



***From Matrilineal Kinship to Matriculture:
Establishing a Canadian Agenda***

Workshop Report

Workshop hosted by the InterCulture research group, University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Canada, 25-28 April 2017

Report by Linnéa Rowlatt
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The organizers of the workshop (Marie-Françoise Guédon, Angela Sumegi, Cheryl Gaver, and Linnéa Rowlatt) gratefully acknowledge all the participants of the workshop, many of whom gave their time, resources, and energy to attend. We are honoured by the trust given to us and recognize the courage and tact that participation (occasionally) required. Thank you.

Citation

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SUMMARY

The InterCulture research group's workshop entitled *From Matrilineal Kinship to Matriculture: Establishing a Canadian Agenda* was held in Ottawa, Canada, from the 25th to the 28th of April 2017. Its main goal was to establish a research agenda for a project initiated by our research team, InterCulture (located in the University of Ottawa), devoted to an examination of the situation of matrilineal societies in the world and a critical review of the scholarly study of matrilineal systems. We wanted to centralize and prioritize questions and issues coming from Canadian Indigenous communities, and to set the foundations for future collaborative projects. At the same time, as the workshop title implies, another goal was to test the viability of the new concept of matriculture. We pursued these goals by gathering members of Canadian Indigenous matrilineal societies, representatives of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), and academics from several disciplines and institutions.

The workshop was successful on many levels. We learned that the concept of matriculture is a relevant and even essential tool for understanding some eastern Canadian Indigenous cultures, that the presence and implications of the idea are confirmed in language, myth, and pre-colonial social structures among the Mikm'aq, Wendaki, Haudenosanee, and Algonquin peoples, and that matriculturality has been largely ignored by settler governments, social services, and other settler interventions in Indigenous societies, to the detriment of these communities. Workshop participants identified several markers or identifying features of matriculture.

Workshop organizers were challenged to identify the value of the concept for Indigenous women today. Our initial response highlighted the policy and social implications of identifying the pre-colonial status of women in matricultural Indigenous societies. These implications include increased security and well-being for women and, for men, an absence of the need to assert their status and worth through violence.

Some areas for future research were identified, including culturally-specific models of puberty and womanhood, correlations between matriculture and birth-giving practices and outcomes, potential links between matriculture and acceptance of non-binary sexuality, and even pre-colonial Indigenous inheritance patterns. An important element for a surviving matriculture is linguistic continuity through the colonization period, leading to our inclusion of linguistic similarities and variations among matricultures as a primary area for future research. Identifying matricultural features which have endured through colonization may play a central role in strengthening Indigenous matricultures facing contemporary challenges.

Workshop Participants

The following twenty-one people participated in all or some days of the workshop: Idoia Arana-Beobide, Jane Ann Chartrand, Cheryl Gaver, Marie-Françoise Guédon, Kahente Horn-Miller, Rebecca Johnston, Margaret Kress, Middlé Lemoine, Alex Maass, Hope MacLean, Catherine Martin, Miigam'agan, La Mingying, Melissa Otis, Evie Plaice, Leah Quinlan, Linnéa Rowlatt, Peggy Reeves Sanday, Georges Sioui, Angela Sumegi, Kim Wakeford. Only those

making presentations are identified by name in the daily proceedings.

ORIGINAL GOALS AND AIMS OF THE WORKSHOP

Building on the lived experiences of the participants, the group aimed first to devise a framework to gather and share information on matrilineal societies in the world and specifically in Canada, their cultural contexts and their contemporary situations, and then to identify primary and urgent issues and questions that would have to find their place in a shared research agenda.

Original Goals, as formulated by the organizers:

a) **A research agenda:** In order to establish a research agenda for our Canadian partners and ourselves, it is necessary to engage with questions emerging from our colleagues and from the Indigenous communities while supporting their experience and explorations. Research must adapt to the needs and values of the communities, and it must address the theoretical and methodological foundations of our collaborative effort.

b) **Test the relevance of the new concept of matriculture:** Since the concept of matriculture is becoming a cornerstone of our program, we have to test its relevance and seek questions and critiques emerging from Indigenous communities and institution engaged in programs that may benefit from this new perspective. Most programs and projects aiming to better the situation of women are engaged at the social or economic levels; few if any, target the cultural dimension.

c) **Further collaborative projects:** Several projects are already being prepared by InterCulture and its collaborators in partnership with communities and researchers in Congo, in China, and in Alaska. In Canada, several related programs and projects are initiated by the Indigenous communities themselves. We have noticed that people involved in these initiatives work in relative isolation and with little resource. Within the next few years, we look forward to establishing a formal collaborative network to support and communicate research programs and results among all participants and between their communities of origin or of work.

THE WORKSHOP: DAILY PROCEEDINGS

Includes schedules and titles of presentations, summaries and discussions; the following excerpts highlight some of the discussions that took place during the event.

Please note: This is not a direct transcript of the conversation during our four days together, as the conversations were not recorded mechanically or digitally. Instead, this is a compilation of the notes taken by Cheryl Gaver, Melissa Otis, and myself. With these notes, I have done my best to bring spoken conversation into the printed realm. To do that, sometimes exact wording was missed or I gathered comments together thematically and out of chronological order. Rather than providing a verbatim transcript, my goal is that readers will be able to follow the growth of ideas and perspectives during the workshop. Linnéa Rowlett

a) Day One - Tuesday, 25 April 2017: Matrilineal societies and matriculture

Welcome to Algonquin Anishnaabeg territory

The workshop opened with a ceremonial welcome to Algonquin Anishnaabeg territory from an Anishnaabe-kwe elder.

Introduction and short history of the project

presentation by Marie-Françoise Guédon, Director of InterCulture

This project began with InterCulture's 2006 visit of several Canadian scholars to the University of Yunnan, in Kunming, China, which led to meeting several Chinese Ethnic Minority communities over the following years. Eventually, the Git'ksan people (a matrilineal Indigenous society from British Columbia) were invited to visit Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces, and to meet people from the matrilineal Mosuo villages at Lugu Lake. There, as the two groups danced with each other and spoke to each other, they realized they had much in common and shared many similar issues. When we returned to Canada, groups from the Tsimshian, Tlingit and other matrilineal Indigenous people in North America became involved; workshops were held in Ottawa to explore what was going on in matrilineal studies and how various societies originally identified as matrilineal were faring today, and what, if anything was needed to happen first to bring some recognition to the Mosuo people, and then to support other matrilineal societies in the world.

An assumption we often encounter is that matrilineal societies are a thing of the past, and that, in any case, they do not matter anymore, if they ever did. But matrilineal societies still exist, composing about 7% of the societies in the world, a small but vigorous minority, most if not all of them being Indigenous people. North America has more matrilineal societies than the other continents. We took on as part of our task, then, to publicize the fact of the existence of these societies, and their importance, both as cultural legacy and as teaching partners.

The first point to come out of these earlier workshops was the recognition that matrilineality is very diverse in its manifestations. Another point raised was the displacement of kinship as a central focus of anthropological study, and the subsequent disappearance of matrilineality as a key feature of social organization studies. But it appeared that for the communities we met, matrilineality was not merely a feature of kinship but indeed a crucial element of their worldview. We soon came to agree with Nicole-Claude Mathieu that the whole field needed a critical revision of its basic assumptions and definitions. Another recurrent point concerned the misalignment and sometimes heated debate between the advocates of the term matriarchy, and the proponents of the term matrilineality. This debate is two centuries old and often centers on undefined and unexamined notions. (Other "*matri-terms*" are being developed to explore what the terms really have to say about cultural encounters between different societies, and the basic assumptions that these terms are hiding. The field turns out to be vastly richer than we had first conceived.) We then introduced the new concept of matriculture to address our growing concern with the cultural context in which matrilineal kin groups or similar structures develop.

Together with colleagues and students, we set out to seek, then meet, scholars and Indigenous representatives of matrilineal societies to construct a new vision of that field. With this workshop, we are focusing on Indigenous North America.

Welcome to matricentric thinking

comments by Dr Georges Sioui

The first speaker was Dr. Georges Sioui, from the Petite Lorette or Wendaki (Huron) community. He quoted at length from his upcoming monograph, *Eatononha: Native Roots of Modern Democracy*. He spoke about *matricentrism* and the rightful place of women at the center of communities, *geogynophobia* (the fear of women and of the earth exhibited by many men), and the need for environmental justice and feminine justice as a way for humans to survive with the earth.

“In a world vastly patriarchal, men have invented means, mostly through the use of force, to substitute themselves as the central place in society. This is the seed of disorder which affects our order. We as a global society must develop the ideological and spiritual means to allow women to occupy the place at the middle, which will allow us to keep imagining and constructing our future as a species.”

- Dr. Georges Sioui

Introducing matrilineal kinship systems

presentation by Marie-Françoise Guédon

The first session began with a brief review of matrilineal kinship, where one's social identity is acquired through the mother; a person belongs to one's mother's lineage or clan, that is a unilineal descent group. A lineage can form either through the mother, or through the father, forming social entities with clear boundaries. Bilateral ties, i.e. through both the mother's side and the father's side result in a very large set of people, called a “kindred”, the composition of which is fluid, varies from one person to the next, has no definite boundary and overlaps with others. By contrast, lineages (with a known ancestor) and clans (with a remote assumed common ancestry) can form corporate entities. Technically speaking, a matrilineal system cannot survive without some form of exogamy, that is without people marrying outside their clan or lineage.

Matrilineal societies are not the norm, but they are not that rare either. Out of six or seven hundred societies with unilineal kin groups, we can still identify at least eighty matrilineal societies. We cannot really measure their prevalence, since we are still uncertain about their actual number; this is due in part to the fact that throughout the world, the field is still anchored in unexamined views inherited from nineteenth century theoretical literature on matrilineal / matriarchal societies. Furthermore, criteria defining matrilineal societies are too narrow and too vague for an adequate inventory of the societies in question. We must also realize that state societies and their administrative bodies are at best not interested in matrilineal systems, at worst openly hostile to them, and in any case, do not often recognize or even mention matrilineal systems even when they are present.

When we move beyond a strict definition of matrilineality to include, for instance, matrilocality (the young couple resides with or near the parents of the bride) or uxorilocality (the new husband moves into his wife's home), many other cases emerge. When speaking about matrilineal societies, we are not necessarily speaking of a clear opposition between either matrilineal or patrilineal systems – but rather of a continuum with variations along the way, which means that further studies are needed in many cases. Finally, scholars working with these societies are rare and often work in isolation; it seems that present state institutions, including NGOs, are reluctant to acknowledge the persistence of matrilineal societies to this day.

A matrilineal society organizes genders around its descent and filiation systems. The special role of the maternal uncle is emphasized, often as the male head of the family while the mother, or mother's mother, usually wields a definite authority, depending on the system, or becomes herself the head of the family. Sometimes, the sister and the brother (children of a common mother), rather than the couple formed by husband and wife, become the primary reference for the family or lineage.

Does this matter as far as women's lives are concerned? As we shall see, matrilineal societies share certain kinship features that facilitate the social visibility of women and the recognition of their social responsibility. The marital bond accommodates the role of the mother's side of the family and defines itself more as a partnership, providing much greater mobility for the wives who retain throughout their lives their identity as daughters of their clan. The expected presence of active female figures in the community finds echoes in the local literature, and even in the mythology. Despite the presence of these features, though, the presence of matrilineal kin groups does not mean that men cannot be in charge nor does it mean that the societies in question are necessarily all at peace with their neighbors. On the average, though, it is clear that women and children are better off under the matrilineal system (see Peggy Reeves Sanday's comparative studies). For women, we have found that one disadvantage of patriarchal societies is that girls marry young and move to the husband's home, due to which the transmission of culture from mother (and mother's family) to daughter and girls in general is much weakened; women have to re-start their cultural tradition again and again in every generation with the often reluctant help of their in-laws (see Germaine Tillion, *Le harem et les cousins*) whereas men continue to build on their own local tradition. We have also begun to notice that generally speaking, matrilineal societies offer much more mobility to girls and women, both socially and geographically.

