnson's *Elmieit* performance symbolically re-enacted the final Mi'kmaq scalping in Nova Scotia—in the same square in Halifax where the statue of Cornwallis is on display. David Murray, who volunteered to take on the role of the colonial scalper, wrote in his blog that:

> In preparation for her protest piece, Johnson had been growing out her hair—in Mi'kmaq culture the longer a person's hair is, the stronger his/her spiritual connection to the world around him/her is considered to be—and also weaving a long headpiece that would cover her head/eyes, and double as her hair/scalp during the performance…[after Mi'kmaq singer] Nathan Sack, came forward and started singing a traditional song…Ursula told me to place my hands on the side of her head. She told me that at the end of the song I was to rip her headpiece off violently, and that I should act very proud since I had done a noble act in killing a Mi'kmaq savage. (Murray 2010)

Although reluctant to depict a violent colonizer, Murray did so because he has "developed a tremendous amount of respect for those Mi'kmaq people who are trying to regain a sense of pride in their history" (Murray 2010). This public performance acknowledged both the historical harms and the contemporary symbolic violence that the Mi'kmaq encounter in public spaces. The performance piece aimed to disrupt the ignorance of Nova Scotia's colonial past. It also coincides with other struggles against the legacy of colonialism and the continued honouring of those who, like Cornwallis, would have supported the silencing of Indigenous people.

The challenges to the public erasures of Canada's colonial past have yielded some success. Elder Daniel Paul spent over 30 years trying to expand the dominant historical narratives in Nova Scotia to include Indigenous perspectives (Paul, personal communication July 1, 2012). He petitioned tirelessly to remove the name of Cornwallis from schools (Paul, www.petitiononline.com). To compare the harm Cornwallis represents for Mi'kmaq people, Paul asked if people would want their school named

"Hitler Junior High?" (Moore 2011). After years of petitioning, and thanks to the efforts of several Mi'kmaq representatives and allies, the Halifax Regional School Board voted unanimously in favour of the motion to rename Cornwallis Junior High School (CBC 2011; O'Connor 2011). The board considered the "ethical representation" of Cornwallis and concluded that the name was "inappropriate and unacceptable" as Cornwallis "ordered the mass killing of Mi'kmaq people" (CBC News 2011). Mi'kmaw school board representative Kirk Arsenault was delighted with the result, but was also very clear when he said that "[as] far as we are concerned, anything with the Cornwallis name on it has to go" (O'Connor 2011).

The efforts to (re)consider historical figures known to have harmed Aboriginal people have sparked some national interest, raising questions about representation and the extent to which we can or should re-write the past. In response to the re-naming of Cornwallis school, a journalist for the National Post questioned what it means to acknowledge historical wrongs, and asked if we would feel similarly if we acknowledged that the "Mi'kmaq certainly were not innocent, passive victims?"[5] (O'Connor 2011). Similarly, one Halifax city councillor was quoted as saying: "history is laced with people, famous people, that have done things that go against everything that we stand for as acceptable today" (Ibid). Elder Paul, however, asserts that everyone needs to remember that "symbolism matters…If there is ever going to be a racially equal society you have to clean up all the mess from the past" (Moore 2011).

Given the historical forces that govern Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, in debating the politics of representation one needs to remember the ethical dimension in responding to the harm that contemporary Mi'kmaq people and their allies feel, think and see today in the face of such uncritical dominant representations. A more just and ethical public space demands the (re)inscription of Indigenous presence on its own terms and in relation to all. For this change to happen, Roger Simon (2000) stipulates that we need to learn to listen differently to those *touched* by historical memories that may alter our own understandings, even if they trouble our current and future social arrangements (75, my italics). In listening differently to the harm experienced by Indigenous people, Simon says the "fundamental issue is to recognize an injustice within a demand for justice and to take the measure of what changes must accrue as a result" (75). Certainly, this appears to be what the school board representatives did do when they learned and heard a different story about history and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations; while those who would dismiss the significance of the past and its impact on the present and future

were invited to respond and listen differently. "In Walter Benjamin's idiom, we need to learn to take counsel in stories of a shared past as told by First Nations people" (Simon, 75).

