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THE TRADITIONAL ROLE  
OF  
GOVERNANCE  
IN  
ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES  
**“MINO-BIMIMADSIWIN”**  
**NATIONHOOD**

PRESENTED BY: DARRELL BOISSONEAU, DIRECTOR  
Governance Advisory Services  
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR FIRST NATIONS GOVERNANCE

***"The first societies governed themselves aristocratically...The Indians of North America govern themselves this way even now, and their government is admirable."  
Rousseau***

I feel quite strongly that history must be placed in its proper context when exploring the impact the Three Fires Confederacy in the development of Turtle Island.

An argument must be made that there are alternatives to government involvement in the day-to-day affairs in Anishinaabe nations and they must be explored.

The following questions must be addressed as they focus on the needs of Anishinaabe nations generally speaking: What are the alternatives to Canadian government involvement in Anishinaabe nations? Do we look toward replacing present government bureaucratic apparatus with one that is more representative and responsive to Anishinaabe nations' needs and concerns? Do we create a political and government process that is accountable to Anishinaabe nations? Or do Anishinaabe nations reclaim and assert their sovereignty and assume stature similar to the European principalities of Liechtenstein, Andorra and Gibraltar? In answering these questions, Anishinaabe peoples will define the alternatives to Canadian government involvement and be the architects of our own future.

How can these alternatives be financed and are there practical approaches and to consider? Therefore, the question of economic and sustainable development has to be explored. From an historical perspective, Anishinaabe nations were largely responsible for building and sustaining the economies of Europe, the United States and Canada. In

light of this, Anishinaabe leadership understands that reclaiming the economic independence of Anishinaabe nations has to be a priority. More fundamental and straight to the heart of the matter is whether economic and sustainable development can take place within the context of government rules and obligations? What of partnerships, mergers, and joint ventures?

What of the massive debt load that many Anishinaabe nations shoulder? A large percentage of Anishinaabe nations shoulder large debt loads because of inadequate funding and unrealistic performance measures. There are similar circumstances that exist in developing and Third World countries as expressed by Luis Ignacio Silva (Lula), President of Brazil while a labour leader that:

“I will tell you that the Third World War has already started - a silent war, not for that reason any the sinister. This war is tearing down Brazil, Latin America and practically all the Third World. Instead of soldiers dying there are children starving; instead of thousands wounded, there is massive unemployment; instead of the destruction of bridges, there is the tearing down of factories, schools, hospitals, and entire economies.”<sup>1</sup> (George, 1988, P. 234)

This scenario repeats itself continuously in some Anishinaabe nations. I consider it simply irresponsible and criminal that the majority of people being added to the poverty line are children. We cannot continue to sit idly by as the lives of children are being destroyed. It is unacceptable. Further, unemployment on average hovers at approximately 80%-85% and there is the continued abrogation of Treaty and aboriginal rights. The situation doesn't improve as we continue to see poverty rear its ugly head creating a sinister spiral...the less you have, the less you can do, so the less you have...

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<sup>1</sup> Susan George, “A Fate Worse Than Debt” 1988

For Anishinaabe nations burdened by debt, government initiated policy and financial regimes support painful financial restructuring and austerity programs. In many instances the debt crisis leads to a growth crisis...living standards plummet...services decline and of course capital investment so critical for economic development is non-existent.

Are governance, sovereignty and self-determination the panacea or are they simple dreams, nothing more, nothing less? Are they ideals that can be achieved within the context of the Canadian constitution or must they be addressed in a completely separate forum? I firmly believe that by addressing each of these questions in their entirety, Anishinaabe nations can develop a “blueprint for the future.”

Is there enough political good will? I am not certain whether the Canadian body politic has the stomach or appetite for such gargantuan change. As well, we must be mindful of the fact that the young emerging leadership must deal with the growing frustration and unrest. The quite obviously, the freedom and resistance movement will have no recourse but to consider confrontation. Again, if the political will is not there, suggesting recommendations are a complete waste of time.

Blood-memory is the center of Anishinaabe strength. It is a strong thread that ties us...to our ancestors, to the earth and to our deep spiritual beliefs. Our Elders tell us about our innate ability to understand and absorb, our Anishinaabe values that have been with us since the beginning of time. They are our ceremonies, our songs and our language.