We owe these new perspectives to scholars such as Annette Wiener, Nicole-Claude Mathieu, and Peggy Reeves Sanday, who are among the best-known researchers.¹ Looking at the new data and the new ideas these anthropologists and others have generated, data that emphasizes the links between matrilineal kinship systems and patterns of governance, cosmogony, mythology, ritual life and other features of "intellectual culture", we now propose a shift from a *matrilineal* perspective to a *matricultural* perspective, so as to enlarge the debate to those

¹We would also like to mention the essential contribution to the field by scholars such as Heide Göttner-Abendroth and Kaarina Kailo, whose work has been focused on matriarchal studies.

aspects of culture that allow the idea and the practice of matrilineal kinship to flourish.

Discussion:

Indigenous peoples have kinship systems and kinship terminologies that differ from the European systems; for instance, they do not use 1st / 2nd / 3rd cousins; relationships (kin connections) are different. There are also different ways of looking at conception. For the Mi'kmaq, it is clear that men don't have children, only women do. They say a human is an image from the divine in human form and the language captures this concept. We gave some time to comparing Iroquois and Basque creation stories.

When acknowledging that examples of matricultures are still around and are still part of the life of many communities in North America, we must challenge academics to deal with them properly, which is to say, by listening to the people themselves and going back to the original sources. The available data is often contradictory; too many assumptions are baseless. Having also noticed also that Indigenous societies themselves as well as the official administrators use the (early) anthropological vocabulary to describe – and define - clans, lineages, matriline, matriarchy, and kinship systems, among other terms, it is urgent to review at least the vocabulary and its implications. In a context with many erroneous assumptions about matricultures, the gaps in our knowledge of the situation today in North America and globally are obvious.

Lunch

Introducing Matriculture

Group Discussion

The conceptual shift from matrilineal kinship to matriculture changes the focus of debate, especially when we address issues of power, issues of gender, so-called “women’s issues”, and how those are defined and wielded within a society. Matrilineal kinship and matrilineages become expressions of matriculturality, rather than isolated traits having a limited impact on the role of women in the society.

A question about *matrifocality* was brought forward, where the women are heading the families, working and holding the communities together while the men are itinerant as in Haiti, for instance. This situation was then compared to India, where the society is very patriarchal, but if you want to make anything happen in a particular village, the men will say “ask the women”. Could something similar be happening with Indigenous people in urban areas? A participant felt this situation was not matrifocality, which entails women as the sole culture-bearers and transmitters because men are absent. Matrifocal systems are produced by circumstances that keep men away, while matrilineality is built into the social structures through matriline into which men are very much present and active participants. We need good definitions of specific concepts to build an adequate terminology. A participant pointed out that this is a major challenge, as we have real-life situations but the terminology available to describe them may carry hidden assumptions.

There was an observation that cultures are living and changing outside of academia, regardless of scholarly views, which raises new issues. For example, what does it mean to be matrilineal when Indigenous women live in patriarchal urban societies, without their grandparents or uncles? A participant responded with an example of how scholars contribute to shaping real-life situations, for example, that of black families in the South (USA). Sociologist Carol Stack wrote about these societies, describing them as *matrifocal*. The term caught on and turned the public's eye away from seeing them as "poor blacks", etc., to recognize that something else was going on. She suggested a need to recognize that anthropologists and anthropological theories can have a powerful impact on the world. Anthropologists are not limited to academia but contribute a useful awareness when they notice something and bring it to the public's attention. (Note: Sanday's own introduction of the concept of 'rape culture' to public discourse is a good example of such an intervention).

A participant talked about competing worldviews coming from the Whites and from the Indigenous society, where, for example, in terms of urbanization, the move to urban areas may be seen by white social workers as a severing of ties with their community while Indigenous women may see it as moving around their own territory and their own (non-localized) community. The reservation is not their longhouse and there can be family members in the city to help someone navigate the city. There may also be competition between different Indigenous worldviews: she mentioned that the Mi'kmaq refer to a feminine earth. A participant introduced the non-gendered suggestion of 'parent earth', used by some Athapaskan-speaking peoples. Also data interpretation differs from people to people, especially when job-related, and we need to keep agency in mind – as in the story of the hospital that the visiting doctors thought *they* 'owned', in contrast with local female nurses who felt they 'owned' the hospital while the doctors were only visitors.

A participant noted that although the Basques remain independent and strong-spirited, traditional culture has eroded under the pressures of modern life. Anthropology and anthropological terms bring a way to communicate about the past and at least introduce some awareness that Basque connection to both the larger community and the ancestors is being lost. Anthropologists therefore have a duty to clean up their terminology, since the terms we use always relate to certain value systems and to an ideology that may not be in keeping with what they are intended to depict

These questions remind us that all matrilineal societies have to contend with profound differences between their own culture and that of their neighbors and of the state.

Break

***Working on Matriculture in Canada / North America: A linguistic survey
presentation by Marie-Françoise Guédon***

Language is a fundamental expression of culture; could it carry basic principles supporting our understanding of society? What would happen if we found that language is an important support for matrilineality and matricultures (as is kinship terminology for kinship systems)?

Marie-Françoise juxtaposed maps showing North American linguistic families on the one hand, and on the other, matrilineal societies, demonstrating a high correlation between them. That is, matrilineality is present in some language families, such as the Athapaskan, Iroquoian, Caddoan, and Algonquian languages, but not in others, including the Eskimoan-Aleutian, Uto-Aztecan, Yuman-Hokan, Penutian, or Wakashan language families (which are almost never matrilineal). Location and geography are important in terms of the relationship between dialects, but language is one of the most enduring components of culture, unless attacked directly by a dominant society with enforced schooling in the dominant language, or a strong class difference between rich speakers of the dominant and colonizing language and poor speakers of the Indigenous language. This simple preliminary survey seems to indicate, therefore, that the location of matrilineal societies in North America may well be related to the geographical distribution of language families.

Early anthropologists thought one could explain matrilineality by the fact that men were away so much that women had to replace them, but this old theory does not explain the patrilineal or bilateral societies which kept their old social system in the same situation. The way of life does not seem to matter, whether societies are more horticulturally inclined, or living by hunting or fishing; some matrilineal societies are hierarchical, other non-hierarchical; some are peaceful, other are more warlike. Even the type of governance does not seem to matter, as some matrilineal societies had women chiefs, some did not, among others women chose the male chiefs. The only variable that seems to fit is the linguistic one.

If the distribution of matrilineality matches that of linguistic families, then worldview, or something expressed through language, is deeply involved in the development and maintenance of matrilineality. The way we think, the way we speak, our values, may shape how we organize our societies.

Group Discussion:

We started this research on language using the expression “matrilineal systems”, rather than “matricultures” because the currently available data, dating back half a century and more, deals mostly directly with kinship and unilineal kin groups, usually identified either as patrilineal or matrilineal. *But a matrilineal system presupposes a matriculture that supports it.*

It was noted that matrilineal organization as currently defined implies lineages or equivalent kin groups. There are not countless ways of developing lineages: one aligns oneself either through the father, or through the mother. However, we have found variations on the theme: switching direction every generation, or matrilineal for girls, patrilineal for boys, or even selecting one’s lineage identity at puberty for instance. Our models will have to be refined.

Question: is it always a situation of either/or, or is there a continuum among descent systems with nuances, where border communities among language groups may start showing traces of both? In other words, is there evidence of cross-cultural influence? Marie-Françoise pointed out that, in fact, there is a large array of possibilities for such influence. There are some instances of

borrowing in border communities (as among the Haisla, northern Wakashan, who have borrowed the matrilineal clan system of their Tsimshian neighbors. Possibly, also, the Algonquian-speaking Blackfoot and their relatives in contact with the patrilineal clans of their southern neighbours, but we do not know how frequently those cases of borrowing occur. The kinship systems seem most amenable to change when the original language is replaced by a new one; research is needed here too. Marie-Françoise mentioned that her supervisor, Frederica de Laguna, talked about 'culture words' which cannot be understood outside of their cultural context. When they are translated or replaced with words from the dominant culture, the new words erase important cultural features.

Speaking of matriculture: we are just beginning to search for, recognize or identify cultural traits that are indicative of a strong matriculture, besides matrilineal kin groups. Is it a fact or a coincidence that many matrilineal societies (including Algonquian speakers) make no distinction in their languages between 'he' and 'she'? This is a fact, but we have not looked at the distribution of that trait in a way that correlates it with matrilineality.

A participant introduced the Mi'kmaq view of the Creator as a mother and the father as her helpmate, and suggested that the way one thinks about the world is related to the way one thinks about women.

A series of questions and comments explored the topic of the origin of patrilineality and matrilineality. One question inquired about the reasons why the Inuit developed the way they did, into a patriarchal or patriarchal-like society – their kinship system is actually bilateral, they do not have lineages or clans – (and a dualistic worldview). A related question asked whether patriarchies are always dualistic or binary. A question arose about a potential link between the various matrilineal societies around the world in the same way that one could suppose that monotheistic religions have some conceptual unity, although we have not seen new suggestions of that unity since the 19th century.

What about gender roles? Could a culture that accepts more than two genders fit with our habit of opposing matrilineal and patrilineal systems? Culturally, humans also merge gender with procreation. No matter how we define genders, we are born from a mother, and most of the time, we have a recognized intervention/participation of a father. Some societies may ignore the father... But none can ignore the mother, though many patriarchal systems do away with the mother's presence by defining her as simply a vessel for the seed of the male progenitor, as done by Classical Roman culture.

And gender-related distribution of power? Again, participants collectively do not know enough at this time to answer those points. These questions about the origins of matrilineality lead us into those fundamental ideological choices or assertions, made more than a century ago, at the beginning of this field of research, assertions that may have been left unquestioned or become articles of faith. If we maintain, for instance, that human societies are all originally patriarchal, then the struggle for the formal recognition of women's rights starts with the recognition of women's universal plight. If we begin with the idea of an original and/or mythical matriarchate

evolving world-wide by changing to male dominance, we leave little room for exploring the cultural dimensions. But there are alternatives to this opposition. We may also have to reconsider our notions of domesticity as powerless (see Nicole-Claude Mathieu, *Une maison sans fille est une maison morte.*)

Other topics of research were suggested: could we say that where men are the hunters, they have knowledge of animals as game, whereas women have knowledge of animals as partners? Is the expression “Man the Hunter”, which was once so popular, still valid? Recent research has shown that among North American hunter-gatherers (such as the Cree and the Northern Dene) and contrary to the dominant assumptions, women are often very involved in hunting.

Another question: Is there a shamanic dimension to matrilineality, a question considered most important by Nicole-Claude Mathieu?

Conclusions and reflections on Day One (25 April 2017) by the organizers

Many themes emerged from the discussions in response to the presentations, such as the many links between matricentric social organization and the cultural context as a whole, as well as the need to enlarge the discussion. They all confirmed the usefulness of the matriculture concept as a working tool.

Comment and reflection by the organizers:

We have several times today been challenged by the confluence between the understanding of matrilineality and that of matriarchy, a confluence we feel we will have to address. We are also held in check by a tendency to see matrilineality and matriculture as a female feature of culture, rather than a cultural system in which everyone is involved regardless of gender. In retrospect and since we, the organizers, had surveyed beforehand the growing use of the term ‘matriarchy’ to describe the locus of difference between European and Indigenous societies, we should have anticipated the rapid move in our discussions from matriculture to matriarchate, on the one hand, and to women’s issues on the other hand. ‘Matriculture’ is an abstract term, as is ‘culture’, and does not present the same concrete rules as, for instance, inheritance from the mother’s side, or the authority of the mother’s brother and, therefore, may not be obvious to those from outside the field of study.

We also have to recognize that early research data on North American Indigenous societies assumed a similar conjunction between the presence of matrilineal kin groups and the political power attributed to women (women as chiefs, sachems, or warriors), without that link having been critically documented and examined.

b) Day Two - Wednesday, 26 April: Matriculture and women’s issues

Smudging ritual

An Algonquin Anishnaabe-kwe Elder offered individual smudging as people entered. Then we formed a circle for our opening prayers.

Keynote Address: Matriculture in action

presentation by Peggy Reeves Sanday (U Penn)

Peggy began her talk by sharing a bit about her schooling in a convent with nuns. It was not always a good experience, but they inspired her to know more about the world. When she arrived at university, she wanted to work with a matriarchy. The choices were the Ashanti in Ghana and the Minangkabau in Sumatra; she chose the Minangkabau and did fieldwork with them from 1981 to 2007, off and on.

