Haudenosaunee Women Lacrosse Players: Making Meaning and Embodying Sovereignty

by

Sharity L. Bassett
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Abstract

Since the 1970s lacrosse has become the fastest growing sport in North America. It is now played by teams from six continents and over 50 nations at the international competitive level and is poised to be an Olympic sport in 2028. Also, since the 1970s, Haudenosaunee communities have worked at the international level to claim lacrosse as an important part of Haudenosaunee culture and medicine. The number of Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse has burgeoned since the 1980s. Haudenosaunee girls and women articulate what is healing for them through the contemporary game, while, with the help of Haudenosaunee knowledge holders, making distinctions from the medicinal game only played by men. Because they cannot seamlessly claim lacrosse as their medicine game, as the Iroquois Nationals and other men’s teams do, Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players must articulate some of the most nuanced understandings of tradition, which places them in a position of defining how Haudenosaunee tradition functions contemporarily and into the future. This qualitative project examines the context within which Haudenosaunee women’s embodied sovereignty and meaning-making regarding their own participation in lacrosse is situated, namely, settler nation state logics that discursively and literally work to remove Haudenosaunee women from their land bases and threaten their corporeal integrity, the contested spaces of defining traditionalism and defining gender relations and sovereignty within Haudenosaunee communities, and the ways in which western feminism tends to misrepresent Haudenosaunee women. This dissertation represents the ways in which Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players are defining the traditional Haudenosaunee game of lacrosse through their participation in the contemporary game, as well as the ways in which Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players, rather than becoming more
assimilated into western culture, are embodying Haudenosaunee sovereignty as they move through the contested spaces of settler nation states and travel internationally to compete.
"There are just some things that I am going to say that you are going to have to accept."

This is one of the first things that Tonawanda Seneca Clan mother and elder, Berdie Hill said when I sat down at the diner on the Tonawanda Reservation to interview her in 2012 about why she believed Haudenosaunee girls and women should not play lacrosse. I knew of the controversy within Haudenosaunee communities regarding girls and women playing the game of lacrosse, a game well documented as originating with the Haudenosaunee. I had read about the controversy in a 2007 New York Times article written by Aimee Berg entitled, "Lacrosse – Cradle of a Sport Has Crossed a Gender Line." I had chosen to write about the controversy in a year-long class on qualitative research methods, largely because I felt Berg’s representation of Onondaga Clan mothers holding back young women from progress was problematic in its incompleteness, simplicity, homogeneity, and how it superimposed western feminist tropes onto Haudenosaunee cultural complexities. Berdie Hill graciously agreed to interview with me for the class project, (that would later become this dissertation project), on the one condition that there would be some things that I would need to hear at face value and not question. I agreed. Berdie was the first person I interviewed for the class and dissertation. My western feminist sensibilities were challenged by her emphatic proclamations that Haudenosaunee girls and women could cause damage to themselves and, by extension, to their communities if they played. Western feminism has long held up Iroquois culture as privileging and valuing women, especially politically. Feminist historians such as Sally Roesch Wagner write and speak prolifically about the influence that Iroquois women and society had on euro-western feminists of the early 20th century. This influence is widely noted, showing up at the United Nations at a panel entitled, Haudenosaunee Influence on the Women’s Rights (April 2018). Others such as Elizabeth Tooker
(1984) refuting that they ever had this power is further evidence of its articulation within the historical and anthropological record. There is this seemingly glaring contradiction when it comes to prohibiting Haudenosaunee women and girls from playing lacrosse. This paradox is what I examine in this dissertation. Berdie was incredibly effective at relaying the depths of what is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities, and I left with a glimpse of an understanding of why Berdie and others felt that Haudenosaunee girls and women should not play. More accurately, I should say, I felt a glimpse of what is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities in holding onto their cultures and traditions. I took seriously Berdie's understanding that Haudenosaunee girls and women play because "they don't know [why it is against our culture that they play]. If they knew they wouldn't play." The depth with which Berdie conveyed what is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities, as well as the deep roots that lacrosse has within Haudenosaunee culture and tradition, informs this project. Her voice – her power and conviction – is in my head when I present on this material, and when others echo her belief. What she withholds in our interview becomes as crucial as what she shares. I take on the task in this dissertation of relaying that which is so critically important to Haudenosaunee women in regards to preserving Haudenosaunee culture for future generations. Importantly, there is no one Haudenosaunee women's perspective

**Definitions of Lacrosse**

In September 2015, the Onondaga Nation, adjacent to Syracuse, New York, hosted 13 nations for the World Indoor Lacrosse Championships (WILC), the Men's Iroquois Nationals coming in second place. The Onondaga Nation hosting WILC – after a 100-year ban on Haudenosaunee men playing internationally (1890-1990) and the Iroquois Nationals not being

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¹ Berdie Hill, Interview by author, December 5, 2012.
able to travel on Iroquois passports to compete (2010) – marks a critical moment in Haudenosaunee sovereignty. Lacrosse is one of the fastest growing sports in North America, and although Haudenosaunee communities are overwhelmingly supportive of their men playing and publicly laying claim to the game as their sport, there exists a controversy over whether or not Haudenosaunee women and girls should play, and what it means when they do. Haudenosaunee creation narratives locate lacrosse as a healing ceremony, given so that men can provide medicine for the communities and settle disputes. Haudenosaunee men currently play the medicine game of lacrosse during winter ceremonies or whenever there is a call for healing of an individual. Haudenosaunee communities agree that only Haudenosaunee men should play the medicine game of lacrosse.

This dissertation looks at what the internal controversy regarding Haudenosaunee women and girls playing says about lacrosse as a Haudenosaunee game as a source of healing, how definitions of ‘traditional' and gender are worked out through the game, and how women enact sovereignty through the game. The relationship between the traditional medicinal game and the contemporary game is part of the internal controversy over girls and women playing. In this section, I pull apart the different kinds of lacrosse to begin to describe them. However, as chapter two will show, how these iterations overlap and the degree to which Haudenosaunee community members conceptualize the iterations as distinct or not distinct inform this controversy. The contemporary game of lacrosse has its roots in historical lacrosse, contemporary iterations including field and box lacrosse. The contemporary rules for men's field lacrosse have their origins in a pamphlet distributed by Montreal dentist William Beers in 1860. Box lacrosse originated in Canada in the 1930s and is dominated by men's teams, though several women whom I interviewed have played on box lacrosse teams and more women’s box lacrosse teams
are emerging. The differences between women's lacrosse and both men's field and box lacrosse are significant. In both men's field lacrosse and men's and women's box lacrosse, there is substantial bodily contact, precipitating the need for pads and helmets. Box lacrosse, played exclusively indoors, has smaller boundaries, more checking, and focuses more on defense. In this dissertation, when referencing women's lacrosse, I am speaking specifically of field lacrosse.

Haudenosaunee communities consider field lacrosse to be more similar to the historical and traditional game because of its more expansive field and required agility. Some Haudenosaunee people believe that women’s lacrosse is even more so aligned with the traditional game, focusing as it does on offense and that there is no checking – meaning no pads or helmets required. This point of view is present in the following narrative given by Six Nations Mohawk scholar, Dawn Martin Hill:

D: At the same time, I was watching [my daughter’s team] play, a lot of old men used to come out when the girls were playing. And I used to wonder, why are these old guys here. And I’d say, do you have a granddaughter playing? No. And then I would kind of be like, ew. I’m not sure I like this. I didn’t know what was going on. And then I noticed more old men coming. One of them followed [my daughter] to every game. He was her biggest fan. So we were parked next to each other at one game, and I asked him why do you come to the women's field lacrosse when there's the men's. And he said because the men aren't playing it with the spirit anymore and the women are.

S: Wow.

D: Yeah. He said this is the way it was meant – look at their skill. They're doing amazing things, jumping. He said they're playing the game the way it was intended, not for money and adulation. It's not the reason these girls are out there. It's the real deal.

Martin-Hill goes onto describe an increase of elders coming to the girls’ games, admiring their grace and skill with the ball, saying that watching it was “peaceful and beautiful” without

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“swearing or scrapping.” Her narrative is a further example of how Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse in increasing numbers is calling Haudenosaunee communities to more deeply discuss meaning when it comes to defining this contemporary game in cultural (specifically historical and traditional) terms.

**Contemporary Lacrosse.** As the contemporary game of lacrosse grows and spreads beyond its continent of origin, it risks losing its Indigenous identity. There is a strained relationship between contemporary accounts of women in lacrosse and links to its historical roots in those same representations. In an article entitled, “Celebrating the Past, Shaping the Future: Native American women in sport,” (1999) Susan E. Keith describes the importance and challenges of including Native women lacrosse players in the National Association for Girls & Women in Sport (NAGWS). Inclusivity of Native women lacrosse players into NAGWS, according to Keith, acknowledges lacrosse’s Native roots and celebrates women’s leadership roles in the past. Under her heading, *Celebrating the Past*, Keith makes mention of Native American women’s occasional “roles as chiefs, peace negotiators, medicine women, scouts, and members of tribal council,” lamenting that their roles have “often been unrecognized” (Keith 1999, 47). Keith then references Oxendine (1998) and Cheska (1982) in describing how their role extended to the sports fields, playing “all types of ball games that men did (Cheska 1982, 47). Keith places Indigenous participation in lacrosse – for men and women – firmly in the past while yanking Indigenous representations into the present to put forth the political agenda of the NAGWS. Later, in a bold move of appropriation, Keith likens the icon and role of the NAGWS to a generic, non-contextualized medicine wheel. Other accounts of women’s growing participation in contemporary lacrosse omit Haudenosaunee women’s participation, as well. In a statement

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demonstrating the incredible growth of lacrosse in the last 50 years, while also lamenting women’s lack of participation, Anne Lee Delano (1970) highlights the differences between contemporary men’s and women’s lacrosse, claiming that “the sport is completely unknown, or, if known is associated only with men’s participation.” The purpose of her book is to claim a space for women’s participation, but with no mention of lacrosse’s Indigenous roots or Haudenosaunee women’s participation. Celia Brackenridge offers a similar approach in her book, *Women’s Lacrosse* (1978) in which she works to carve out a space for women's participation in the sport, including internationally. As with Delano’s work, there is no mention of lacrosse’s Indigenous roots or Haudenosaunee women’s participation. This dissertation intervenes in omissions such as these by describing how Haudenosaunee women contribute to meaning-making and defining of contemporary, traditional, and medicinal lacrosse, as well as foregrounding how Haudenosaunee women enact sovereignty through the game.

In identifying the controversy within Haudenosaunee communities regarding women and girls playing lacrosse, it is necessary to explain its growth as a contemporary sport and its impact on the international stage.

The 1980s mark the growth of lacrosse in two particular ways relevant to this project. First, the 1980s mark the decade when Haudenosaunee communities endorsed the Men’s Iroquois Nationals team to play at the international level, less than a decade after the Federation of Lacrosse lifted a 100-year ban on their playing internationally (described below). Haudenosaunee communities would come together to support their playing as an essential expression of national sovereignty. Secondly, the decade would mark a precise moment when some Haudenosaunee leaders would make clear statements against Haudenosaunee women and

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girls playing the game, especially internationally and in any way that would represent Haudenosaunee nationhood. When the Women's Iroquois Nationals team disbanded before the third international women's world cup in 1999, a competition for which they were preparing, women's lacrosse was continuing to grow worldwide. It was not until 2009 that Haudenosaunee women joined international competitions as full contenders and members of the Federation of International Lacrosse (FIL). Kim Clause (Tuscarora) was part of the Iroquois Nationals Women’s Team that was preparing for the 1989 world cup. The night before the team was to play an exhibition game against a prominent high school girls lacrosse team in the Syracuse area, their coach, Sandy Jemison (Cattaraugus Seneca Nation), received a call informing her and her team not to pack because they were not going to be allowed to play. Twenty-two years after Kim Clause was part of the team that could not play at Onondaga, her daughter, Corinne Abrams was part of the Haudenosaunee Women's Lacrosse team that played in 2009, in the team's first world cup in Prague. In those two decades, women and girls continued to play lacrosse, just not as a team endorsed to represent the Haudenosaunee at an international level. By the time Haudenosaunee did make it to the international lacrosse scene, there had been seven prior women’s lacrosse world cups, beginning in 1982.

Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, the US, and Wales were the first teams to play the women's world cups. Between the first world cup and the 2005 world cup, the Czech Republic, Japan, Germany, and New Zealand would join the world stage in competing. The

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7 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
8 Corinne Abrams, Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
9 More on this history is found at the Federation of International Lacrosse website, https://filacrosse.com/.
Haudenosaunee Women's Lacrosse Team was joined by Austria, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, and South Korea as first-timers in the 2009 games. The 2013 games would include Finland, Hong Kong, Israel, Latvia, and Sweden; the 2015 games would add Belgium, Columbia, China, Italy, Mexico, Spain, and Switzerland.

England, the US, Australia, Scotland, Japan, Czech Republic, and Canada have all hosted the women's world cup. Over nearly four decades, women's lacrosse has grown from being an international sport involving six nations to nearly 30, with others on deck to become part of the scene. The team that Corinne's mother Kim played for, the Iroquois Nationals Women's Team, was preparing to be part of the 1989 world cup games, just the third women's international competition. However, they disbanded due to pressure from some traditional Haudenosaunee community members for Haudenosaunee girls and women to stop playing. When I asked Sandy Jemison when women started playing again, she responded that they never quit. That is when Sandy began the Seneca Girls Lacrosse Club in which, over the decades, several hundred have participated.¹⁰ During the late 1980s through the mid-2000s, girls and women's lacrosse has grown within Haudenosaunee communities to the point that over 60 young women tried out for the team that played an exhibition game at the 2005 world cup in Maryland, and then four years later play at their first world cup in Prague. This growth in Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse is part of the reclamation of lacrosse, calling it back to communities in ways that defy western sexism in sports as well as colonization of women's power within Haudenosaunee communities.

The most visible representation of Haudenosaunee reclamation of nationhood via lacrosse is the Men’s Iroquois Nationals Team. During the same decade when the Iroquois Women’s Nationals team was asked not to play at Onondaga the Men’s Iroquois Nationals team that began

¹⁰ Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
in 1983 was gearing up to play in the 1990 World Lacrosse Championships in Perth, Australia.
The growth of lacrosse as an international sport mirrors the women's world cup, with some distinctions. By the time of the first women's world cup in 1982, the men's world lacrosse championship had occurred in 1967, 1974, and 1978. While the women's international competition started later, its level of internationality was greater, sooner. In 1982, its first year, the women's world cup hosted six nations: Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, the US, and Wales, whereas the men's world lacrosse championships hosted the same four nations – Australia, Canada, England, and the US – for the first five championships. Where the Men's Iroquois Nationals team can boast being the first team to join the international arena in 1990, infiltrating a competitive space cornered by the same four nations for 19 years, by the time the Haudenosaunee women's team competed in its first world cup in 2009, 15 nations were competing. Today, 50 nations compete in the men's international championships and 28 in the women's world cup. Lacrosse has taken the world stage, on its way to becoming an Olympic sport, potentially by the 2028 summer games. Given the layered ways in which the historical record ignores Haudenosaunee women the shared, international space they find themselves engaging their cultural game, and the internal controversy over their playing, Haudenosaunee women insert themselves into the world of lacrosse in profound ways.

Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players I interviewed struggle to name what exactly lacrosse means in their lives. Some women speak with ease about the historically Indigenous game, giving details about its scope and significance to inter-tribal relations. They clearly articulate the importance of the game to their culture and communities and do not dispute that the medicine game played both historically and today, is played only by men for the whole of the community. The articulations become more muddled when they try to explain the significance of
playing lacrosse to their own lives, to their healing and connection to culture. Often, Haudenosaunee women who play lacrosse play or have played a variety of other sports as well. In those cases, lacrosse rings through as special. For the women who work to give language to its meaning, it sits somewhere between being more than a just a sport and not precisely a medicine game – but certainly incredibly meaningful in their lives for how it connects them to their culture and is part of their medicine. Haudenosaunee women claiming lacrosse as their own is no small feat, doing so as they do against a background that works to exclude them both as players and as producers of meaning around its cultural significance. Haudenosaunee women claim lacrosse as their own while recalling its roots in their creation narratives and how the game is played contemporarily as a medicine game, only by men. None of the women lacrosse players or their supporters whom I interviewed refute that only Haudenosaunee men play the medicine game. Haudenosaunee women who claim lacrosse as their sport are part of Haudenosaunee communities who have been claiming lacrosse as their own with fervor and conviction as the game has grown like wildfire in North America and across the globe since the 1970s. This project continually addresses what it means for Haudenosaunee women to claim lacrosse as their game.

This project draws to the surface how Haudenosaunee women experience lacrosse as more than just a sport, playing it as a way of claiming a distinct and traditional Haudenosaunee identity. In chapter one, I position the controversy over Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse within a contemporary reality whereby Indigenous women and girls are particularly affected by social ills within settler national space. To do this, I center Louise McDonald's reflections that Haudenosaunee women have two choices: to fall prey to a great many social ills, or to participate in the best that Haudenosaunee culture has to offer, including lacrosse. Chapter
one demonstrates how the social ills that befall Haudenosaunee women at a disproportionate rate from other groups of women are not the end of the story. Lacrosse is decolonization in motion, not just for Haudenosaunee men and communities, but particularly as coming from Haudenosaunee women playing.

**Traditional and Medicinal Lacrosse.** Lacrosse is present in critical locations of Haudenosaunee philosophy, such as creation narratives and the Great Law of Peace, underscoring its cultural significance. In his chapter, "The Kayeneren:kowa (Great Way of Peace)," Mohawk scholar Brian Rice shares the narrative of the young man, Tekana:wita, who later became known as Skennenrawawi, The Peacemaker, who worked with the Mohawk, Onondaga, Oneida, Seneca, and Cayuga communities to put down their weapons of war, teach them unifying ceremonies, and introduce the Longhouse. After all five nations joined the Great Peace, Skennenrawawi taught them the Teyotiokwaonhas:ton, the Great Law of Peace.\(^{11}\) Rice tells of Tekana:wita scolding some boys for playing Tewaarathon in a way that indicated that they were preparing for war.\(^{12}\) "Tekana:wita yelled to them, ‘Stop what you are doing! Why do you continue to play games of war? Did not anyone in the village tell you that using the Creator’s game to prepare for warfare was against the will of Teharonhia:ako?’\(^{13}\) Here, lacrosse is rooted in Haudenosaunee

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\(^{11}\) Tuscarora joined the Confederacy in 1722, making the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy.

\(^{12}\) Tewaarathon is the word for lacrosse in the Mohawk language, which is also the name of a lacrosse award for top college players. The Onondaga word for lacrosse is Dehontisgwaehs, which translates to "they bump hips." I learned when visiting Onondowa’ga:’, the language immersion program at the Seneca Cattaraugus Nation, that the Seneca word for lacrosse is also Tewaarathon. For more on lacrosse and Haudenosaunee language see Christopher Root, "An Examination in the Evolution of Iroquois Lacrosse" Master’s thesis, SUNY Buffalo State, 2016.

Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabe language) Speaker, Mark Freeland shares that for the Anishinaabe, the same root for lacrosse is used for drumming and drumstick, suggesting ‘hitting’ as a morpheme: baaga’adowe (play lacrosse) baaga’adowaan (lacrosse stick).

\(^{13}\) Brian Rice Rotinonsshonni: A Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2016), p. 180.
creation narrative, as Teharonhia:ako, the grandson of Otsi:tsia (Sky Woman) – the woman in the narrative who falls from Sky World onto turtle's back – is attributed with creating humans. Later, when chief Ayenwatha (Hiawatha) becomes ill, men of his village are called in to play a lacrosse game "in order to amuse him and lift up his spirits."14 Throughout his relaying of The Great Law of Peace among what would later be called the Iroquois Confederacy, Rice reminds the reader of the profound cultural and cosmological importance of lacrosse to the Haudenosaunee.

This brief discussion of Haudenosaunee philosophy demonstrates how "traditional" and "medicinal" are often used interchangeably within Haudenosaunee discussions of lacrosse. Lacrosse as it sits in Haudenosaunee creation narratives and the Great Law of Peace is simultaneously traditional in the ways it holds and reflects culture for future generations, as well as medicinal in its function for Haudenosaunee people as a ceremony. Today, Haudenosaunee men play the medicine game of lacrosse during mid-winter ceremonies and when there is a specific call for healing. It is a ceremony that is only played by men for the benefit of specific community members who may need the healing ceremony, as well as for the community's general well-being. In his book, Creator's Game: Lacrosse, Identity, and Indigenous Nationhood (2018), Allan Downey engages perspectives from Haudenosaunee community members to craft understandings of how lacrosse functions as medicine. Through oral history, Downey reveals that the lacrosse stick is an important location of medicine within the game of lacrosse for the Haudenosaunee. Drawing from an interview with Rick Hill (Tuscarora), Downey offers: “From a Hodinöhsö:ni’ [Haudenosaunee] Longhouse perspective, the lacrosse stick was, and continues to

be more than just piece of sports equipment; rather, it is live and is a form of medicine that allows the game to heal, whether for an individual, a community or a nation.”

This dissertation does not probe why only men play the medicine game both historically and contemporarily, mainly because everyone I interviewed agrees that only men should play the medicine game. The controversy lies in girls and women playing the modernized version of the game of lacrosse, played with plastic sticks. Because of the significance of the lacrosse stick for the medicine game, Haudenosaunee communities debate whether even the plastic stick is equipment Haudenosaunee women should not touch.

Through this qualitative project, I demonstrate that Haudenosaunee communities are more clearly defining 'medicinal' and 'traditional' lacrosse because of the growth of Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse since the 1980s. These articulations connect to larger conversations within Haudenosaunee communities regarding the power that women hold and rematriation of that power, a concept that I weave throughout the project. Akwesasne Bear Clan Mother, Louise McDonald defines rematriation as the returning of the sacred to the mother, or, the return to mother-law. For a matrilineal society, Louise McDonald and others such as Michelle Shenandoah (Oneida, Wolf Clan), Jonel Beauvais (Akwesasne Mohawk, Wolf Clan), and Chelsea Sunday (Akwesasne Mohawk, Turtle Clan) call for a rematriation of the power that goes along with being matrilineal, rather than in name only. In chapter one, I discuss rematriation in connection to violence against Haudenosaunee women, and how rematriation is engaging Haudenosaunee cultural skills to restore corporeal integrity. In chapter two, I discuss

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16 Personal conversations with Louise McDonald, Jonel Beauvais, and Chelsea Sunday, November 2016.
rematriation in relationship to the concept of 'traditional,' and how western patriarchy has colonized how Haudenosaunee communities conceive of 'traditional.' In chapter three, I engage rematriation through discussions of gender construction and gender balance, and in chapter four, I discuss rematriation as a way of theorizing embodied sovereignty. In this dissertation, I argue that the internal controversy regarding Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse has rematriation at its center, and more deeply roots lacrosse as a Haudenosaunee sport both within and outside of Haudenosaunee communities.