A New Story: (Re)inscribing Aboriginal Presence in Public Spaces

Newhouse maintains that if Indigenous people are mentioned at all in dominant public narratives that constitute spaces of memory and history, they are usually "stories of Aboriginal pain and suffering" (2010, 3). In working with Aboriginal people, Newhouse says that they/we "want a new story" —a "story of talent, competence, accomplishment, and hope" (3-5). As Indigenous people and non-Indigenous allies move to create spaces and places where Indigenous people, culture, knowledge, art, spirituality, perspectives and histories can be appreciated, we wanted to begin to understand how Mi'kmaq art in public spaces might evoke a "new story," and offer as an example the case of the collaboration that took place in a public library.

The new People's Place Library opened its doors in 2011, in the small Nova Scotia town of Antigonish[6], with a prominent display of Mi'kmaq art (http://www. peoplesplace.ca). Interviews with Mi'kmaw artist Alan Syliboy (AS 2012) and with Chief Librarian Eric Stackhouse (ES 2012), taken from a larger research project on libraries, place-making, and Indigenous people (Kearns and Peters 2012), show a deliberate and purposeful attempt to render visible Mi'kmaq art and people in a public space. Chief Librarian Stackhouse said he was committed to "inclusion" from the outset of the development of the new library (ES 2012). This public space can be seen as opening up the possibility for a more inclusive space, "as indicative of presence rather than absence," and where Mi'kmaq stories could be seen, told and heard. Prominent in this location is Syliboy's *Dream Canoe*, described as a "mural [that] combines ancient Mi'kmaq history with contemporary life in fluid, mixed-media imagery and is as deep in meaning as you want your mind to travel, as well as expressing a wonderful summer's day" (Barnard 2011).

Public libraries are an important but sometimes overlooked public space. Libraries have been called one of our "most enduring public institutions—priceless repositories of history, language, and culture" (Nikitin and Jackson 2009). They occupy a "special role in the popular imagination" (Newman 2007, 888). Libraries have been described as community "living rooms" where people gather together and share with one another (Campbell 2008, 4). They are also recognized as a public

extension of the home, workplace or classroom, where people can read, write, study, research, gather, hold meetings and community discussions, socialize and relax with others (Given 2003). In an interview commenting on the new library, Stackhouse said "librarians have to think about our spaces differently. Before we managed book collections, and today we're doing much more management of community spaces. That's where our role is heading—towards more community development skills" (Nikitin and Jackson 2009). Certainly, the library is supposed to be a "place for everyone. All inhabitants have the same right to use it, and the feeling that it belongs to all seems dominant" (Aabo and Audunson 2012, 144).

Libraries are, also, not "neutral" public spaces (DeFaveri 2008, 10). Since their inception, libraries have responded to social, economic and political forces that have reshaped their understanding of community, and the groups they can and should serve, mediating race, class and gender (Newman 2007). Over the past decade, there have been increasing calls for Canadian libraries to promote social inclusion, defined as both a process and an outcome that "upholds and reinforces the principles of access and equity" (Canadian Urban Libraries Council 2010). Common strategies for inclusion have included improving services and collections for diverse user groups, particularly for groups who may be or feel excluded from other public spaces such as people with special needs, people living in poverty, seniors, marginalized youth, people with mental health issues, and members of ethnic minorities like new immigrants and Aboriginal people (Williment 2009).

As part of a concerted effort to create a socially inclusive space, the Antigonish Town and County Public Library drew upon the Project for Public Spaces (www.pps.org), and used a placemaking approach to the design of its new building. Stackhouse studied placemaking in New York, and had his library staff receive professional development in this approach (ES 2012). The vision was that people in the Town and Country of Antigonish would "see themselves reflected back in the building" (Stackhouse 2011). More commonly used for revitalizing public spaces like museums, parks, university campuses and civic centres, only a few libraries in the United States (primarily in large urban centres like New York) have used a placemaking approach to date (Murdoch 2010). Based on the work of visionary urban planners like Jane Jacobs (2004, 1984, 1961), the Project for Public Spaces sees community members as the experts and invites participation of key partners in gathering data that will transform a "space" into a vibrant destination "place." Placemaking mirrors emerging bottom-up approaches to community-led library design

where libraries are seen as "an expression of (a) community's vision and creativity" (Williment 2009).

During the design process, the People's Place Building Committee held some 35 public consultations in different locations throughout the service area. Some consultations were open to everyone; others invited input from specific groups such as youth and municipal government representatives. Chief librarian Eric Stackhouse (AS 2012) recalls that a "common element that came through was that it had to be a gathering spot" and that people had a strong desire for "artwork" in the building.