Chief Chi Basase proclaimed in 1880... “You do not know where you are going...unless you know from whence you came.” The Three Fires Confederacy is part

of all our history. We came together for historical; political; social; and spiritual purposes. The Confederacy met regularly throughout our history at locations that were major stopping places during the “Great Migration”... Madeline Island...Kichi ka be kong (Niagra Falls)...Spirit Island...Manitoulin Island...Michilimakanak...Thunder Mountain (Mount McKay)...Baw wa ting (Garden River).

The Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibway nations established the Confederacy in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century as a political, economic, military and spiritual alliance. Within the structure of the Confederacy, each of the three nations had a specific responsibility. The Potawatomi for example, were responsible for safekeeping the sacred fire, which symbolized independence and sovereignty; the Ottawa were responsible for the economic well-being as they provided for food, goods and supplies; and as the eldest brother and spiritual leader, the Ojibway had responsibility for the Midewiwin ceremonies, spiritual knowledge, traditions and safekeeping the Waterdrum (Little Boy Drum). All one needs to do to get a flavour for this statement is to look at the vast territory that the Ottawa, Potawatomi and Ojibway nations held and recognize their impact and role in the creation of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and the Treaty process as we know it today.

Historically, the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibway lived on the eastern Atlantic seaboard prior to our movement westward. In time, the Potawatomi made their home in the southern part of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan; the Ottawa established settlements along the shore of Lake Michigan and in southeastern Michigan; and the Ojibway flourished with settlements in the Upper and Lower Peninsula of the Kitchi Gami. (Great Lakes) The Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibway saw each other in the family context, with:

“The Ojibway being the eldest brother, the Ottawa the next oldest brother and the Potawatomi the younger brother.” (Confederacy, 2004, P. 4)<sup>2</sup>As well, they spoke similar dialects of Anishinaabemowin, shared similar cultures and beliefs, and often shared the same land territories.

“By 1701, the Anishinaabe controlled most of lower Michigan. By the 1800’s, they were living in Ontario, Saskatchewan, Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio. No other nations have ever controlled such a vast area of land as the Confederacy did at this time in history. They were the largest and the most powerful tribe in the Great Lakes area.” (Tanner, 1976, P. 14-15)<sup>3</sup>

During this period, the Three Fires Confederacy enabled the economies of Britain, France and the United States (U.S.) to expand. In fact, the relationship between the Confederacy, Britain, France and the U.S. was defined and expressed from an economic perspective. Because of the it’s importance to the survival of the early British, French and United States settlements, its not surprising that each non-Anishinaabe nations sought to protect their fragile existence and economic relationship by entering into numerous political and military arrangements with the Confederacy.

However, as the economic competition between these non-Anishinaabe nations heated up, the Three Fires Confederacy found itself embroiled in matters of international political and economic/commercial intrigue at different points in time. Further, as European immigration continued to increase, the immigrants inevitably brought with them their animosities and history, which were often the precursor to war. Not surprisingly, the Three Fires Confederacy soon found itself involved in all of the four

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<sup>2</sup> Confederacy of Three Fires: “*A History of the Anishinabek Nation.*” (May 20, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> Tanner, Helen Hornbeck. “*The Ojibways.*”1976

major conflicts (French and Indian Wars) from 1698-1763.

From a political perspective one must recognize that during this period the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibway were seen as sovereign nations with a system of governance that had existed from the beginning of time and as Rousseau stated, had no parallel. Each of the three nations were self-governing, self-determining and had the ability to make independent decisions. Given the established nation-to-nation protocol, it was quite clear that non-Anishinaabe governments considered the nations of the Three Fires, sovereign governments under the rule of international law. Article 1, Section 8 of the United States Constitution recognized as much.

Although Anishinaabe nations began their relationship with the United States government as sovereign governments recognized as such by the numerous treaties that were into, the powers of Anishinaabe sovereignty have been limited from time-to-time. However, one must that the powers that Anishinaabe nations now exercise are not delegated powers, but rather “inherent powers of a limited dependent sovereignty which has not been extinguished by Federal action.

Chief Minivavana at a meeting at Fort Vincennes in 1779 made very pointed references to what he thought was the nature of the Treaty relationship when he stated:

“We are not your slaves. Our ancestors left these lakes, these woods and mountains, to us. They are our inheritance; and we will part with them to none. Your nation supposes that we, like the white people, cannot live without bread, and pork and beef! But, you ought to know that He, the Great Spirit and Master of

Life, has provided food for us, in these spacious lakes, and on these woody mountains.” (Minutes of Conference, Fort Vincennes, 1779)<sup>4</sup>

This fundamental difference in the understanding of the Treaty relationship has created many problems for Anishinaabe nations as even today the Canadian government does not or simply refuses to understand the Anishinaabe perspective. Obviously, from an Anishinaabe perspective, the question of "ownership of land" and property rights will become central to the notion of sovereignty.