Chapter two focuses on why there are divergent viewpoints, what different views say about definitions of 'traditional' and the connections of these perspectives to colonization. I examine why and how Haudenosaunee community members sometimes conflate the historical game with traditional lacrosse and how that conflation leads to understandings of tradition that are relegated to the past. When those within Haudenosaunee communities harken to a definition of traditional lacrosse that centers the past, they compromise the political and future-oriented potential of tradition. Chapter two works to distinguish between historical and traditional lacrosse. I examine questions about whether or not girls and women are playing the traditional game of lacrosse while demonstrating how their playing at all brings the need to define traditional to Haudenosaunee communities in new ways. The fact of Haudenosaunee women and girls playing calls for an articulation of the distinctions between historical and traditional lacrosse to define the political and future-oriented potential of tradition. Chapter two is centrally concerned with how Haudenosaunee communities make claims to lacrosse; how historical, traditional, medicinal, and contemporary lacrosse is being defined; the overlaps and distinctions therein; and how women and girls playing informs these discussions.
Representing Haudenosaunee Women Lacrosse Players  Around the time that Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse was making its resurgence, Aimee Berg's article, "Lacrosse – Cradle of a Sport Has Crossed the Gender Line" gave a brief account of the moment in 1987 when "the Onondaga clan mothers threatened to lie down on the field in protest." Berg tells a story of young women who are caught in the struggle between tradition and opportunity, placing ‘crossing a gender line,’ alongside the binary of tradition and opportunity, and opposition to clan mothers. This representation of the controversy recasts the characters in this narrative onto certain western feminist tropes while ignoring others. Pitting Clan mothers and the lacrosse players against each other casts Clan mothers as the traditional western patriarchy, thus holding young women back and keeping them firmly on their side of the gender line. Berg views young women playing as a victory along these western feminist lines. At the same time, this representation omits the power that western feminisms acknowledge Iroquois women have had traditionally and historically.

This omission points to the importance of the work of Sally Roesch Wagner and others in establishing Iroquoian influence on western feminism. The omission cannot and does not end there. If we insert the importance of Iroquoian contribution to western feminism, we erase how western impositions of patriarchy have colonized how Haudenosaunee communities themselves participate in this colonization. Berg’s representation of the controversy hides more than it reveals, squeezing how a few Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players feel about some Clan Mothers’ negative responses to them into a western feminist framework of the ‘old guard’ or tradition holding them back from ‘progress.’ Such monolithic representations of Haudenosaunee women reflect a historical, cultural propensity in the West to erase the complicated lives and

relationships of Indigenous women to their communities while ignoring Indigenous national sovereignty. From this perspective, Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse puts them on track with women from all over the world who are also playing. Effectively, they now have the potential to catch up in the realm of progress and opportunity. This representation falls in line with dominant representations of Indigenous people within settler nation-states, as being primitive and anachronistic, while hiding the paradox of western feminist fascination with Iroquoian women’s power. The error of simplicity in this representation is that not all Clan mothers oppose young Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse, nor do Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players think in such stark, contradictory terms about Clan mothers who do oppose them playing. This representation does not accurately or adequately represent this conflict or how lacrosse creates meaning within communities, erasing as it does the interdependence that generations have on one another to hold and perpetuate culture. In this dissertation, I demonstrate how this controversy over women playing lacrosse further embeds lacrosse into Haudenosaunee communities at a time when there is a risk of the Haudenosaunee roots of lacrosse being swallowed up in the international growth and fervor around the sport.

These examples of misrepresentation are part of a collection of work that focuses almost exclusively on an historical perspective of Haudenosaunee women. Roesch Wagner paints a simplistic understanding of gender relations among Haudenosaunee, for example calling rape

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19 An example of this is "Beyond Pocahontas," in which Joanne Barker critiques an advertisement put out by the US Secret Service, entitled "A New Kind of Warrior." The glossy advertisement features a photograph of a nameless Native woman donning a warrior staff, US flag pinned to her lapel, and is meant to symbolize diversity in the ranks of the US government. Barker bridges the ways in which this Native woman and has been cast without a name, homeland, community, or nationhood, with the ways in which Pocahontas continues to be cast as a "quintessential American hero is the way such inventions render her without significance outside of her heterosexualized relationships to men and how they erase her identity and affiliation as a Powhatan, dispossessing Pocahontas of her sovereign identity, culture, and history" (65).
and battery among the Haudenosaunee ‘unthinkable.’ This romantic take portrays a stagnant and a-temporal representation of the Haudenosaunee. If there were no tools within the culture to deal with issues such as rape and battery, there is the possibility of portraying a culture as void of these tools for present day and future issues. In portraying the Haudenosaunee gender relations of the past as easy and romantic, Roesch Wagner erases internal struggles – or that there could be an internal struggle – required to reach and maintain gender balance. This portrayal runs the risk of perpetuating an attitude that once colonization imposes western gender constructs, there are no skills within the communities to regenerate desired constructs of gender. It is tempting to relax into a representation of Haudenosaunee women's power that is all at once powerful and a-temporal. However, leaving the presumption of this power in-tact without further investigation configures that power as a quaint relic without political currency or contemporary struggle.

In chapter three, I illuminate the way the prohibition around women touching a man's lacrosse stick is intended to function as a way of preserving gender balance and ceremonial space. When Haudenosaunee community members invoke the protocol, they often follow it with an explanation that it is because women hold so much power because of their ability to give birth and menstruate. In this chapter, I look at the particular ways in which gender balance has been misinterpreted, positioning the protocol as a source of oppression rather than a reflection of balance. I also examine how Haudenosaunee women's power has been romanticized and firmly placed in the past by western feminists such as historian, Sally Roesch Wagner. Finally, I look at how the protocol works to name and claim lacrosse as a contemporary medicinal ceremony, profoundly connecting lacrosse within Haudenosaunee culture. In chapter three, I analyze gender balance within Haudenosaunee communities both as a prescriptive solution to incomplete or misrepresented traditional Haudenosaunee gender constructs as well as to tease out the how both
Haudenosaunee and non-Indigenous romanticized representations further limit the potential power of balance.

**Methods and Methodology**

*Qualitative Research.* For this dissertation, I interviewed over 25 Haudenosaunee, twenty-three women, and two men, coming from four generations, spanning from 18 to 80+ years of age. The two Clan mothers I interviewed, Berdie Hill, introduced earlier, and Akwesasne Bear Clan, Louise McDonald lay the theoretical and cultural groundwork for much of this project, offering the depth and breadth within which this paradox lives. I interviewed past, recent, and current lacrosse players who come from Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve in Ontario, Canada; Akwesasne Mohawk territory in the Adirondack region of New York State; Onondaga Nation near Syracuse, New York; Oneida Nation in Oneida New York; Tuscarora territory south of the Onondaga and Oneida Nations; and Cattaraugus Seneca Nation near Irving, New York. The women whom I interviewed offered diverse experiences in regards to the controversy over their playing.

In some cases, such as women from Tuscarora, they did not know of the controversy until they picked up a stick at Onondaga Nation. In two cases, young women reflected on forging their mothers' signatures as young girls so that they could play. Others, from Cattaraugus Seneca Nation and Six Nations reserve, had the full support of their communities in the midst of traditional Longhouse. I interviewed two women who had played on the team in the mid-1980s that disbanded after being not asked to play at Onondaga, one of whom did not know that was the reason they stopped playing. I interviewed two coaches and one referee, two men who play the medicine game, one of whom played for the Iroquois Nationals Team. I interviewed a community leader from Six Nations Reserve, a scholar from Six Nations Reserve, two additional
elders without formal leadership in their community, and an Onondaga midwife and elder. Those I interviewed represent all corners of the internal controversy over girls and women playing lacrosse. Some adamantly oppose their playing, others once opposed their playing and now range from putting up with it to emphatically supporting it. Some did not know it was a controversy for a time, and others knew of the controversy and supported their playing despite it. Through the interviews, I represent every Haudenosaunee Nation but not all territories such as the Cayuga territory or Wisconsin Oneida. Each person interviewed lent to the knowledge production regarding Haudenosaunee lacrosse.

Oral history, as accessed through qualitative interviews, maintains its strength and legitimacy when it does “not suppress conflicting voices in order to force a single and collective narrative but instead to embrace multiple voices and conflicting points as inevitable.” Oral history presents the possibility of nuance (through multiple interviews) ‘official public narratives' regarding difficult topics such as tradition and women's roles. Ethics in a qualitative endeavor involve holding carefully and with great respect the stories that others have offered you. Trust is key. After sharing difficult stories about his parents, Cherokee scholar Thomas King says, “…stories can control our lives, for there is a part of me that will be chained to these stories as long as I live.” King then goes on to describe how stories remain within Indigenous communities as well. So, doing this work means asking to be invited into a matrix and memory of stories long held within communities.

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Thomas King and Linda Tuhiwai Smith inform how I represent the interviews. King states, “The truth about stories is that that’s all we are.” Qualitative researchers cannot reduce someone to one “characteristic.” When I spoke with Berdie Hill, she shared a piece of her collection of stories, some of which I had an internal reaction. It was complex. My stories stayed silent except for how they interacted with hers inside of me. In this dissertation, I aim to give a fleshed-out version of Haudenosaunee women’s stories and the culture to which they are connected. I work to craft representations that trouble the binary categories of western thought and avoid “claiming an authenticity which is overly idealistic and romantic, and simply engaging in an inversion of the colonizer/colonized relationship which does not address the complex problems of power relations.” However, my own biases as a researcher are present, as is my intention to center Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players and give them an opportunity to articulate meaning about their playing to their communities. What this methodology allows for is the centering of women’s voices in a matrilineal culture in the process of decolonizing western impositions of patriarchy.

**Field Observations.** Over the course of six years, I spent time at and near Haudenosaunee nations and territories in the US and Canada, both in the role of observer and participant-observer. I attended lacrosse games, community educational events, film viewings, and participated in activism events organized by the Onondaga Nation, such as the Sgeñañh Unity March in solidarity with Standing Rock water protectors. I visited and took extensive field notes at the communication offices at the Onondaga Nation and Tonawanda Seneca territory, as well as the cultural center located at the Oneida Nation. I spent time in diners at Awkesasne Mohawk

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Nation, Onondaga Nation, and Tuscarora territory. I went to Sally Roesch Wagner's brainchild, the Matilda Joslyn Gage Museum in Fayetteville, New York. I participated in educational events hosted by the Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation (NOON). This included the fishbowl discussion between Onondaga midwife and elder, Jeanne Shenandoah, and Sally Roesch Wagner entitled, "The Influence of Haudenosaunee Women," held as part of the Onondaga Land Rights and our Common Future series at Syracuse University between February 2010 and February 2011. I attended one session of a language immersion class at the Cattaraugus Seneca Nation. Time spent at Haudenosaunee nations and territories was almost always a result of an interview I had scheduled and was reflective of the reality that if the interviews were going to happen, I would be traveling to Haudenosaunee nations and territories. A home court advantage could better facilitate trust. A methodology that acknowledges all of Haudenosaunee land, not just that which has been parsed off into reservations, territories, and reserves also promoted trust.

Each of these field experiences lends to understandings of how Haudenosaunee communities are engaging the conversation about girls and women playing lacrosse. The rich qualitative material from interviews informed how I experienced the games. To hear how vital lacrosse is to Haudenosaunee women, and then attend women's college games where they make up one or two of the entire team presents itself as a surprise, but a surprise in Black feminist, Kathrine McKittrick's use – that the surprise is that the thing observed is surprising at all. Being present for an opening prayer at the Sgeñoñh Unity March at Onondaga Nation, and watching as a Haudenosaunee community member asked a participant to stop filming the prayer, taught me about respect in the process and asking permission at every step. By going to Haudenosaunee territories repeatedly and developing field notes on the differences between when they invited me and when I just showed up, I developed a methodology of respect, times of appropriate
silence, and process. Riding to Albany with people from the Onondaga Nation to protest hydro-fracking informed a knowledge of relationship to land. Through my fieldwork, I developed a methodology of relationality, foregrounding the importance of trust for those I am interviewing, as well as the relationships I observed between Haudenosaunee and non-Indigenous people. In sum, this project is only possible with the intentional and frequent movement across Haudenosaunee ancestral lands and in and out of the colonial impositions of the space of territory that are held intensely by Haudenosaunee peoples.

**Presentations.** The several times that I presented on this project over the course of six years serve as primary research for the critical interactions that occurred between myself and the audiences or the interactions among audience members. Presenting at Haudenosaunee research symposiums at the University at Buffalo, to mainly Haudenosaunee audiences, proved incredibly helpful in gaining perspective on this controversial matter. I was able to observe gender dynamics that raised questions for me about matrilineality and colonial impositions of patriarchy. Why, for example, at one symposium did only men respond to my presentation for the first several minutes, and women comment very little? Was this related to colonial impositions of western patriarchy or Haudenosaunee traditionalism whereby men speak internationally what women leaders have instructed them to say? Alternatively, why in another symposium did men stay silent after a young woman brought up the colonization of the power held in women's bodies? These presentations facilitated probing questions, informing a methodology that works to hold open, rather than foreclose on inquiry. Other presentations I have given serve this project differently. The presentation at SUNY Oswego, where most of the women's lacrosse team was in attendance, allowed me to assess how informed non-Haudenosaunee lacrosse players were about the origins of lacrosse. Presenting to a variety of classes brought questions such as, Are the
Haudenosaunee just trying to replace one set of gender norms with another? Are Haudenosaunee women not supported in lacrosse in the same way as women, in general, have struggled in sports historically? What is at stake if Haudenosaunee women keep playing? Stop playing? This fieldwork informs a methodology of situating fields of questions within particular contexts, a trajectory that informs how this project works to firmly situate lacrosse within a Haudenosaunee historical, traditional, and cultural context.

**Materials Produced by Haudenosaunee Peoples.** For this project, I examined the historical periodical, the *Turtle Quarterly*, which gives Haudenosaunee perspectives through news, commentary, artwork, and stories. I worked with archives at the University at Buffalo's law library and the Seneca Nation Library to access historical perspectives from the 1980s on Haudenosaunee women and lacrosse, as well as photos. Several films and documentaries, produced, directed, or informed by Haudenosaunee people have come out about lacrosse, such as *Sacred Stick* (2013), *Crooked Arrows* (2012), *Keepers of the Game* (2016), and *Spirit Game: Pride of a Nation* (2017). I engage these for the way that they are moments of solidification, a particular narrative told by some in Haudenosaunee communities, on top of shifting ground. They serve a methodology interested in how the solidified moment of film declares specific realities, both real and hoped for, that articulate hopes for the present and future. Also informing this project for the ways that it speaks to matrilineality and the importance of Clan mothers, and women more generally, is the emerging online publication, *Rematriation Magazine* with over 200 contributors. While the publication is not yet available, the magazine produced a short documentary, *An Indigenous Response to #MeToo*, which informs discussions in chapter three regarding Haudenosaunee women's power and colonization.
All of these methods work to inform a methodology that foregrounds Haudenosaunee women’s perspectives and meaning-making. Through the experiences of interviewing Haudenosaunee people, spending time over meals and on their homelands, observing and participating in what matters to them, and learning from relationships they have established with their non-Indigenous neighbors, I am able to offer a project rooted in a methodology of close listening, emerging trust, and deeper understandings of the rematriation of Haudenosaunee women’s social and political power.

**Lacrosse and Sovereignty**

It is essential in this dissertation to name some of the colonial limits and prohibitions that have interfered with Haudenosaunee people playing their game of lacrosse and to distinguish these colonizing factors from Haudenosaunee cultural protocols regarding lacrosse. I outline colonizing limits and prohibitions here so that when I talk about Haudenosaunee cultural protocols that appear only to limit and prohibit, we know first, that I am not conflating these cultural protocols with colonizing limits, but that also, I am not leaving specific cultural protocols alone. The cultural protocols that I dig into are the ones that community members bring up as contributing to the controversy, such as the protocol that women are not to touch a man's lacrosse stick, which I discuss in chapter three. The colonizing limits and prohibitions discussed below – the 100-year ban on men playing internationally, imposed requirements to be part of leagues, and issues with Iroquois passports – are meant to give a greater understanding about how and why lacrosse functions as a vehicle for sovereignty in Haudenosaunee communities.

The 1980s mark a pivotal moment when Haudenosaunee communities claimed lacrosse as a location of sovereignty. The Men’s Iroquois Nationals team formed just four years before the Federation of Lacrosse lifted restrictions on Haudenosaunee teams playing lacrosse
internationally. In 1880, the National Amateur Lacrosse Association (NALA) of Canada banned all professional teams from membership, targeting Haudenosaunee teams. Up until that point, Haudenosaunee men’s teams from both sides of the US/Canadian border had played in international and regional exhibitions, such as in England, New York City, and Boston. Often these exhibitions charged an entrance fee for observers, some of which would go toward Haudenosaunee teams' travel. Haudenosaunee teams were also outstanding, often defeating opposing all-white teams while playing with fewer players.\(^{24}\) The ban meant that white teams could poach light-skinned Haudenosaunee men to play for them, and was more about restricting Haudenosaunee men from playing.\(^{25}\) Haudenosaunee men played on both US and Canadian teams after their expulsion from NALA, but it wasn't until 1987 when the Federation of International Lacrosse (FIL) accepted the Men's Iroquois Nationals team as a member, the first sports' governing body to recognize Haudenosaunee national sovereignty.\(^{26}\)

Through their use of Iroquois passports, both the Men's Iroquois Nationals team and the Haudenosaunee women's U19 (under age 19) teams have engaged with Haudenosaunee communities to exert sovereignty. The Iroquois Confederacy first issued passports in 1923, which they used more widely, beginning in 1977, with frustratingly limited success. In 2010, England denied the Men's Iroquois Nationals team from flying on Iroquois passport for fear that the US and Canada would not let them return. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered the team, coaches, and managers expedited US passports (for those on the team within US borders). In collaboration with Haudenosaunee communities and leadership, the team declined the passports that would reflect forced citizenship and did not play.

The community support of the 2015 World International Lacrosse Championship (WILC) held at the Onondaga Nation just three months after the Haudenosaunee women’s U19 team could not fly to England on Iroquois passports, reflects support around sovereignty through lacrosse. I asked Onondaga midwife and elder, Jeanne Shenandoah, what that was like:

It was nice in the fact that [13] different countries came here and we stamped their passport. Because we have our own passport, you know? And England who had given our teams so much trouble a couple years previous – that was a whole political wrangle…They were not able to go, and when they came here, England was the first country to show up to get their passports [pantomimes stamping]. And I know it because I stamped them.

A similar moment happened in 2015 with the U19 Women’s team as they prepared to travel to Scotland. This decision is examined in chapter four when I take up embodied sovereignty.

The FIL, which oversees both men’s and women’s international lacrosse championships, as well as WILC, has strict codes regarding the kind of arena which must be available for the host nation. When the Onondaga Nation won the bid, they needed to build a new arena, which they did in just five months. It is not the first time they have had to do this, reflecting another limit that Haudenosaunee teams run up against when trying to compete in their sport.

Shenandoah elaborates:

We have this arena next door. The story about that is, we have an outdoor lacrosse box. Lacrosse was an outdoor game, down on the other road. Well, people started complaining about having to play outside. That’s the honest truth. Started complaining, said it was dirty, blah, blah, blah. They called it the dust bowl. So the league that we were in, without our consultation, passed a rule that you must have an arena. All ages of our people here, from five years old, you know six, begin playing, right up to elderly men. So this league changed the rules. We had to go way over in Camillus and rent an arena for our games because they would not play in the dirt. Is the dirt that bad when you’re

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playing a traditional game that gives thanksgiving for Mother Earth? And your feet are on the ground. They wanted an arena, so we built an arena.²⁹

Amidst these restrictions, prohibitions, and limits, Haudenosaunee peoples continue to play their game. This dissertation begins with the moment in the 1980s when the Onondaga Clan Mothers asked the newly formed Iroquois Nationals Women's team not to play in their territory. Against the backdrop of this moment is a long history of Haudenosaunee men fighting to play their game within the colonial contest over sovereignty. The chapters in this dissertation aim to interject a Haudenosaunee cultural theory as it relates to women's lacrosse by centering the voices of Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players and Haudenosaunee community members who range from non-support to support of their playing.

As with chapter one, chapter four defines lacrosse as a decolonization project, this time looking at the way Haudenosaunee women enact sovereignty through the game. The Haudenosaunee is claiming lacrosse as a way of claiming a distinct Indigenous identity and as a way of claiming sovereign national space. In chapter four I develop the theoretical and analytical category of embodied sovereignty through essential narratives by and about Haudenosaunee women who travel through space to play the game and carry with them their nationhood and connection to communities. I attend to the various ways embodied sovereignty travels, carries homeland, and claims sovereignty, disrupting and decolonizing western spaces through the action of the body, in part, because of the space the body occupies.

The primary literature on Haudenosaunee communities is riddled with references to matrilineal and matrifocal relationships in their society. As we move into chapter one, I juxtapose the narrative of Haudenosaunee women's power with the contemporary lived violence

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that Indigenous women face both from outside of and within their communities. Often this gross disparity is met with denial and omission as historical renderings of matrilineal power are used as a discursive mask for maintaining the colonial status quo at the expense of the women they report to be influential and respected. The theoretical and methodological emphasis on the voices of Haudenosaunee women works to shed much-needed light on their contemporary lived reality. This dissertation then is grounded in the ongoing rematriation of Haudenosaunee cultures, as evidenced by ceremonies such as Oher:okon discussed throughout the project.
Chapter One

Haudenosaunee Women Lacrosse Players and the Potential for Healing

If you had a daughter, and you were going to choose the current conditions, would you rather have your daughter be trapped in silence, being abused by an abuser, caught up in an addiction, be incarcerated, be caught up in the social ills of our communities, or would you have her be participating in something that makes her feel good about herself, so that she is driven and determined to be greater than she is? That’s the choice.