Minangkabau ('Glorious Buffalo') cultural community numbers about forty million people, within Indonesia and abroad. They are a very stable matrilineal society who gained independence from the Javanese in the fourteenth / fifteenth centuries through a buffalo fight. Both people introduced a buffalo to the fight in a field, with the winning buffalo to determine the victorious people. As the story goes, the Minangkabau starved a baby buffalo and sharpened his horns. On the day of the fight, the baby wanted milk, so he ran to the big male buffalo introduced by the Javanese and tried to suckle him. The horns of the baby ripped open the stomach of the big male buffalo and killed him. That was the end of Javanese patriarchal rule for the Minangkabau.

To commemorate this victory, buffalo horns are a prominent design feature in the culture: women wear horned headdresses; house roofs are shaped like horns. Traditional matrilineal longhouses face the peak of Mount Sarape, the mountain from which they originated in that land, having alighted there after crossing the ocean. The culture puts a strong emphasis on the concept of motherhood and the figure of the mother. The Minangkabau are the largest matrilineal / matriarchal Islamic culture in the world. Islam arrived sometime in the sixteenth century. There was conflict between the two ideologies in the eighteenth century, as the Muslims wanted to end the matrilineal features of the Minangkabau culture. The Padri War between the Muslims and the Minangkabau ended with the arrival of the Dutch who supported the Minangkabau. The two ideologies now live side-by-side under the traditional Minangkabau way known as *Adat* (local custom). *Adat* custom includes:

1. All land passes through women. Men do not inherit land.
2. Genealogies only trace women's descent.
3. Houses and land are owned by women. Brothers can use the land and work on it but do not inherit it.
4. Traditional customs are gendered and help to rule village life. But male and female work together and council house is shared by male and female councillors.

Peggy introduced the concept of the *matrixial*, the female counterpart to phallic, from Bracha L. Ettinger, a psychologist who wrote about the importance of the matrix. The characteristics of the matrixial are associated with the experience of a womb and mothering, including the pregnancy, birth, and growth experience (as opposed to the phallic meanings of those experiences). Minangkabau women's *adat* is matrixial, as they say that all that is born into the

world is born from the female. Fathers are only known from the confession of the mother. Therefore, males should protect the women because they are so important; women are supposedly weaker than men. Men live two lives: that of their mother's family (clan) and then their wife's family. Nature and growth are both very important essential values. Nature to nurture, growth in nature, Nature is their teacher. Women are associated with nature by having children and working in fields with their husbands. All women are called *Ibu*, meaning 'mother'. The ceremonies of women's adat form the core of village life, centering on cooking (and feasting) and maintaining good relationships between clans (peace). Their land is called *sabua*, meaning 'one womb'. All the land owned by one lineage is called *sabua* ('this land is our womb'). As all property is inheritable only through the matrilineal line, they say "We come from the land, it is our land and passed down thru the matri-line".

Peggy introduced the ceremony and story of the Queen, Bundo Kanduang, which is performed several times a year. The story opens with Bundo Kanduang teaching her son what he must know to be a proper king. When speaking to her errant son who was not paying attention, she reminded him of her power – "you really are an idiot, aren't you – have you forgotten that all Minangkabau is under my control and my power. If I have to, I can ask for help from them ...". Older women have to train young men to be good citizens in order to maintain an egalitarian society. The ceremony celebrates not so much women as much as *the maternal*. Mothers have to teach sons how to be decent to live in a matriculture society. This womb-based model has powerful meanings for females and males. Even though we may have no memory of it, we have all been mothered.

After she learned Minangkabau culture, Peggy thought about the concept of matriarchy and concluded that it is not really a mirror image or a reflection of patriarchy. She noted the Latin roots for *mater* (mother) and *archy*. The later means 'rule' when used with patriarchy. Another meaning of the term, however, is 'beginning, source, action, first principle or element, principles of knowledge' and the like. So, both Peggy and Heidi Göttner-Abendroth, a German scholar, are redefining matriarchy with the second orientation of the term. They take 'matriarchy' to represent an egalitarian concept where power is shared, but which stresses the importance of the maternal; one that nurtures the social order. It does not reflect power *over subjects* but, rather, female responsibility to *conjugate* social ties in the here-and-now through leadership and example. It is a social ontology which gives control to women with their brothers over the economic in a way that authenticates, regenerates and nurtures the social order, and stresses the importance of the women. There are many examples of women-centred societies like this, where sovereign authority is with the maternal and public life is womb-centered, but this is not stressed in scholarship.

This presentation on the Minangkabau paved the way for an essential distinction between matriarchy (or patriarchies) that relates to governance and socio-political power, and matrilineality that relates to kinship and culture. The Minangkabau describe themselves as both matrilineal and matriarchal; but matrilineal societies are not necessarily matriarchal, and most do not exhibit any matriarchal features.

With reference to a slide of a statue in the presentation, a participant notes the electricity coming out of the statue's bowl at a power dam, saying that the statue is showing that the woman is the source of electricity just like the food. Why did they put the statue at the hydro dam? Why did they build the statue *there*? Is the dam an exploitation of the land or of women? Peggy says that the dam is the only source of energy in the region and women *are* the energy source for the culture. Therefore, the dam is not seen in a negative light as it may be in North America and the land for the dam was not expropriated.

Break

Introductions / reintroductions for newcomers

Where are the matrilineal societies in North America?

Presentation by Marie-Françoise Guédon

Back to the linguistic maps and the location of matrilineal tribes, we may notice the anomalous position of the Algonquian speaking tribes. Between thirty-five and fifty percent of Algonquian tribes in the US used to be matrilineal. However, in Canada, with one exception (and some of the Cree people who are considered to be bilateral), they are all listed officially as patrilineal, even when their American counterparts or relatives are identified as matrilineal. Why is it so? Did something happen so as to reduce the number of matrilineal Algonquians tribes in Canada? What would result from discovering that at least some of the Canadian Algonquian speaking tribes used to be matrilineal and/or matricultural? Would it make a difference in the present time? Much research needs to be done to explore that hypothesis. But if we take that possibility seriously, we could ask whether there are any matricultural features still alive in the Canadian Indigenous societies? Could they have survived the loss of their language? And how would we recognize them?

Group Discussion:

The residential school system goes back 150 years and impacted traditional knowledge, but as one participant notes, there are still elder Anishnaabeg-kwe who know that their community is matricultural. If you want to conquer a nation, you take their children. Everything the society believed in was challenged and affected by the (patriarchal) school system.

Another participant notes that even with respect to the Canadian matricultural communities most often cited in the literature, the Wendaki (Huron) and the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), one must keep in mind that most written documents have been written by men. The female realm was not recorded. The clan mothers' council was not recorded. Yet, historically, they had even more influence than the men. Luckily, it survived in oral history, but the imperial gaze says 'prove it'. (For instance, the Haudenosaunee practice of adoption including deciding the fate and citizenship of captives was women's responsibility. Jesuit Relations documentation is useful but what is this source not saying, especially around the role of women? Indigenous people need to look at these documents because they can tell you what's missing.)

Today, young people are beginning to reconstruct the missing elements of their culture, which

absence was created by the male and scholarly gaze. Language carries the blueprint for the culture, and is the most direct key to unlocking it. Those who speak their language cannot be easily challenged because they understand nuances that others do not. The language used in rituals and in myths, such as the creation stories is particularly pregnant with basic principles.

A participant declares that communities need this new information. Suicide rates are high because people don't know which way to turn. Daughters are raising their children alone. How do we reclaim them? The community? We need champions in all areas to free us from laws that hurt us.

Participants recognize a need to organize a collective to work with communities. People were first affected by missionaries who saw the power of women and worked to undermine it. As individual Mi'kmaq clan mothers died, imperial governments replaced them with men under male grand councilors. When the British arrived, they colonized the region and did their best to get rid of the people. They too saw the power of the women who were allowed to speak in public. They also witnessed the caring given to children. The British fought this by portraying Mi'kmaq parental duties as 'uncivilized'. People living in longhouses were especially attacked by missionaries and colonists when women were in charge. The Mi'kmaq would make a good case study to reveal French Catholic influence, followed by the British impositions, then by the rules of the Canadian Indian Act. The Indian Act trained men to think they were and are the power in Mi'kmaq communities. So now Indigenous men have the power and most need convincing to let the women act. They don't speak their language and have been raised to believe in the power of men.

Lunch

We Are In Her And She Is In Us: rematriation through performance of the Haudenosaunee Sky Woman narrative

performance by Kahente Horn-Miller (Kaniienkehaka (Mohawk) / Carleton)

Kahente notes that the story has been colonized by being written down by so many who filtered it through their own perspectives. How can a Kanawake woman reclaim it in a way that is true to herself? Rematriation of the story is her methodology. This provides the information to live by, how to plant beliefs. Deconstructing takes a lot of work and elder input, including permission to share the story in this way as a performance.

Entitled *We are in Her and She is in Us*, this presentation is a re-enactment of the middle part of this sacred origin story (when Sky Woman gives birth to her daughter) retold from a woman's perspective, and in the first person.

* live ritual performance (unrecorded) *

Group Discussion (led by Kahente):

Question about her tattoos. Kahente answers that her tattoos are the story, their history, which connects them to Sky World. She had the story tattooed on her arms, so that people see it and

ask, what is it? Answering gives her an opportunity to tell the story. Kahente wants to look at the Confederacy story too - Jigonhsasee is usually omitted.

A question comes about the Sky World. Kahente answers that the Sky World is where the earth meets the sky. It is where consciousness meets unconsciousness, the moment of awakening, the celestial tree. Together with the three sisters (corn, beans, squash), everything is interconnected. Corn is planted and beans are planted around the base. As the beans grow, they grow up the stalks. Around them is the square of squash plants that protect the plant from deer etc.

Kahente says that when she shares the story, the story is a ceremony, she is bringing us into it. She moves in a counterclockwise direction, which is typical of dancing in the Haudenosaunee longhouse; her feet never leave the soil when they dance so they remain connected to the land. It is embodied knowledge, connecting us to the story and to the natural world, and to the responsibility of being caretakers of the world. Our accountability is to the next seven generations. This is a very deep accountability that transforms how you live. What kind of impact will my actions have on the future generations? My story performance is the starting point of bringing us into the circle. This is the way we learn – through embodiment of the story. Archetypal story telling is always embodied. Giving birth is a very spiritual act, coming from Sky Woman through our body to the land.

There are different versions of the Sky Woman story (she falls, she is pushed, she jumps). It would be interesting to look at the different versions to see where and how the differences were created. But they all actualize ways of being, in societies where women are active participants.

Again, the issue of distinct worldviews vying for authority comes to the fore in a discussion about representation vs. being. The Western worldview is based on representative narrative whereas Iroquoian and Algonquian peoples consider the narrative as a participation, an embodiment. Someone notes that Indigenous people won't always know this, as it takes years to learn. The discussion is still turning around the need to transmit a knowledge at risk of being forgotten, and the difficulties inherent to being between two very different cultures

Albert Marshall's (Mi'kmaq Elder) *Etuaptmumk* or 'Two Eyed Seeing' is when you see something from one eye with Indigenous knowledge, from the Indigenous worldview, and with the other eye, you use Western knowledge and the Western worldview to get another understanding.

Break

Over the Generations, They Have Done Everything: Indigenous Women and Matrilineality
presentation by Kim Wakeford and Leah Quinlan, Native Women's Association of Canada /
Policy Analysts and Researchers – Justice and Human Rights (see Appendix A for full

presentation)

“If I am the object of some form of discrimination, it is very difficult for me to separate what happens to me because of my gender and what happens to me because of my race and culture. My world is not experienced in a linear and compartmentalized way. I experience the world simultaneously as Mohawk and as woman.”

- Patricia Monture-Angus

“The voices, stories, and organizing of Indigenous women and Elders must be the central source of defining and revitalizing traditional matrilineal society systems.”

- anonymous

Introduction of the Native Women's Association of Canada: they are the political voice of Canadian Aboriginal women in overcoming sex-based discrimination on national and local bases. They are involved, for example, with the federal inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women.

Presenters noted that much of their information is not documented academically speaking in an academic way, but it is found in the bibliography.