Throughout the People's Place Building Committee's design process consultations there was a demand for public art as a way of making the new space comfortable and welcoming for all:

> ...we picked up on the idea that when the building was done, people wanted to see Antigonish reflected back to them in the building. What is one of the best ways to do that? Through art. So when we did the call for public art, we wanted to ensure that...[it] was really about the people who lived in the community, in the various communities that made up Antigonish town & county. We wanted to make sure that it was an inclusive gathering spot... (ES 2012)

As a result of community consultations, The People's Place Building Committee put out a call for public art and eventually selected over 26 art works by 17 artists. Displayed both indoors and out, works include a mosaic bench, textiles, stone and metal sculptures, stained glass, tapestry and paintings[7]. Although a number of different artists and mediums are on display at the People's Place, which lends to the diversity and the inclusive feeling of the space, we focus on one particular art work created by Mi'kmaw artist Alan Syliboy: the *Dream Canoe*. In interviews with Stackhouse and Syliboy, both affirmed that the inclusion of Mi'kmaq art was a deliberate attempt to highlight Indigenous presence in the community. As Stackhouse said, "we wanted to ensure that [the library] was as inclusive as possible. Once Alan explained the concept of the *Dream Canoe*, we (myself, the architect and the planning committee) knew that his piece had to go into that main area because it was going to be an important feature" (ES 2012).

Mi'kmaw Presence: The *Dream Canoe*

Placed on the south wall of the central reading area, Syliboy's 12' by 6' *Dream Canoe* mural represents a positive, contemporary image of Mi'kmaq people, a poignant symbol of the resilience of Aboriginal

peoples and the continuity of Aboriginal tradition and culture that each successive generation represents.

Fig. 1 Alan Syliboy, *Dream Canoe*, 2011. Reproduced with permission.

Similar to other public art installations with social justice goals, the focal point of the *Dream Canoe* is a group of people, suggestive of "the communal, the mutual endeavours, and the shared struggles" (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005, 1008). From the point of view of Mi'kmaw artist Alan Syliboy the *Dream Canoe* creates an Indigenous presence. He said:

> I wanted Paq'tnkek…to be represented in the town somewhere…and this was perfect…I feel like it has the effect that we wanted…it sort of levels you, just kids playing in a canoe, who happen to be Afton kids, kids that are just down the road …that was my whole idea…this would have the effect we want and be humanizing and relating and everything that I was hoping for. (AS 2012)

Paq'tnkek, also known as Afton, is the home of Mi'kmaq people in the Antigonish area, one of 13 designated Mi'kmaq reserves in Nova Scotia. The photos of the children in the canoe were taken by Syliboy years earlier. In describing the inspiration for the Dream Canoe, Syliboy said:

> Sometime in the mid-80s I was visiting the Afton reserve where I developed many lasting friendships. I came upon the Prosper kids playing in a canoe on a summer's day. This took me back instantly to many summer days of my childhood where I did the exact same thing. But now, I was an observer. I was lucky to have my camera with me and that I went unnoticed (which would have broken the spell). This is the closest I'll ever come to re-living a moment of my childhood. This painting will forever take us back to a warm summer's day on a voyage with your best friends.

> Most of my subjects deal with the concept of family—their searches, struggles and strength. All of these things are part of my art, and my art gives me strength for my continuing spiritual quest. (Antigonish Town and County Library 2011)

There are multiple interpretations and ways to connect to the *Dream Canoe*. According to Stackhouse, the mural "has a local story, but it is a story that everyone can relate to" (ES 2012). Stackhouse reflected that: "people feel more at home when their world is reflected back to them. Allan's piece is a great representation of that…it has common motifs, some that are familiar and some that aren't" (ES 2012). Almost every viewer can find a personal connection to the scenes in the mural.

Fig. 2 Alan Syliboy, *Dream Canoe*, 2011, detail. Reproduced with permission.

On a local level, there are children, close by, at play on a summer's day. These could be any children having fun in the water. Yet, there are also motifs that not everyone may be familiar with. There is deep and meaningful symbolism that reflects Mi'kmaq heritage, connections to the land, water, earth, air, animals and plants. These symbols also encompass body, mind, heart and spirit connections and the interconnection of all of creation. Some of the images are contemporary and others offer a deep connection to history and tradition that show a continuation of past, present and future. All of these elements honour Indigenous knowledge and presence.