Akwesasne Mohawk Clan Mother, Louise McDonald

Louise McDonald's words conjure an image of a deep canyon with a sharp, inverted apex. On the one side, Haudenosaunee women are systematically pushed down through settler nation-state apparatuses set up to disenfranchise them. On the other side, a steep incline, a severe climb, as steep an ascent as the descent colonization creates in order to render Haudenosaunee bodies and cultures invisible and deformed. The descent is thistle and barren; the ascent also thistle but prevailing with memory and possibility. This chapter engages Louise McDonald's above quote as an outline, examining two intimately connected realities for Haudenosaunee women: the specific ways in which settler nation-states continue to colonize Indigenous women's bodies and the healing potential of crucial Haudenosaunee cultural components present in Haudenosaunee philosophies. Engaging Haudenosaunee feminist scholars such as Audra Simpson (Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk), I articulate how the social ills that Indigenous women face are entirely explainable through the logics of settler colonialism. So too, are the solutions embedded within Haudenosaunee cultural relevancies such as creation narratives, ceremony, the clan system, and matrilineality. In this chapter, I argue that within the context of settler colonialism that systematically dispossesses Indigenous women's bodies, lacrosse emerges as a healing ceremony for Haudenosaunee women, connecting them to their land and culture.

This chapter describes shifting landscapes, how settler nation-states perpetuate a colonized reality on Turtle Island by using stolen land and other means to keep Haudenosaunee
conceptualizations underground, but how the land and its people never forget.¹ Thus the shape of
the land and the landscape as settler nation-states would have it, never remains, even through the
dispossession of land, legislative impositions of the nuclear family, legislation that dispossesses
Indigenous women from their Indian status, such as the Indian Act, and legal loopholes that
create a vacuum of justice for sexual and other violent crimes against Indigenous women. Such
measures illustrate ongoing anxiety for the settler nation-state, particularly when it comes to
Indigenous women. The settler state controls Indigenous women’s bodies for a particular
purpose – to dispossess Indigenous people of their land. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson and
Muscogee Creek scholar Sarah Deer critique the use of ‘phenomenon' or ‘epidemic' when
referring to violence against Indigenous women, demonstrating instead that the apparatus of the
nation-state is historically and contemporarily set up for the sustained and systematic success of
said violence. This chapter begins with a description of how the U.S. and Canada handle this
anxiety in regards to Haudenosaunee women, hurling them down this tilted landscape into an
abyss of dispossession.

In the second half of this chapter, I point to how Haudenosaunee philosophies found in
creation narratives and ceremonies, such as lacrosse and Ohero:kon, hold ancestral knowledge on
how to deal with the social ills that Haudenosaunee women face. Lacrosse as a ceremony given
to Haudenosaunee communities is part of the best that the culture has to offer, connecting to
Haudenosaunee Creation wisdom as articulated by John Mohawk, Katsi Cook, and Jacob

¹ In Haudenosaunee creation narratives, when Sky Woman falls (or is pushed, depending on the interpretation), from Sky World, she lands on the back of a turtle, which becomes known as Turtle Island, also known as North America.
Thomas Hadajigerenhtah (Six Nations of Grand River). For Haudenosaunee women, lacrosse is a location of healing, sitting on multiple fields of history and tradition. Haudenosaunee women who play lacrosse break the rules of the settler nation-state by healing their bodies and disrupting colonial landscapes, restoring Haudenosaunee cosmology, worldview, and relationships to land. In this, Haudenosaunee women's bodies become a site of ceremony.

Louise McDonald is a vital informant and theorist for this project. To demonstrate the way that she became involved in this work, I relay here our first interaction, which occurred over social media. After introducing myself and my educational location, I said, "I am conducting interviews for my dissertation on Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players, and I am asking you to participate because you are a Clan mother and the mother of a player. I learned about you through the documentary series, *Sports Matters: Salmon River Lacrosse*.” After sharing a couple more details about what I was asking for, Louise’s response came: “Okay.” I interviewed with Louise a month from that first exchange, and again in February 2016, this time with her daughter, and lacrosse player, Tsiotenhario Herne. I had interviewed many women lacrosse players who had struggled to articulate just how important lacrosse is in their lives, how it connects them to their culture, and what that means in their communities. Louise’s insights intervene with razor-sharp choice, that turns out, is no choice at all. I employ her words throughout the chapter as an outline for the discussion. Before Louise and I officially began our interview in a diner at Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, she met my young daughter. Towards the

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2 The insights from Jacob Thomas Hadajigerenhtah come from Brian Rice, *The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013).

3 This series later came out as the documentary, *Keepers of the Game*. Directed by Judd Ehrich. Produced by Aiden TumasU. United States: Flatbush Pictures, 2016. DVD.

4 Personal communication with the author. August 18, 2015.
end of our time together, Louise said, “You as a mother want what’s best for your daughter, right?” I replied, “Absolutely. I get that.” Louise went on, “And I want the best for my daughter. And I want the best of what our culture has to offer her.”

When Louise McDonald names two choices for Haudenosaunee women, she is saying several things at once. She is invoking a memory and a present reality of how colonization and the settler nation-state disastrously limit Haudenosaunee women’s choices in regards to traditional identity, affiliation, and corporeal wholeness. Simultaneously, she bursts open what is possible for Haudenosaunee women through the game of lacrosse. Her statement is as expansive as the fields on which young women play, the colleges and universities they attend to do so, the miles they cover to play, sometimes crossing continents, and the choices they make on behalf of their daughters and mothers. This choice is so obviously no choice at all. Her statement is, of course, meant to demonstrate what is at stake for Haudenosaunee women specifically, and Indigenous women more generally. It also demonstrates that this is not the end of the story for Haudenosaunee women. The specific social ills that Louise McDonald names – silence, abuse, addiction, incarceration – profoundly connect to colonization and the settler nation-state.

Would you rather have your daughter be trapped in silence, being abused by an abuser…?

Louise Bear

Dreams of Violence
Naomi Littlebear

...It was the moment before the actual sight of them coming that froze our hearts with fear. Suddenly like a stampede of wild bulls they plummeted towards us. A half dozen or more boys, a frenzied blur of leather jackets, screaming wild devils, thrashing at us with the harsh stiff leather, metal teeth zippers battering our bewildered bodies...I could remember my own silence thundering through my body

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5 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
As previously mentioned, the ‘phenomenon' of 1200 missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada is not a surprise to Haudenosaunee people, but is “explained by Canada’s dispossession of Indian people from land.”

Audra Simpson eloquently articulates the relationship between land and Indigenous women’s bodies in the settler colonial imagination:

Indian women “disappear” because they have been deemed killable, able to be raped without repercussion, expendable. Their bodies have historically been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship and governance, an alternative to heteronormative and Victorian rules of descent. Theirs are bodies that carry a symbolic load because they have been conflated with land and are thus contaminating to a white, settler social order.

Simpson reveals the severe tensions between a settler nation state that renders land and women's bodies invaluable while doing all it can to subjugate both for its desires. Simpson unmasksthe word ‘settled' in reference to settler society, settled meaning, "'done,' ‘finished,' complete.’ This is the presumption that the colonial project has been realized: land dispossessed; its owners eliminated or absorbed.” Simpson contends that sovereignty can exist within sovereignty, but that it is fraught with great tension. That tension is a reflection of settler anxiety over that which has not been settled, undone, unfinished, incomplete. Indigenous women bear the brunt of this anxiety on their bodies, as that which must be settled (state-sanctioned marriage), done (raped), finished (murdered), in order for settler society to truly be complete. The sovereignty that

for this collection, Naomi Littlebear Morena says, “This has been no fairy tale. I hated gang fights, street life, stumbling on dope, actin' tuff, being poor, wearin' second hand inferiority complexes....”

Haudenosaunee women embody is particularly threatening to the ongoing project of colonization, which masks Haudenosaunee land as settled.\(^\text{10}\)

Indigenous women's bodies pose a specific threat to colonial projects and the ongoing desires for land in the settler nation-state. The imposition of a public/private split, nuclear families, and boarding schools are measures the U.S. and Canada have taken to distort and sever Haudenosaunee women’s corporeal integrity and affiliations to home and homeland. Legislation such as the Dawes Act in the U.S. and the Indian Act in Canada pushed for private ownership of land, constructs of the nuclear family with the father at its head, and western patriarchy more generally.\(^\text{11}\) According to colonial logic, Haudenosaunee communities were pushed “from ‘primitive’ matrilineal to ‘civilized’ patrilineal law.”\(^\text{12}\) The space of home moves from communal (visible) to private (hidden), and land went from shared to owned. Outside the purview of the community, in the private home, under state-sanctioned marriage, violence breeds. In the annual conference, *The Color of Violence*, Luana Ross argues “that the consolidation of male power within tribal councils and communities has created a situation within tribes that fosters the disregard and perpetuation of sexual violence against Native


\(^{11}\) For more on how the Indian Act affects First Nations women in Canada see, Joanne Barker, "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women’s Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada." *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (2008): 259-66.

\(^{12}\) For more on how the U.S. legislation undermined matrifocal society, particularly with the Hopi, see, Wendy Wall’s chapter, "Gender and the ‘Citizen Indian’ in Elizabeth Jameson and Susan H. Armitage, *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women’s West* (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 207.
Settler nation states depend on the maintenance of these gender imbalances. Angela Davis implicates specific apparatuses of the nation, stating that it is, “precisely because the primary strategies for addressing violence against women rely on the state and on constructing gendered assaults on women as ‘crimes,’ the criminalization process further bolsters the racism of the courts and prisons. Those institutions, in turn, further contribute to violence against women.”

The *Color of Violence* contributors address how these state structures and institutions do not adequately address violence against women of color, as elaborated below, not in small part because of state-sanctioned violence itself. In these collaborations between Indigenous women and other women of color, it becomes necessary to make distinctions between particular relationships with nation states and colonization. For example, "civil rights" is not a salient category or starting place for the many Haudenosaunee women who refuse settler nation citizenship. I will be examining these distinctions later in the chapter.

Within colonial ideology and mythology, Indigenous women find themselves confronted by compounding sources of violence: (1) white men who have far too much access to Indigenous women’s bodies without consequence, and, (2) violence they experience coming from their communities, which is connected to colonial impositions of western patriarchy and gendercide. Indigenous women experience disproportionately high incidence of violence against by an intimate partner. For every 1000 women, 23.2 American Indian women report abuse by an intimate partner, compared to 1.9/1000 for Asian women, 8.1/1000 for white women, and

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11.2/1000 for Black women. The disproportionality is compounded when considering population rates in the U.S. of 1.4% American Indian, 13.2% African American, 62% white, and 5.4% Asian American. This data does not, of course, include the undetermined number of women who do not report abuse by an intimate partner. The fact that 61% of American Indian women marry a non-Indigenous person would suggest that less than 50% of the time, Indigenous women suffer violence at the hands of Indigenous men. What firmly roots the reality of domestic violence against Indigenous women within Indigenous communities is that Indigenous communities are not adequately addressing the violence.

At times when Haudenosaunee communities do address violence against women, it is done so in ways that further injure Haudenosaunee women. In her article, "She No Speaks: And Other Colonial Constructs of ‘The Traditional Woman," Dawn Martin-Hill (Mohawk) describes how male leadership ‘punished' a perpetrator of rape by bringing him to the sweat lodge. In response to questions regarding this (lack of) response, the leadership said that punishment is not traditional. Indigenous women are addressing this problem head-on by calling out ways in which male authority is consolidated in Indigenous communities in ways that disenfranchise Indigenous women. In “Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging,” Renya Ramirez (Winnebago), engages a multitude of scholars aimed at

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18 Dawn Martin-Hill's article is published as a chapter in, Bonita Lawrence and Kim Anderson, Strong Women Stories Native Vision and Community Survival (Longueuil, Québec: Point Par Point 2009). I will go into greater depth about how ‘tradition’ can be used against Indigenous women in chapter three.
“[contributing] to the building of a corpus of Native feminist thought.”\textsuperscript{19} This article is a collection of Indigenous feminist scholars and women of color speaking as allies, identifying two of the most recent moments – in a long history of colonization and gendercide – of the consolidation of western patriarchy within tribal governments and Indigenous communities more generally: Boarding schools and the Indian Act. Upon pinpointing these moments, Ramirez elucidates examples of consolidated patriarchy and what that means for violence against Indigenous women.

Boarding schools have long been identified as detrimentally disrupting Indigenous communities.\textsuperscript{20} Between the 1860s and 1950s, the U.S. operated 100 boarding schools across the country. Between the 1830s and 1990s, Canada operated 80. Around 150,000 (30%) The Canadian government placed First Nations children in boarding schools with at least 6,000 dying while there. The boarding school era peaked in 1931 in Canada, the last one closing in 1996. It was not until 1978 with the passing of the \textit{Indian Child Welfare Act} in the U.S. that American Indian parents gained the legal right to deny their children’s placement in off-reservation schools. In Canada, in 1990, leader of the Manitoba Chiefs, Phil Fontaine, called for all churches involved in residential schools to recognize the physical, emotional, and sexual abuse that went on. In 1991, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples began to interview residential school survivors, putting out a report in 1996, recommending a public inquiry, which they never did. In 2005, the Canadian government announced a $1.9-billion reparation package, $1.6 billion of which had been paid out in 2013 to 105,548 cases.\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{20} I will examine boarding schools again in chapter three with my discussion of gendering the lacrosse stick.
The opening of the first boarding schools – the Mohawk Institute Residential School in Brantford, Ontario, 1831, the Yakima Indian Reservation in the state of Washington, 1861, and the Carlisle Industrial Indian School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania, 1879 – were part of the official U.S. and Canadian governments assimilation policies to *kill the Indian, save the man.*\(^{22}\) In order to do this, reformers worked to destroy social practices and gender constructions, and impose Victorian patriarchal systems and norms.\(^{23}\) Reinforced by the Dawes Act (1887) in the U.S. and the Indian Act (1876) in Canada, assimilation policies, to varying degrees of success, de-centered women in the family and imposed a hierarchy with men as head, moving the home from communal and visible to private and hidden, and changing land from shared to privately owned.

The combination of the impositions of a public/private split, nuclear family, and the devastation of children removed from their communities led to domestic violence and addiction issues in Haudenosaunee communities. Dawn Martin-Hill puts this into cultural context:

> Traditionally, in my Nation, the Haudenosaunee women did not “stay home alone with children.” They worked in the fields harvesting and preparing foods and clothing. Children were raised by the mother’s clan (her extended matrilineal family), usually by the elder women. The mother’s brothers were also responsible for rearing the children, and her husband was expected to maintain his role and responsibilities with his mother’s clan and in rearing his sister’s children. *This left little room for spousal or child-abuse, since young families were never left in isolation...That is the Western tradition and it is based on the nuclear family, which isolates the mother from her extended family and leaves her and her children vulnerable to her husband’s authority.*\(^{24}\)

Since 1876, the Indian Act has worked to disenfranchised Aboriginal women in Canada. The Indian Act, defines who is legally an Indigenous person in Canada. Through this act, "status

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\(^{22}\) Colonel Henry Pratt of the Carlisle infantry first said this phrase.

\(^{23}\) For an incisive look at the connections between Indian boarding schools and the incarceration of Native peoples, see the poetry collection, Laura Tohe, *No Parole Today* (Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 1999).

Indians” and their land became the legal responsibility of the Canadian government. The government regulated their lives by legislating who was considered Indigenous, jurisdiction First Nations people had on their reservations (solidified through the Constitution Act, 1869), how they educated their children, and how they handled their estates. In 1951 the Indian Act was amended, and any First Nations woman who married a non-Indigenous person lost her status as an Indigenous person, in the eyes of the Canadian government. Bill C-31 (1985) allowed for women who had lost their status to reinstate it, but not their children. Audra Simpson articulates how the Indian Act has always been about dwindling the land base, resources, and identity of Aboriginal people in Canada, a set of logics that undergirds the “phenomenon” of missing and murdered aboriginal women.

Euro-Western gender roles were reinforced during the height of the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. Ramirez points to AIM as contributing to Indigenous women’s reticence toward addressing sexism in their communities for fear of usurping work toward national sovereignty, stating:

Indigenous women were placed in subservient roles as cooks and helpers, and at times were expected to attend to the sexual needs of the male leaders of the movement. Native women were, therefore, taught that Native men should be in control. Within this sexist context, indigenous women were supposed to defend a Native nationalism that ignored their own needs to be liberated from misogyny and sexism.

25 For a discussion on the activism of Aboriginal women that pushed for C-31, see Janet Silman, Enough Is Enough Aboriginal Women Speak Out (Toronto, ON: Women’s Press, 1997).
Through personal experience, Martin-Hill elucidates how expectations of women’s subservience as reinforced during the 1970s have carried on. While organizing an event for elders and spiritual leaders in 1995, Martin-Hill rejected the overt sexual advances of one of the presenters, only to have him admonish her publicly at the event as not having adequate organizational skills. There are consequences for Haudenosaunee women who speak out against these imposed stratifications. Seeing this history of western impositions of gender norms onto Haudenosaunee women helps to illuminate the problem with western feminism as the primary solution, a set of concerns I discuss briefly in the introduction and elucidate more fully in chapter three. Briefly, Indigenous women are reticent to take up western feminist analysis because of how it ignores settler colonialism, seeing it as a discursively colonizing arm of settler society. The kind of feminist discourse most available to all of us is still white upper-middle-class feminism, as feminism by women of color is still quite marginalized.

In her poem, *To the Spirit of Monahsetah*, Charlotte DeClue (Osage) pays reverence to the daughter of Cheyenne Chief, Little Rock. Monahsetah (1850-1922) and 52 other women and children were taken by the seventh cavalry after her father was killed in the Battle of Washita River, under Custer’s command. The first line, *To the spirit of Monahsetah and to all women who have been forced to the ground*, DeClue brings together generations of Indigenous women who have suffered violence, rape, and dispossession (of land and body) through colonization.

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obscuring time, and centering colonized space. By connecting an historical battle over traditional territory, and the ensuing mass kidnapping and violence, with the ongoing violence that Indigenous women experience, DeClue connects Indigenous women’s bodies with settler desire and need to keep stolen land. The violence with which rape is inflicted on Indigenous women’s bodies is tied to settler anxiety to keep stolen land. The legality of colonial processes enables such crimes to occur with little impunity, clearing a path to Indigenous women’s bodies, hence land, through legal loopholes. Federal legislation enables the raping of Indigenous women. Indigenous men who enact violence are in accidental coalition with settler nation-states in dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land.

Cecilia Firethunder (Lakota) says, “Indian women in the U.S. are the most violently raped of any other ethnic group.” An unnamed Lakota woman in the short documentary about sexual violence on Rosebud Reservation states, “Men [rape] because they can. That’s the bottom line.” Within these two statements are a world of historical and legislative context. There is no such thing as a non-violent rape. However, the rape that Indigenous women report has a particularly brutal and racial element attached to it. At least 86% of reported cases of rape or sexual assault are committed by non-Indigenous men. This is unusual in that for whites and African Americans, the majority of perpetrators are within the same race, 65.1% for whites and

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89.9% for African Americans. This illuminates a nexus of race, gender, and land, drastically affecting Indigenous women, violence tied to settler anxiety to keep stolen land, and getting away with it, clearing a path to Indigenous women’s bodies through legal and juridical loopholes. Amnesty International published a report, entitled “Maze of Injustice: The failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence in the USA” (2007), in which they demonstrate how:

[Sexual violence against Indigenous women] has been compounded by the federal government’s steady erosion of tribal government authority and its chronic under-resourcing of those law enforcement agencies and service providers which should protect Indigenous women from sexual violence. It is against this backdrop that American Indian and Alaska Native women continue to experience high levels of sexual violence, a systemic failure to punish those responsible and official indifference to their rights to dignity, security and justice.

the 1978 U.S. Supreme Court decision, Oliphant v. Suquami protects non-Indigenous men from prosecution for raping Indigenous women by divesting tribal courts criminal jurisdiction over non-Indigenous peoples, even those who are members of their territories. Muscogee Creek Indian Law scholar Sarah Deer calls the combination of this court ruling, the Major Crimes Act (MCA) and Public Law 280 (PL 280) a vacuum of justice for Indigenous women.

The Major Crimes Act (MCA), a federal law passed in 1885, works to convolute justice through ‘concurrent jurisdiction.’ MCA prohibits tribal courts from prosecuting felony violent crimes, including rape and murder is. It is not merely that the federal government prosecutes these crimes on behalf of sovereign tribal governments. Instead, tribal governments and the federal government have concurrent jurisdiction. Deer illustrates how concurrent jurisdiction

results in a *vacuum of justice* for Indigenous women by pointing to interpretations of the legal language as well as how the law is applied (or denied) on the ground. She says, “Tribal nations have successfully sustained authority over rape (and other major crimes) arguing that the doctrine of inherent sovereignty requires Congress to divest tribes of concurrent jurisdiction in clear language. The MCA never explicitly divested tribal nations of authority over the enumerated crimes.”36 How this plays out on the ground is that “Many tribes to not pursue cases against rapists, or will wait until a declination from a federal or state prosecutor before proceeding with an official tribal response.”37 This vacuum of justice is further complicated by the shame and fear of retaliation Indigenous women (like many women) feel after an assault.38 All of these jurisdiction questions result in obscuring and confusing the routes a Haudenosaunee woman can take after a violent assault of any kind. In sum, the ability of Haudenosaunee women to find justice in cases of violence ends up being only as good as the relationship between tribal and local, state, and federal governments. Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe Chief Beverly Cook illustrates this point: “Our community and governmental issues are as complex as they are numerous. Ongoing conversations such as these are essential to the process of developing respectful relationships between law enforcement agencies, governmental bodies and communities.”39 In her chapter, “The Enigma of Federal Reform: The Tribal Law and Order Act

37 Sarah Deer, *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 37. State prosecutors are only involved in states where Public Law 280 (PL 280, 1953). PL 280, part of termination (of tribal nationhood) policies of the mid-1940s-mid-1960s transferred federal jurisdiction to the state in Alaska, Oregon, California, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. PL 280 does not apply to the Haudenosaunee context.
38 This reality is poignantly and painfully illustrated in *Rape on the Reservation* (2013).
and the Violence Against Women Act,” Sarah Deer demonstrates her confidence in the knowledge that Indigenous communities hold in eradicating rape. Deer argues that, while both pieces of legislation have improved the safety of Indigenous women, in order to “truly end rape” full jurisdiction to tribal governments is what is needed.40

As with the U.S., within the Canadian context, Indigenous women’s safety is directly contingent upon how leadership responds to violence against Indigenous women. Under Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, the over 1200 missing and murdered Aboriginal women is being investigated as the racial and gendered reality that it is. The Canadian government’s response is the direct result of the activism and outcry of Indigenous women and communities. It is not that there was not this activism before the onset of Trudeau’s tenure in 2015. Rather his predecessor Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, 2006-2015) refused to acknowledge the 1200 missing and murdered Aboriginal women as a “sociological phenomenon,” meaning that race and gender were not factors.41 Audra Simpson incisively articulates this lack of surprise, noting the many individuals and organizations who have tirelessly worked to expose it.42

How jurisdiction plays out within the Haudenosaunee context varies. For example, Akwesasne Mohawk Nation and the Oneida Nation have tribal police, while the Onondaga Nation has an agreement with Onondaga county sheriffs to only come onto the territory if invited.