Several important points were brought in that underlined, for the anthropologists, the cultural differences between the academic world and the Canadian Indigenous political world, but those points also emphasized, for the presenters, the continuing encroachment and disruption of the Indigenous world by scholars in their colonizing roles imposing their views.

White patriarchy versus Indigenous: Matrilineality across Turtle Island – women were knowledge carriers and political leaders, and colonial patriarchy disrupted these roles. Elders must be the central voices for matrilineality. The balance of gender roles is central, it is a collective balance.

Gender issues: Dr. Marie-Anne Battiste advises caution when dealing with ideas of genders among Indigenous communities. The pre-determined perspective of gender is not as important as the fact of being born into a community. Gender is about 'roles' for Europeans but extraordinary honours for Mi'kmaq people.

Individual versus community: The fight for justice and equal rights is good from one perspective and may be representative of traditional Indigenous cultures in some cases, but from another perspective it may be destructive in its emphasis on the individual rather than the individual within a community.

Colonialism: Europeans refused to negotiate with women. Gendered struggles have often been reduced to 'women's issues' rather than seeing them as representative of the broader cultural collision/deconstruction of colonialism.

Knowledge Ownership: How is truth, knowledge and wisdom constructed in the different cultures? How much is reflexivity encouraged? Research is used as a tool to legitimize a variety of agendas, including that of imperialism. How can research be used as a tool for legitimizing the Indigenous way of doing things – but legitimize for whom?

Conclusions –Indigenous matrilineal cultures have survived in spite of colonial and often academic disruption and intervention.

Then the presenter asked two questions of the participants:

1. Given that the First Nations understanding of gender is, generally speaking, neither hierarchical nor binary, how does the *matricultural* classification help us understand First Nations issues and communities any better? [That is patri- versus matri-cultures, what about other non-binary ways of talking.]
2. What, tangibly, does the theoretical delineation of the idea of *matriculture* do to ensure the survival of Indigenous matrilineal communities?

(NB: the full presentation is available in Appendix 2)

Group Discussion (led by NWAC team):

The dialogue turns mostly around three themes:

-Are we exploring the new concept of matriculturality? Do we agree it fits with Algonquian (Miq'maq, Anishnabeg, Cree, Blackfoot etc.) perspectives? To understand any culture, you must understand the role of women in that culture. The present categorization of Algonquian speaking peoples as patriarchal has impacted these peoples, especially women, greatly. Can the concept of matriculture be useful in this battle? Or is it another imposition of a label?

- The term 'matricultural' creates confusion. Further, participants were cautioned to be careful about binary gender formations, because Indigenous people have more genders than male and female, more sexualities than heterosexual. One response was that matricultural classification helps at least non-indigenous scholars to understand communities with women at the centre, and supports these societies in understanding themselves.

Identity is fluid in being a female: girl, woman, mother, employee, student, grandmother etc. which are very rich and important, we live them at different times. Key ideas are that these are not hierarchical nor are they binary. How does that shift our 'problematic'? Is the answer to bring genders and the matricultural *problematique* together? Within a patriarchal worldview, gender is only two: male and female. Matriculture goes beyond this. Women elders and teachers present their knowledge through embodiment and customs.

- Academic research has been a tool of legitimization for many things. Can it eventually be used by Indigenous scholars and their allies to legitimize their own needs or does it need to be thrown out altogether? Research has to be Indigenous-lead; scholars need to wait until they are invited to the table. Once there, they should follow the ethics of the nation. This is an act of reciprocity for a lifetime. There is also a question of how the Indigenous scholar can work the

settler academic system. These are two different questions.

Monture's work is very much from the Mohawk perspective, the cultural embodiment of a Mohawk woman. One needs to be careful how one uses her work, as there can be conflicting paths when compared to other works. A participant asks if any concepts or questions come from a colonizing view, as words tied to Western concepts are problematic; the individual scholar has to know the individual peoples.

Boat Harbour Research is a model of Indigenous-led research, where scholars were invited into the community because the water was making people sick. Indigenous women controlled the research and informed the scholars re: stories, and the scholars showed the women how to test the water and do the research, etc. The women knew they needed the information and they worked together. Research question needs to be asked by the community and the community should participate in the research. [The process is being filmed.]

Some anthropologists are looking at relationships beyond the West and Indigenous people by looking at nation states (China, US, Canada, etc). How do Indigenous peoples fare with these nation-states? How do you maintain your specific identity, community and culture in the face of these domineering nation-states? If they do it, if they still exist, how do they manage? How effective is their effort? Can flourishing cultures help those who are struggling? Scholars can't impose models or definitions but do need concepts for discussions.

Concluding remarks by the NWAC presenters:

How to help and listen to the people? The conversation should be about language, land, and women being in a state of wellness. This is why we do this work.

Lateral violence is a huge issue for communities of Indigenous women, but we need to be proud of each other's accomplishments. Too many jealous comments - we need healing.

Matriculture is a holistic term. There is a need for some discussion on its meaning. Winona LaDuke talks about this and she would be a good matron for the project.

Beware of imposing values and choices on communities. There is need for us to be something that challenges the systems of the status quo and that helps us restructure, rebuild ourselves as a people. Balance is vital.

Conclusion and reflections on Day Two (26 April 2017) by the organizers

Two kinds of questions are emerging from day two. First are questions concerning the community: what difference does it make for a community to live in a matrilineal social system? What difference does it make for a community to live with a strong matriculture? Does it influence how women are respected? In today's socio-political dynamic, does the identification of an Indigenous community as presently or formerly matrilineal have an impact on its status, role, or opportunities? Do the women in that community play or have played historically

recognized political and economic roles?

Second, there are other questions concerning the researchers, anthropologists, historians, linguists and other scholars. For instance, they are asking: What difference does it make to think from a cultural perspective with the term matriculture? What kind of approaches do we trigger when we focus on matrilineal descent and kinship and when we focus on the cultural context? Can these approaches be interpreted as just another attempt to colonize Indigenous women's lives, at yet another level, since all those concepts are created by the West?

In retrospect, we, the organizers, who had anticipated a cultural gap between the Indigenous representatives and administrators of Indigenous organizations on the one hand, and the academic world in general on the other hand, had failed to recognize that this was too simplistic a view. We should have learned from the refusal of many organizations to concretely participate in our activities, and from the lack of interest specifically demonstrated by many scholars in Native Studies but also in Women's Studies, Gender Studies and Critical Studies departments, among other academic disciplines. And we should have noticed the academic sophistication of the views and ideas expressed by Indigenous women's media as informed by Women's Studies and Cultural Studies. It might be more useful to consider the cultural gap separating anthropologists from their academic peers and from Indigenous organizations at the same time, while Indigenous researchers involved at the grass root level are left stranded in the middle. We will have to address this when we talk about agenda and next steps.

c) Day Three - Thursday, 27 April 2017: Toward a common agenda

Prayer Circle

A Mikm'aq elder gathered us in a prayer circle to open the day.

Review of Days One and Two (including markers of matriculture)

led by Linnéa Rowlatt

We review the first two days, and this spurs new discussion by the group about concrete indicators in the field of matrilineal identity and related processes. From working with matricultural communities in China, Africa, South America, and North America, InterCulture has noticed the need for plain and practical markers or indicators of matrilineal kin groups in the way people talk and behave. The discussion focused on the following markers:

- One identifies oneself as belonging to one's mother's lineage or clan;
- The kin groups (whether lineages, clans or moieties – the society is divided in at least two sides) are named;
- A most important indicator is the strong bond between brother-sister relationship when they are children of the same mother (often marked by ritual avoidance when lineages, clans or moieties are exogamous), and the subsequent bond between mother and mother's brother.

- A second big marker is the active role of the mother's brother in a woman's family. He is the male authority in the family, especially for boys. The father holds different responsibilities; he often is a teacher rather than a disciplinarian. The mother's brother disciplines and takes care of his sisters' kids. The mother's mother may hold even greater authority.
- The kin groups in most matrilineal societies are exogamous: one is to marry outside one's clan or lineage;
- The land is often linked to the kin groups acting as corporate units;
- Kin terms reflect the social system by lumping together children of sisters, and distinguishing the boundary between parallel cousin (children of sisters, or children of brothers) from the boundary between cross cousins (children of siblings of different sex or children of brother and sister);
- Is your mother's brother referred to by a different term than your father's brother?
- Kinship terminology: Persons belonging to the same clan and the same generation tend to be addressed by the same terms: Mother and mother's sister, father and father's brother , father's sister differentiated from mother's sister. Children of two sisters are called by the same terms as one's brothers and sisters, often children of two brothers are also called by the same terms. Children of a brother and a sister (cross-cousins) are called by a term that is different from the terms used for one's own brother and sisters
- Kin behavior's rules: mother's brother and mother's mother are more authoritarian; father and father's brother as well as father's sister are friendly and supportive, often in charge of rituals (rites of passage)
- inheritance of land rights, social status, ceremonial rights or political formal responsibilities are through the mother's line.
- Households are often built around a female core with an older woman and her sisters , these women's daughters and unmarried sons, and these daughters's daughters and their children.
- To preserve the strength of the family, cross-cousins are often advised to marry each other.

Linnéa concluded her review of Day Two with a summary of the NWAC discussion from the previous afternoon, noting that NWAC is the umbrella organization for many but not all Indigenous women. Their challenge about the value and use of the concept of matriculture to Indigenous women brings us face-to-face with current political realities of Canadian Indigenous women. She focused the discussion on answering this challenge, and asks the question: how can we help each other individually and as a group? What are the specific and universal challenges?

Group Discussion:

Please note that comments during this session were grouped thematically.

During the group discussion, a new question was introduced: By what or whom do Indigenous women want to be led? We need to connect to governments (federal, provincial, tribal) and teach them, as they are part of the problem and must be part of the solution.

A- The challenges for academics

A- 1 Working with Indigenous Organizations

A question about the funding and the fewer-than-anticipated number of participants at the workshop – why so few? InterCulture responded that NWAC was the only group to support us and they offered in-kind support through communicating and promoting the workshop. Why didn't the other groups and institutions we approached? A discussion followed about the groups we approached and didn't approach. It comes down to one issue, that of financing. With the exception of the University of Ottawa, none of the organizations we approached, whether local or national, could contribute money, especially travel money for our Central or Western Canadian guests. And most of them did not judge our work relevant to their own needs.

A- 2 Working with interested communities and individuals

We all agree on the primary need to set up collaborative processes with specific communities. InterCulture was advised to be in touch with people who are already involved in some way with Indigenous women / Indigenous feminism. Some names that were mentioned include Paula Allen Gunn, Emma Larocque, J. Green and others in the West, Verna St. Dennis. Winona LaDuke who is writing about matricultures. Local women elders can be a council of elders. *Honour the Earth*, LaDuke's organization, offers grants and she has done work with environmental sustainability. She includes matriculture in this work.

Marie-Françoise warned us that not everyone is willing to work specifically on matricultural issues, even though women's issues are usually received favorably. The most negative reaction is that matrilineality is unimportant or no longer relevant or that present matrilineal societies are more fantasy than reality. Scholars in Women's Studies have often been openly hostile; she has been accused of weakening the feminist cause by suggesting that there are societies where women are not victims. A comment was made that in some ways it may be easier for Indigenous women because they don't have many scholars in the different fields. However, there are new opportunities; the University of New Brunswick is very open at the moment.

We discussed models of collaboration. If InterCulture's initiatives / programs are not led through Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous people will not come. We also agree that the information we collect should be made available with no strings attached. With respect to this workshop, Linnéa will write up a report and send it to all participants for feedback. Once feedback is integrated, then the report will go to many including the above-mentioned Indigenous feminist scholars. We will then make it available to the communities, researchers, and scholars we have already identified. [This basically means to build a network; and think about website and other media of communication.]

Break

A- 3 The challenge for academics in Indigenous contexts

A participant said that safety and security are extremely important needs to create true dialogue for Indigenous women. They are practical needs that will help Indigenous women to share. They need to have these practical needs addressed. In this context, scholarly language, as well as methodology and goals, can be off-putting and must be guided by how Indigenous

people themselves are talking about it. We need allies to show up in partnership to bear witness (like in courts), which would validate our knowledge and the message. Specifically, she continued, we need some of the research presented here written down to counterbalance the writings of patriarchal society. Keep in mind the elders' knowledge and value it as much as a scholar's knowledge. Consider the knowledge keepers, ceremonial keepers, and language speakers. Another participant mentioned UNB's elder-in-resident has an MA but cannot sit on a PhD committee because she does not have a PhD. Same with an elder at another university - she can sit on a committee but cannot vote. This fails to respect Indigenous knowledge systems.