Philosophically speaking it seems inconceivable to “own” land that belongs to all human beings. How can one have ownership of Mother Earth?.

It is important to understand that within the Three Fires Confederacy system of traditional governance; both leadership and the clan system determine the responsibility of each citizen. Interestingly, the nature of Anishinaabe governance from an inherent right perspective, speaks to such issues as governance, self-determination and sovereignty. Nothing has changed really. The only significant difference would be the Canadian government's concept of sovereignty. Consider that during the initial stages of immigration, the nations of the Confederacy were seen as sovereign under the guidelines of international law. Today, Canada attempts to treat them as something less.

Despite the impacts of colonization, the nations of the Three Fires Confederacy continue to press for recognition of their inherent right to independence and sovereignty. From a Three Fires Confederacy point of view, great leaders and war chiefs such as Pontiac, Tecumseh, and Shingwauk sought to establish a unified opposition to the social,

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<sup>4</sup> Minutes of Conference. Fort Vincennes. (1779)

economic and political changes that were threatening the Anishinaabe way of life.

Traditionally, the majority of chiefs will trace their heritage to "an apical ancestor, Gitcheojeedebun, or Great Crane, who had been the Sault head chief."<sup>5</sup> (Chute, 1998, P. 10)

"A leader who was chosen by consent of all his family members represented each family in the village. Responsible for expressing opinions and protecting the interests of their families, leaders were chosen for the ability to deal with outside groups. In matters of importance, such as warfare with a neighbouring group, moving villages to new locations, or threats to peaceful relations within the village itself, the village leaders assembled in council to decide on a course of action. Decisions were not reached by majority vote, but by the agreement of all members of the council, and most often, by the agreement of the entire family who supported the leader."<sup>6</sup> (Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986.P.5)

Leaders in traditional practice did not give any commands as most decisions of national concern and importance were made by consensus. Therefore, it is easy to understand that once a decision was made it was almost always carried out.

As well, it's important to note that each nation within the Confederacy was an autonomous and independent political unit that would come together during conflict to strengthen the alliance. An important teaching of the Anishinaabe peoples focused on the interconnected relationship between the nations and clans. Cooperation between clans

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<sup>5</sup> Chute, Janet E. The Legacy of Shingwaukonse (A Century of Native Leadership)

<sup>6</sup> Clifton, James A., Cornell George L., McClurken James M. People of the Three Fires (The Ottawa, Potawatomi and Ojibway of Michigan)

and their members was seen as necessary to survival because clan members were dependent upon each other. Therefore, it was often not surprising that an individual or clan attempting to assume too much power or wealth was seen as threat to these relationships. (Which were specifically defined by a complex set of principles and teachings that linked all people in terms of kinship)

***"The trading people of the Confederacy and middle-brother."***

The Ottawa recognized the importance of the need to behave in accordance with the laws and Seven Teachings of the Midewiwin Lodge. This unique form of nationalism created a sense of shared identity from the time of creation.

One of first fundamental teachings in Ottawa society was to respect. As such, no one individual could determine the fate of another. Again, decisions that affected the entire nation were arrived at by consensus; the second fundamental teaching was that all citizens of the nation must share. Survival of course, depended on supporting and being supported by your clan as sharing was the social security and safety net of the day. By sharing, individuals and the clan gained respect and prestige. Very often, a person's wealth meant that he simply had more to share; therefore he gave more of what he had. The emphasis on sharing was so strong that almost no interaction could be carried on without it; and to reiterate, the third teaching concerned the interconnected relationship of the Ottawa and other nations of the Three Fires Confederacy with the natural world.

It is obvious to see why the clan system was intrinsically important to Ottawa society. The Ottawa were organized into four major clans all of whom spoke the same language, practiced and believed in the same traditions and customs. As well, it was

the responsibility of these clans to maintain a close alliance in trade, ceremonies and political activities. The use of the clan system ensured an obligation to provide safety and comfort through the provision of food, assistance, shelter and hospitality.

The entrenchment of strong clan ties and sharing of resources was fundamental to Ottawa society and ensured the survival of the nation. This was demonstrated in their shared relationship through the use of the Ododem, which means, "I have him for my family mark. The Ododem was a representation of the animal from which each Ottawa group was descended."<sup>7</sup>(Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P.6) The importance of the clan system cannot be over-stated. For example, within each of the Three Fires nations, the clan controlled hunting territories, properties or ceremonial knowledge. Therefore, the clans had considerable influence and were responsible for the essential tasks in life.