40 Sarah Deer, The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 106.
“Yes, it was a surprise,” said Royal Canadian Mounted Police Commissioner, Bob Paulson, in response to the compilation of nearly 1200 police cases involving missing or murdered Indigenous women in Canada in 2014, dating back 30 years. This finding multiplied the earlier calculation of 824 cases since the 1940s and is a figure three to four times higher than previous totals. For Indigenous peoples, this ‘phenomenon’ is no surprise at all, but a part of the ongoing realities of settler colonialism.

*Would you rather have your daughter…caught up in an addiction, be incarcerated…?*

*Louise McDonald*

**Cells**

Mary Bennett (Seneca)

*Cell, brick, cement, bars, walls, hard,*
*tv’s, soaps, stories, tears, no visitors*
*allowed, lawyers, liars, guards, big,*
*touch guns, mean fingers, small bed,*
*green cloth, disinfectant, toilet, sink,*
*bars, no window, no door, no knob to turn,*
*no air, no wind, cold, nightmares, screams, no touch, no touching.*

*I want to touch someone. I want to hold that woman who cries every goddamn night.*
*I WANT TO TOUCH SOMEONE.*

Prison is a precise location for nation-states to carry out its goals of keeping stolen land, being a location whereby Indigenous women’s bodies can be simultaneously hidden and sexually abused, their connections to home and homeland distorted or severed. Over the past three decades, the prison population in the U.S. has more than quadrupled, with Indigenous

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populations disproportionately represented. As the keynote speaker of *The Color of Violence: Violence against Women of Color Conference* (2000), Angela Davis gave tribute to feminists of color in the 1970s who worked to draw domestic violence into the public sphere as a public issues.\(^{45}\) In her speech, Davis effectively names the prison industrial complex, and women’s prisons in particular as “[pointing] to a continuum of violence at the intersection of racism, patriarchy, and state power.”\(^{46}\) In naming prisons as places that effectively disappear people of color, Davis illuminates the ways in which prisons can effectively enact ‘private’ violence against women, as “[like] the military, they render women vulnerable in an even more systematic way to the forms of violence they may have experienced in their homes and in their communities.”\(^{47}\) What cannot be effectively drawn from Davis' analysis how the prison apparatus functions as an ongoing arm of colonization, and how that immediately affects Indigenous women.\(^{48}\)

There are particular relationships that Indigenous women have to the prison apparatus that cannot be subsumed into the fold of *women of color*. Doing so ignores the specific ways in which nation-states have imposed particular colonizing acts onto Indigenous populations vis a vis violence, and that the prison functions as an extension of such acts. For example, historicizing feminist activism to bring domestic violence into the public square beginning in the

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\(^{45}\) Renya Ramirez, "Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging," *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 7, no. 2 (2007): 22-40. The first The Color of Violence conference was held in 2000 at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and has been held annually since. For an anthology of these conferences see, *Color of Violence: The INCITE! Anthology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).


1970s, runs the risk of ignoring how this public/private split was imposed onto Indigenous communities through the Dawes Act of 1887. It minimizes the resistance of Indigenous women to being isolated away from their communities into nuclear families, where violence can breed. It also ignores how the Haudenosaunee have traditionally handled issues of violence ‘publicly,’ or more accurately, communally. The apparatus of the state has systematically imposed laws on Indigenous populations as a means of controlling, disappearing, and incarcerating. From the perspective of the state, prisons hide social ills. From the perspective of Indigenous peoples, prisons are central to the state in carrying out its aspirations for land.49

For the settler state, prisons contain Indigenous women’s bodies within a culture of sexual violence, a more precise articulation of what befalls Indigenous women outside of prison. For example, a Chief Medical Officer told Ted Koppel in 1999 that women enjoy their pelvic exams because it is “the only male contact they receive.”50 That corporeal control extends to the ability to give birth. For example, between 2006 and 2010, California prisons sterilized 148 women even though a 1970 state law prohibits any sterilization in any state penitentiary. Unlike legal loopholes that obscure justice, doctors blatantly breaking the law on disenfranchised women’s bodies, and getting away with it, points to just how deplorable settler society sees those it locks away. One woman who was in prison for nine years clearly articulates how prison is not an environment where women can fully consent:

We’re throw-aways. We're society's trash. So it's easy for them to treat us as such. So for them to say, we feel you should do this, you feel more or less compelled to comply because that's what you're taught in there. When you're in prison you do what you can to get out. Period. So even in the idea of medical care, if a doctor tells you, you should do

this, you're automatically inclined to feel you should do it, simply because of the environment you are in. And you're likely to sign a piece of paper without fully understanding the life-long ramifications especially if they hand you a paper; you sign it. That's it. Some people may be happy with that decision, but at the end of the day, it is not informed consent, and it is coercive.\textsuperscript{51}

The practice of sterilizing women in prison, rooted in the logics of eugenics, is evident in one doctor’s explanation for sterilizations he performed: “($147,460) isn’t a huge amount of money compared to what you save in welfare paying for these unwanted children – as they procreate more.”\textsuperscript{52}

\begin{quote}
\textit{\ldots or would you have her be participating in something that makes her feel good about herself, so that she is driven and determined to be greater than she is? That's the choice.}

\textit{Louise McDonald}
\end{quote}

Woven throughout Haudenosaunee philosophy are useful ways to address adversity such as violence against women. As mentioned previously, historicizing the advent of women systematically addressing domestic violence as beginning in the 1970s runs the risk of erasing long ago established ways for addressing such adversity within Haudenosaunee communities. Addressing violence against women begins for the Haudenosaunee in the Creation narrative. As Otsi:tsia (Sky Woman) plummets toward all that will become The Mother Earth World, a collection of animals ponder the best way to break her fall, save her life, and sustain her being. They accomplish this successfully on Turtle’s back, North America becoming Turtle Island. Some renditions of this story attribute her fall to the push of her jealous husband.\textsuperscript{53} Taking


Otsi:tsia’s point of departure from Sky world and connecting it to other cultural moments within Haudenosaunee philosophy highlights Haudenosaunee approaches to violence against women.

I begin by discussing the development of the Haudenosaunee clan system, a process that undermines any static understanding of tradition. Haudenosaunee communities survive because they have tools and skills for handling adversity embedded within their worldview and philosophies. Young people and Clan mothers have especially important leadership roles among Haudenosaunee people. Within Creation narratives, the Haudenosaunee cycle through periods of flourishing and balance, followed by periods of excessive illness, death, and abandonment of ceremonies. Each cycle of difficulty is met with help from Sky World, usually with a new ceremony, including ceremonies for strawberries, the three sisters, corn, bean, and squash, and the coming of age ceremony, Ohero:kon (Under the Husk). During one of these cycles of difficulty due to expanding populations, it becomes clear that a new political and familial organization is needed. The elders come together to work out a solution but when they cannot come to a consensus, state, “Let the women, or even the youths, be the ones to do it if they can, so that our children and our grandchildren may continue to live and have a future.”54 They assign the task to a young man, Okweta: she who looks to the earth for a solution as “She is the mother who has given birth to all the things that grow.”55 Earth as mother is then connected to woman as mother:

The young man answered them, ‘…Tomorrow at noon, all the people will assemble themselves together. At that time, I will try to arrange something so that the clan system will work. Those who are female will be the principal persons involved in this process.

54 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 154.
55 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 154.
That is because they are the ones who give birth to the new onkwe:honwe on earth.\footnote{Onkwe:honwe translates to “real human beings.”} The woman who is the oldest of each of the families will be the head of the entire clan that I will develop.\footnote{Brian Rice, \textit{The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 157.}

A trial ensues whereby Okweta:shē leads the Rotinonshonni to cross a river and only some do. The next morning Okweta:shē visits the eldest matron of each of the families gathered on both sides of the river, asking each what she saw when she went to the river for water. Each matron answers by identifying the animal they saw, which would become their Clan, as they gathered water, followed by, “I then departed for my lodge where I prepared some food to feed my children and grandchildren.”\footnote{Brian Rice, \textit{The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 159.} In regards to maintaining Clan relationships, Okweta:shē then says to all of the matrons, “You ancient ones, the eldest women of the clans, are to be in charge of this matter.”\footnote{Brian Rice, \textit{The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), p. 162.} The eldest women were responsible for gathering the water for the evening meal, dipping in the ladle and letting the young man know what they had seen – deer, bear, wolf, turtle, hawk, sandpiper, beaver. Here, important relationships of inter-dependence amongst generations are demonstrated as well as the role of Clan mothers in naming social relations. Within Haudenosaunee philosophy, wisdom lives within the acts of feeding and caring for the future generations.\footnote{This does not diminish individual choice regarding motherhood. It is the connection to creation that is associated with the power.} It is because of this capacity that Clan mothers come to be and hold the power they hold. There is a precedent of young people and Clan mothers working together to address issues.

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56 Onkwe:honwe translates to “real human beings.”
57 Brian Rice, \textit{The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 157.
58 Brian Rice, \textit{The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera} (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 159.
60 This does not diminish individual choice regarding motherhood. It is the connection to creation that is associated with the power.
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Louise McDonald is deeply concerned for the young people of her community at Akwesasne. That is part of her role and responsibility as Clan mother, to hold and care for the young people. Because of the long history of physical and cultural genocide against Indigenous people – systematic stealing of children to attend boarding schools, a gradual and persistent outlawing of Indigenous ceremonies – Haudenosaunee rites of passage ceremonies went underground for several generations. Louise McDonald worked with her community to bring Ohero:kon out from under the husk, first in 2006 with eight young people. A decade later, nearly 100 young people participate in the ceremonies each year at Akwesasne. The ceremony takes four years to complete. The first years prepare and fast in fields with no food or water for one day. The second, third, and fourth years fast in the woods for two, three, and four days respectively. Aunties, uncles, grandparents, mothers, and fathers all help in the preparations and teachings, and they camp nearby during the fasts. The fast is broken with a whole community celebration, the fourth years arriving by canoe. These moments, this cycle, are the embodiment of the revitalization of tradition, focused within a communal reality.

In the film *Keepers of the Game* (2016), deep intergenerational and ancestral Haudenosaunee relationships are demonstrated. On the day of the fast, Tsieboo is escorted into the woods by her father. They hug, and the camera lingers for long enough that the viewer may ask, are they going to film her during her fast? At the moment of that question, the camera pans out and away, backing off as a reflection of its invasive history, or perhaps it was given a firm boundary to start. Instead, viewers see a time lapsing sky spanning four days. And then they see something positively magnificent. A community of grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles, mothers, fathers, family, community all waiting on the shore as the young people who fasted for four days come around the corner with elders in canoes. Every person is adorned in exquisite
Mohawk dress. Traditional foods await. Everyone leaves the canoes and embrace those waiting on the shore. The landscape seems to sing and breathe deeply. There is a memory of Haudenosaunee ceremony embedded in the land here, as reflected in how the clan system reflects the natural world: “It is evident that there are clans of grasses, as well as shrubs, trees, and game animals.”61 During the process to establish clans, “The young man then took hold of the vine and began to cross the river. Many of the onkwe:honwe followed the young man and began to cross the river one by one, as quickly as possible holding onto the vine.”62 There is a depth of meaning in this community near and traversing the water, a rightness that the land remembers. The ritual space and time of these ceremonies shifts and re-members the landscape.

Like Ohero:kon, lacrosse bridges land and cosmology. If bodies (land) are vessels of memory holding generational trauma, lacrosse becomes a location of tremendous healing. In many games, young women play on traditional Haudenosaunee land. Colonization has disrupted relationships to land, as well as cosmology, and a lacrosse game has the potential to restore these relationships. Lacrosse takes place in the Sky World before humans are ever a part of the scene, as well as during the Great Law of Peace when Ayenwatha (Hiawatha) is overcome with grief at the loss of his daughters:

Since the beginning of time, Tewaarathon, lacrosse, has been played by the onkwe:honwe as a form of amusement for the Creator. It involved many men from the villages and was played in the fields. The fields sometimes could go on for miles. The people felt that this would surely lift the spirits of Ayenwatha and that the Creator in watching the game might be looking over him.63

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61 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 156.
62 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 158.
63 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 198.
John Mohawk’s telling of the creation narrative has lacrosse coming in as a ceremony to help the community, parallel to many of the other ceremonies such as Peach Pit Game, and the Three Sisters (corn, bean, squash). Lacrosse is deeply connected to a cycle of ceremonies. Each time the people struggle to find balance, a new ceremony is introduced to restore balance. In Mohawk’s account, lacrosse is one such ceremony. In Rice’s account, it has been there all along as a source of help and healing.

Indigenous ceremonies are never fully lost, but rather stay etched within the landscape, in anticipation. Mark Rifkin’s analysis of “Love Poems: 1838-1839,” by Qwo-Li Driskill (Cherokee), focuses on Driskill’s meanings of love between Cherokee people and Cherokee land. The land is anything but inanimate, has a memory, and its own sets of longings, as evidenced in “My arms, muscled rivers/you came to/each morning.”64 In Driskill’s poems, Cherokee people and land are not one and the same, but an extension of one another. Land refuses to forget relationships to its original inhabitants “neither forgotten nor erased, but etched into the body of the land.”65

In both Rice’s and Mohawk’s accounts, there is mention of men playing lacrosse, but no explicit mention of women not playing. That came later. According to Louise McDonald,

So the evolution of the human being and the gift of lacrosse, it’s changed. And in the beginning it was a brutal s, ort and it was intended for the men. But as we evolved and through the ages, where lacrosse was big and then it diminished, and then it reclaimed itself again. And part of the reclaiming, there became an attitude with it. Because the more that the men were unable to hunt and fish, the more that they were unable to go to war, the more that their own environment and their roles and responsibilities got diminished, they had to hold fast to certain areas of the culture, and so lacrosse became a men-only sport.66

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66 Author’s emphasis. Louise McDonald. Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
A prominent player and recent graduate of Syracuse University said that her great-grandmother (Onondaga Nation) used to play for fun and that “when she was young it wasn’t taboo to touch a lacrosse stick.” Haudenosaunee women are defining lacrosse in ways that connect to cultural relevancies, and amidst great boundaries.

Like Otsi:tsia (Sky Woman) from the Haudenosaunee creation narratives, Haudenosaunee women are creatively manifesting realities against great odds, while honoring multiple points of view and processes. The world described in Haudenosaunee Creation knowledge is large, multidimensional, full of processes, and capable of holding adversity. It is a world unto itself. Colonization disrupts that world, but Haudenosaunee people are very adaptable in how they access and preserve that world. So in describing lacrosse, Haudenosaunee women peel back layers of colonization and protect the world so intricately woven on Turtle Island, a world connected to the ancestral goings on of Sky World. Toward these ends, Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players often begin with what lacrosse is not.

First and foremost, what Haudenosaunee women and girls are playing is not the medicine game. That the medicine game is played only by men is not refuted. The medicine game refers to a game contemporarily played during midwinter ceremonies and whenever there may be a call for healing. Each of the women who play or played lacrosse, as well as Louise McDonald, express a similar sentiment. Amber Hill-Donhauser (Six Nations, grew up in Tuscarora) says of the traditional medicine game, “And obviously women aren’t supposed to participate. I would never ask to participate just because I play lacrosse because I’m respectful.” Another player from the Oneida Nation echoes with, “Is this the medicine game that you’re playing? No. It’s

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67 Interview by author, March 20, 2013.
68 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
completely different.” As a purveyor of cultural knowledge, Louise McDonald helps give context to these young women’s statements:

When you actually take it to a ritual space, that’s when the women overpower the ritual. And because in our culture men deal with death and women deal with life, that’s the reason why the game is played, to deal with grief, to settle disputes, to bring medicine to somebody who is sick. It’s the mental health and wellness in our community, so men are supposed to take care of that. It’s their job. It’s their responsibility. And we have a rightful part in it, but it’s they who carry the burden of it.

A traditional game of lacrosse, played with a woven ball and wooden sticks, within the larger context of ceremonial space, is played by men. Women’s internal medicine, drawn from their connection to the earth and moon, is not a good mix for that particular ceremonial space. Given the import of protecting ceremonial space in generating and regenerating Haudenosaunee culture, women who play lacrosse are careful to protect that space in their articulations of and participation in the game.

Lacrosse is also not just another sport for Haudenosaunee women who play. Many Haudenosaunee women who play lacrosse play other sports as well, and articulate differences in their meanings. Amber Hill-Donhauser says, “It’s a different feel when you get out there. I’ve played a lot of sports. I’ve played softball, basketball, soccer. But when I play lacrosse, it’s different. It’s like a connected feeling. Your mind’s clear.” Star Wheeler (Cattaraugus Seneca Nation, Turtle Clan), who played on the team in the 1980s that disbanded after Onondaga Clan mothers protested their playing, echoes this with:

I played basketball too, and I ran cross-country. Basketball didn’t do that for me. I think it was because it was lacrosse. It is our game. I think that was like a – I didn’t have a sense of pride playing basketball, but I did playing lacrosse. Because it was our game and that I was doing something that made me more culturally connected, because obviously I

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69 Interview by author, November 22, 2014.
70 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
71 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2016.
wasn’t culturally connected to basketball. But it did make me feel more connected with my culture.\textsuperscript{72}

By defining lacrosse as what it is not, Haudenosaunee women create space to articulate what it is, solidly claiming it as their sport. As one young player from Tuscarora territory, who graduated from Syracuse University, struggled to negotiate adversity from some of her community about her playing, her mother stepped in with the following perspective, which she then took on: “I think my mom put it like, you know if they let the Australians play and they let people from all over the world play – not that they let them, but they do it. If they can do it, then so can you. And as a Native person, you have the right to because it’s your game.”\textsuperscript{73} Another young player from Oneida Nation put it as such: “I went to college and saw all of these girls playing lacrosse. And I wasn’t going to sit back and let all these white girls play my sport and not play myself.”\textsuperscript{74} Within these articulations – so clearly in response to the rapid growth of lacrosse being played cross-continentally, often without the knowledge of its origins and cultural meanings – is a claiming of lacrosse as a game with deep cultural relevancies and origins, a game played all over the world by a growing number of women, that will include the participation of Haudenosaunee women!

Between Haudenosaunee women’s assurances that the lacrosse they are playing ‘is not the medicine game’ and their feelings that ‘it is everything’ lies a deep struggle to name that which is so essential to these women’s lives. Louise McDonald helps to mitigate and create space for a growing and deepening articulation of Haudenosaunee lacrosse that includes Haudenosaunee women, first by giving voice to an expanded location of ceremonial space. A

\textsuperscript{73} Interview by author, March 31, 2018.
\textsuperscript{74} Interview by author, February 28, 2012.
woman’s body is too powerful for the traditional ceremonial space of the medicine game of lacrosse, and yet that power is deeply compromised by colonization. Louise McDonald names Haudenosaunee women’s bodies as both that which needs medicine and the location which can bring that medicine in collaboration with the healing game of lacrosse. In order to make that claim, she calls on traditional Haudenosaunee frameworks:

And I think what we have to consider, is in the evolution of our people, when times got heavy and times got so brutal, and people moved beyond the level of integrity, we were given gifts in order to bring order to the chaos. And lacrosse was one of those gifts. And to me, through the things that change and the conditions of people as we live it change over time, our realities change. So does the culture. And to make the culture stagnant doesn’t serve rightfully for the people. And even in the frameworks of our (Mohawk word), The Great Law of Peace, they put in there a provision that says, when you come in times of change, and you need to change this law, you can add to the rafters. So in the evolution of the human being and the gift of lacrosse, it’s changed.75

It is already within the culture to adapt and survive through trying times through the gifts of ceremony, including lacrosse. Colonization hinders but does not obliterate that. Tradition is living and breathing, not stagnant. The Longhouse began with one rafter: “It was at this spot that the Peacemaker decided to begin to build his Longhouse of One Family; it was time for him to put up the first rafter.76 Louise McDonald builds on that Haudenosaunee cultural concept with the assertion that women playing lacrosse adds to the rafters. This is a very different representation than attributing the increase of Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse with increased western influence. Instead, that which has been recently articulated as traditionally ale, grows to include women, all within a framework of traditional Haudenosaunee culture.

This framework gives new language to lacrosse as being a healing game housed within the space of the Haudenosaunee woman’s body, the ceremonial space within the body itself.

75 Author’s emphasis. Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
76 Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonni a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wako and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 190.
Louise McDonald says, “the woman can play the game if it’s a medicine for herself.” Here she is saying to the Haudenosaunee women who make sure to add, “it’s not the medicine game,” that if it is after all, a medicine game. She is assuring them, who are so cautious, that it is okay that it is a medicine game because what constitutes ‘a medicine game’ is necessarily changing. In her statements, she is recognizing the compromised position that young Haudenosaunee women find themselves in within settler nation states. She also cautions in the statement, “she can play if it is a medicine for herself” she cautions Haudenosaunee women not to play without a recognition of how lacrosse offers cultural medicine. She then both reaffirms and expands a cultural boundary:

And to me, any day I’d move heaven and earth to have our women more empowered, and if lacrosse can give that to them, then I support that. But I in no way, when it comes to that medicine piece, and you’re doing a doctoring, true enough that the culture holds true to what a woman’s place is inside that. Now if there would come a time, if there’s no men capable of playing in our game, inside the medicine of that game, there’s nothing to say that women can’t play then. So it evolves, it adapts, it changes.

It is within the context of living, breathing, expanding cultural space that Haudenosaunee articulate that healing, that medicine.

Two Haudenosaunee lacrosse players describe the healing they experience through lacrosse. Tsiotenhariio Herne, from Akwesasne states:

T: You know, you love the feeling of feeling like you’re important and feeling like you have a part of the team. I don’t know ever since then it stuck with me. I’d have to say two years ago is when it really, I started realizing how important it was to me.

S: What happened two years ago?