The presence of this work of Mi'kmaw art in the People's Place was deliberate; Stackhouse and Syliboy were both interested in creating more awareness of Mi'kmaq people through art. As Sharp, Pollock and Paddison state: "'Public art' can be used to foster 'social inclusion… giving expression to multiple and shifting identities of different groups, as indicative of presence rather than absence, and of avoiding the cultural domination of particular elites or interests (2005, 1006)." In a landscape that is largely absent of Mi'kmaq representations, Syliboy said,

> …you don't really have an opportunity to see anything Aboriginal, we are pretty invisible. In this whole area…I don't know if it is suppressed, but it is difficult and this is an opportunity [for Aboriginal art in the public library space]. It's like a lot of things form as you go. You see the lay of the land and you kind of want to fill it. (AS 2012)

In acknowledging the "invisibility" of Mi'kmaq representation in the public realm, Syliboy and Stackhouse both talked about the need for more opportunities for Aboriginal representation. They also wanted to urge people to take more risks in working and collaborating with Indigenous artists, and with artists in general (AS & ES 2012).

Syliboy and Stackhouse discussed the need for greater visibility and social inclusion of Indigenous people in public spaces. Syliboy, who had travelled to Vancouver for the 2011Winter Games where his work was on display, and Stackhouse, who has family connections to B.C. and whose own father was an artist, noticed that Aboriginal Peoples are more "visible" in British Columbia than in Nova Scotia. Stackhouse commented: "I was saying to Alan it would be nice if that kind of artistic recognition was here" (ES 2012). To which Syliboy replied, "That was exactly what I was looking for" (AS 2012). Stackhouse continued: "I look at that and how they've done that and I was thinking: why isn't that happening here? It is a huge opportunity for everyone. To me …it should happen. So anything we can do to make that happen…Trust in Artists." Part of the larger conversation also had Syliboy acknowledge and appreciate the "courage" of Stackhouse to work with artists and support Indigenous artists, in particular. Syliboy said that not everyone is willing to enter into collaborations with Indigenous artists (AS 2012). Both said it takes "courage", and "trust" to work collaboratively (AS & ES 2012).

Syliboy and Stackhouse's vision to (re)inscribe Mi'kmaq presence has taken root. Reports from library staff, patrons, and acquaintances of Stackhouse and Syliboy suggest that the *Dream Canoe* mural has become a destination in and of itself, not only for art lovers, but also educators and students, local residents and visitors, and for groups of Mi'kmaq Elders

(AS & ER 2012). Syliboy and Stackhouse also suggested that some of these visitors might not otherwise have ventured either into the Antigonish Town and County Public Library or into galleries where Syliboy's work is more commonly displayed (AS & ER 2012). As a result, Syliboy's *Dream Canoe* has been seen not only by a larger number of people than it otherwise might have been, but by more diverse viewers. In taking up the challenge to become inclusive spaces, libraries begin to be recognized as places that help to open up our collective social and cultural and horizons. Aabo and Audunson say that libraries are:

> … an arena where one is exposed to otherness. Such exposures partly result from initiatives consciously organized by the public library, and partly from the fact that the library is used by people belonging to highly diverse ethnic, cultural, social, and generational groups. The public sphere is an arena where different ideas and opinions are presented to the public, and where people develop their civic skills in order to make informed opinions on public matters after having been exposed to different viewpoints…users being individually exposed to issues and opinions in public debate, or consciously seeking information in order to qualify as citizens. (2012, 144)

The *Dream Canoe*'s notable presence is such an opportunity—an opportunity to consider those who have been deemed "other." Its visible presence offers the possibility to seek further understanding and dialogue. Its respectful and central presence can also be seen as part of a larger inclusion project that seeks to decolonize public spaces by inscribing Indigenous presence.

Public Aboriginal Art, Imagination and Place-stories

What is the relationship between public art and social inclusion? "Public art can either perpetuate traditional relationships of domination or it can spark the imagination about the possibilities of other forms of relationships" (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005). In highlighting the collaborative and inclusive presence of the *Dream Canoe* in a public space as a more just and ethical representation of Indigeneity, we do imagine that it offers new possibilities in opposition to domination. Fraser (1995) explains that injustice is tied up with "social patterns of representation, interpretation and communication" (71). She identifies three ways in which non-dominant groups have been erased or diminished in the public eye: through non-recognition or an absence of representation, through the assertion of stereotypical or false images, through "cultural injustice"

whereby representations of marginalized groups are largely controlled by dominant groups or ideologies (Fraser 1995, 71).