"Clan relationships and descent were traced in two ways. Through the mother (Matrilineal) or through the father (Patrilineal). Matrilineal kinship systems usually operated in agricultural societies like that of the Ottawa's southern neighbors, the Huron. The Ojibway were a patrilineal society as well. Men were food producers in a hunting and fishing economy, their central location, the Ottawa maintained a set of rules that allowed them to marry into both neighbouring groups, as their emphasis on trade along the line of kinship was important. We've seen that in some nations, every village was a separate clan.

In other societies, several clans lived in the same village. For example, each Ojibway village was originally composed of a single clan; large Huron

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

villages on the other hand were made up of several clans. The Ottawa in this respect was very flexible. The families living in each large village could be loosely linked into clans. As an example, two of the four major villages, which formed the Ottawa nation - the Kiskakon or cut tails, a name, which refers to the bear, and the Sinago or black, squirrels-were identified by the animals from which they claimed descent."<sup>8</sup> (Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P.7)

The beginning of French immigration to Turtle Island in the 1600's saw the French become a major trading and military partner with the Ottawa. In 1608, Samuel de Champlain founded Stadacona (Quebec City) and established trade relations shortly thereafter.

"Trading relationships were essential to the Ottawa way of life. The word "Ota"wa" as noted earlier means either "to buy" or "to trade," Ottawa men traveled throughout the Great Lakes acting as middlemen for the Ojibway to the north and the Huron to the south. The Ottawa supplied the Ojibway with their own and the Huron's surplus corn and received in return the furs that they traded to the Huron. Each Ottawa clan had its own trade route, which was either a geographical path or waterway and a set of relationships with trading partners. These trade relationships were so important that marriage was often arranged to turn trading partners into clan members and thus extend clan ties.

Clan members who maintained that the gift exchange and clan ties assured safe passage for the traders and the supply of goods could only use the trade

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

routes. Members of the clan who controlled the trade route used it only with the permission of the clan leader, usually the same person who represented them in the council and was respected for his personal powers. Trespassers along the trade route could be charged a toll of furs; grain or other trade goods or they might be killed for their trespass."<sup>9</sup> (Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P. 11-12)

The French recognized that to have access to this wealth it was necessary to have established trade relations. "During the 1600's, the Ottawa enjoyed the benefits of a successful trade relationship with both the Huron and French. As the importance of trade increased in the 17th century competition became a factor."<sup>10</sup>(Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P. 13)

As the Iroquois Wars wreaked havoc with the economy, trading networks and relationships, one of the first serious casualties was Huronia, which was almost completely destroyed by 1650. Those that survived took advantage of their trade relationship by being absorbed into the Ottawa nation. The Ottawa realizing the danger and threat the Iroquois represented called upon their alliance with the Ojibway and Potawatomi to deal with this threat. Further, the Ottawa utilized the clan system to the extent that it helped establish criteria for determining who was and who was not Ottawa. Interestingly, the question of citizenship raises fundamental differences between Anishinaabe nations and the federal government even today.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

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**Note: From a nationhood perspective, it is extremely important for Anishinaabe to reclaim responsibility for determining citizenship. We simply cannot continue to sit idly by and allow the federal government to run roughshod over this specific right.**

One practice I found particularly interesting was the fact the Ottawa charged a toll for use of their waterways. This is particularly telling because no one could reach the vast and rich fur-producing territories without traveling through Ottawa territory. Therefore it is not surprising that control of these water routes gave the Ottawa a virtual monopoly over the profitable fur trade. It should be noted that during this period (1650 -1700), the Ottawa were one the best-known and most successful trading nations. Not surprisingly, their wealth and prestige was unprecedented. The Ottawa did not rest on their laurels as they continued to develop their trade network and one of the fundamental principles to this success was the flexibility of their political organization, which allowed them to adapt to new territory without sacrificing their cultural identity or losing their strength.

***"The Fire Keepers and Youngest Brother "***

The Three Fires Confederacy was an essential element in the Potawatomi's social, political, economic and spiritual fabric as well. The Potawatomi's responsibility within the structure of the Confederacy was to protect the Sacred Fire as it represented the sovereignty and independence of each nation. The term "Potawatomi" itself translated from Anishinaabemowin means "fire man or keeper."

Leadership within the Potawatomi nation was the responsibility of the citizens as a collective; therefore leaders and/or headmen were expected to embody all of the Potawatomi's traditional values.