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77 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
78 Author’s emphasis.
79 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
T: Well um, I was going through a lot of stuff in my personal life and having a lot of doubts in myself. Just personal struggles. And making stupid choices. And I didn’t feel important.\textsuperscript{80}

Almost as if directly responding to Tsiotenhariio, Star Wheeler from Cattaraugus Seneca Nation says:

To me it just provided an outlet for me to really come out of my shell. And I’m a turtle too! (Laughs). So, because I was pretty introverted when I was younger and I think that that really helped my self-esteem and form bonds of friendship with the other girls and really motivated me to do something better with my life. And I think that it does that with the girls now. I think it’s a such a great way for them to build their self-esteem, and to get that connectedness with not only their culture, but other females. So it was a big turning point for me playing lacrosse. I think it really helped me a lot. I really think that playing lacrosse did propel me to want to do bigger and better things. But I know there were other girls I had asked if they could play and they said their parents wouldn’t let them because girls aren’t supposed to play lacrosse. And there was only a handful of us back then. Now there’s like – it’s exploded.\textsuperscript{81}

**Conclusion**

This chapter describes the landscape Haudenosaunee women engage when they step onto the field. Settler colonialism cannot function and prosper with Indigenous woman’s body and affiliations in-tact. This project describes bodies in motion, Indigenous women’s bodies in motion, Haudenosaunee women’s bodies in motion. When Haudenosaunee women go out on the field to play lacrosse, in the eyes of the settler nation-state, they are meant to do so at least as bodies that are not supposed to exist, and at most as bodies that are disembodied from their Haudenosaunee affiliations and homelands. Settler nationhood depends upon this dispossession. But as Louise McDonald contends, this is not the end of the story for Haudenosaunee women. There are Haudenosaunee philosophies that demonstrate the importance of ceremony and process. The clan system, Longhouse, and ceremonies, have stories about coming into being for

\textsuperscript{80} Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
\textsuperscript{81} Star Wheeler, Interview by author, June 21, 2016.
the purpose of lifting up Haudenosaunee people and creating/restoring balance. Lacrosse is a source of healing for Haudenosaunee women that is rooted in their culture and philosophies.
Chapter Two

The Community Speaks: Why the Contest?

The independent film *Spirit Game: Pride of a Nation* (2017) chronicles the 2015 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships that the Onondaga Nation hosted for the first time. As with the film, *Sacred Stick* (2013), this film tells the story of the Haudenosaunee medicine game of lacrosse and how it connects to the contemporary game. Both *Sacred Stick* and *Spirit Game* demonstrate how lacrosse informs and is engaged in sovereignty, the latter, specifically through having this international competition at the Onondaga Nation. In both films, there is no mention of the hundreds of Haudenosaunee women who are playing lacrosse at community, club, middle and high school, college, and international levels, or how their playing contributes to discussions of traditional and medicinal lacrosse. In *Spirit Game*, there is a moment where an unnamed Haudenosaunee woman plays catch outdoors, while Iroquois Nationals player Brett Bucktooth (Oneida; grew up at Onondaga Nation) says, "When my mom has some time, she’ll pick up a stick and play pass and catch with us."¹ What does this particular moment in the film, *Spirit Game*, say about the manner in which Haudenosaunee communities are responding to Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse? The following statement appears in the film credits:

This story belongs to the Iroquois. It could not have been told without the special help of the following: Onondaga Nation Citizens, Onondaga Council of Chiefs, Onondaga Clan Mothers, Iroquois Nationals, (Onondaga) Tadodaho, Sid Hill, (Onondaga) Faithkeeper, Oren Lyons, (Onondaga) Chief Irving Powless, Betty Lyons (Onondaga Nation), and Haudenosaunee Six Nations Confederacy: Onondaga, Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Seneca, Tuscarora.

Two decades before these documentaries were released, in the mid-1980s, Onondaga Clan mothers threatened to lie down on the field in the mid-1980s if a team of Haudenosaunee women

¹*Spirit Game: Pride of a Nation*, Directed by Peter Baxter & Pater Spirer, USA: One Bowl Productions, 2017.
played there. Leaders at Onondaga Nation, along with Tonawanda Seneca Nation have been some of the most vocal opponents of Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse, voicing their opposition to their even picking up a stick. And yet, Spirit Game: Pride of a Nation opens up just a bit to the enormity of this controversy with one scene where an Iroquois Nationals player’s mother is playing catch in the backyard. What does giving a nod to women playing lacrosse in a film, largely influenced by key hard-liners against Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse say about the shifting landscape undergirding this controversy?

Whether or not Haudenosaunee women are a part of lacrosse is not the question, as they have always been involved, weaving the balls or netting for the sticks, being the reason the game is played for healing purposes, and more contemporarily, rooting on the teams. However, as for playing? Some would say Haudenosaunee women and girls have always been playing lacrosse. Recalls one player, “My great-grandmother, who is no longer with us, Phoebe Hill [Onondaga], said that when she grew up with girls and women playing lacrosse was not taboo. She remembers playing with the boys.”2 Louise McDonald, from Akwesasne, echoes with, “I remember playing some box games at Gowanda. I think unofficially, girls have always been playing.”3 What Phoebe Hill and Louise McDonald have in common is that they were playing ‘unofficially’ prior to the mid-1980s, when the controversy hit a pivotal moment among Haudenosaunee peoples over whether or not girls and women should play lacrosse.

Within Haudenosaunee communities, no one disputes that women should not play the

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2 Interview by author, September 21, 2016.  
3 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
medicine game of lacrosse; the medicine game is played during midwinter ceremonies, or whenever there is a call for the healing of a member of the community, or the larger community.\(^4\) Out of respect for Haudenosaunee communities and the participants steering this project, I have chosen not to delve into the Haudenosaunee medicine game beyond what Haudenosaunee community members shared about lacrosse with myself or other scholars.\(^5\) For example, Christopher Root, in his Master’s thesis for SUNY Buffalo State, shares an interview with Haudenosaunee lacrosse player, Pete Hill, who says, “Most notably, medicine games are played in the autumn on the Tonawanda and Onondaga Reservations, however, are closed to outsiders from participating or viewing.” \(^6\) One Haudenosaunee woman lacrosse player states, "There are games within communities where they do play for medicine. And obviously, women aren’t supposed to participate. I would never ask to participate just because I play lacrosse because I am respectful…Obviously, only men compete." \(^7\) Louise McDonald concurs with, “True enough [the medicine game] wasn’t a place for women…The culture says that women shouldn’t play lacrosse. And it’s true inside the medicine game because a man’s role is to deal with death and to


\(^5\) However, as discussed later in the chapter, Haudenosaunee community members are not always aware of where and when the medicine game is played. This is in no small part because communities are in the process of reclaiming the medicine game as part of traditional reclamations.


\(^7\) Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
deal with the responsibility of grieving.”

When I asked one young player if she agreed with only men playing the medicine game, she responded, "Yes, I am in complete agreement with that. I don’t know how to describe when things just make sense to you, in your mind. It just makes sense to me in my mind."  

Haudenosaunee communities protect the medicine game, refusing to divulge certain aspects about it, including why only men still play it today. The medicinal ceremony of lacrosse is so clearly not what the Haudenosaunee are working to define in traditional terms, and if they are, these conversations are not for the greater public. This chapter works to illuminate where and how the lines become fuzzy and complicated concerning how Haudenosaunee communities define medicinal and traditional lacrosse and the relationships between these definitions and contemporary lacrosse. I demonstrate in this chapter how Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse impels communities to more clearly define what is traditional lacrosse, and how contemporary lacrosse intersects with traditional and medicinal lacrosse. I argue that Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse enriches understandings of tradition and medicine, propelling a traditionalism that reflects continuity and change represents futurity through embodied sovereignty and intergenerational relationality and is grounded in what is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities.

In this chapter, I examine the relationships between this controversy and definitions of tradition: how Haudenosaunee women articulate tradition, and how a nuanced understanding of the controversy combats demonized, simplified, or romanticized representations of tradition. With Haudenosaunee culture threatened to the extent that it was through the boarding school era,

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8 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
generations have fought hard to make definite statements about what is, and what is not traditional; lacrosse is a location whereby Haudenosaunee communities work out these understandings. While all interpretations of tradition draw from ancestral and ceremonial knowledge, the relationships that tradition has with a colonized past, as well as present and future trajectories, are diverse and complex. What definitions of tradition do some apply when they make the statement that women who are playing lacrosse are not traditional? What definitions of tradition are being employed by those who are playing and claiming the identity of tradition? What are the limits of ontology concerning ‘traditional’? How is engaging in the questions themselves traditional? These questions are what I aim to address in this chapter.

Indigenous scholars such as Jennifer Denetdale, Audra Simpson, and Theresa McCarthy make clear that Haudenosaunee communities should not relegate ‘traditional’ to the past or make it synonymous with ‘pre-contact.’ Instead, the past is accessed and talked about in the present; it is an act that can only happen in the present, meant to inform the future.

How this controversy is nuanced and connected to tradition is informed here by three Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players; a coach from the Cattaraugus reservation of the Seneca Nation, Sandy Jemison; Onondaga Nation elder midwife, Jeanne Shenandoah; Mohawk, Bear Clan mother, Louise McDonald from Akwesasne; and Tonawanda Seneca Clan mother, Berdie Hill. The three lacrosse players played both for all-Haudenosaunee teams and for middle and high school teams at schools they attended a few miles from their reservations. This group of seven Haudenosaunee women represents diverse denotations of the controversy surrounding girls and women playing and how definitions of tradition interact with medicinal, traditional, and contemporary lacrosse.

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10Berdie Hill has since passed away since our interview in 2012.
Experience of Tradition and Lacrosse

Amber Hill-Donhauser, a Six Nations of the Grand River band member raised on the Tuscarora nation territory in New York began playing women’s field lacrosse in the mid-1990s, at seven or eight years old. She started on the team that would play in the 2006 World cup in Prague when she attended Niagara Wheatfield Middle School, two miles from her home on the reservation. Amber has played on all-Haudenosaunee teams, such as the First Nations Elite team, and for teams with Indigenous and non-Indigenous players, such as the Saint Catherine’s league in Ontario, and for Syracuse University. She has played co-ed box lacrosse and on the Haudenosaunee women’s team for the 2007, 2009, 2013, and 2017 World cups. Growing up on the Tuscarora Reservation, she did not know that girls and women were discouraged from playing in some Haudenosaunee communities until, at age 17, she “went to Syracuse and met people from Onondaga.”

Another player represented in this chapter, Corinne Abrams, a citizen of the Tuscarora Nation in New York, who began playing in 2000 at the age of 11, remembers visiting Onondaga Nation and being told she was not supposed to play. Both Amber and Corinne started playing at a young age, played on teams where they were the only or one of a few Haudenosaunee girls, and played on the Haudenosaunee women’s team and in world cups. They also both shared that they did not know about the controversy over girls and women playing, citing Tuscarora as not as traditional as Onondaga or Tonawanda, but naming decolonization and revitalization projects of which Tuscarora has been a part. Both are proud of their lacrosse background and were not exposed to the prohibitions against their playing. However, now that they have come to know them, Amber and Corinne articulate their respect for those who say they should not play –

acknowledging the role that those who may oppose it hold in carrying culture – but see their playing as acts of sovereignty.

Sandy Jemison, of the Seneca Nation in New York, coached both of these players and one of their mothers. Sandy started the Girls Seneca Lacrosse Club, a club in which over 600 girls have played for since its beginnings in the mid-1980s. Sandy learned to play lacrosse during her high school years at the Emma Willard School, a private boarding school in Troy, New York. She coached women’s lacrosse at SUNY Fredonia and the Haudenosaunee Women’s Lacrosse team that plays internationally. Sandy was part of the group who went to the Six Nations Council of Chiefs at the Six Nations Longhouse in 2005, in order to seek approval for the Haudenosaunee women’s team to represent the Haudenosaunee people at an international level. Sandy’s memory of lacrosse in Haudenosaunee communities spans several generations. She was at the center of the moment in the 1980s when Haudenosaunee girls were asked not to play at Onondaga. She has extensively fundraised and put together a group of volunteers to sew uniforms ‘on a dime’ for a girls’ team preparing to compete at an international level; and has supported hundreds of girls and women to pursue lacrosse in their communities, in colleges, and at the international level. Sandy shares the following narrative of the impetus to bring lacrosse back to her community in the 1970s:

And then I went to college. That was just at the time of Title IX. And it was like – we wanted to play lacrosse. A bunch of us girls wanted to play lacrosse, but we couldn’t. I mean no one really recognized girls playing lacrosse. So what we did is we used a corner of the golf course. The [college] had a golf course. And it’s a rich, private college and we had an area that was about the size of a lacrosse field. And that’s where we would practice. And we’d practice. We were just a little club team. And we went up to Clarkson or Potsdam, tried to get some girls from up there to play. And that’s what we did. That’s what we did for about four years. And then when I finished college, I came home, and I played around here. And there was really nothing. I mean there was absolutely nothing for young women. I got so disappointed because I got home from college, and yeah,
everybody was around, but they were all out partying, and doing this. And Lake Erie is just down the road and all the clubs that lined the lake, the big beach clubs they called them. They have the big dance floors, bars. And you'd go down the road, and there's another one, and there's another one, and there's another one. They were all along the lake. And if you’re a college kid, it’s a fun place to be. But I was also looking for something else to do. So we had tennis courts over there so I would play tennis. But I still wanted to play lacrosse. So when I heard about the Iroquois Nationals, it made me frustrated. They had a men’s team. And I kept saying, why not women? Why not women? We can do a women’s team. We can teach them.12

Sandy’s commitment to lacrosse and Haudenosaunee girls and women playing is palpable in interviews. She is from a community that is known for being traditional and for condoning girls and women playing, a seeming contradiction that I address in this chapter.

Tsiotenhariio Herne, from Akwesasne, played every sport possible “because my mom thought it was good for me to be in figure skating for all my life, and I hated it.”13 Tsiotenhariio “never thought about girls being able to play lacrosse,” until someone on her soccer team suggested it. At that time, they “played for the fun of it,” and they “had a really weak program.”14 It was their coach, John Lazore from Akwesasne, who built up the new and fledgling program at the Salmon River High School, just east of the Akwesasne Nation in New York. Lazore has two daughters who, Sandy Jemison reports, made commitments to Dartmouth as high school sophomores. At the time, his daughters were in sixth and seventh grade, playing varsity lacrosse for Massena High School, twelve miles southwest of Akwesasne. They transferred to Salmon River, and John Lazore worked with the team year-round, playing tournaments in Rochester, Syracuse, Albany, and Long Island. "It was one of our last tournaments, and we had got beaten pretty bad, and we were getting beat by these good teams like constantly. And we got

12 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.  
14 Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
beat by this team by two or three points. And he turned to us and said when was the last time you
guys got beat by twenty or ten? That’s when I realized just how much he has put into us.”

Tsiotenhariio said she kept playing for the sheer joy of it. “It felt right, and I loved it. I could run.
Everyone told me how fast I was on the field and I loved that.” Tsiotenhariio, who at the time
was going through personal struggles and “making stupid choices,” says that lacrosse saved her
life and helped her feel important.

Akwesasne Mohawk Clan mother and Tsiotenhariio’s mother, Louise McDonald, frames
the controversy with the following: “The game was given to the people.” Louise McDonald
asks, “At what point did it become a men’s only game?” Most would say that the medicine
game never left the community, but that colonization and assimilation has changed it. The game
that returns now to communities is a contemporary game, with traditional and medicinal roots.
During the process of returning, the contemporary game has become a location whereby
Haudenosaunee men can consolidate masculinity, after hundreds of years of having traditional
roles diminished by settler colonialism. Louise McDonald says:

And with the reclaiming, there developed an attitude with it. Because the more that the
men were unable to hunt and fish, the more that they were unable to go to war, the more
that their own environment and their roles and responsibilities diminished, they had to
hold fast to certain areas of the culture, and so lacrosse became a men-only sport.

In understanding this controversy from a Haudenosaunee perspective, it is important to
acknowledge how much colonization has taken away from Haudenosaunee men, informing a

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15 Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
16 Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
17 Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
18 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
19 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
20 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
growing popularity of lacrosse as a cultural reclamation. A player from Oneida Nation captures the manner in which Haudenosaunee communities staked their place as the original people to play the game in the 1980s when lacrosse was dramatically increasing in popularity. She says of her time playing at college, “I wasn’t going to sit there and let white girls play my sport and not play.”

What it means to be traditional, and how Haudenosaunee communities define lacrosse in traditional terms, is at the center of the controversy over Haudenosaunee girls and women playing. Jeanne Shenandoah, Onondaga midwife, and elder believes that it is a loss of tradition that is resulting in, and has resulted from, Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse. Jeanne, and those who share her hard line that this generation of Haudenosaunee girls and women who are playing are "disrespecting our true way for convenience." Jeanne expands: “Lacrosse has become a popular thing…It’s always been here, besides the fad that it is now – the college deal, and scholarships and awards…It’s always been here.” It is not that Jeanne is opposed to Haudenosaunee people going to college, but that Haudenosaunee women using lacrosse as a way to access a college education mistreats the game. She states:

I truly believe that you need to know who you are, have a good solid foundation about who your people are, who you are. And then you can go anywhere you want, all over the face of this earth. But that's the problem; people are not giving these young people this knowledge. We're at the point where we have several generations that are away from it, have been away from it, have not truly tried to be part of it, or to be faithful to our way of life and our cycle of thanksgiving all year round…So some people go to Longhouse for that day, and that's that.”

21 Interview by author, March 14, 2012.
These concerns are directly linked Haudenosaunee community members' sorrow for what has been lost through colonization – lifeways and cultural knowledge, specifically – and fear that something so central to Haudenosaunee culture as lacrosse is that which is taking younger generations away from these knowledges and life-ways.

Jeanne and Berdie Hill, introduced in the introduction to this project, share similar, though not identical points of view when it comes to Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse. The following piece of our interview illuminates Berdie’s and Jeanne’s shared points of view, as well as why it is imperative for them to be central to this chapter:

J: Who are you going to please when you write this? Who are you presenting it to?

S: Well, I'll be honest that by and large, the voices in this will be people who play, or who support women who play. And my daughter, my 13-year-old daughter just asked me what my opinion was about – because I said I was interviewing you today – she said, well what’s your opinion? My opinion is that I need to present this in a complex way that makes sense for a culture. It doesn’t really matter what I think. But I am writing it. That’s the challenge. My point of view – whether or not I want it to – will be there.

J: Yeah, and who knows, maybe it will change by the time you get to the point, too.

S: That’s quite possible. I interviewed Berdie Hill before she passed. And…even though I may have felt disagreement with some of the things that she said – which doesn’t matter, if I feel or don’t feel – but, I kind of left the interview feeling like I understood why it was so important that Haudenosaunee women don’t play. So that’s the essence I’ll be trying to write.

J: Yeah, Berdie was a good friend of mine. We didn’t share the same views on everything, but they were similar. We were friends. She came from the older group of people teaching stuff…. So, it was comforting to be friends with them because we shared the same views, although I think that my lifetime of political experience and activism – always in some kind of movement – I’m not patting myself on the shoulder. I’m just giving a – it gave me a wider view of things. So, I was very curious. I did a lot of reading when I was younger and met up with people. I’ve traveled all over the world. Not on a vacation, ever. Always working. So, it helped me to understand a lot of the stuff that had happened to us. Most of our people don’t even realize, you know? Intrusions into our thinking and people not realizing it.

S: Colonization of the mind.
Jeanne and Berdie embody the sovereignty that the Onondaga Clan mothers held when they decided in the 1980s to lay down on the field if Haudenosaunee women played.

The internal controversy over girls and women playing strikes poignancy at a particular moment in 1987 when Onondaga Clan mothers asked a team of women not to play, creating fuzzy lines around what is and is not a medicine game. Did they see it coming, this poignant moment in the controversy? Sandy Jemison recalls preparing for a demonstration of girls' lacrosse to be held at Onondaga Lake, between the Iroquois National Women's Team and "one of those Syracuse teams – CNS (Cicero-North Syracuse) or Fayetteville-Manlius." She continues, "It was going to be a big deal because they were really a powerhouse in New York State at that time." She was informed the night before by coach and supporter, Carol Patterson, that, “You don’t have to pack, we can’t play…The Clan mothers are real upset…and always been fighting that we shouldn’t be playing, and they said that if we play, they will lay down on the field, so we can’t play.” So when Sandy protested, Carol continued, "No, we can't. They're going to go there in full force, and that's what they're going to do. So, I'm calling everyone and telling them just to stay home.”

Sandy did not stay home: “I got mad – very mad.” While she was there, some asked her why they were not playing: "And some of them could understand [the ban from playing], and some did not. And [some] said, look, we have videotapes of the games. We'll show the Clan mothers what we're playing, and…what's so different about it. And [the Clan mothers] didn't

25 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
26 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
27 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
28 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
29 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
even want to see it. They said, ‘No, we know it's still called lacrosse.’

Speaking about her mother who played for the team in the 1980s, Corinne Abrams (Tuscarora) relayed:

I have the picture of my mom (below) on the cover [of The Turtle Island News], sitting with her jersey on, but I don’t know that she actually played. I think that it got up to the point where they had the team together and then they never actually played. I didn’t realize it had been because the Clan mothers protested.

The caption under the image of Kim Clause (now Kim Abrams) says, "Lacrosse Player, Iroquois Nationals." The article, which pictures Kim Clause giving a simple lacrosse workout says, "The Iroquois Nationals Lacrosse Program, which includes both men's and women's teams, was begun [sic] after being sanctioned by the Iroquois Grand Council." Not long after this went into

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30 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
31 Corinne Abrams, Interview by author, September 21, 2015. Turtle Quarterly is a Haudenosaunee produced periodical that was published between 1986 and 2011 in Niagara Falls (U.S.). The publication featured news articles, letters to the editor, artwork, stories, and features of local interest. The issues from the 1980s are particularly vocal about the fear of assimilation, land rights, and Christian encroachment.
publication, some Haudenosaunee leadership told this team's leadership they would not be able to call themselves the Iroquois Nationals. So decades later when Haudenosaunee women again formed teams to play internationally, they called themselves the Haudenosaunee Women’s Lacrosse Team.

What is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities and respect for the integrity of the medicine game frames the controversy. What is at stake and the integrity of the medicine game are deeply connected. There is protection around the medicine game. Haudenosaunee people whom I interviewed ranged from not interested in sharing much about it to outwardly offended by questions about it. However, girls and women playing lacrosse calls for more precise definitions of what constitutes medicine and where medicine resides in relationship to the game. The collection of women represented in this chapter are all deeply invested in defining traditional lacrosse for their communities. Some embody sovereignty through playing, some through holding a hard line against women playing. Moreover, while some play it as a way of restoring their physical and mental well-being, and thus the health of their communities and others see this as a sign of assimilation, all hold lacrosse as an essential vehicle for traditionalism for the present and future. This is an incredibly complex set of questions that are being worked out, and overly simplistic explanations erase how Haudenosaunee communities are working to define traditionalism and medicine through the controversy.

