

Community Voices

Living Inside Layers of Colonial Division: A Part of the Algonquin Story

Heather Majaury

The Algonquin Nation was never a newcomer to its territory. Our occupation and use of an identifiable tract of land goes beyond the limits of what is now called history. The Algonquins have been in the valley of the Ottawa river, at least as long as the French have lived in France or the English have lived in England. Before there was a Canada, before Cartier sailed his small ship up the great river, Algonquins lived in, occupied, used and defended their home in the Ottawa Valley. (Greg Sarazin 1989, 169)

My name is Heather Majaury. I am Algonquin. But perhaps that is not enough, in our colonized condition, to identify me. I must, therefore, further qualify myself. I am a non-status Algonquin Woman. I am a non-status Algonquin Woman of mixed Indigenous and Canadian ancestry. I am a non-status Algonquin Woman of mixed Indigenous and Canadian ancestry with no federally recognized land base, who lives outside my defined territory.

This is the story I wish to tell in the hopes you will understand why the Algonquin Nation has not been able yet to successfully negotiate a land claim settlement with the Government of Canada.

The Algonquin Nation has never signed a treaty with Canada. We have never relinquished our inherent rights or title to the land where we emerge.

Our name confuses many people because linguistically we share our name with the larger language group which includes many surviving Anishinabe nations.

We are a people divided by many layers of colonial history and policies all created to "solve the Indian problem," as well as undermine and

obliterate our conscious understanding of our nationhood.

We are divided first of all by provincial lines, artificially drawn on a map of our territory and making the Ottawa (Kichisibi) River, which divides Ontario and Quebec, into a significant symbol of separation where it was once the heart of our territory in trade, commerce and transportation.

The provincial division has created a language division. There are few people still speaking our language and most speakers come from the Quebec side of the territory. Few Algonquins in Ontario speak anything but English. Many Algonquins in Quebec speak only French.

The province of Quebec is home to nine reserves registered under Canada's *Indian Act*. The province of Ontario is home to only one reserve of 1700 acres under the *Indian Act* and several non-status communities of both historical significance and current emergence.

Our nation is divided spiritually. We have been divided in this manner since the 1600s because of missionary interventions that are well documented through Jesuit accounts of our conversions to Catholicism. Ironically it is often the Catholic Church that provides the records that help us to identify Algonquin people who have been lost to assimilation for the past 100 years.

Perhaps the most potent symbol of our disempowerment is the manner in which Canada has not only disregarded our nationhood to the point where it appropriated our lands to build its capital city on, but has absolutely refused to address this in the land claim talks that have been going on for the past ten years. For me, there is an ominous quality to those beautiful castle-like buildings that symbolize the seat of power for the Canadian Nation. For me the parliament buildings are a constant reminder of injustice perpetuated by bitter

division and the illegal and immoral domination of one nation over another.

Canada must recognize that a treaty process which does not address jurisdiction or provide compensation for damage still felt by generations alive today, as a result of genocidal practices and apartheid policies toward our nation, is not an adequate, nor a legitimate, process that can be taken seriously by Algonquins or Canadians.

The only reserve on the western side of the Kichisibi River, Pikwakanagan, is a tract of land of postage stamp proportions as compared to the original territory which was 8.2 million acres. It currently sustains approximately 300 residents. It cannot physically sustain many more.

I have been directly involved in the treaty negotiation process, as it has unfolded in the Algonquin Nation, since the fall of 2001. This was when I arrived at Pikwakanagan First Nation Reserve across the lake from the small village of Golden Lake, to fulfill the duties of the Communication Officer for the main table negotiating team.

I worked with the then Chief Negotiator and resident of the reserve, Greg Sarazin. There, I found myself in the middle of one of the most toxic internal wars I could imagine - a battle to the death between the "Real Indians" and the "Wannabees" - or those registered as status Indians under the *Indian Act* and the non-status Indians who were asserting their rights under Canada's Constitution. The final score of this war game can only be zero, in this final attempted and internalized assault on Algonquin sovereignty, which I have come to understand as the second wave of genocide.

The defining dehumanizing moment for me in this battle to survive was an attempt on the part of the Band Council bureaucracy to evict me and my four year old daughter from a unfinished and mouse-infested home, known for not having drinkable water, on the reserve, in the middle of winter, even though I had been formally hired to work on these negotiations as the Communications Officer. My early job termination was due to lack of funding. I believe the attempted expulsion from the reserve was based on the simple fact that although I am an Algonquin, I am not recognized as a "status Indian" by the federal government. This is only one of the tactics employed by factions of the Algonquin Nation who were trying to sabotage

efforts for our nation to reorganize itself outside and beyond the constraint of what I have come to term the "Indian Extermination Act."

I am a singer/songwriter. So in conclusion I will leave you with the words to this song as to a testimonial of the how I see Canada's treatment of and relationship to the Algonquin Nation: my Nation.

"I have a story you may not have heard,
So listen carefully to my words,
Yes I'm hoping I can help you understand,
The Department of Indian Affairs keeps
their offices on stolen land.
Oh yeah,
The Department of Indian Affairs keeps
their offices on stolen land.

Well the King of England he said to me,
In the year 17and63,
That he recognized the people of the
Kichisibi.
Oh yeah,
He said he recognized the people of the
Kichisibi

Now I guess you're wondering where that
could be,
Let me get out a map I'm certain you'll
see,
It's the river flowing through Canada's
Capital City.
Oh yeah,
It's the river flowing through Canada's
Capital City

For over 200 and 30 years,
We've been fighting our anger,
We've been holding back tears,
And in less than 10 we're told you gotta
problem solve it my friend.
They said in less than ten you know you
gotta problem solve it my friend.

But what Canada didn't let you see,
Is that he still illegally occupies me
And no matter how much money you can
put on the old night stand....
It'll never be okay,

Until Canada gives back everything it took
away.
Oh yeah,
Canada give back everything you took
away.

Now the millenium has passed by me,
And the land is still waiting to be set free,
And the people, we've been dealt an unfair
hand....
Because Parliament hill you're still
squatting on Algonquin Land.
Oh yeah,
Parliament Hill you're still squatting on
my grandmothers land uh huh huh...

Parliament hill please stop squatting on
my grandchildren's land..."

REFERENCE

Sarazin, Greg. "220 Years of Broken Promises," *Drumbeat: Anger and Renewal in Indian Country*, Boyce Richardson, ed., Toronto: Summerhill Press and Assembly of First Nations, 1989, pp. 167-200.