A discussion ensued about elders not being given the power to vote in dissertation defenses and that it is so important to have support for Indigenous students as well as role models.

A participant asserted that they were at the workshop to get allies for confronting the people with power, and that the Mi'kmaq and other First Nations have their own road. Indigenous Studies works alongside and within the box; changes are very gradual. Marie-Françoise shared her perspective on the university, in that it is like a forest - a place to gather, to collect what we need (colleagues, data, money, etc) in order to do the work we want to do. If I want to plant trees in the university / forest, then we need a PhD, which is like a passport. But our goal is to develop and preserve knowledge, not to acquire a diploma. Knowledge and traditions cannot be preserved on shelves, they have to feed a community in order to remain alive.

A participant said that it is hard for Indigenous women to stop the herd. Young people have heard so much about universities that they want them, but how do they stop the herd? What can we do to support the foundations of our culture? To instill this kind of power in the longhouse? In the clan system? In the clan mothers? In the past the clan mothers and the longhouse were the foundations, they kept the cultural knowledge and distributed resources; they had economic power. We need the cultural keepers because Indigenous people are suffering the consequences of the Western loss of their own cultural keepers.

We continued to reflect on the issues based on the themes of this workshop, trying to identify stakeholders, the most affected, deepening our understanding of the importance of this, and looking for solutions.

Lunch

Afternoon Session 1

Please note: the discussion was fast. Comments are identified as best as possible.

B- Challenges within Indigenous communities themselves: What Indigenous women are facing

An Indigenous participant said the 'matriculture' term is the key. As women, we have been so accommodating that we have put our own stories aside. We've done it so much that we raised a male god and lifted the men in our communities. That's my reality in my community and the reality of some of the women in other communities. Women leaders have gained a bit more

ground. We have not been asked, 'What is it that you want?' Our voices have not been heard / uttered. It's 'we don't want to rock the boat' thinking. Kahente showed us another way to transmit knowledge with her dancing – and it is important that she is a professor – she brings some legitimacy to our way of thinking. Some of the questions that were shared here – we are introducing them back into the community, questions like decolonizing and re-introducing our language.

Another participant asked: where could this go? One of the bigger challenges is the work we need to do inside ourselves – we need a lot of healing – but we can't delay the project because of all the healing we need. The issue of murdered and missing women is on-going; it doesn't really matter what stage it's at, the fact that it exists is amazing. There has been so much oppression in the system that women have feared to rock the boat. There's a two-row wampum belt from 1701, which says that we live our way and you live your way. We need to be aware of the violence and racism in the legal and political systems, and the lateral violence in communities. We need to deal with that right and to do that, we need to be able to take advantage of the current administration (that is not Stephen Harper) and we have to talk with our neighbors, especially after the New Brunswick and Nova Scotia fishing rights issue.

An example: Walking With Our Sisters, the artist memorial to MMIW which was a Peace and Friendship Initiative from the United Church (Jan-Feb 2017), based on pairs of vamps representing missing loved ones. It was created with much protocol. Any time the memorial was displayed, the gallery had to fund it and fund family expenses for whoever wanted to come, and the money could not be from oil. The memorial brought students, faculty, and community together. They all had to be smudged in order to go through the exhibit together, through 1800 pairs of vamps by the time it came to Halifax. The focus was on the family - it was a wake, an opportunity for families to heal. Families told their stories, grandmothers were there. Weaving the art within what you are doing helps you dilate. Walking With Our Sisters brought a lot of awareness and is an interesting model. (Here is the URL: <http://walkingwithoursisters.ca/>)

One of the biggest challenges is starting our own healing – but there's also the disconnect between us and our ancient ways. We need to remember that the men have also been disconnected from who they are. Today, Indigenous peoples are disconnected from their own traditions, especially in the east, so one of the biggest challenges is bringing men on board. We need healing for men and teachings for young men because so many have lived away from the grandmothers. We need people to surround us and help us create our safe space.

We see all of these people in prisons and they shouldn't be there. Then they come back to our communities with their violence and infections (drugs, etc.). Call it violence, that's what it really is. We need to build towards righting relations, and not always focus on terminology. The Kathryn Donnelly Foundation gave five years of funding to address violence. We have so many women, such as Josie Augustine, who need to be paid to go wherever they are needed. Hearing about the challenges that (*another participant's*) people are facing – how can we help her and how can she help us?

Question: what about restorative justice?

Reply: the cultural support systems are not in place.

A participant notes that the worst form of punishment is public shaming. Our support system is not in place to make this happen. We have a restorative system of justice that is not recognized by our own people. We need the master to acknowledge something when it happens – and once it is acknowledged, then there is a movement. The fact is that a disempowered mother cannot raise an empowered son. Because of the Indian Act, you could not even sit in a circle. Circles weren't allowed, not even in the 1990s!

Question: How can we educate to support women? What can we do with the young people who don't understand their clan system? Or even other traditions. Especially in those communities where women were affected by the Indian Act. It's become a mess. We need knowledge keepers; some knowledge is gone. The bureaucrats have males doing the jobs of women and they would have to let go of that power. Women are having to negotiate in patriarchal systems, and we are punished when we aren't submissive to the system.

A participant noted that men have power in Indigenous cultures, they're the pipe keepers, sweatlodge keepers, etc., and now they come with rules that they try to impose on women. Some are violent or abusive. There is a lack of support and a need for protection in the community. Lateral violence is very real there. Women need to learn to rock the boat.

Another participant noted that she understands that this is going to take a LOT of time. Colonization was hard; decolonization will be harder.

A participant talked about some of her indigenous female students. Some were shamed and call "whites" by their neighbors because they had acquired university degrees. Their Band Councils tried sometimes to force them out of the community in order to destroy the network they had built within their community, even though they belonged to matrilineal societies. Today, this is changing. But the Indian Act and its administrators still discriminate against women; and especially against women working as the bearers and transmitters of their language and culture. And matrilineal systems are not a panacea, and they cannot be imposed. It would also mean a different way to claim one's Indigenous identity.

Question: who is Mi'kmaq? This is an issue. Multi-race families include white women who married into the community. They don't share the culture, so it also raises questions of treaty rights, inherent rights, and citizenship law. Who has the right to vote to even decide who is Mi'kmaq? Do we decide by blood quantum? Will we set criteria like if you speak the language, you get a certain number of points, or if you know the culture or have money, you get points? The Indian Act created this situation, not the communities. The big question is *how do we decolonize?* Are there traditional ways that can be used? Can we rematriate pre-colonial authority?

A participant notes that the Git'ksan on the west coast have two forms of political power. There is official "Indian status" and modern councils for one way of acting and doing things. There is also a second way that is traditional and based on matrilineages ('house') and clans. Sometimes there is an overlap but sometimes the two don't overlap; and the most knowledgeable elders and chiefs may find themselves without official status. The traditional form of power is the one that deals with cultural issues.

A participant notes that the Mi'kmaq have twenty years to deal with land claims, and who is and who isn't Mi'kmaq, but while this is going on, we're still losing our culture. We need to start the process and hopefully we'll establish at least a framework as different issues need to be resolved.

Another participant notes that the Mi'kmaq are reclaiming our words. We are taking the Western layer off our language to see what we are really saying. We are sharing our stories and documenting everything. These become important. For example, our words for 'half-sister' and 'half-brother' are specific. They mean the children have the same father but different mothers – different wombs. That's in the language and in the teaching. If the children have the same mother but different fathers, they are considered full sister and brother. Another example of the importance of language is that in Mi'kmaq, the moon is grandmother and the sun is mother. Both terms are feminine. Earth is mother; the sky is father.

We have to live in two worlds. When we speak in English, as an Indigenous person, we get into that canoe, the one in the two row wampum belt, and then we return to our own canoe when we return to our own language. Including having to explain things; and end up adding gender. The institution of the university is not representative of Indigenous culture. Even when they're trying to teach Indigenous language, they are not teaching it right, because the verbs and the pronouns are different. It's stressful to deal with this. We want some of the things in a westernized world but not all of it.

Question: the issue is biculturalism – how will you act with it?

A participant shares that when her husband was 31 years old, he was dying. He was healed by the sweatlodge and owes his living to the ancient ways. He says, I walk with a computer in one hand and the drum in the other. In order to be bilingual, you need to have a language to begin with. You learn the language in your mother's womb; that's old memory. These institutions are designed to nurture and complement each other but they often lead to a split identity, what another participant called 'bifurcation of the soul'.

Another participant noted that, when you go back to the land, there is no stress. You are back in the womb. Now, we are suffering from PTSD, from generational trauma. We're disconnected from society. But we can help ourselves with our own traditions and ceremonies. We need to deconstruct traditional knowledge and ask, Is it the Mi'kmaq way? There is so much violence against women, which is social violence. Women can be abusers too.

A participant identified another huge challenge, which is faced by graduate students dealing with professors who hit on them. There is also lateral violence against Native women students, and also with speaking outside their community, where they get challenged by other Indigenous peoples for not being correct, but it's because each nation has its own way. We need forums and workshops like these, where we can talk and share. We need talking circles, gatherings, sharing circles, to share our personal history, our family history, and to talk about recovery and what it means. There is an awakening need for the cultural foundations held by the clan mothers. We need to bring in information that nurtures the clan mothers and reclaims their work. We need to deconstruct the pipe, what does the pipe mean? The bowl is female, the stem is male, and women were the pipe carriers, not the men. But in Europe, smoking was for men. Women were also carriers of the wampum belts, which are the treaties. We need to build alliances and networks.

Break

Afternoon Session 2

Where research could take us - Research topics and applied research

Group Discussion

As far as InterCulture's third goal is concerned, it is obvious that we do not have the critical mass of participants needed to take on the task of creating a Canadian agenda for research on Canadian Indigenous matricultures. This is due partly to a lack of funding that prevented Western Canadian potential participants to attend the proceedings, partly to the lack of interest demonstrated by the answers to our invitations, partly to the very small number of scholars interested in matrilineal systems or matriculture (including our colleagues in Women's Studies), and partly to the disdain shown by First Nations when faced with yet another intrusion of Western scholarship.

However, we could focus on the issues that are with us at this point.

A participant shared that when she was a child, during the week, she stayed at a convent. She went home only on the weekends. She started observing everything around her and started being an anthropologist as a child because that's the only way she could survive. She noticed that there is a relationship between creation stories and women's roles and status. In her first book, *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexual Inequality*, she found a high correlation between the story and society. If the story focused on a woman or a woman and a man, then the society generally gendered an egalitarian model. If the story focused on a man and warfare, then there was a high correlation with male dominance. Matrilineal kinship was probably the first form of society and male dominance came later and likely around periods of warfare or migration. In any case, we have to continue supporting projects exploring the features of myths and other stories expressing a matricultural orientation.

Among the topics deemed important, the participants discussed culturally-specific models of puberty and womanhood, correlations between matriculture and birth-giving practices and

outcomes, potential links between matriculture and acceptance of non-heterosexuality, and even pre-colonial Indigenous inheritance patterns. In all these issues, linguistic continuity remains a priority, both as research tool and as mean to promote traditional values and matricultural orientations. We agreed to enlarge our field of research to explore linguistic similarities and variations among matricultures. As well, we recommended that future research on the subject of matriculture would have to explore cultural features that have endured through colonization and their recent role in Indigenous societies, a role that may become crucial.

We agree that there has been a tendency to ignore the consequences of reintroducing old knowledge about past cultural orientations, about gender roles and former political systems, but reviving or rectifying one's history can instill pride and provide tools that can be applied to present situations. An issue was identified of drug dealers in a specific community, but the men on the Band Council are relatives of the drug dealers, so opponents of the trade find their homes and cars vandalized. We need a revolution where we can fight with peace tools.