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33 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
Overly-Simplistic Representations

The following four examples are simplistic representations of the internal controversy over women and girls playing lacrosse. I share these first as a way of distinguishing them from more complex understandings of traditionalism that privilege futurity. As previously stated, Aimee Berg's representation is an outsider's perspective that limits the political role of tradition within Haudenosaunee communities. In her representation in “LACROSSE: Cradle of a Sport Has Crossed the Gender Line,” tradition is the enemy of progress. Berg uses the language of crossing a gender line and succeeding against the wishes of the Clan mothers to portray young women “caught in the struggle between tradition and opportunity.”

Here, Berg recasts the characters in her piece into a narrative of western feminism, pitting Clan mothers and the lacrosse players against each other. Berg does not identify the Clan mothers except to say that they are Iroquois, but for her purposes, she does not need to. In her lack of acknowledgment of women's power within Haudenosaunee communities, the Clan mothers and traditionalism are cast as oppressive similarly as western patriarchy, holding young women back and keeping them firmly on their side of the gender line. Berg establishes the young women playing two decades later as a victory along western feminist lines, while ignoring how their playing is attached to their being Haudenosaunee.

Berg's representation is fraught with irony, as it omits a long history of sexism in sports and exclusionary realities for women athletes within mainstream dominant cultures. Berg’s colonial gaze is unreflective of the fact that there is no professional lacrosse league for women, a function of the sexism inherent in dominant society, positioning the Haudenosaunee as not entirely up to par with advancement for women. This depiction does not

35 I address gender norms and gender balance more specifically in chapter three.
accurately or adequately represent this conflict from the point of view of Haudenosaunee peoples. Even reference to Haudenosaunee cultural traditions can present overly simplistic representations and erasures regarding girls and women playing lacrosse, as with the next example.

When I first started this project, while presenting the early set of questions to a mostly Haudenosaunee audience, after I laid out some of the questions I would be addressing one gentleman in the room asked me if I knew that lacrosse was part of their creation narrative (indicating that he was not Haudenosaunee). This question was meant to answer the question and end the discussion with an overly simplistic analysis. What was being communicated here was that all that needed to be understood was that lacrosse is a game that is part of the Haudenosaunee creation narrative, given by the creator, and played by men. Knowing this should answer why women should not play because men did not play the version of lacrosse that the creator gave as a medicine game. The question, are you aware that lacrosse is part of their creation narrative, does, at least in part, explain why there is a controversy surrounding girls and women playing. However, it also points to a conflation of medicinal and contemporary lacrosse, and here is where definitions of tradition come into play. In this man’s logic, because there is a game given by the creator as a medicine game for the community that is traditionally only played by men, then the game that Haudenosaunee men play today is traditional, and therefore medicinal, and therefore only played by men. Two things never change in this understanding of tradition: the game of lacrosse and Haudenosaunee culture. Those employing this trajectory fix definitions of tradition and simplify the controversy within culturally rigid terms.

The third example in this inquiry is ‘the power Haudenosaunee women hold to give birth.’ Haudenosaunee women hold the culture alive through ceremony, their connectedness to
creation, through giving and sustaining life, and as important repositories and purveyors of knowledge. This power is at times reduced in patriarchal and heteronormative ways, to simply the ability to give birth. At a research symposium, a young Cayuga man echoed an adage I have heard many times, "Women do not play lacrosse, or touch a man's stick, because of their ability to give birth and menstruate." One young woman lacrosse player echoes this: "So the way [it was explained to me], as women, as givers of life, our bodies are sacred.”

Nancy Napierala’s biographical dissertation of Pearl White (Cattaraugus Seneca, 1933-2012) establishes the long-standing perspective: “When Pearl was young, girls were not allowed to play lacrosse, which was exclusively a male game. Pearl says the running and stick manipulation were thought to overdevelop the 51 muscles they would need for childbirth, making a barrier around the birth canal.” At the same gathering where an audience member asked if I knew that lacrosse was part of Haudenosaunee creation narratives, an elder Haudenosaunee woman said that she had always heard that women do not play because it threatens their ability to give birth. She discussed the physical risk, a concern echoed by several I have interviewed as a way of explaining the controversy. Such statements suggest that if we only acknowledged and understood that women’s power is why they should not play, the questions would be answered. It also seems that

36 I discuss the gendering of the lacrosse stick and the colonization of menstruation in chapter three.
37 Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
39 We can make parallels between this statement made by Haudenosaunee community members and arguments against non-Indigenous US women playing sports in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This parallel is complicated because it is difficult to pull apart what is and is not colonial impositions of western patriarchy onto Haudenosaunee culture. There is a risk, as with Berg’s representation of superimposing western feminist history onto Haudenosaunee relevancies. Doing so first situates Haudenosaunee women as “behind” eurowestern women in a fight for equality. Doing so also runs the risk of conflating two sets of value ascribed to childbirth—eurowestern and Haudenosaunee—while ignoring the ways in which the power associated with connection to creation has actual teeth in Haudenosaunee communities—but that has, to varying extents been colonized.
such a statement ignores a history of colonial assaults on Haudenosaunee women’s bodies, specifically their ability and power to give birth.\footnote{One example of how Native women’s bodies and rights are violated in regard to giving birth is the rampant coerced and forced sterilizations of Native women in the 1960s and 1970s, through Indian Health Services. See Jane Lawrence, "The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women," \textit{The American Indian Quarterly} 24, no. 3 (2000): 400-419.}

The final example of overly simplistic representations of tradition is connected to the sentiment, “It’s how we’ve always done it.” An example of how the male gendering of lacrosse is linked to tradition is in the recent article, “WLAX (Women’s Lacrosse): We Got Next: Rise of the Haudenosaunee,” in which Iroquois Nationals player Neal Powless (Onondaga Nation, Eel Clan) states that the only two communities who still play traditional lacrosse are Onondaga and Tonawanda.\footnote{OrangeXtreme, "WLAX: We Got Next: Rise of the Haudenosaunee," Syracusefan.com, September 02, 2014. Accessed June 10, 2018. https://syracusefan.com/threads/wlax-we-got-next-rise-of-the-haudenosaunee.79469/} This is directly referencing that these two communities discourage women and girls from playing. Here, Powless is defining traditional lacrosse as the medicine game, which does not include women playing. To make this claim, ‘traditional’ exists on a linear timeline, conjuring an image of a past and fixed reality. Employing an understanding of tradition that \textit{only} looks to how things were done in the past – most often pre-colonization – solves the question of whether or not girls and women should play the contemporary game by first determining what was done in the past, and then applying past practice to the present. Two interesting facts about this 2014 article are that, (1) it is no longer accessible on laxmagazine.com or syracusefan.com, the only two places it was featured, and that (2) Neal Powless’s position has shifted since then. The only piece of the article that is available is a bit of the abstract:

\textbf{Why do you want to play lacrosse? Nowhere is that question more important than in Native American communities. From Neal Powless at Nazareth to Marshall Abrams at Syracuse and the Thomspsons at Albany, Iroquois men have forged a path from the Six Nations to the U.S. collegiate ranks, honoring a game rooted in their native traditions. They left their reservations with lacrosse scholarships in hand and returned as role
models. But what about their sisters and cousins, mothers and aunts? That’s a loaded question...

When I asked Neal Powless about his position when I interviewed him, his point of view had shifted.

S: I read something in Lacrosse magazine or LAX magazine where you were quoted as saying that only two communities that still practice or play traditional lacrosse are Tonawanda and Onondaga. Now I cannot – I think that article has been pulled from the internet.
N: Mmm hmm.
S: Because I cannot find that anywhere. Maybe you could just talk about that. Is that the case that just two –
N: Well that’s changed. So initially, at that time when I did that interview, I hadn’t known a whole lot of people. I know that I had talked to individuals from Six Nations and they didn’t know of the traditional medicine game going on in their community. It might have been individual families that may have still been doing it, but they weren’t like saying, ‘Hey here’s a medicine game. Grab your wooden stick and come play.’ And since then, I’ve been to multiple communities with traditional teams.

Neal’s comments reflect both the ways in which conversations regarding the medicine game’s relationship to the contemporary game is a gendered discussion, as well as why Haudenosaunee girls and women playing requires communities to more clearly define these distinctions. Later in the interview, Neal described how his long career with contemporary lacrosse began with his participation in the medicine game. This is not and cannot be the case for Haudenosaunee women who play the contemporary game, and yet Haudenosaunee women claim the game as their own, and some Haudenosaunee communities and community members culturally claim the game for their girls and women. This complexity demonstrates how the simple articulation, it was not done in the past, therefore women should not play in the future, does not work, not to mention that some claim that girls and women have always played.

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During an interview, two Oneida elders employ this approach in discussing why some think girls and women should not play: “It just wasn’t a function for women. There was no purpose for a woman to play. There were women there, but they were more or less to get the water and make sure the men were nourished and hydrated.” This approach to the conversation forecloses on the question of whether or not Haudenosaunee girls and women should play by ignoring contemporary issues that Haudenosaunee women and communities face, especially in relationship to a colonized past and present, are ignored. Colonization is only implicitly named through the accusations of assimilation connected to girls and women playing, as assimilation is only possible in relation to colonization. Rather than foreclosing on the question of what is and is not traditional, and if girls and women are violating tradition if they play, a more complex rendering of the controversy holds open the category of tradition, illuminating how the Haudenosaunee address change through tradition.

**Conceptualizing Tradition**

What follows are moves toward defining and understanding tradition and how Haudenosaunee community members employ tradition specifically in relation to girls and women playing lacrosse. I begin with broad strokes and then move to Haudenosaunee and other Indigenous scholars to more incisively articulate tradition. There are two primary understandings of how tradition informs understandings of girls and women playing lacrosse. The first tenet is that traditional communities do not approve of or condone girls and women playing lacrosse. In broad strokes, not accounting for individual differences within communities, Onondaga Nation, Tonawanda Seneca territory, and Tuscarora territory hold this belief. In interviews, two young women from Tuscarora describe a direct relationship between support for girls and women

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44 Interview by author, March 15, 2012.
playing lacrosse and a more inclusive policy toward non-Haudenosaunee people living on their reservation. Amber laments, "My family, unfortunately, wasn't traditional...and nobody in our community that I knew of was outwardly against women playing lacrosse."\textsuperscript{45} Corinne, from Tuscarora, further describes a loss of tradition, relating the controversy to exclusion versus inclusion: “Generally they don’t kick anybody off [the reservation] if they’re not Native. And [at Onondaga] that happens...And we’re a lot more inclusive to outsiders, but at the same time, that’s diluted our culture a bit.”\textsuperscript{46} Here, these two women from Tuscarora equate more relaxed rules about white people living in their territory with a more relaxed relationship to girls and women playing lacrosse. In a follow-up interview for clarification, I asked her if it is acceptable at Tuscarora for white people who have no familial affiliation with Haudenosaunee people to live there and our exchange went as follows:

C: Technically, no. That happened a few years ago in one of the trailer parks, I think, and the council asked them to leave. It is only acceptable for someone who has married a Tuscarora to live with them there.

S: Is that the case for both men and women? A man can marry a Tuscarora woman and a woman a Tuscarora man, and stay? Does Tuscarora recognize same-sex union?

C: Yes, it’s fine either way. And yes to same-sex, I believe, too.

S: In your interview, you said that Tuscarora is more open to outsiders than Onondaga. Is that still the case, do you think?

C: Yes. No white people are allowed to live in Onondaga.

S: Even if they are married to someone there?

C: Yeah.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
\textsuperscript{46} Corinne Abrams, Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
\textsuperscript{47} Interview by author, June 9, 2018.
While some talk about tradition as something that must be preserved, from a position that tradition was not and cannot be wholly lost, others talk about it as that which must be revived, further demonstrating how tradition is in flux. Again, of Tuscarora, Corinne articulates, “So we don’t have the Longhouse and traditional ceremonies as often as they do here [at Onondaga]. There’s a small group of traditionalists on the Tuscarora reservation who are trying to revive our culture and bring back the ceremonies. They’re doing that more and more now than they ever have in the past 30 to 40 years.”

Another broad stroke understanding of traditional that is employed to understand girls and women playing lacrosse is that girls and women playing lacrosse is traditional; the Great Law allows for adding new rafters when times call for it, and colonization has called for it. Again, not accounting for individual differences, this is the point of view present at Six Nations, Akwesasne Mohawk Nation, and Cattaraugus Seneca territory.

Within the framework of traditional longhouse communities do not endorse girls and women playing lacrosse is the understanding that girls and women playing mean assimilation has occurred. Within this perspective, those who adamantly disagree with girls and women playing sometimes attribute their playing to putting opportunities such as college ahead of cultural integrity. From the perspective that it is possible to be a traditional Longhouse community and support girls and women playing lacrosse, women, and girls who play are shaping what traditional means in this moment and for the future. It is not so cut and dry, because even those who may lament that girls and women playing lacrosse has some assimilative causation – but who still play anyway – rely on those who oppose it for how they hold the culture.

In order to define Haudenosaunee traditionalism and make connections to this controversy, I turn to Haudenosaunee scholars Theresa McCarthy (Six Nations, Onondaga,
Beaver Clan) and Audra Simpson (Kahnawà:ke Mohawk) for the ways in which they (1) conclusively demonstrate the limits of defining traditional along a linear timeline, (2) illuminate the ways in which traditionalism informs essential discussions among Haudenosaunee community members, and, (3) analyze how they define traditionalism as that which has continuity, is about futurity, and at times requires ethnographic refusal as a way of preserving that continuity into the future.

Both McCarthy and Simpson critique an understanding of Haudenosaunee tradition unchanging and relegated to the past, critiquing Iroquoianists such as Hewitt, Parker, Goldenweiser, Speck, Shimony, and Fenton for their anthropological search for a "pure" traditionalism, untainted by colonization. Says Simpson, “[Fenton] focuses on the ‘traces’ of cultural knowledge and practice that appeared pure and unchanged from the past.”48 The problems with this, Simpson contends, are many, not the least of which that “the people he worked with were knowledgeable about tradition and Iroquois lore, but that knowledge and lore was of ‘the New Religion’ of Handsome Lake, the preacher/prophet who revitalized and reinterpreted the Great Law of Peace to adjust Iroquois people structurally and ritually to the demands of a settler landscape.”49 What Fenton et al. miss in these representations of "untainted," pre-contact Haudenosaunee traditionalism is traditionalism that deeply responds to colonization, traditionalism that Haudenosaunee communities reinterpret through the continuity of The Great Law. McCarthy demonstrates how Fenton's lifetime of work with the Haudenosaunee did not at all render him sympathetic to their labors toward sovereignty. For

example, Fenton was actively against the inter-generational fight the Haudenosaunee engaged in to repatriate 21 wampum belts from the New York State Museum in Albany and the Heye Foundation Museum. Fenton's work toward "preserving" a "past culture" not only missed but was actively against the contemporary labor of sovereignty and how that labor is deeply connected to tradition.

Simpson and McCarthy demonstrate how The Great Law itself is an articulation of tradition as continuity and futurity. That it came into being pre-contact disrupts the idea of a "pure" tradition pre-contact, for the very fact that it is itself a response to the great turmoil that occurred before European encroachment. The Great Law already names Haudenosaunee traditionalism as an intellectual, ongoing reality, a tradition that has the broad ability to deal with warring nations and extremely diverse points of view. McCarthy names the capacity of the Great Law and its significance for the Haudenosaunee to address present difficulties:

The Great Law is not meant to impinge on personal autonomy, but it encourages collective responsibility. It offers many orienting principles that can unify people, without requiring everyone to be the same. Historically, it has brought together people who were so at odds that they were killing each other, so it has accommodated enormous differences without being exclusionary. And it has continued to serve these functions since its formation. Over time, we have had Christian Chiefs and Clan mothers; we have had leaders who have intermarried with non-Natives or other nations. We have the Mohawk Workers who are Christian proponents of the Great Law as well as staunch advocates of the Confederacy. The system can transcend diversity, and it is meant to be inclusive. It espouses thinking and practices meant for everyone to get behind.50

This understanding of the Great Law is incredibly vital for naming how the internal controversy over girls and women playing lacrosse functions within Haudenosaunee communities. As McCarthy states, personal autonomy is essential within Haudenosaunee

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communities. Girls and women enact that autonomy regularly by playing lacrosse, even without full consent or approval from their communities. Collective responsibility comes into play when whole teams and their leaders look to the future of their sovereignty and decide to stay home instead of flying with settler state passports, as happened with the U19 girls' team in 2015. The Great Law holds within it "the things we hold sacred; our languages, cultures, beliefs, and rights. The people within the circle are to be of one mind and heart." That there is not one clear opinion about if girls and women should play lacrosse does not indicate that some are traditional, and others are not, but instead that the Great Law intends that the "one mind" of the people should be expansive and inclusive. As McCarthy purports, this "commitment [to futurity] long predates settler encroachment" and is grounded in present action. Haudenosaunee tradition holds space for raising or adding to, the rafters to address changing times. Culture is dynamic, not fixed. Fixed interpretations of what it means to be traditional threaten the health and longevity of any culture. And yet, Haudenosaunee community members sometimes employ this definition of tradition to explain why Haudenosaunee women and girls do not, or at least should not, play lacrosse.

At times, the discussion of traditionalism falls into ontological trappings and the limits of individual identity, (which is distinct from individual autonomy). Arguments about who is and

53 Recall from Chapter one, the Longhouse beginning with one rafter: “It was at this spot that the Peacemaker decided to begin to build his Longhouse of One Family; it was time for him to put up the first rafter,” Brian Rice, The Rotinonshonn: i a Traditional Iroquoian History through the Eyes of Teharonhia:wak: and Sawiskera (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), p. 190. Louise McDonald echoes with, “Where The Great Law of Peace, they put in there a provision that says when you come in times of change, and you need to change this law, you can add to the rafters.”
who is not traditional significantly limit what traditionalism is and does within Haudenosaunee communities. Both Jeanne and Amber make a distinction between tradition as an ontological identity and tradition as praxis. Jeanne states, “There’s a difference between theory and practice. A lot of people running round talking about theory. If you truly believe in something then you practice and make it a part of your whole being.”

Amber echoes that distinction:

Maybe they say they’re traditional and they don’t go to Longhouse…when you’re traditional, you’re always supposed to have a good mind. And you’re not supposed to…participate in any activities that would change your mind and give you a bad mind, so drinking, alcohol, anything of that nature. But people do that and then say they are traditional…They like the badge of “I’m traditional, but I do what I want.”

Also, within this field of understanding, the community sees itself as dynamic, and change not just assumptive of assimilation, but traditional in and of itself, as communities make important shifts as needs arise, though the speed at which change is enacted and how is up for debate.

It is this painful and recent past that is shared inter-generationally among Haudenosaunee women and their communities. With this collective, painful past, generations look to each other to hold the culture. At the center of this interdependence is the value of respect, which Linda Tuhiwai Smith says is:

consistently used by indigenous peoples to underscore the significance of our relationships and humanity. Through respect the place of everyone and everything in the universe is kept in balance and harmony. Respect is a reciprocal, shared, constantly interchanging principle which is expressed through all aspects of social conduct.

Paula Gunn Allen echoes this reality with, “Belonging is a basic assumption for traditional Indians, and estrangement is seen as so abnormal that narratives and rituals that restore the

54 Jeanne Shenandoah, Interview by author, June 9, 2017.
estranged to his or her place within the cultural matrix abound.”  

Haudenosaunee peoples, like all Indigenous peoples, held onto, and continue to hold onto, their cultures by their fingertips over and over again, through all of the difficulties of colonization; an ongoing history of survival, within a cultural context of respect and interdependence that must inform any discussion about the internal controversy about women playing lacrosse.

Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players demonstrate through their actions that simplistic representations of this controversy, cannot and will not adequately capture that which is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities. Haudenosaunee women speak of the interdependence they have among the generations, how the wisdom of elders is passed on from generation to generation, and the ways in which this controversy is tied to loss of language and land. Of Berg’s article, Amber Hill, of Six Nations of Grand River, responds, “Western media, people who are outside of our communities, that don’t really understand what’s going on, [can villainize] the Clan mothers…[when] they were standing up for what they believe in.”  

Another player, from Tuscarora Nation in New York, concurs, demonstrating what makes this controversy distinctly Haudenosaunee:

Standing up for what you believe in is a fundamental in our culture. My grandmother always says, Indians are the most stubborn people you’ll ever meet…That’s ingrained in us to stand up for our ideas and what we think is right, and how we think our future generations should live…That’s why we’re still around today, right? Because maybe another culture would have…[assimilated] into your culture…But we don’t do that. And that’s why we’re still here today, although in smaller numbers because of the sad history that’s happened…settlers taking our land.

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58 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
59 Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
Amber also disagrees with Berg in that their cultural stance stood in the way of anyone playing lacrosse, stating, “You can’t say that one incident held back anyone. Claudia Jimerson still played lacrosse at Fredonia and became an All-American and she’s in that same age group. And she played on my World cup team after having five kids…so I don’t agree with this statement [that women were held back from playing].” These young women are relying on the lessons learned from their elders to make decisions for their own daughters: “I would never not allow my daughter to play…I would always want her to go out, just because that’s my identity and I believe that’s a good thing for me and for future generations. But I can completely understand why someone would think the opposite, too. And I see where they’re coming from…and I respect that.”

Amber’s daughter has been playing co-ed box lacrosse since she was three. When her team plays at Onondaga or Tonawanda, her daughter cannot play. When I asked Amber how this is understood and who enforces this she responded: “It’s an understanding [that she doesn’t play]. Although if I wanted to push it, her team wouldn’t let her, and if [her team] wanted to force the issue, the staff at Tonawanda and Onondaga wouldn’t even let her on the floor.”

Amber says she is “sad that she has to see that and experience that being so young,” but also glad “because she won’t get slapped in the face with it when she’s older and doesn’t understand.”

Amber says she and her daughter go to Longhouse, are very traditional, and play lacrosse. Here, Amber seems to be conceptualizing her and her daughter’s participation in lacrosse as in addition to their participation in Longhouse, perhaps in defiance of understandings of tradition that would

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60 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
61 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
63 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
omit not only her participation from lacrosse, but from Longhouse because of her participation in lacrosse.

**Boarding School and Cultural Memory**

The act of remembering a colonized past is far more than an ethnographic exercise, but a political path toward shaping the present and future. Remembering, as a collective, communal act, is part of identifying how Haudenosaunee communities respond in the present day to a painful past. When a community acknowledges a painful past, according to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “Both healing and transformation become crucial strategies in any approach which asks a community to remember what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget.”