Following Fraser, we see, first and foremost, the *Dream Canoe* signals Mi'kmaw presence, highlighting what was formerly absent. Until recently, there was little or no public recognition of Mi'kmaq history and presence in either the community of Antigonish as a whole or in the public library. Against a backdrop of a Nova Scotian landscape where Mi'kmaq's historical perspectives are largely absent or need to be fought for, any Mi'kmaq art in a public space is itself significant. One of the most important functions of public art is to "reclaim place and recognize the past" (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005, 1007-1009). The *Dream Canoe* reclaims place as it asks us to become aware of who has (and who has not) been present and made welcome in public spaces. Literally and figuratively, the *Dream Canoe* reinstalls the Mi'kmaq into the landscape, reminding us that the Mi'kmaq have never gone away.

Second, the *Dream Canoe* does not reproduce false or stereotypical images of the Mi'kmaq as they are represented as changing and evolving with time. The mural is particularly interesting because it simultaneously evokes *both* contemporary and traditional Mi'kmaw life; for example, the youth are surrounded by important cultural teachings and understandings but are wearing jeans in the canoe (AS 2012). They are also each uniquely enjoying the summer day in a different way. Sylliboy has used mixed media in the mural, both photography and painting, which may also challenge some people's preconceived notions about what Aboriginal art or storytelling is or should be like. In this way, it shares new and old cultural stories using non-traditional Aboriginal technologies. It is the lack of reductionist images and the multiple meanings the diverse images elicit that opens up the possibility of using the mural for a new story.

Third, the *Dream Canoe* is an effort to address an all pervasive "cultural injustice" which marginalizes messages communicated by Aboriginal people. The *Dream Canoe* provokes multiple possibilities, and invites us all to imagine multiple stories about Indigeneity. Syliboy's use of Mi'kmaq symbols like the turtle and the whale shows the continuity of Mi'kmaq spirituality, philosophy, stories, interconnection, while signalling that the Mi'kmaq continue to resist assimilation and are consciously holding on to culture and tradition with successive generations. The Mi'kmaq in the dream canoe are not static, or stereotypical. Most importantly, the deliberate, respectful and central positioning of the large mural in the public space from the outset of the creation and imagining of the public library itself shows an Aboriginal artist's work being included

on its own terms. Hence, the *Dream Canoe* may be seen as a more just and ethical representation of Indigenous people in public spaces.

Smith (2001) points to the potential of using contemporary Aboriginal art not only to draw attention to the presence of Aboriginal peoples' cultures and traditions, but also to the possibility of new relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. As we have seen, public art can help to counter stereotypes (Fraser 1995; Mitra 2011; Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005; Puwar 2004; Smith 2001). Puwar (2004) shows that public representation of non-dominant groups can disrupt privileged understandings of history and the nature of public spaces. Although it is not easy to precisely pinpoint the impacts of a particular piece of public art on different people, in different communities, and what conversations or responses they provoke (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005; Smith, 2001), public art does have power. Public art and memorials may be experienced on multiple levels, some may be enjoyed, studied, reflected upon, discussed and questioned, while others may be forgotten or ignored, and some may even offend, harm and/or provoke resistance (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005; Puwar, 2004; Smith 2001). Public art asserts a presence. Indigenous art, therefore, may be one way of moving beyond stories of Nation that privilege the colonizers' perspectives and that construct Aboriginal people as "the other."