Conclusion and reflections on Day Three (27 April 2017) by the organizers

In retrospect, participants were shy about concretizing any plan. If we decide that InterCulture's present job, as members of this academic team, is to support the continuity of cultural knowledge in Indigenous communities, then we have to place ourselves openly at the service of the communities, not to sanction their opinion and declaration, but to promote and to support those who need hard academic skills to build up their knowledge base: elders, knowledge-keepers, clan mothers, and so on. Historians, archivists, linguists, ethnographers, and others have skills that have been learned and can be taught. That supposes a dedicated web site, workshops and publications, though not necessarily in the usual media.

The organizers and their Indigenous partners still find themselves confronted with the demands expressed by many communities to support the restoration of an often-forgotten worldview within which flourished the matriculture they recognize as part of their cultural identity(ies). But who would engage into such a process? How would they pursue it? How much of that heritage is still available is a recurrent question explicit in the ethnographies and other primary sources. There is no ideal past.

In retrospect, though we noted the importance of the recommendation to explore cultural features that have endured through colonization and the recent role of these features in Indigenous societies, we failed to follow its ramification and to discuss its feasibility. Yet recovering meaningful components of past matricultural systems *is* feasible as a long term if not as an on-going formal program, not so different from the linguistic recovery programs attempted today. At the community level, it would provide the intangible infrastructure that could successfully support a community through a crisis and lead to long-term cultural revival and, even, community health. At the academic level, it would have to call upon a multidisciplinary approach including ethnographic, linguistic and historical methods, among other skills, keeping in mind the fluidity and the creativity inherent to cultural processes.

We all recognize the need to update mistaken, vague, and partial definitions of matrilineal and matricultural societies, thereby introducing up-to-date anthropological and ethnohistorical concepts into the discourse of human sciences about such societies. But we have to go farther than that and be open to a redefinition of basic concepts, such as power, authority, domesticity, or motherhood. Moreover, this critical review has to rely on ethnographic data, not on ideology, and the research process should respect the specific situation of each cultural community rather than engaging into generalizations. Our agenda has to engage into an active witnessing of what is happening in the contemporary Indigenous world as it reclaims and adapt large segments of its cultural heritage.

We also missed the opportunity to discuss the problems inherent in the notion of “Indigenous Knowledge”. This term encompasses so many different forms of knowledge, all of it fully integrated into Indigenous cultures. Generally, anthropologists are suspicious when the term is used, partly because Indigenous knowledge that may be packaged into a scientific format (environmental maps, animal behaviors, distribution of resources, demography, genealogies, etc.) can be marketed and used dishonestly. This is partly because Indigenous knowledge that can be packaged is *not* scientific knowledge. Scientific knowledge tries to be narrow, precise, controlled, objective and universal, which cultural knowledge in general and Indigenous cultural knowledge, specifically, is not. Instead, Indigenous knowledge casts a wide-ranging net on the life and traditions of a community, including myths, rituals, individual memories, and always relationships rather than objects. That view of knowledge is forgotten or distorted when one tries to equate it with scientific data (See Cruikshank, *Do Glaciers Listen?*). Recognizing the difference is not a lack of respect; it is to acknowledge the immense cultural difference between scientific enterprise and cultural wisdom, and the real difficulties encountered by scholars in attempting to bring them together, especially younger Ph.D. candidates working on a topic close to their heart and having to squeeze and mold their life experience into the little boxes required for a Ph.D. thesis. That is where the real insults are felt.

d. Day Four: Friday, 28 April 2017

Prayer Circle

A Mi'kmaq elder gathered us in a prayer circle to open the day; each of us offered a thought to connect with the divine.

A participant commented that there are two important components of matricultures: women's culture, and women's role in transmitting cultural knowledge.

Morning Session

presentation by Catherine Martin

Catherine introduced the Catherine Donnelly Foundation and the project her group is undertaking with their financial support. It's called Righting Relations, for both among ourselves and with the settlers in the Maritimes. The Foundation is funding three hubs of women-led initiatives for adult education for radical social change:

- Maritimes, which is her group. Right now, they are recording teachings from Mi'kmaq elders. There is a profile of each woman that is being recorded – who she is and what she does, and the teaching that she has given.
- Central, based out of Toronto, which focuses on immigrant communities and women-led initiatives.
- West, which focuses on low-income communities and again women-led initiatives.

Catherine then showed us two videos that are still in process of being finalized: the teaching elder is Josie Augustine and the community is the Elsipogtog Mi'kmaq Community.

- *Josie's Profile*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zQVOCmNCh6s> and

- *Josie's Teaching*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n8UEUXi9uLE>

The goal in their project revolves around *Righting Relations* – but what does this mean? What did it mean in the original model? It's very important to reach the boys and the men. As Josie stated, the men need medicine bundles to connect them to Spirit. It's not so important for women because we are the ones who give life and our periods automatically connect us. Yet, women nowadays do need some rituals; we need cleansing because of the environment and because of the kind of experiences so many of us are having. Sweetgrass is so important due to the fact that it's braided like our hair.

Catherine also talked about Saint Kateri, who brought her a message in a church, and the COTY Institute, as well as various case studies. She also mentioned women's gathering in New Brunswick from May 24-28 and invited those present to come.

Catherine and another participant talked about the strawberry ceremony. The strawberry is the heart of women and is linked to a girl's rite of passage in womanhood. It's a very important first celebration of a girl becoming a woman. It's the first berry and the first voice has to come from the heart. "We begin to celebrate when the flower comes out and then when the berry is blood red. It connects with the women's moons to show she's come to the age of flowering. Everyone gathers in recognition of who we are. Women are central to this ceremony. This is where life comes from. This is where we receive our knowledge, our truth, our heart. If we collect and eat the strawberries – it's the medicine to help us through those times, through the winter". Strawberries represent the knowledge of our mother (Mother Earth). "As I was eating, I was reconnecting – and then I ate on behalf of my mother, and on her mother's behalf, and on my daughter's behalf. Eventually, I had a vision of strands of connection". When our ceremonies were attacked or buried, that is when we began to be disempowered.

Catherine continued her talk with a presentation about her trip to Honduras. There, she learned about Berta Cáceres, a Honduran woman who spoke out about the environment and what was happening in Honduras. She was murdered a year and a half ago. The murderers also shot Gustavo Castro Soto who was her guest at the time, but he disguised himself as dead. She died in his arms. Gustavo Castro Soto's life was also in danger, but her group was able to get him out of the country and he is still alive.

(From Cheryl: For more information about Berta, see the following articles on the event:
https://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/8/honduran_activist_berta_caceres_died_in
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/28/berta-caceres-honduras-military-intelligence-us-trained-special-forces>
<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-death-of-berta-caceres>
https://www.democracynow.org/2016/3/11/before_her_assassination_berta_caceres_singled
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/aug/31/hillary-clinton-honduras-violence-manuel-zelaya-berta-caceres>)

Catherine described how mining companies in Honduras, including Canadian mining companies, are violating human rights. Who is our government supporting? What is Goldcorp hiding? In such countries, the last people you call are the police. But, even here in Canada, the police are the last people you call in many communities.

Break

Responses to NWAC's questions from Day 2

Presentation by Marie-Françoise Guédon with ad hoc interventions from the group

Marie-Françoise Guédon: Those questions matter. They can be distilled as “What use is matrilineality today?” and “How can the concept of matriculture help Canadian Indigenous women now?” Before attending to these questions, I would like to mention four points:

First: it should be reiterated that it's not because something is matrilineal (or matriarchal, matrifocal, whatever) that it is necessarily better. Matrilineality in itself is no guarantee for a peaceful society, or for the respect of women's rights. And we have to rebut any tendencies to romanticize matrilineality or matriculture.

Second, from an anthropological perspective, not all Canadian Indigenous groups are or used to be matrilineal (though many Algonquian speaking communities possibly used to be matrilineal).

Third, we must understand that concepts and terminology do matter because they carry connotations that may reinforce or weaken the original worldview. The NWAC presenters are right to think that words are dangerous.

And metaphors are dangerous because they carry hidden connotations. What are the metaphors we use to talk about women? about sex, about pregnancy and birth? What are the implications of the metaphors in our academic disciplines? They influence our attitudes about ourselves, about genders and the attitudes of others about women. For example, the Mediterranean and European tendency to think of peace in terms of whiteness, passivity, weakness, sheep, or innocent lambs – and femininity, when we need to think of peace in terms of redness, life, fertility, a room for action and freedom, a lioness with her cubs. See Jean Houston: *The Possible Human*, for this suggestion. And yes, the term 'matriculture' leads us to

think of society by reference to motherhood, and female, though not necessarily in binary terms. Some authors prefer terms like 'gynocentricity or women-centered', but we would have to find societies with that emphasis in mind.

Finally, we talk about matricultural systems as cultural systems like we talk about kinship systems as cultural systems. Essentially, cultural systems are those systems which can be recognized from one culture to the next, one society to the next, in spite of enormous differences in content, because they seem to deal with similar functions or similar forms. Geertz gives art, religion, jokes, or myths as examples of cultural systems. Notice how all cultural systems have to do with how people *think* about life, the world and themselves. All societies have cultural systems, but not all cultural systems are found in all societies. Though most cultural systems are found in all societies, they can vary in intensity and development. In the same way, though all societies have to deal with sex and genders, with birth and mothers and with women, among related concepts, some societies allow little room for a matricultural system to flourish. Others take men and women, and others, as equal participants in the cultural life. Matrilineality supposes a strong matriculture. But little research has been done.

Question One: What use is matrilineality today for Indigenous people in Canada at Community Level?

Group Discussion: At the community level, does it make a difference to any of us if women can identify themselves as a member of a matrilineal society rather than a patrilineal one?

For most of us here, it does. It gives us an identity and a sense of strength – just in the term itself. Femaleness is valued, girls are valued, mothers and grandmothers are respected. at the center of their family. It would position women in a visible position.

Policy Level:

Marie-Françoise proposes some examples: Would it make a difference if social services dealing with Indigenous communities knew grandparents were to be involved in the lives of grandchildren, which is a key marker of matrilineal societies? And if they knew about the rights and expectations held by the mother's brother? What if social services could consider extended families as positive features instead of suspicious social arrangements?

Discussion: There was a general consensus among the Indigenous women present that it does matter how Indigenous people are labeled, it matters how informed policy makers are. What if the Indian Act accepted the fact that not all Canadian Indigenous tribes are patrilineal, and actually treated men and women in the same way?

Societal Level:

Marie-Françoise Guédon: At an even larger level, let us look at the way in which Canadian society is organized.

For instance, let us discuss the case of Sandra Lovelace, the Maliseet woman, which was a

human rights issue concerning the Indian status of Indigenous women marrying a white man, which led to the judicial decision that she had been discriminated against on the basis of her gender. The government responded with the recognition that: “many of the provisions of the *Indian Act*, including section 12(1)(b) require serious reconsideration and reform.” But the Canadian government stressed the necessity of maintaining the status quo of the *Indian Act* in that matter as an instrument to protect the Indian minority of Canada. The government lawyers stated in court that “Aboriginal peoples traditionally had patrilineal families, which determined legal claims to land. Further, they stated that the non-Indian men (as opposed to non-Indian women) were a threatening force to reserve land of the Indian and, for these reasons, legal enactments from 1869 provided that an Indian woman who married a non-Indian man would lose her status.” (Boyer, p. 83). In other words, the government saw land as belonging to men. If Indian men married white women, they still owned the land but if Indian women married white men, the whites would get the land and gradually Indians would lose their territories.

Group Discussion

This example shows us how a bit of historical information can change our perspective on, for instance, the situation of the Algonquian-speaking Canadians.

Question 2: How can the concept of matriculture help Canadian Indigenous women now?

Marie-Françoise Guédon: What does it change if we place matrilineality in a cultural context called matriculture?

It reminds us that matrilineal kinship, in the form of lineage and clans, matters only if it is supported and celebrated by cultural features: communal rituals, stories and myths, knowledge, rules of transmissions of resources and information; links to ancestors and so on.

Group Discussion

An increase sense of identity and security for the women would be a first benefit.

A participant noted that it is important for men too. She mentioned the Mosuo men, in China explaining to her how their links to the mother and to their mother’s house were secure and unbreakable - without men having to fight for status or control;

Speaking of matriculture helps us consider the links between social structures and cultural as well as linguistic heritage. It also provides a link with what we have begun to call “matriarchal features” such as Indigenous models of female authority, of female mobility (like the women in Iroquois or Tsimshian myths who go by themselves on sacred quests, of female political figures, of male relationships with themselves and their communities informed by a matricentric ideal (See Georges Sioui’s work).