Haudenosaunee people remember the boarding school era from generation to generation, as a painful reality that nearly eradicated Haudenosaunee cultural practices and identities. Each generation of Haudenosaunee people share this painful past, though the approaches to healing and transformation vary.

Louise McDonald says, “Our ancestors were holding onto our culture by their fingertips.” This image conjures a people who are actively being pursued; a people whose reality includes a settler nation state that spends considerable resources and time addressing ‘the Indian problem.’ It reflects the reality of a people who are the target of a settler nation state whose legislative and religious entities engage in pseudo-philosophical debates about which policies are simultaneously the most humane towards ‘the Indians’ and best serve the nation-
state. Boarding schools housed some of the most insidious assimilation practices and reflect the ways in which the U.S. and Canada were working out their own identity issues as being benevolent – as opposed to violent – nation states.

The boarding school era, as assimilation policy, was informed by approaches that worked toward the outright corporeal destruction of Indigenous peoples. In regards to what her ancestors suffered, Louise McDonald iterates, “With much reverence for the generation that suffered and when through those tortuous things – and the genocide – for them it was a time of survival.”

This cruelty is encapsulated in General Philip Sheridan, language “The only good Indian I ever saw, was a dead one,” or Theodore Roosevelt’s, “I don’t go so far as to think that the only good Indians are dead ones, but I believe nine out of every 10 are.” In this climate of overt hatred reflected in policies of termination and removal, assimilation through boarding schools was purported as a kinder, gentler approach to the Indian problem.

The Carlisle Indian School, in Pennsylvania, where hundreds of Haudenosaunee young people were forced to attend, had been open for 13 years when “The Friends of the Indians” made remarks at The Nineteenth Annual Conference of Charities and Corrections in 1892. Reflected in statements made by Carlisle’s founder, Captain Richard Henry Pratt, is a national angst regarding how containment policies had left Indigenous populations in a state of “pauperism and crime.”

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67 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
and President of Colorado College, William F. Slocum encapsulate the role (and destructiveness) of boarding schools through the guise of benevolence, though to hear them tell it, they believe what they are saying in terms of their service to the Indians. Granted, the bar was low.

Commenting on ‘The only good Indian is a dead one’ Pratt iterates, “In a sense, I agree with that sentiment, but only in this: that all the Indian there is in the race, should be dead. Kill the Indian in him and save the man.” This nuance distinguishes from the overt annihilation of Indigenous bodies and overt land left in the form of outright massacres that were the backdrop of this assimilation policy but proves just as insidious in its goals and scope. At the same conference, William Slocum opines, “We may differ in our opinions in regard to the amount of training they are capable of receiving, or the regard to the direction that training should take; but we are agreed that the national policy of pauperizing the Indian, and keeping him as near to the brute life as possible, is a mistake, and a national disgrace to us.” Slocum goes on to say that of course none of the friends of the Indians were proposing that Native peoples were qualified for industrial or agricultural schools, let alone the likes of Harvard. These statements reflect a sub-par educational system, created to serve the avarice of the settler nation state. This history illuminates the obstacles that Indigenous peoples face in accessing higher education, and the successes of self-determination when a young Haudenosaunee person attends college, particularly in connection with their cultural game of lacrosse.

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The ‘friends of the Indians’ mock the lack of greed found among Natives, simultaneously justifying their belief that they are incapable of higher learning and forcing them into boarding schools. Philip C. Garrett, chairman of the assembly complained, “They are content with little. That is one thing that retards their civilization, because civilization has been defined to be a multiplication of wants.” Boarding schools, in part, were established to foster the success of privatization of land, forced on Native peoples through the Dawes Allotment Act (1887). Boarding schools were meant to create in Indians a sense of capitalist desire, though it was understood that the ‘multiplication of wants’ would not be possible among the Indians who were not capable of higher learning, or the associated insatiable capitalistic desire for more. Of the Allotment Act, Pratt laments, “Land in severalty, as administered, is in the way of the individualizing and civilization of the Indians and is a means of holding the tribes together.”

Pratt claimed that missionizing and Indian schools were to blame for the separateness of Native peoples from the rest of the nation. He claimed that only would the Indian be fully individualized and civilized when the government “interspersed good, civilized people among them.” As such, Pratt claimed, “The school at Carlisle is an attempt on the part of the government to do this. Carlisle has always planted treason to the tribe and loyalty to the nation at large.”

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fitness. Pratt saw organized physical activities, such as sports, as a way of “civilizing” those whose bodies he saw as impure and barbaric. This, however, was extremely gendered, and not surprisingly, the opportunity for girls and young women in boarding schools to play on sports teams was far less than the opportunity for boys and young men, a reality that mirrored mainstream society.  

So, when Louise McDonald says, “We were holding on by our fingertips,” she is remembering an insidious history of assimilation, a plot against Indigenous peoples by the settler nation states that is taking generations to heal and transform. This healing and transformation is deeply tied to Audra Simpson’s theoretical category of ‘refusal,’ in this case, the refusal to be eliminated. Simpson discusses the labor required for “refusing to go away, to cease to be” …by refusing to accept:

…the dispossession of your lands, of internalizing and believing the things that have been taught about you to you: that you are a savage, that your language is incoherent, that you are less than white people, not quite up to par…To accept these conditions is an impossible project for some Indigenous people, not because it is impossible to achieve, but because it is politically untenable and thus normatively should be refused.

The controversy itself over whether or not Haudenosaunee girls and women should play lacrosse represents a struggle over sovereignty, and a lamentation for land, life ways, and language lost. This is tied to how communities understand how tradition is in relationship to women and girls playing.

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77 For further information on sports and Indian boarding schools, see John Bloom, To Show What an Indian Can do: Sports at Native American Boarding Schools (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).
78 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
80 This connection to the embodiment of sovereignty is discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.
The Art of Refusal

The following discussion goes deeper into the discussion of refusal as it pertains to Haudenosaunee tradition and women and girls playing lacrosse, specifically engaging Audra Simpson’s generative theoretical category of ethnographic refusal. In short, generative authority is established by Haudenosaunee people through ethnographic refusal because communities decide what to include and not include in their own story production. This authority over Indigenous peoples’ story-telling is highlighted by Diné scholar, Jennifer Denetdale: “So it is that the Navajo in the very telling and retelling of their own stories, that their experiences under colonialism, have resisted Americans’ representations of Navajo.”81 Denetdale further articulates, “Perspectives of the past are constructions that transmit cultural beliefs and values that allow for the reevaluation and revaluation of indigenous peoples’ oral traditions as valid and legitimate histories.”82 In the following, I give three examples whereby Haudenosaunee community members determine the narrative, resisting colonization and transmitting cultural beliefs and values through ethnographic refusal.

The first example is the 2013 documentary, Sacred Stick, directed by Michelle Danforth (Oneida), which narrates Haudenosaunee reclamation of the contemporary game of lacrosse, rooted in the traditional game and medicinal ceremony. The film gives a narration of lacrosse that links the contemporary game played with plastic sticks, to the historical game played with wooden sticks, to the cosmological game played in the Sky World, and echoed in the medicinal game. The medicinal game, given to the Haudenosaunee as a ceremony to settle disputes and

82 Jennifer Denetdale, Reclaiming Diné History: The Legacies of Navajo Chief Manuelito and Juanita (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2007), 133.
bring medicine, weaves in and out of the film, adding layers of complexity to how lacrosse is
defined for future generations of Haudenosaunee people. In the film, Onondaga leader, Oren
Lyons, says that in the medicine game, “All the participants are spiritual beings for the help of
the person or community, the nation, the earth. We can do that with the game.”83 The medicine
game, still played today during Midwinter Ceremonies, or when there is a call for healing from
the community, is intricately linked to the traditional game and the contemporary game in the
film. ‘Traditional’ and ‘medicinal’ are sometimes used interchangeably when referring to the
contemporary game. Both, however, are meant to firmly position the contemporary game of
lacrosse as a game that originated with the Haudenosaunee.

_Sacred Stick_ tells the story of a game that is simultaneously returning to the
Haudenosaunee, and never left. Though some Indigenous claims are enacted on at the formal
level, passport disputes for example, others are made through informal venues such as film. Such
locations for claiming, according to Maori scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, “teach both the non-
indigenous audience and the new generations of indigenous peoples an official account of their
collective story.”84 Haudenosaunee communities have been in the process of crafting the official
account of lacrosse for broader audiences and new generations of Haudenosaunee people since
the 1980s when the Men’s Iroquois Nationals Team began preparing to play internationally; to
claim sovereign spaces through _their_ cultural game. The film relays that between 1887 and 1987,
Iroquois men’s lacrosse teams were officially banned from playing internationally, as they were
deemed, “too professional.”85 During that ban, many Iroquois men were recruited to play on U.S.
and Canadian teams, but without the ability to openly identify themselves as Haudenosaunee or

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83 _Sacred Stick_, Directed by Michelle Danforth, USA: Vision Maker Media, 2013. DVD.
85 _Sacred Stick_, Directed by Michelle Danforth, USA: Vision Maker Media, 2013. DVD.
claim the game as their own. Prior to the ban, Haudenosaunee teams were encouraged to “dress up Indian,” to add to the fan fair. This further separated Haudenosaunee players from their communities and lacrosse. In 1987, after years of work by leaders such as Oren Lyons, the International Lacrosse Federation voted in the Men’s Iroquois Nationals team with nation status. The team first played internationally in Perth, Australia in 1990. As Haudenosaunee communities claim the game of lacrosse, a game that has been disrespected and stolen, the acknowledgement of its roots returns to the people, though “the root of it all has never changed.” From the space of claiming and returning, the community can move to, “The creator gave us this game. We are sharing it with people all over the world” because, “It’s our game to share.”

Films such as Sacred Stick mark a victory for Haudenosaunee cultural repatriation. They provide a forum whereby Haudenosaunee community members can say to the growing lacrosse community; this game is everything to Haudenosaunee communities – far more than just a sport – and precedes everything on earth because it is part of Haudenosaunee Creation narratives. Members of the Men’s Iroquois Nationals team can say, “I’ve made plays where I didn’t know how I did it,” and be supported by elders with, “Our creator gives us these instincts. Non-Natives have to work harder to get the level Native players do with a clear mind.” Nowhere in the film is there any mention of Haudenosaunee women or girls playing lacrosse. As it claims lacrosse and beckons its return, and in an act of ethnographic refusal, the film names by omission the controversy over whether girls and women should play, purporting a decidedly simplistic representation of the medicine game. In talking about her own ethnographic work, Simpson

86 Jeanne Shenandoah, Interview by author, June 9, 2017.
87 Sacred Stick, Directed by Michelle Danforth, USA: Vision Maker Media, 2013. DVD.
88 Sacred Stick, Directed by Michelle Danforth, USA: Vision Maker Media, 2013. DVD.
describes how one makes particular decisions about the story being told: “The ethnographic limit then, [is] reached not just when it would cause harm (or extreme discomfort)\(^{89}\) – the limit [is] arrived at when the representation would hurt all of us and compromise the representational territory that we have gained for ourselves in the past 100 years.”\(^{90}\) One can surmise that Michelle Danforth hit ethnographic refusals in working with Haudenosaunee peoples to make this film, as told by the glaring omission of Haudenosaunee women’s contributions to the reclaiming of lacrosse.

The second and third examples of ethnographic refusal are found within my interviews with Jeanne Shenandoah and Berdie Hill. The ways in which Jeanne and Berdie drew a hard line against Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse are positioned within a framework of refusal, speaking to what is at stake for Haudenosaunee communities. There is very little about the heart of their culture that these two women were willing to share. There has been too much damage; too much theft. I asked Jeanne if she could share something with me about traditional lacrosse. She responded:

> What do you want to know about it? Maybe I don’t want to tell you about this stuff. I just got through telling you that it’s such a hard time for us to protect what we have…We’re asking for respect, that you don’t come walking in the door and say, this is my house, and you come in, you want to know everything – you’ve got a right. People think they have a right to know everything and then do whatever they want, which…is disrespect because people use knowledge as possession. Possession moves it away from spirituality.\(^{91}\)

Jeanne recalls a time when in the late 1800s, the local newspaper would write about and share photographs of Haudenosaunee ceremonies:

> I’ve seen those clippings…They were appropriating…and that caused us to close the door here. Because it’s our teaching that the door’s open anytime and anybody’s welcome, but

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\(^{89}\) Author’s emphasis.


\(^{91}\) Jeanne Shenandoah, Interview by author, June 9, 2017.
stuff was going on…that caused us to close the door. [Lacrosse] is one of our original teachings. It’s a very sacred medicine game that we use to help each other. Specific ways that they do it, that I’m not gonna say because if somebody hears it, they’ll go running out there setting it up.92

The one statement that Jeanne shared with me about Haudenosaunee lifeways was, “My path in life is to be humble, compassionate, dedicate myself to the spiritual ways of thanksgiving, all the time; to appreciate the original teachings of my people, to keep them alive. Because if we don’t have spiritual beliefs or behaviors, what are we?”93 For those who are in opposition to girls and women playing lacrosse, this is what is at stake. For those involved in traditional Longhouse communities, who are in opposition to Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse, the integrity of the Longhouse and the future of tradition itself is threatened.

The contradictions present in Jeanne’s interview can also be underscored by ethnographic refusal, as well. This can be seen in Jeanne’s responses to Haudenosaunee men playing the contemporary game, and the changes to the game as being acceptable. I asked Jeanne what she thought about Haudenosaunee boys and men playing this contemporary version of lacrosse:

J: I don’t know, it’s okay, I guess, because we do have our own sacred games here, public not invited. And then, like I told you, things change. It’s a big sport amongst our people. All ages. And things change because you have to join a league. You can’t just be a team, you gotta be in a league and follow the rules. And they didn’t want to play outside anymore. We just have to follow the rules, so most people do. Running around with aluminum, plastic sticks. Yeah. I just went to a nice game last weekend. I went to Allegany with my daughter and a whole load of kids. And it was so nice because the announcer did it entirely in the language.

S: Really?

J: It was so nice. That was some fast thinker to be able to watch this fast sports game and then announce it all in – because you know, in announcing sports you gotta say the number, and what play, and all that. Oh that was, that was great.
Jeanne’s hard line is motivated by refusing colonialism, though it is also possible to read these as punitive responses resultant from what was imposed on Haudenosaunee youth through boarding schools – a fascinating conundrum inherent in this controversy.

Young Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players are responsible for more and more first-generation college students among their communities. Akwesasne Clan mother, Louise McDonald, attributes this increase to the Thompson brothers who played for the University of Albany. “They started to create new veins of success. So, you know usually when the men do something the women aren’t too far behind. And colleges started to offer scholarships for lacrosse, it wasn’t enough to do it for the boys, they had to do it for the girls.”

Tsiotenhariio says that without lacrosse she doesn’t know that she would have even thought of college. This empowerment connects to what is at the center of Haudenosaunee communities: women and being a matrilineal society is at the center of what the culture works to hold onto. Louise McDonald claims that decolonization has to include being real about being a matrilineal society: “Because of the undercurrents that have diminished those roles of women with colonization, we have gotten away from it. And we’ve lost focus and we’ve lost sight of the importance of a women led society.”

Jeanne Shenandoah agrees with this, but comes at it at a different angle, seeing girls and women playing lacrosse as a sure sign that they are out of touch with their culture; a direct result of colonization. From this perspective, a matrilineal society is in danger with girls and women playing lacrosse, but it also a moment of refusal. This is directly tied to land, ceremony, and nationhood. Both Amber and Corinne from Tuscarora claim that the strict adherence to tradition

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94 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
95 Tsiotenhariio Herne, Interview by author, February 5, 2016.
96 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
at Onondaga, maintains “a stronger community.” The Onondaga Nation’s refusal to open up to outsiders in both residence and ceremony is tied to Jeanne’s and others’ hard line against girls and women playing lacrosse. Non-Indigenous peoples are not asked to leave the Tuscarora reservation, and Longhouse ceremonies have only made a resurgence there in the last five years. From this point of view, accepting women playing lacrosse is tied to the ability to maintain culture, though young women lacrosse players, their supporters, and the controversy itself are shaping and shifting what constitutes tradition.

The third example of ethnographic refusal is found in Tuscarora Seneca Clan mother, Berdie Hill’s interview. I opened up the introduction to this project with Berdie’s words: “There are some things that I am going to share with you that you are just going to have to accept.” Berdie was not going to spend the time, waste the energy, to work to get me to understand cultural difference. Simpson describes these interactions as “…everyday encounters [that] enunciate repeatedly to ourselves and to outsiders that ‘this is who we are, this is who you are, these are my rights.’” From this theoretical base that Berdie created for our time together, she discussed her concerns about the physical risk associated with birth directly speaking to a culture very much concerned about carrying on into the future. This set of concerns speaks directly to an understanding that the traditional power that women hold in their communities as that must be regenerated because of the effects of colonization. Berdie Hill illuminates this concern, connecting the risk to the physical female body with the celestial location of lacrosse, when she expresses fear that women playing any game of lacrosse, medicinal/traditional, or modern

97 Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
98 Berdie Hill, Interview by author, December 5, 2012.
renditions, could anger the creator, thereby threatening women’s ability to give birth and carry on the nations. Also present in her concerns is a pragmatic fear of a shift in balance, when she states, “I think it’s very simple. There are some things that are meant for the women and some things that are meant for the males. Playing lacrosse is one that’s meant for the males. You don’t see males bearing children, do you?” Perhaps a young Cayuga man, whose reflection that women do not play because of their ability to give birth, can be accused of naïvely making such a statement that ignores the colonizing effects on women’s bodies, but certainly a Tonawanda Seneca Clan mother and an Onondaga elder midwife – both of whom have spent most of their adult lives in the service of restoring women’s traditional power – cannot be accused of the same when they make this claim.

A midwife, Jeanne Shenandoah has spent nearly 50 years seeing to the health and continuation of the Haudenosaunee people and culture through birth. Western medicine has pushed birth from the home into the hospital, diminishing the power held in women’s bodies and midwifery knowledge for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, alike. Prior to 1920, most women had their babies at home. Jeanne Shenandoah recalls, “homebirth was not anything unusual. That’s just how you did it.” And then there wasn’t a homebirth at Onondaga Nation for 45 years, between approximately 1920 and 1965. Jeanne’s great-grandmother was a midwife prior to 1925, but then stopped. I asked, “What was happening between your great-grandmother being a midwife and delivering babies and then you becoming a midwife?” to which she responded, “They started going to the hospital because they frightened out those

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100 Berdie Hill, Interview by author, December 5, 2012.
101 I more thoroughly address colonial impositions of gender norms in chapter three.
[Lacrosse] doesn’t hinder ability to give birth. If anything, it helps it, because obesity is probably the number one thing that prohibits a healthy birth. So when you have a healthy, fit mother, her odds of having a healthy pregnancy and delivery are greater…There’s nothing more appealing, more healthy, than a woman with a fit body. And there’s nothing that can help the re-productivity of our nations than…our women having healthy bodies.\textsuperscript{106}

Jeanne’s critique is not so much that women will not have healthy babies if they play lacrosse, but that playing lacrosse as women separates them and their children from their culture. What is central for Haudenosaunee people, the importance and integrity of the medicine game and women’s health and well-being, is negotiated within shifting and colonized landscapes. The lived reality of Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players and their relationship to their bodies and tradition is what is shaping the cultural game of lacrosse. To some extent, the question of whether or not women playing lacrosse will hinder their ability to give birth – a question still quite unanswered in the mid-1980s at a pivotal moment in the controversy – has been answered. Many, many Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players have had children, and continue to have children.

\textbf{Conclusion}

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how Haudenosaunee girls and women playing lacrosse presents an important challenge for communities in their work to name and claim the contemporary game of lacrosse that is played worldwide. The following piece of interview with Sandy Jemison illustrates the depths with which Haudenosaunee women are engaging these sets of questions, while demonstrating that Haudenosaunee tradition is, as the late John Mohawk described it, “a thinking tradition.”\textsuperscript{107} Here, Sandy Jemison works to make distinctions between

\textsuperscript{106} Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
\textsuperscript{107} Theresa McCarthy, \textit{In Divided Unity: Haudenosaunee Reclamation at Grand River} (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2017), 83.
medicinal (both historical and contemporary) and contemporary (medicinal and the game played with plastic sticks) lacrosse:

The rules and all of it, it was developed in Scotland. It’s just a whole different thing…We don’t use protective [gear]. Our purpose isn’t to go out and settle differences. [The men’s] reason for doing it – we play for the creator also but it’s in a different way – for his pleasure.

Blending historical and contemporary medicinal game that only men play:

They play for his pleasure, but they also play to settle differences. That’s what it was developed for – to settle differences, and for the creator’s pleasure.

Articulating the historical medicinal game:

And they played for days, and sometimes weeks. Their game would go on and it would go from here to who knows where – wherever it took them…

And then to the contemporary game of field lacrosse played by women:

And we just had it for different reasons and we had all these different rules that were very different from the men.”

Here, Sandy Jemison wrestles with an articulation of the differences, echoed by one of the young women she coached, “But it’s different when I guess you’re playing with a regular stick because it’s not the medicine game. I guess that’s why it’s okay.” How the contemporary game played by men and women is defined in traditional and medicinal terms is a deeply gendered conversation. Those who simultaneously are part of traditional Longhouse communities, and support women and girls playing, are at the forefront of working to make these distinctions. They are working through the presumed binary of a gendered prohibition and allowing for the possibility of cultural change.

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109 Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players are in a position where they have to work through the distinctions among traditional, medicinal, and contemporary lacrosse, sometimes using traditional and medicinal interchangeably when referring to historical game of lacrosse played by men, sometimes making a distinction between traditional/medicinal and contemporary game played, and usually making a distinction between what they are playing and the medicine game. When I asked one player if what the Men’s Iroquois Nationals team plays is the medicine game, she said that what the women play is not a medicine game because they do not burn tobacco, but was not sure if the men burned tobacco, further articulating, “When they talk about it being a medicine game, what that means is that they burn tobacco and they talk to the creator, and they play for the creator to entertain him.”

She said she has had opportunities to go to medicinal games, but has not. Another reason the definition of medicinal or traditional lacrosse is murky has to do with some not having access to the contemporary medicine game. When asked if she knew where the medicine game was held, one young Haudenosaunee player stated:

I don’t know because I’ve never heard of it happening. Only like years and years ago…It’s been described to me as pre-colonization. So they would have these medicine games that would go on for weeks…And they would be without boundaries…They would be in the woods…in the whole forest. That’s what I picture in my mind’s eye the traditional game of lacrosse…what it used to be in ancient times…but I really can’t say that I’m familiar with the modern medicine game at all.