Given this respectful Aboriginal presence in a public place, might this not create an opportunity for, as Donald suggests, Aboriginal people and Canadians to critically encounter one another by (re)exploring their shared past, and understand their present and future connections (2009, 9)? To engage in such dialogues requires the questioning of old assumptions and a genuine leap of imagination (Regan 2010, 227). In a volume of case studies describing the potential for and pitfalls of Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal alliances, Davis writes that "the authors collectively point to the *failure of imagination* in Euro-Canadian society to move beyond its colonial past" (2010, 14, italics mine). To being new conversations about the past, and to "create a history with as much complexity as our imaginations can grasp" (Haig Brown and Nock 2006, 5), all participants must

> ...reimagine themselves, not as citizens with the privileges conferred by being a descendent of colonizers or newcomers from other parts of the world benefitting from white imperialism, but as human beings in equal and respectful relation to other human beings. (Taiaiake & Alfred 2010, 6)

It is in the respectful relationships that we form, in the connections, questions, explorations, discoveries and the conversations that inclusive

spaces spark, that we can begin the dialogue to decolonize public spaces and imagine otherwise. Art, with its imaginative qualities, and images like the *Dream Canoe* with its "humanizing effect" that can be storied in many ways, may provide the impetus for wanting to imagine differently, and create new stories of and with Canada's First People.

We "imagine" that the Indigenous presence in the public building of the Antigonish library that contains Mi'kmaq art, the *Dream Canoe*, could inspire a new story, perhaps one of social inclusion and decolonization, or be an entry point to unpack history and culture, and tell "place-stories." Donald describes place-stories as:

> stories that Aboriginal people tell about places in Canada...[which may] prompt Canadians to question the depth of their understanding of the familiar places they call home...place-stories can help people reframe their understandings of Canadian history as layered and relational, and thus better comprehend ongoing Indigenous presence and participation. (Donald 2009, 10)

The possibility of Canadians and Indigenous people decolonizing our past exists by recognizing the multiple stories and the perspectives of Indigenous people in the public realm. In order to do this, we must move beyond binary logic, specifically colonial frontier logic that frames insiders as Canadians and outsiders as Aboriginal people, who are separate and divided as opposed to interconnected. This logic further sustains stereotypes of Aboriginal people, in static images of teepees and costumes or as a presence only in the past, instead of viewing Aboriginal people as contemporary people who may wear regalia as part of their identities and live in many different places. As the *Dream Canoe* evokes images of contemporary and traditional Mi'kmaq presence, it may provoke questions, or connections or memories related to Mi'kmaq knowledge. What stories do Mi'kmaq people tell about some of the elements in this painting? What might Mi'kmaq traditional knowledge teach us about the land, ocean, place, earth, air, animals, people? What joy and pleasure did these young people experience on a summer's day? What joys, pleasure, do many Canadians experience during the long-awaited summer? How can we all play together? How might we all enjoy the land and water? The *Dream Canoe* is a piece that provokes multiple possibilities, questions, and in that provocation of the imagination invites us all to imagine a new story, multiple stories of Indigeneity and multiple stories of our (inter)connection to one another.

Overall, by acknowledging Mi'kmaq presence, we may begin to (re)story our past and explore Indigenous place-stories. We may do this by

acknowledging the colonizer and colonized relationship and consider Indigenous perspectives, knowledge and values that have been largely written out of the history and building of the Canadian Nation (Donald 9). By moving beyond stories of Nation that see Aboriginal people as other, separate, in opposition, or 'hidden in plain sight,' and that privilege settlers, like Cornwallis, or present idealized images of First Nation people through the gaze of the colonizer, such as in the *Burying the Hatchet* exhibit, we may begin to see Aboriginal people as The *Dream Canoe* depicts, as "contemporary people" steeped in traditional knowledge of place. This is vital to the effort to tell new stories about and with Indigenous people. The *Dream Canoe* could indeed offer a pedagogy of place-stories, if we take up the relational invitation it offers to our imaginations. This is the hope, invitation and the provocation. Roger Simon reminds us that that the sphere of public memory is a transactional space whereby the experience of learning about the stories of others' may not only change what we know about our own stories, but expand our responsiveness and responsibility to the lives of others (2000, 62-63). The response now rests with the listener.

Conclusion

Challenging the public erasures of Canada's first people in Nova Scotia is a work in progress. The (re)inscription of Mi'kmaq presence through public petition such as those campaigned tirelessly by Elder Daniel Paul, public performance such as that of Ursula Johnson, and artwork in public spaces such as that of Alan Syliboy's *Dream Canoe*, are efforts to attend to Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations and to remember and recognize Mi'kmaq people. Certainly, some Nova Scotians have begun to rethink public spaces of memory and history as they are supporting and collaborating with Mi'kmaq people. Syliboy and Stackhouse both believe that public art can be a powerful force for social inclusion and decolonization. Their efforts demonstrated a conscious attempt to render visible Indigenous people and decolonize one high-profile public place in the province. The opportunity to imagine, rethink, appreciate and value Indigenous representations challenges dominant public narratives that have failed to do so. The *Dream Canoe* at the People's Place Library not only highlights Mi'kmaw presence, it also opens up the possibility to share new stories that have, are and will be told. As a further testament to this, Paul gave a public lecture at the People's Place Library in November 2011, attracting over two hundred people; only two years earlier at the local university there was a mere handful. Perhaps