Marie-Françoise also referred to the Delgamuukw case. In the original decision, the judge stated that Git’ksan culture died at the time of contact. The people have adapted to Canadian society

and are no longer the Git'ksan people of the past. This made it easy to conclude that the people did not own traditional Git'ksan land. His decision was later reversed. This case demonstrates the need to emphasize that Indigenous cultures are alive now, in the present, and to articulate what they are.

Another example: currently, the Algonquin Grandmothers are taking the chiefs to court over land claim issues. Showing their culture from a matrilineal perspective would help their claim for the right to represent their community since governance is part of the matrilineal system.

Group Discussion

We have to consider how much of the “traditional” cultures and values are tied up to the matrilineal social organization. True, you cannot impose a clan system (especially matrilineal) on a society that has become bilateral and is sustained by the English kinship terminology, and that no longer lives within tight communities where everyone knows everyone else. Yet, knowing more about history and the social systems of the past may strengthen cultural preservation efforts. It would also accentuate the specificity and the richness in the cultural heritage of the Indigenous groups.

If we want to use the term *matrilineal* to support what Indigenous communities are trying to do, then we need to make sure that the term says what we want it to say. We need to make sure that the term is not appropriated and distorted.

Marie-Françoise Guédon: So what can we find in a matrilineal cultural system?

First, everything that has to do with one's connections with one's mother, daughter, sister and wife or any kin of another sex, and by extension the whole kinship system, as well as treatment of boys and girls by society; negative and positive connotations in the perception of genders

Therefore, everything that has to do with motherhood, mothers, connections with ancestors in the mother line; this leads to womanhood, the definition of femininity and masculinity, the view of sex and gender, the relationship between womanhood and sexuality, between womanhood and motherhood.

Then everything that has to do with birth and birth rituals, children, care of children, as well as procreation, pregnancy, fertility, who controls the fertility of the women? Father's side? Mother's brother? Grandmother? Or the woman herself?

Also: puberty, treatment of girls at puberty, puberty rituals, how much do girls learn about what is happening to them, integration of young women into the group;

The relationship of people of all genders with their body, how much do they control? What about genital mutilation, circumcision? Do the women learn to recognize when they are fertile, do they know about to prevent or interrupt a pregnancy?

Sexuality and the metaphors used to talk about it, sexual pleasure;

The relationship with what is defined as nurturing, source of being, (such as the land, or the water, or the light),

The use of masculine and feminine as metaphors to talk about reality, or about the cosmos, or about nonhuman or sacred dimensions (animals, spirits, divinities).

All the basic principles (“root principles” in Pinxten’s terms) that surround mothers and women. We talk about a strong matriculture when that system is positively oriented toward women.

Break

Features of a strong matriculture, articulated collectively by participants
group discussion based on stickies on the wall

- Cosmogony / cosmology which emphasizes the active role of women in the creation/origin of the world; the centrality of women to myths; in quest stories, women figure as active agents, not prizes.
- Rituals demonstrating a positive evaluation of menarche and puberty for girls and / or a positive evaluation of menopause. In a patricentric society, menopausal women have no value, but in a matricentric society, menopausal women are very important because they are the ones to transmit culture.
- The mutuality of the community of women, including sharing the role of mother among one’s sisters’ children or age-mates’ children. For example, a baby may be breastfed by all the mothers in the community. When the baby is unwrapped (after 1 year or so), he/she knows everyone as mother. When the biological mother is away, the child doesn’t care because the mother is still there. *Discussion* We’re not sure whether this is a feature of matriculture – it may be a marker of Indigenous society regardless of whether the society is matricentric or patriarchal.
- Girls are valued as much as boys. *Comment* Mi’kmaq children are named after our animal relatives (bear, otter). Among the Tsimshian, little boys are nicknamed after animals and little girls are nicknamed after fruit.
- At home, the focus is on the extended family. Either today or in the past, would you welcome your grandparents at home? Would you take care of your grandchildren? Often homes were multi-generational; if a man had several wives, they often lived in one home; longhouses were often the norm. The strength of the extended family is demonstrated in that it is still that ideal today. If the extended family survives even after colonialism, then this is a great marker that the society is matrilineal.
- Extended families help each other. The reality – and why governments tend to abolish them – is that extended families are harder to control. See Meyer, *The Child and the State*, for this insight.

- There is a ranking among the women within the clan – clan mothers are more important than other mothers, for example – and old people more important than the younger ones. Look at the role of grandmother.
- Rituals ask for the participation of men and women, and sometimes other genders.
- Another set of features surround the attitude towards women’s power. Women are as mobile as men – they are in action. In particular, look at the role of women after menopause. Yes, you might have a society that is very restrictive for women during their puberty and their menstruations. At the same time, women are a reference point. Men are essentially considered like menopausal women.
- Women are involved in governance and leadership – either today, in the stories, or in the myths, women are as mobile as men and as vocal even on the public scene. “When the women speak, we shake.” Women as chiefs or ‘sachems’, as diplomats, as warriors, as traders.
- Joy of women in going back to the land. Women can move across the land and see it as their world. In foraging societies, women are in the woods as much as the men. They have fewer weapons, however, and tend to communicate with animals; there is power in communication. In some societies, women are as involved in hunting as the men. In horticultural societies, women are the main food producers and they control the product of their farming. Compare this with the sense of domesticity that is very strong in Mediterranean societies, or Islamic societies, where women are at home and work for men while men are outside in the public sphere.
- Women are part of the communication network and information circulates between both sexes
- Leadership is not concentrated exclusively on one gender. Shared power was the norm. If one got too powerful, one was replaced.

Topics for further research:

* whether people in matricultures tend not to see things in universal or absolute terms but rather in relational terms – these are more complex, diversified, varied, and filled with nuances.

* attitudes in matricultural systems toward other genders

CONCLUDING REMARKS ON THE WORKSHOP

What is next? We agreed that Interculture will support Indigenous colleagues through the academic world. We all agreed on maintaining connections and communication channels open. We are going to explore possibilities to attend conferences, meetings and events allowing us to pursue the questions we have raised here. InterCulture is headed toward a symposium and a website allowing our networking joining groups on other continents. We had decided that the needed critical review of data and theories has to rely on ethnographic and ethnohistorical

data, and that the research process should respect the specific situation of each cultural community rather than engaging into generalizations. We are definitely not aiming for a pan-Indian perspective.

Moreover, our agenda has to engage into an active witnessing of what is happening in the contemporary Indigenous world as people reclaim and adapt large segments of their cultural heritages.

And more thanks than can be expressed here to all the participants.

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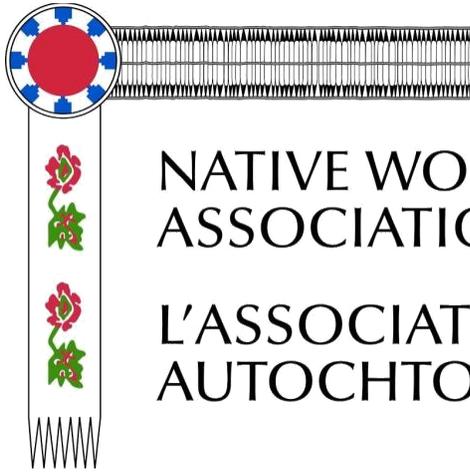
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NATIVE WOMEN'S
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

L'ASSOCIATION DES FEMMES
AUTOCHTONES DU CANADA

**"Over the generations, they have done everything":
Indigenous Women and Matrilineality**

Discussion Paper

From Matrilineal Kinship to Matriculture: Establishing a Canadian Agenda

25-28 April 2017, University of Ottawa

Prepared by NWAC's Justice and Human Rights Policy Department

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ABOUT NWAC

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) is a national non-profit Indigenous organization representing the political voice of Indigenous women throughout Canada. It was incorporated in 1974 as a result of the activities of local and regional grassroots Native women's associations over many years. NWAC was formed to promote the wellbeing of Indigenous women within Indigenous and Canadian societies, and we focus our efforts on helping women overcome sex-based discrimination.

Today, NWAC engages in national advocacy measures aimed at legislative and policy reforms that promote equality for Indigenous women and girls. Through advocacy, policy, and legislative analysis, we work to preserve Indigenous culture, advance the wellbeing of Indigenous women and girls, as well as their families and communities.

NWAC is actively committed to raising the national and international profile on many issues specific to Indigenous women, including violence against women, the overrepresentation of women in prison, poverty, and ongoing sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and girls, along with the many other violations to Indigenous women's basic human rights. As a leader both domestically and on the international stage, NWAC works to improve the human rights of Indigenous women and remains dedicated to promoting gender equality through research, policy, programs, and practice.

INTRODUCTION

Mainstream feminism has been well-critiqued for not reflecting the lived realities of non-white, non-cisgendered women, especially when those lives are complicated by colonial violence.¹ Such thought additionally has a troubling history of conflating the experiences of all non-white women.² In articulating the intricacies of living at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture writes:

If I am the object of some form of discrimination, it is very difficult for me to separate what happens to me because of my gender and what happens to me because of my race and culture. My world is not experienced in a linear and compartmentalized way. I experience the world simultaneously as Mohawk and as woman.³

It is for this reason that NWAC applies an intersectional and decidedly Indigenous⁴ feminist lens to its policy development and advocacy work. If feminism provides us with the tools to analyze "how social systems work to privilege men and disadvantage women",⁵ then Indigenous feminism 1) roots itself in an Indigenous understanding of balanced gender roles rather than a European/ patriarchal understanding of hierarchical gender roles; and 2) analyzes racial and colonial oppression in conjunction with patriarchy. As Cree scholar Verna St. Denis notes,

Colonization has involved the appropriation of sovereignty, lands, resources and agency, and has included the imposition of western and Christian patriarchy on Aboriginal peoples. Patriarchy is not the only form of oppression experienced by Aboriginal people, but it is certainly a part of that oppression.⁶

Among and within Indigenous communities, the impacts of the imposition of this colonial patriarchy—and, by extension, the disruption of matrilineality—has been well-documented.

¹ See Joyce Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007); Grace Oulette, *The fourth world: An Indigenous perspective on feminism and Aboriginal women's activism* (2002); Patricia Monture-Angus, *Thunder in My Soul: A Mohawk Woman Speaks* (1995)

² Patricia Monture, "The Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women: Reclaiming Justice" (1992), *Saskatchewan Law Review*, 246.

³ Monture-Angus, 178.

⁴ Generally speaking, we use the term "Indigenous" except when sources use the terms "Aboriginal", "First Nations", or "Native". Wherever possible, we refer to specific nations.

⁵ Emma Larocque, "Metis and Feminist" in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2007), 57.

⁶ Verna St. Denis, "Feminism is For Everybody" in *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2007) 46.

Given the pernicious misconception that all Indigenous thought is identical, as well as the historical and ongoing silencing of Indigenous voices within academia, this paper will synthesize the writings of Indigenous women from the Eastern, Central, and Western areas of what is now known as Canada. Through their writings, we can see that while there are common threads of thought on matrilineality that can be traced through Indigenous and First Nations thinking, it is not necessarily a universal or blanket notion that can be applied across all Indigenous cultures. Rather, it contains multitudes of ideas and responsibilities that vary from nation to nation.

As everyone in this room is likely aware, Indigenous women are disproportionately discriminated against in a number of ways, but perhaps most notably in the **Indian Act**. Status provisions and other colonial governance impositions have left Indigenous women vulnerable to legal discrimination, for example, in the case of matrimonial real property. The **Indian Act** does not contain provisions governing on-reserve “matrimonial real property”, which is a term that includes a couple’s home or land that they live on, or benefit from, during their marriage or marital relationship. In 1986, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that provincial and territorial laws on matrimonial real property do not apply to reserve land. These decisions created a gap in the law which has had serious consequences, especially for Indigenous women who are often not recognized as owners of property, contrary to traditional teachings and practices. Today, legislation has been passed that allows First Nations to develop their own laws around matrimonial real property, opening doors for equal distribution among women and men. This is just one instance in which matrilineality has been interrupted by colonial state policy.