"The leadership of the Potawatomi nation showed remarkable political skills and steadfastness in their dealings with the French and the United States. As an example, the leadership once they had met in the council debated an issue and achieved a consensus position and agreement on policy would adhere to their positions thus making their alliances reliable and durable. The French valued their alliance with the Potawatomi and by the 1680s regarded as their strongest ally. Their enemies recognized them to be a formidable and dangerous adversary."<sup>11</sup>(Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P. 41)

From an economic perspective the Potawatomi as well, were quite successful, as their highly developed canoe technology became the basis for their successful local and long-distance trading relationships that enabled them to establish and increase their economic success. Therefore, it is easy to see how they acquired greater control over the major avenues of water transportation. These trade routes thus became major links in the development of trade, which stretched from Turtle Island to Europe.

It was the norm then and it is still factually relevant that with increased population and greater technology comes military power. The point being that there are greater human resources for trade and military action. Of course, all of this contributed to a higher standard of living, military power and prestige for the Potawatomi nation and its citizens.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

"The combination of technological, economic, political, geographic and demographic advantages led to the greater influence of the Potawatomi in the 17th and 18th centuries. The fusion of canoe technology with the mastery of key geographic locations was intrinsic to increased Potawatomi influence. Increased population provided the means obviously. Strong alliances with the French and the Three Fires Confederacy were other reasons for increased influence."<sup>12</sup>(Clifton, Comell & McClurken, 1986, P. 43)

Potawatomi institutions served as a vehicle for the mobilization and utilization of resources thereby creating a sense of identity and purpose. As a matter of consequence, the Potawatomi developed social and political organizations that encouraged expansion. Further, the Potawatomi's nation strength lay in its ability to unify separate communities into one society and withstand any challenge and threat that the social, physical and political environment posed. This ability is interesting because each Potawatomi community was inherently independent and had the flexibility to make decisions in most areas. However, when it came to matters of the national significance, a decision-making process was mobilized.

"A Great Council meeting was called. All of the Potawatomi communities came together to debate this potentially damaging controversy. The Wkamek (leaders) assembled and debated the issue with Nicholas Perrot, a French diplomat. Behind each "Wkama" (leader) sat his clan members, who were there to show support and monitor the "Wkama's" behavior in Council. Throughout the debate many different positions were discussed, in the end, however, they reached

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

the consensus. One that was acceptable to all of the communities and all of its citizens. “Wkamek”, elders and youth alike...

Once the decision was reached, a Speaker was selected to chant the words of the new agreement. Then, one by one, from eldest to youngest in turn, all the leaders stood to sing out their acceptance of the Speaker's proclamation. A consensus was reached and publicly accepted by all those in attendance. There would be no dissenting minority and no opposition was tolerated thereafter."<sup>13</sup> (Clifton, Comell & McClurken, 1986, P.44)

Councils and consensus seeking public debates were held regularly at the community level concerning issues of national importance. As well, decisions affecting clans and communities were discussed in public forums. It stands to reason that once decisions were made by consensus rather than by majority vote, there was little room for dispute or frustration among a minority on any given issue.

This emphasis on public debate, consensus, sharing and decentralization of political power was indicative of the value the Potawatomi and other nations of the Three Fires placed on equality in the political decision-making process and the distribution of economic resources. Today, there is much discussion regarding the lack of accountability and transparency within Anishinaabe Nations.

**Note: The Conservative/Alliance government and the Canadian Taxpayers Association have made this their "call-to-arms" and rallying point. Their ignorance**

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

**concerning traditional systems of governance and decision-making is most telling, however, it must be said that traditionally our systems of governance were the most fluid and inclusive of any system anywhere.**

Again, the essence and soul of each individual Potawatomi was found in the context of the clan. Similar to the Ottawa and Ojibway, the Potawatomi had at their core the Ototeman (clan system):

"Clan descent was always patrilineal. There were approximately forty-two Ototeman identified. Before the great migrations each clan represented a separate community. It should be noted that it was forbidden to marry within each's clan. Therefore, when women married, they moved to live with their husband's people. By the late 1700s, larger communities had two or more clans.

The clans also had sub-clans as can be seen within the large Golden Sucker clan, which resulted in the creation of two smaller clans, the Red Suckers and Black Suckers. Sub-clans still retained their loyalty to their original clan.