the *Dream Canoe* image and the inclusive library space helped people see Paul's presentation as part of their own history—not just belonging to Mi'kmaq people. The presence of Syliboy's *Dream Canoe* invites non-Mi'kmaw to embark on new relationships with Mi'kmaw. The new library in Antigonish, the place where the waters meet, with all of its art, architectural features and place-making approach, is part of rural regeneration, provincial regeneration, national regeneration, and hopefully a regeneration of Turtle Island (North America). As we "mov[e] from traditional civic monumentalism towards seeing a more socially inclusive and aesthetically diverse" public realm (Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005, 1014) the possibility to imagine otherwise challenges us all to create a new dream. It is a "dream" for us to embark in the canoe and voyage to a place where we may all be included and valued in the public realm.

Notes

[1.] The Mi'kmaq are one of many Indigenous, or Aboriginal (a legal term used to describe First Nation, Métis and Inuit people in Canada), people found in Canada and the United States. We focus on the Mi'kmaq who are geographically situated in what is now Nova Scotia, Canada. The word Mi'kmaq is a noun that means 'the people' and is the plural form of the singular word Mi'kmaw. Mi'kmaw can also be used as an adjective. We try to use both spellings consistently.

[2.] Thomas Raddall (1903–1994) was a Governor General's award winner for historical fiction. William R. Bird (1891–1984), also known as "Mr. Nova Scotia", worked with the Nova Scotia Tourism Bureau and became widely known for his 1950 travel guide *This is Nova Scotia*.

[3.] A series of treaties with the Mi'kmaq were signed in the 18th century, and in 1985 the Supreme Court of Canada affirmed that the Treaty of 1752, the Peace and Friendship treaty, is still in effect. Unlike treaties signed with Aboriginal Peoples elsewhere in Canada, neither the 1752 treaty nor any of the other treaties with the Mi'kmaq (1725, 1726, 1749, 1760-61, 1776) mentions a surrender of lands. Instead, the promise is that the two nations will live together in "peace and friendship."

[4.] Puwar (2004), for instance, describes the furore which erupted around a proposal to install a statue of Nelson Mandela opposite Nelson's Column, a memorial to Lord Admiral Nelson, in Trafalgar Square in London. According to Puwar, the posture and positioning of the Black African freedom fighter was perceived as 'threatening' to the emblem of British colonial rule (3-4).

[5.] O'Connor (2011) made reference to Grenier who wrote *The Far Reaches of the Empire: War in Nova Scotia*, 1710-1760, for this interpretation of history. Although we concur that the Mi'kmaq had some power and are resilient, the force of colonialism is not redressed by continuing to unproblematically honour those who not only held views that we might find problematic today, but that actually called for the mass murder of an entire group of people.

[6.] The town of Antigonish in Nova Scotia, sometimes referred to as Little Scotland, is a Mi'kmaq word that has several different meanings including a place where the rivers meet.

[7.] See, *The People's Place Artists and Artisans Guide* http://www.parl.ns.ca/peoplesplace/guide/artistsartisans.html

[8.] Simon (2000) maintains that public memory is not just that which contributes to knowledge of our past, but that which has the ability to move memory beyond remembrance; it is not only pedagogical, but transactive, having the ability to affect our own stories and our relationship to others. Public historical memory is "transactional, enacting a claim on us…is informed by the reflexive attentiveness to the retelling or representation of a complex of emotionally evocative narratives and images which define not necessarily agreement but points of connection between people in regard to a past that they both might acknowledge the touch of…a transactive public memory places one in relation to the past in its otherness and in its potential connection to oneself …Such a form of public memory thus should be in a position to raise questions…Whose and what memories matter—not abstractly—but to me, to you? What practices of memory am I obligated to, what memories require my attention and vigilance, viscerally implicating me—touching me—so that I must respond, rethinking my present?" (63-64).

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