It is worth noting that the history of matrilineal relationships of Indigenous women in Canada is an oral and living history, and much of what is presented in this paper is not documented in a traditional academic sense. Works listed in our Works Cited and in **Appendix A** should be consulted for a deeper understanding of traditional epistemologies and cosmologies which cannot be wholly represented in one discussion paper, but are rather a way of life that takes time and a lived experience to understand. As such, the final section of this paper contains a short discussion of the pitfalls of academic knowledge-gathering and emphasizes the fact that this knowledge belongs to Indigenous women and communities.

MATRILINEALITY ACROSS TURTLE ISLAND⁷

In articulating their understandings and lived experiences of matrilineality, First Nations women emphasize different aspects of its importance within their communities. However, across writings from Eastern, Central, and Western First Nations cultures, women are consistently positioned as knowledge carriers and political leaders, and colonial patriarchy is consistently framed as having disrupted these important roles. From a theoretical perspective, the writers cited below allow us to move beyond ethnography to explore the connections between Indigenous women, history, gendered politics, and narratives of identity. Collectively, they fill a gap that academic research cannot attend to, where Indigenous women's voices are at the center of traditional knowledge. This serves to highlight an important component of this discussion: the voices, stories, and organizing of Indigenous women and Elders must be the central source of defining and revitalizing traditional matrilineal societal systems.

Beginning in the East, Dr. Marie Anne Battiste (Mi'kmaq) urges caution when discussing gender roles in relation to matrilineal Mi'kmaq society, given that the idea of gender⁸ is an import of European settlers, and as such is "a strained thought to the Mi'kmaq worldview".⁹ She goes on to write that

The predetermined natural fact of being created by the Holy Spirit as either a woman or man is of minor importance in the Mi'kmaq worldview. More important to the Mi'kmaq is the fate of being born into a tribal community which contributes to a shared mental experience: the sense of having a view of the world and of the good in which others participate.¹⁰

Unlike Mi'kmaq society, European society at the time of contact was intensely hierarchical and divided by an understanding of gender that directly contradicts this worldview and, indeed, much of Indigenous thought. Expanding on this, Battiste writes that

Mi'kmaq concepts do not divide man from woman; the concepts only honour their ordinary efforts as mothers, grandmothers, godmothers, teachers, healers and the like. European thought calls them 'roles.' Mi'kmaq thought labels them extraordinary honours.¹¹

⁷ In an attempt to represent a cross section of First Nations thought on matrilineality, this section relies on writings by Mi'kmaq (Eastern), Mohawk (Central), Cree (Central/Western), and Salish (Western) women. Other matrilineal First Nations communities include the Huron, Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida, Kwatkuiltl, Tsimshian, Sioux, Navajo, Hopi, and Zuni (See Kirkness, 1988)

⁸ Note the distinction between biological sex and the social construct of gender, which labels certain behaviours, attitudes, and/or ways of living as either "feminine" or "masculine"

⁹ Dr. Marie Anne Battiste. "Mikmaq Women: Their Special Dialogue" (1989) *Canadian Women's Studies* 10:2-3, 61.

¹⁰ Ibid at 61

¹¹ Ibid at 61

From Battiste's writing, we can delineate that in Mi'kmaq culture, these "roles" were not denigrated or considered subordinate to male roles. Indigenous women writers from across Turtle Island echo some of these same themes in their writings about women's roles in matrilineal communities, while teasing out the nuances of these roles within their communities. Lee Maracle (Salish), for example, emphasizes women's roles as storytellers in both her fiction and nonfiction work. Maracle argues that understanding how First Nations women's roles have changed through the years requires an understanding of colonialism as a lived reality in every Indigenous woman's life.¹²

Comparatively, Battiste delves more into Mi'kmaq women's roles as spiritual leaders, knowledge keepers, and social actors:

In the traditional Mi'kmaq worldview, Mi'kmaq "woman" and "man" are the fulfillment of each other. Most of women's undivided obligations are held in common with their male partners. But Mi'kmaq thought teaches of special obligations which "women" have to the Holy Spirit. Mi'kmaq "women" are the keepers of the unknown. They have the ability to see the ordinary with amazement and to create the future.¹³

Similarly tying women's roles to spirituality, Verna Kirkness (Cree) attributes the change in the traditional roles of Native women in large part to the imposition of Christianity on Indigenous spirituality.¹⁴ Kirkness expands on what was lost when the connection between women and spirituality was severed, writing that the imposition of Western governance systems—which took deciding power away from women—toppled the spiritual balance between men and women that existed before colonial invasion. For Kirkness, matrilineal relationships are characterized by a balance between women and men, where “the female was created simultaneously with the male, neither was accorded supremacy, and each was made dependent upon the other for existence”.¹⁵ This notion not of eliminating gender roles but of balancing them is central to First Nations worldview and is one of the ways in which Indigenous feminist thought conflicts with mainstream feminist thought, which frames all gender roles as a symptom of patriarchal oppression.

Both Kirkness and Maracle position women as the gatekeepers of culture and tradition, and position them as responsible for passing that culture, tradition, and language on to future generations, as well as

¹² Lee Maracle, *Daughters are Forever*, 2002, 123.

¹³ Battiste, 61.

¹⁴ Verna Kirkness, "Emerging Native Woman" (1987), *Canadian Journal of Women & the Law*, 410.

¹⁵ Kirkness, 409

being crucial to balanced governance. In *Daughters are Forever*, Maracle argues that the political stability of First Nations communities is inextricably tied to respect for women and their safety, writing that First Nations governance systems are traditionally “rooted in the goodwill of safe womanhood”.¹⁶ A central component to the imposition of colonial patriarchy, which positions women as subordinate to men, has been the disruption of these roles. Kirkness writes that, unlike European societies, “traditional Native societies are examples of democracies in which all people were accorded equal rights”.¹⁷

Battiste closes her piece by noting that it is precisely because of Western modernization and individualism that the fight for equal rights between and among genders is necessary, but within a society such as the Mi’kmaq one--where collective balance is more valued than individual ambition--the fight for gender equality does not resonate the same way, and in fact, could prove detrimental:

In the restless individualist society of Canada, the equalization of gender is a necessary task in creating a better society. In the restoration of Mi’kmaq thought, an unreflective notion of gender could be merely another means of dividing our tribal society.¹⁸

As illustrated above, the impacts of the imposition of colonial patriarchy--and, by extension, the disruption of matrilineality--has been well-documented among and within First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities. Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis) and Bonita Lawrence (Mi’kmaq) argue that the imposition of this foreign gender division has resulted in “different definitions, among men and women, of ‘sovereignty’ and ‘nationhood’”,¹⁹ and, in turn, women have been actively left out of consultations and policy development by the men in their communities.

Anderson and Lawrence trace this exclusion back to early settler-colonial interactions when colonial governments “actively disempowered [Indigenous] women” by refusing negotiate with them present, “accepting only male representatives when discussing [the] terms of [the] relationship”,²⁰ despite the fact that governance and leadership responsibilities typically fell equally between men and women. State representatives additionally “[attacked] the clan system and other forms of female representation, by making it illegal for Indian women in Canada to take part in the band councils that replaced

¹⁶ Maracle, 13

¹⁷ Kirkness, 411

¹⁸ Battiste, 63

¹⁹ Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, “Introduction to ‘Indigenous Women: The State of Our Nations’” (2005) *Atlantis* 29:2 at 1.

²⁰ *Ibid* at 1

traditional Indigenous governments”.²¹ This, in turn, “has set the stage for a political representation that is not shaped by women’s ways of knowing the world”.²² Excluding women to this extent has meant that “gendered struggles against colonialism have all too frequently been reduced to ‘women’s issues’ by the formal male [Indigenous] leadership”.²³

²¹ Ibid at 1

²² Ibid at 1

²³ Ibid at 2

KNOWLEDGE OWNERSHIP

It is surely difficult to discuss research methodology and indigenous peoples together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex ways in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices. (Tuhiwai Smith, 2013, p. 2)

As outlined above, individual nations define for themselves what matrilineality looks like within their communities and why it is important. In discussing matrilineality, and the usefulness of “matriculture” as a theoretical concept, it is imperative to draw on the work and words of Indigenous women in order to avoid discursively reproducing colonial knowledge and power hierarchies. This is particularly salient in an academic context; Western academia has a long and troubled history of harmful and extractory practices in the name of accumulating knowledge.²⁴ Fanon, Foucault, Derrida, Said, and other postmodern and postcolonial theorists would certainly not be out of place in this (or any) discussion of how power operates through discourse. However, Maori author Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that historical silencing of Indigenous voices in academic research calls for an approach that “privileges the Indigenous presence and acknowledges the continuing existence of Indigenous peoples”,²⁵ so we have aimed to do that here.

Patricia Monture (Mohawk) notes that individuals of Aboriginal ancestry who try to speak in both the academic world and the Aboriginal world are confronted by the profound cultural differences in the ways in which truth, knowledge and wisdom are constructed, including the notion that introspection is not typically considered a proper research method within Western institutions.²⁶ Simultaneously and contradictorily, Aboriginal academics are frequently asked to explain their unique cultural ways of being in a way that is comprehensible to Western thought. These contradictions exist in the way that knowledge and truth are constructed and sanctioned in each culture and Western institution. Bonita Lawrence echoes this claim, adding that

²⁴ See Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Research Methodologies* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2013)

²⁵ *Ibid* at 6

²⁶ Patricia Monture, “The Roles and Responsibilities of Aboriginal Women: Reclaiming Justice” (1992) 56 *Saskatchewan Law Review* 237 at 240 [*Roles and Responsibilities*].

A crucial part of the silencing of Indigenous voices is the demand that Indigenous scholars attempting to write about their histories conform to academic discourses that have already staked a claim to expertise about our pasts--notably anthropology and history.²⁷

In *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Tuhiwai Smith writes that, for colonized peoples “the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism”,²⁸ and that to discuss research methods alongside Indigenous peoples necessarily means discussing imperialism.²⁹ Her work recounts the ways in which research on Indigenous peoples by colonial states and institutions has historically been infinitely harmful to those peoples but eminently useful to the colonizer in that research is what legitimizes the colonizer’s policies, and policies are what define and restrict Indigenous lives.³⁰ The Cree/Métis writer Emma LaRocque similarly takes up this notion in *When the Other Is Me*, wherein she traces the history of Indigenous resistance in Canada as being inextricably tied to rewriting national colonial discourses, including academic ones.

²⁷ Bonita Lawrence, “Rewriting Histories of the Land” in *Race, Space, and the Law: Unmapping a White Settler Society* (Toronto: Between The Lines, 2002)

²⁸ Lawrence at 1

²⁹ *Ibid* at 2

³⁰ *Ibid* at 2

CONCLUSION & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Indigenous matrilineal cultures have survived in spite of colonial (and, often, academic) disruption and intervention. For this reason, we must emphasize the importance of thinking about this community configuration from an Indigenous understanding of womanhood/ woman-ness; this paper has attempted to present such an understanding from a few different First Nations perspectives. While we did not examine thought and writing about and by other Indigenous groups such as Métis or Inuit in this presentation, those perspectives do certainly exist. The discussion questions below are designed to ensure any work on matrilineality is accountable to the Indigenous women directly impacted, and to whom this knowledge belongs.

Discussion Questions

- Given that the First Nations understanding of gender is, generally speaking, neither hierarchical nor binary, how does the “matricultural” classification help us understand First Nations issues and communities any better?
- How can we have these conversations in a way that is ethical and decolonized, and that privileges the needs and voices of Indigenous women, rather than knowledge accumulation for its own sake?
- Relatedly: What does the theoretical delineation of the idea of “matriculture” do to ensure the survival of Indigenous matrilineal communities? How can this be measured?

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APPENDIX A - FURTHER READING

Kim Anderson and Bonita Lawrence, *Strong Women Stories: Native Vision and Community Survival* (2003)

Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (2011)

Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping our Nations* (2013)

Bonita Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (2003)

Eden Robinson, *The Sasquatch At Home: Traditional Protocols and Modern Storytelling* (2011)

Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (2003)

Leslie Marmon Silko, *The Turquoise Ledge: A Memoir* (2010)

Audra Simpson & Andrea Smith (eds.), *Theorizing Native Studies* (2014)

Cheryl Suzack, Shari M. Huhndorf, Jeanne Perreault, Jean Barman (eds.) *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* (2011)