The forty-two Potawatomi clans were organized into six larger divisions called phratries. These were named the Great Lake, Thunderbird (Sky), Man (Human), and Bear, Buffalo and Wolf divisions. Each of the phratry contained two to eleven clans who often cooperated, in conducting and arranging ceremonies. The clans within each phratry had names and emblems that indicated their affiliation. The Great Lake phratry, for example, includes the "Kitchigumi" (Great Lake), "Gigo" (Fish), "Wasi" (Bullhead), "Name" (Sturgeon), "Mshike"

(Turtle) and “Nmapena” clans as well as others called Frog, Crab, Golden Sucker, Black Sucker and Red Sucker.”<sup>14</sup> (Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P. 45)

The importance of the clan was deeply rooted as each clan established the identity of each individual and ensured loyalty and obligations that each clan member had to fulfill.

"The Potawatomi traced their descent through the male line. Kinship ties extended back from the individual to his father's father, and down through the generations to his son's sons. The individual was also linked to the clans of his mother's male relatives, her father, brothers, and their sons, but not to the clans other sisters and their children.”<sup>15</sup> (Clifton, Cornell & McClurken, 1986, P. 47)

For the Potawatomi, the clan was a corporation in the truest sense as each clan had responsibility for certain activities, such as a corporation with its own distinctive set of personal names as well as its own property. For example, the Great Sea clan members had the sole right to build canoes and only members of the Buffalo clan could claim the privilege of organizing the hunt for buffalo.

### ***"The Spiritual Leader and Eldest Brother "***

The Ojibway were the most powerful nation on Turtle Island. It was said that the sun rose and fell on Ojibway territory. Rousseau in his treatise would have no argument in recognizing the greatness of the Ojibway nation, He stated, "a body politic may be measured in two ways-either by the extent of its territory or the number of its people...a

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

right relation which makes the state really great."<sup>16</sup> (Rousseau, P. 11) The Ojibway nation as did the Ottawa and the Potawatomi, saw the clan system as fundamental to its society. As we have read, the clan system provided a sense of place, belonging and knowledge. To the Ojibway, the notion of sharing one's wealth was seen as a practical and generous facet that ensured the well being of all people rather than just a few.

The fish, loon, marten, crane and bear clans served as figureheads for the five great families of the Ojibway. Again, identity was based on membership in either one of the five clans. Even today, many Ojibway can still trace their ancestry back to these original five clans.

Elders and men who had gained a reputation for providing for the needs of the community often provided leadership amongst the Ojibway.

"The Ogima (chief) was generous and fair-minded. Thus, the Ojibway followed them because they respected their judgment in civil and political matters. An Ogima would almost always prove himself as a 'war chief before assuming the higher status of a civil leader. The Ogima exercised his traditional powers that granted them prestige. As well, it should be noted that other leadership roles existed, but the role of civil chief being the most prominent.

All roles were achieved rather than ascribed. These included that of Kekedowenine (spokesman), an advocate who acted whenever disputes arose within the nation.

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<sup>16</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, Social Contract: Book II

Tebahkoonegawenene, (judge) in such disputes, and the Ani.ke.ogima(sub-chief). Other status positions existed within the Grand Medicine Society or Midewiwin. Midewiwin ceremonies focused on the individual and the world. The Oskabewis (speaker and messenger); the Mishinowa (economic aide to the chief) who had the responsibility for the distribution of gifts and supplies."<sup>17</sup>(Chute, 1998, P. 15)

An important point of clarification at this point concerns the position of chief. There was no election process as we know it today simply because chiefs gained prestige and renown for their courage in battle and for their "medicine" powers. To reiterate most of the Chiefs traced their genealogy from an apical ancestor, "Gitcheojeedebun", or Great Crane.

"Of all echo-makers, the crane was most eminent and for this reason was selected to symbolize leadership and direction. The call that he uttered was as infrequent as it was unique. So unusual was the tone and pitch of the voice that all other creatures suspended their own utterances to hearken to the crane. When the crane calls, all listen."<sup>18</sup> (Johnston, 1976, P. 61)

Today, the position of chief has become an amalgam of leader, despot and politician. The very nature and image of the position within Ojibway nations has created a very distorted and oppressive picture of the position. Traditionally, each extended clan recognized a headman, the "ani.ke.ogima" (sub-chief) who would at times serve as a "spokesman" or "War Chief." For whatever reason, it was very difficult for a middle-aged

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<sup>17</sup> Chute, Janet E. The Legacy of Shingwaukonse (A Century of Native Leadership)

<sup>18</sup> Johnston, Basil. Ojibway Heritage.

man to rise above the position of “ani.ke.ogima” to become a head chief. It should be understood that factional strife over any issue was a rarity. Today it seems that government is quick to pounce on division and political differences to exacerbate strife within a community.

To the Ojibway, the Head Chief was a father figure and a protector. He negotiated on behalf of his people. The issues that many leaders were facing during the time of Pontiac, Tecumseh and Shingwaukonse are not much different than what leaders face today. They emphasized sovereignty, the importance of treaties, economic independence and political self-determination. They also gave great importance to land and resources as they took responsibility for the stewardship of these resources. From a non-spiritual perspective, power is of course dependent upon a hierarchical structure. Often we equate power with autonomy and self-sufficiency. Although, we expect each individual to be self-sufficient, we recognize that it is the responsibility of those with power to assist others in becoming self-sufficient. On the flip side, speaking from a more traditional and spiritual perspective, sharing was one of the Teachings/Laws that the Ojibway held sacred. Therefore, the role and position of Chief was seen as one that sought to take responsibility for the citizens of the nation.

"An Ojibway root, *debenima*, has been variously translated as 'boss,' 'master,' 'the one in charge,' or 'the one in control.' But the favoured translations of a sensitive bilingual was 'those I am responsible for.' The idea of bossing is generally rejected, as is the idea of competition, yet both must occur at times. It can be seen that the areas of social control, of leadership and political structure, of the various cooperating social units necessary to kinship organization and

subsistence activities - all these must be balanced somehow to accord with the rules of the system about power."<sup>19</sup>(Chute, 1998, P. 17-18)

As we've seen with the Ottawa and Potawatomi, decision-making was done by consensus rather than by authoritative action. These decisions of course would vary according to the concept of self-sufficiency and productivity. Today it seems that dissension and divisions are the result of having limited options open to our citizens. Very often Anishinaabe nations are faced with situations where citizens do not work together to further the collective good and to reiterate government and outside forces are quick to take advantage of this dissension and division to undermine the leadership.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The purpose of this paper is to determine and clarify the role and responsibilities of leadership, decision-making and the clans within the Three Fires Confederacy governance structure. What does traditional leadership imply? Or more succinctly what does it mean? What is the nature of the Three Fires Confederacy's traditional structure and clan system in relation to traditional governance, self-determination and sovereignty? Great civil leaders and war chiefs such as Pontiac (Otter), Tecumseh (Panther), and Shingwauk (Crane) had a definitive role within the structure of the Three Fire Council as was evident in their organization and unified opposition to the social, economic and political changes that threatened the traditional *Anishinaabe* way of life.

Do we as Anishinaabe consider ourselves independent and sovereign peoples or Canadian citizens?

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<sup>19</sup> Chute, Janet E. The Legacy of Shingwaukonse (A Century of Native Leadership)

As we have seen, the nature of sovereignty has been explored throughout the world in many of the former colonies, protectorates and principalities. Of course each vary in degree of their sovereignty and independence.. In a discussion with Eddie Benton-Benais, we discussed the nature of Anishinaabe sovereignty and its endless possibilities; I brought up the European experience. He was quick to respond that the European experience was good for the Europeans. Our freedom movement needed to be Anishinaabe in spirit and intent. However, for the purpose of this discussion I would like to reference the status of these former colonies and the degree of independence and sovereignty each has achieved, as I think each can lend some reference point.

- Isle of Man is a British dependency, an internally self-governing dependent territory. It is however not part of the United Kingdom. There is a free movement of industrial and agricultural goods in trade with the European Union. As well, the Isle does not give or receive monies from the Union and is therefore considered fiscally independent
- Channel Islands (Aldemey, Guernsey, Herm, Jersey and Sark) are self-governing British dependencies as well, with legislative assemblies, a local administration, their own laws and courts. As is the case with Gibraltar, the United Kingdom assumes responsibility for defence and international relations
- Greenland, part of the Kingdom of Denmark. It recognizes the Danish Royal Family, the Constitution of Denmark, Denmark's foreign policy, defence, judicial system and currency. However, Greenland does exercise a certain amount of autonomy through "home rule" which was legislated and approved in 1979.

The nature and organization of principalities are somewhat similar to the island protectorates.

- Monaco, a constitutional monarchy governed by a Prince.
- One of the world's smallest countries, Liechtenstein is described in its own constitution as a "constitutional hereditary monarchy" It has a Prince as head of state that governs with the people.

Other examples of smaller republics and dependencies include San Marino, Vatican City and Ceuta and Melilla (small Spanish enclaves) that were granted limited autonomy in 1994.

The reference to this madness is simple. The islands and principalities each have a degree of independence and sovereignty. Further, each was a former colony and each has developed a process and strategy that has allowed them to gain their independence from their colonizer., I believe that if we continue to travel down the path of freedom and independence they can be of some reference as we reclaim our sovereignty and develop our own blueprint and strategy. Further. I wanted to try and give some face to the Canadian-Anishinaabe relationship that was once described by Chief Justice John Marshall as, "like no other in the world."

The Treaty period recognized the sovereignty and independence our people. The United States ended the treaty period in 1871, while Canada on the other hand began its treaty movement in earnest August 3, 1871 with the signing of Treaty One. However, throughout the course of European history on Turtle Island we have seen the evolution of

Anishinaabe nations from sovereign, independent Nations, to "domestic, dependent Nations" and finally to a practical relationship that for all intensive purposes "resembles that of a ward to his guardian." Logically, it would seem that Anishinaabe nations should have the same political status as San Marino, Monaco, Liechtenstein and so on. Therefore, we must get on with the task. "We can begin by asking whether constitutional reform is possible?"

Contrary to what the Canadian government believes, we could return to the constitutional table to press for fundamental change as to how our nations are treated. Are there practical alternatives that could utilize existing processes and affect change and redefine our relationship with the federal and provincial governments? This process is an issue of moral, ethical and political importance to Canada because it enables it to "complete the circle of confederation" as the Inuit have referred to it.

A declaration of sovereignty would support the concept of a constituent or constitutional assembly. We presently have the organizational and structural infrastructure and capacity to do as much in the regional, national and numbered Treaty organizations. (Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, Assembly of First Nations, Treaty Three) A constitutional convention could be used to begin the constitutional building and amendment process. It is practical from a historical perspective, as the United States held its own constitutional assembly in 1787 when developing their constitution. Other constituent assemblies of some renown were the Indian and Pakistani assemblies during the time of Ghandi.

A constituent assembly would allow for the creation of an Anishinaabe parliament. The template for this concept would be found in the Sami peoples of Northern Norway, Sweden and Finland.

“The Sami Parliament in Norway (Samething) is in large part the result of the Norwegian Sami Rights Committee, which was formed in 1980. The committee has 18 members, representing different interests and settlements, and was given the mandate of assessing the political, economic and cultural needs of the Sami. It allowed for a Sami parliament. Each of 13 constituencies returns three members, elected directly by those on the Sami electoral register. In Finland, the Finnish Sami Parliament has 20 members elected from four Sami constituencies, and two each from four Sami local councils.” (Hawkes & Morse, 1991, P. 181)

Using this scenario of a Constituent Assembly and Anishinaabe parliament, our people would elect representatives in a national decision-making forum, which would include the participation in the constitutional reform process. Each Anishinaabe citizen would have one vote. Seats in this parliamentary process would be allocated proportionally.

The point to all this is very simple. The nature and framework for traditional governance, leadership and accountability principles were going to be determined by, firstly a Standing Committee that did not have a clue as to what Anishinaabe peoples were demanding and secondly, by a Parliament that is largely predisposed to ignoring its obligations to Anishinaabe nations. It would have been better served by providing opportunities for Anishinaabe nations to discuss and to decide the future by referendum.

This was the process that the Canadian government implemented when attempting to move the Charlottetown Accord.

If by some misbegotten chance we feel that our needs and future would better be served by remaining within Canada the Anishinaabe agenda would then include Senate and parliamentary reform with proportional representation. The other is guaranteed representation in the House of Commons. The Maori in New Zealand is a workable structure and framework. The Maori elect their MPs from 4 different constituencies. In any event, the possibilities are endless. What is required is a definitive strategy that will determine the direction we take, how we get to where we want to go and whether we chose to consider ourselves Canadian or citizens of our respective nations. This is the starting point.

Anishinaabe peoples continue to honour and respect the “sprit and intent” of the Treaty process and nation-to-nation relationship continued to display good faith in their relationship with other Nations. There was a commitment to peace and to share. The Treaties spoke to this. There were considerable concessions made by Anishinaabe peoples in return for commitments by the Crown. Sadly, the federal government has sought to renege on the Treaties and do dishonour to their predecessors.

The fundamental principle underlying a charter for sovereignty, self-determination and governance is the concept of nationhood. A nation may choose to join with other nations in different structures or it may choose to act independently and exercise political authority. The nation however is free to determine its future.