The turn of phrase, ‘modern medicine game’ further connotes that tradition has a contemporary iteration, and change is understood to be part of tradition. While the medicine game being played only by men is not in dispute, that girls and women are playing opens up the question of what constitutes medicine. When Haudenosaunee men play the contemporary iteration with plastic sticks, and talk about it as their medicine game, they are not talking about the same game that is

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110 Amber Hill-Donhauser, Interview by author, September 30, 2015.
111 Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
played within the community for healing purposes. Even though the contemporary game played with plastic sticks is not the medicine game in the strictest definition, it does provide medicine and healing for the men playing, perhaps especially when they are playing non-Indigenous teams. In this way, the contemporary game that Haudenosaunee men and women play provides a similar medicine of healing.

Louise McDonald speaks into this opened up space with, “It only becomes a medicine when it changes a life.”\textsuperscript{112} Louise expands by saying that it is traditional to adapt, change, and shift, without that automatically meaning assimilation. For example, she grew up with women burning tobacco because there were no men around to burn it. She reminds us that the Great Law of Peace has a provision that when the needs of the community call for it, rafters can be added to the Longhouse to make room. She says that men play the medicine game because it is their role to deal with sickness, death, and war for the community, but that if a time came and there were no men to play it, women would have to play the medicine game in order to keep that part of Haudenosaunee culture alive.\textsuperscript{113} Louise makes sense of girls and women playing lacrosse by engaging tradition, attaching the medicine inherent in the game with the need to heal that Haudenosaunee girls and women face in colonized spaces.

A binary understanding cannot adequately access what is and is not traditional. What is traditional are the deep, sometimes frustrating ways in which community members wrestle through these discussions: deeply intellectual, philosophical, and heart-felt traditional. Tradition is the process of engaging one another for the purpose of continuity for future generations, and it is painstakingly intellectual. From this set of voices from Haudenosaunee communities we can

\textsuperscript{112} Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.  
\textsuperscript{113} Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
see three conflicting conceptualizations of how lacrosse and tradition are being defined and used. First, while the simplistic representations of the controversy provide an entry point for some people, it can provide a mask of tradition with little to no cultural understanding behind it. This type of engagement provides for the maintenance of the status quo of prohibiting women from playing. While it is part of the conversation, it does not provide solutions to the problems facing Haudenosaunee communities. Second, there is a definition of lacrosse as a Haudenosaunee game, it is a medicine game, and all iterations of that game are by definition lacrosse and should only be played by men. This argument views tradition as static and is resistant to change. While one can certainly argue that this perspective is also grounded in futurity, it does so by attempting to continue the culture regarding lacrosse as male only. While lacrosse may encompass multiple forms (i.e. medicinal and contemporary forms) it must continue to prohibit women from playing. Finally, this is contrasted by a perspective that defines lacrosse as originating with Haudenosaunee peoples as a medicinal game played by men. However, this perspective allows for change in culture when it is life giving to the communities. This third way conceptualizes the contemporary games of lacrosse, played with plastic sticks, as significantly different from the medicinal game to allow for the lifting of prohibitions. This conceptualization is also grounded in the futurity of tradition. It responds to the problems that colonization has provided by connecting more people, in this case women, to the life giving cultural expression of lacrosse.

The women playing lacrosse are demanding that they participate in the culture, and by conceptualizing contemporary lacrosse as a different game than the medicine game, they provide a means of engaging in a cultural phenomenon which bring them both healing and closer to their culture. They break through the prohibitions around gender and lacrosse while working to continue the culture into the future.
As McCarthy articulates above, the Great Law is grounded in inclusivity of multiple perspectives and provides a method of working through conflict. Considering the extraordinary changes that colonization has brought to Haudenosaunee communities, it should not be surprising that there are controversies within and between communities about lacrosse. However, as communities engage in the process of decolonization, they work to engage in their own cultural protocols to provide structure and guidance. While the tide is turning in many communities towards women playing the contemporary forms of lacrosse, this controversy is not over. It is up to the communities to continue to engage in their own cultural methods to overcome conflict. That the Great Law provides for the adding of rafters is a strength of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.
Chapter Three

Wood, Plastic, and Gender: Crafting the Stick

As a fourth grader, I was sitting with my mother, weaving the webs of those sticks. Soaking the cat gut and the cow hide, prepping the sticks and getting them ready for the weaving.

Louise McDonald, Akwesasne Mohawk Clan Mother

My great Grandma used to tell me that she used to play lacrosse all the time. She would pick up a stick and run around because she was the fastest girl in the neighborhood.

Corinne Abrams, Tuscarora

Haudenosaunee women have always had a relationship with lacrosse and the wooden lacrosse stick. In the Mohawk language, tewaraathon is the word for both the netting for the sticks and the game of lacrosse. Since it is women who traditionally weave the baskets for the sticks, an intimate linguistic relationship is revealed through this word. There exists a protocol within Haudenosaunee communities that women are not to touch a man’s lacrosse stick. Some say the prohibition begins when the stick and the male player begin their relationship; some say
it only applies to wooden, and not plastic sticks. Respect for the protocol is closely aligned with the general agreement within Haudenosaunee communities that only men play the medicine game. Where Haudenosaunee communities respond differently to the degree with which they support girls and women playing lacrosse, most agree that only men play the medicine game and respect that women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick. There are exceptions, as some women have their own “woody” as they are sometimes called. Corinne Abrams from Tuscarora began using her mother’s stick when she was a small child – a woody that had been crafted for her mother to match the contemporary sticks marketed to female players: “My mom had this old wooden stick. A wooden one…It was a girls' stick. It was really hard, so I would get so frustrated trying to play catch with her stick…She cut it down on the bottom, so it was shorter, and she painted it purple for me.” I asked this player where her mother got her woody:

On the Tuscarora rez, they have a lacrosse barn. It's called Tuskewe Krafts…And at this place, they take the long wooden sticks, and they keep them for a year in this vat where they humidify them. And then they bend them and do the whole process of grinding them down. My mom got her stick there, and at the time, wooden sticks were a lot more popular…The plastic sticks are easier to throw a ball and catch with, but the wooden sticks are a lot stronger.1

Figure 2: Tuskewe Krafts. Tuscarora Reservation. Photo courtesy of Corinne Abrams.

Corinne describes how she learned of the restriction:

Tuscarora is a lot different. Each reservation has its mini-culture. So at home, I was allowed to play catch with my brothers…and I remember one time visiting Onondaga…I just picked up my stick and went outside…and my grandma came out and said, you can't do that here…Later I was with two friends, and we were sitting in their dad's pick-up truck, waiting. He went inside for something, and…he had a miniature lacrosse stick…And I went, and I touched it. And the girls, both of their faces dropped, and they were like…'why would you touch that? That's my dad's lucky stick.'

Another young player who grew up both at Onondaga and Oneida nations, whose family member made her a wooden lacrosse stick remarks, “It’s unheard of for a woman to have a wooden lacrosse stick.” The diversity in relationships to the wooden lacrosse stick speaks to the diversity of Haudenosaunee communities and nations themselves. What they have in common is a deep relationship with the history of wooden lacrosse sticks and the contemporary use and meanings of those sticks.

Figure 3: Tsionehariio Herne, playing with a contemporary lacrosse stick designed for women’s field lacrosse. Photo courtesy of Louise McDonald.
The Haudenosaunee women I interviewed for this project make three critical interventions into the use of the adage that women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick: First, they expose the ways in which its unreflective utterance obscures the colonization of women’s bodies and power, even when the adage is invoked to honor Haudenosaunee women’s power. Second, they make statements about the prohibition that call into question internalized sexism in Haudenosaunee communities. And third, their respect for the prohibition (1) calls into question western feminist representations of Haudenosaunee women, and (2) makes distinctions between medicinal and contemporary lacrosse, which clears space for their participation in lacrosse both as players and as meaning-makers.

In this chapter, I argue that Haudenosaunee women relate to the prohibition that women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick toward decolonizing ends. In order to make these claims, I examine two clauses that often surround the prohibition ‘women are not to touch a man’s lacrosse stick.’ The first is the preface, ‘because of the sacred nature of the game’ and the second often follows the protocol, ‘because of the power that they have to give birth and menstruate.’ These two explanatory clauses simultaneously name what is powerful and balanced within Haudenosaunee communities as well as that which has been colonized regarding power and balance within those same communities. Examining the protocol through Haudenosaunee gender constructions organized around balance exposes how colonization has undermined Haudenosaunee women’s power and gender balance and how Haudenosaunee communities have internalized western impositions of patriarchy. The latter exposes the problems associated with western feminist representations of power and gender balance. I argue that equating restriction with oppression misses how such a convention illuminates Haudenosaunee women’s power and traditional gender balance within Haudenosaunee communities. Throughout this chapter, I
demonstrate how Haudenosaunee women challenge western feminism to fully understand cultural difference when it comes to gender balance.

How one hears this protocol, that within Haudenosaunee culture women are not to touch a man’s lacrosse stick, is dependent upon that person’s proximity to the culture. If we look at the rule that women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick as a piece of history, we can think about its present-day reality as somehow old-fashioned. Within Haudenosaunee constructions of time and space, however, this protocol is more about memory than history. In an interview, Mvskoke poet Joy Harjo illuminates the nuanced differences between memory production and historiography: “Memory [is] not just associated with past history, past events, past stories, but non-linear, as in future and ongoing history, events, stories. And it changes.”

This understanding of memory as being connected to the past in order to inform the present and future is connected to the previous chapter’s discussion of tradition as being as much about the present and future as it is about the past. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot posits that the production of history is dependent upon its contemporary relevance and the audience’s particular relationship to that which is being historicized. Interpreting the convention from a western settler-colonial perspective is at once to historicize the protocol and lodge Haudenosaunee culture firmly in the past. Trouillet points to how that which is being represented as history makes its mark in particular, authentic ways for those who hold “an honesty vis-à-vis the present as it re-presents that past.”

It is here that we can see a clear distinction between a hearing of the protocol by someone outside of Haudenosaunee social and ceremonial life, and someone within it. For Haudenosaunee communities, memory is shared relationally and inter-

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generationally, and is more relevant than ‘history.’ The protocol is a part of contemporary life, in relationship to tradition, which is based more on collective memory than what where history most often resides – the past.

**Brief History of the Wooden Lacrosse Stick**

Before the 1970s, all lacrosse was played with wooden sticks. Woodies were produced by Haudenosaunee artisans such as John Wesley Patterson, who started Tuskewe Crafts at Tuscarora Nation, Herb Martin (Six Nations Reserve), Enos Williams (Six Nations Reserve), and Alf Jacques (Onondaga Nation). In 1937, five years after the beginnings of box lacrosse, Canadian Robert Pool invented the double walled lacrosse stick, that would inform the plastic model largely played with today.  

The popularization and westernization of lacrosse meant the increased demand for sticks, which were exclusively made by Haudenosaunee artisans, many of whom refused to move to the commercialization of mass production. Alf Jacques began making lacrosse sticks with his father and then opened a small manufacturing house at Akwesasne. At the height of production, the company produced 11,500 for two years in a row. In 1970, All American lacrosse player at Johns Hopkins University, Richard Tucker, started the lacrosse stick manufacturer, STX, and patented the first plastic molded head. This first synthetic lacrosse sticks quickly and immensely grew in popularity, and in 1974, Jacque’s production of wooden sticks went from nearly 12,000 to 1,200 in six months. They sold the piles of wood that were cut for the sticks as firewood, dealing with the devastating decline. These changes all contribute to the meaning of the wooden lacrosse stick becoming that much more embedded within Haudenosaunee traditional and medicinal space. Today the wooden lacrosse stick is most closely

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7 Sacred Stick, Directed by Michelle Danforth, USA: Vision Maker Media, 2013. DVD.
associated with the medicinal and traditional game, and largely understood to be within the sphere of men. The rule that women do not touch a man’s stick precedes the shift from wood to plastic, though this shift certainly informs and even solidifies it.

‘Because of the Sacred Nature of the Game’: The Wooden Lacrosse Stick and Ceremony

When the protocol that women do not touch a lacrosse stick is preceded with the explanation ‘because of the sacred nature of the game,’ lacrosse is firmly placed within Haudenosaunee ceremonial space. Berg’s introduced this to a broader audience in her 2007 New York Times article, quoting Jeanne Shenandoah as saying, “Because of its deep spiritual significance, women are not even allowed to touch a stick.”8 When I asked Tonawanda Seneca Clan mother and elder Berdie Hill about this quote, she said, “That’s true,” and added, “Instructions from all across the Haudenosaunee land was that no females should participate in the game. They shouldn’t even touch the lacrosse sticks or their equipment.”9

The sacred nature of the game is demonstrated by its use for the sick and dying. As one mother from the Oneida Nation explains, “Lacrosse is a very sacred game, and there are special games that are held if somebody's sick.”10 The Great Law of Peace advises language in the funeral of a chief that conjures the memory of what constitutes a good life: “Let nothing that transpired while you lived hinder you. In hunting, you once delighted; in the game of lacrosse, you once took delight, and in the feast and pleasant occasions, your mind was amused, but now do not allow thoughts of these things give you trouble.”11 Arthur Parker (1911) records that

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9 Berdie Hill, Interview by author, December 5, 2012.
10 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
before Handsome Lake’s death, "A game of lacrosse was played to cheer him."\textsuperscript{12} The Iroquis [sic] Foods and Food Preparation (1916) notes, “When a person has been suffering from some ailment such as rheumatism, lame back, fever, or headache, it may be decided…that a game of lacrosse is required.”\textsuperscript{13} A mother of a lacrosse player (Mohawk, Six Nations) further describes the conditions under which a medicinal game would be played:

If somebody gets sick and they go to a see-er, and the see-er says, you need a game…they tell you how many players. Sometimes it's the whole Longhouse; sometimes it's just one against one. It depends what they see. And then there's a ceremony. They burn tobacco. The sick person – let's say it was me – they would come here to play lacrosse as a medicine to make me better.\textsuperscript{14}

This is not the game that women (or most men) are playing, though that does not mean they do not have a role in its construction.

A man (Onondaga) who plays the medicine game, describing it as "rough, real rough," demonstrates how the medicine game overlaps with the contemporary game played, as well as the role that women have in shaping its execution:

This one woman who I really respect, she's a language teacher. She's my teacher. She highlighted this one time when [a male lacrosse player] was getting up and getting ready to fight with this kid. She said, I just stood right up in the stands. And he grabbed this kid, and we went just like this to him [pantomimes threat], and he panned over to his mom. And his mom was standing up then. And she was just standing there. And he gets all sad, and he walks away. But I'm glad she shared that because then she followed up with, the way she looks at it is whenever you pick up that stick you are playing for the creator.\textsuperscript{15}

Here we can see how women's power acts as an intermediary between the contemporary game of lacrosse and the aspects of that contemporary iteration that are being claimed as traditional and

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{12} Arthur C. Parker, The Code of Handsome Lake, the Seneca Prophet (1913), 12.
\bibitem{14} Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
\bibitem{15} Interview by author, June 30, 2017.
\end{thebibliography}
medicinal. There is collective acknowledgment regarding the sacredness of the medicinal game of lacrosse and the protocol of women not touching the stick, as well as the question of women playing at all, working to firmly place lacrosse within Haudenosaunee ceremonial space, further demonstrating the connection of lacrosse to the Haudenosaunee as a sacred game.

When Haudenosaunee ceremonies were systematically being pushed underground and outlawed, lacrosse was able to fly under the radar as a ceremony because it was perceived as only a sport. As such, it has retained much of its strength as a ceremony within Haudenosaunee communities. This strength interacts with a history of colonization that grossly interferes with ceremonial space, specifically regarding clans and Clan mothers and Haudenosaunee languages. One young woman from Six Nations points out how the Indian Act in Canada has worked to undermine matrilineality and the clan system, particularly ceremony, which “heavily relies on who you are…what clan you are.”

Haudenosaunee community members lament the loss of language due to boarding schools:

It's sad to say; my mother came from, her parents were the boarding school age and lost the language with her. They never taught her. They were fluent speakers and never taught her how to speak the language, and it was never passed to me. And that's the saddest thing I've ever heard in my life, how the boarding schools, what they took from our people. It's just disheartening for me to think about. It's unfathomable to imagine that could even happen to somebody, or to a whole race of people…They were just taken, well my grandfather was taken, and he was beat if he spoke the language…How do you get taken somewhere and literally tortured? It was taught to him that it was wrong to practice anything that was native to our culture, especially speaking the language….And so when he married my grandmother, she was a fluent speaker, and he would tell her, 'don't' ever teach these kids to speak Native because they don't ever need to use it. They'll just get ridiculed. They'll get punished.' So they never did. They never taught them the culture or anything. So…it was just gone. In one generation it was gone. Everything.

16 Interview by author, February 13, 2012.
17 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
In the midst of this history, communities regenerate the ceremonial cycle. Lamenting this loss is met with celebrating survival, as when Tuscarora Seneca Clan mother Berdie Hill scolds me for talking about ceremonial decline: “Our Longhouse is bulging when we have ceremonies.” In another moment, one young woman articulates what this loss of language means for ceremony:

All of the ceremonies are done in the original languages. But once in a while, the speakers will speak English because not everybody knows it fluently, the language. So they'll speak English and tell what's going on... But you can tell the difference [between] who knows the language fluently and who doesn't because the speakers will joke, just joke around and then one crowd will be chuckling and laughing, and it will be quiet on this side.

The prohibition that women must not touch the stick ‘because of the sacred nature of lacrosse,’ sits within the turmoil of colonized ceremonial space. It is embedded within the succinct and poignant way in which Louise McDonald reminds that:

We have to look at the turn of the century when the government began to outlaw a lot of our beliefs and practices and customs... And then we have to look at the time when anyone who practiced them were considered witches. And we have to look at how those practices meant death and how harsh and brutal they were.

This protocol is embedded within a colonial history of Haudenosaunee ceremonies being restricted, and Haudenosaunee women's leadership, in particular, being brutally punished. Because of the restrictions and outlawing of Indigenous ceremonies, there is an enormous amount of protection around the medicine game of lacrosse within Haudenosaunee communities by both men and women. This restriction around women not touching the stick is loaded with a colonial history of ceremonial restriction and Haudenosaunee women's roles in ceremony diminished by both colonization and internalized patriarchy. A simple, non-critical utterance of it

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18 Interview by author, December 5, 2012.
19 Interview by author, February 28, 2012.
20 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
threatens to erase this historic reality and its contemporary aftermath, but it also has the potential to reveal itself as that which it represents: a set of questions about the medicinal nature of lacrosse and women’s relationship to that power.

These conversations occur in the midst of communities working to regenerate ceremonial space. There are places in which this space is increasingly healthy – people traveling far and wide for ceremony at Tonawanda Seneca territory, language programs, and immersion schools at Six Nations Reserve. This protocol has a dialectic relationship with ceremonial space that communities are working to regenerate. I spoke with the administrator of Onöndowa’ga:’ Gawë:nö’, the Seneca language immersion program for adults at the Cattaraugus Seneca Nation, Brandon Tehanyatari:ya’ks Martin about language revitalization and gender. Martin made a parallel between the recitation of the Great Thanksgiving address and lacrosse. Where it may be the case that historically only men recite the Thanksgiving address and play lacrosse, revitalization projects necessitate that women participate in ways they may not have before. In the case of Onöndowa’ga:’ Gawë:nö’, the majority of the participants are women, and in order for the language to survive and for important components to carry on, women learn and recite the Thanksgiving address. I witnessed the recitation of the Thanksgiving address at a Haudenosaunee research symposium at the University of Buffalo in the fall of 2015, where Jody

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21 Berdie Hill elaborated in our interview about the health of ceremony: “You should see all the people who are getting ready to come...we had a ceremony last night and they’re just itching to put the ceremony forth and to be part of it...the Longhouse is bulging, and it’s wonderful. It’s a rebirth.” In interviews I learned of the language program, Onyota’a:ká, at the Oneida Nation Early Learning Center, Onyawenna, a community-based adult language immersion of Kanyen’kehá (Mohawk language) at Six Nations. For more on language immersion in K-12 education see Tehotä’kerä:tonh Jeremy Green, *Pathways to Creating Onkwehonwehnéha Speakers at Six Nations of The Grand River Territory*. Report. Six Nations Polytechnic. Accessed July 19, 2018. [https://www.snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/research/pathways_to_creating_speakers_of_onkwehon wehneha_at_six_nations.pdf](https://www.snpolytechnic.com/sites/default/files/docs/research/pathways_to_creating_speakers_of_onkwehon wehneha_at_six_nations.pdf), and Tom Porter, *And Grandma Said...Iroquois Teachings as passed down through the oral tradition* (Philadelphia: Xlibris Corp, 2008).
Lynn Miracle (Mohawk) opened the event, with her small child in arms, as he worked to say the words with her. Louise McDonald said that in her youth, her mother and aunts would burn tobacco, a job historically reserved for men alone, but there were no men around to do it. Both men and women from Haudenosaunee communities are playing lacrosse, which poses a challenge to a system of gender balance with diverse roles. However, as this project purports throughout, given Haudenosaunee women’s particular relationship to settler colonialism, women’s playing has a distinct role to play in decolonization.

**Intervention 1: ‘Because of the powerful medicine women hold’**

*Whenever I hear that I’m not supposed to touch a man’s lacrosse stick, I feel dirty, tainted, shameful.*

These words are a paraphrased response that a young Onondaga woman, who played lacrosse through college, made at a research symposium after hearing – perhaps for the hundredth time – it is because of your power that you cannot do this thing. Her words open up space to discuss that which has been colonized in relationship to that which is supposed to bring power. She names a lived reality that does not match up with what is supposed to be.

The protocol, women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick, followed with ‘because of the power she holds within her to give birth and menstruate,’ encapsulates the medicinal power associated with the female body. Haudenosaunee women demonstrate an ease, diminished in western society, about the power that they hold, yet as I demonstrate later in this section, that power functions paradoxically within the lived reality of Haudenosaunee women’s lives. One young woman explains, “I’m very familiar with women not touching the stick, [especially] not on your time, because [of the] power that you have…especially during that time.”

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22 Interview by author, February 13, 2012.
Haudenosaunee women concur that women especially should not touch a wooden stick “when she’s on her time” and “when [the stick] goes through ceremony.” The connection to creation informs how Haudenosaunee women articulate their roles and participation in ceremony: "When you're going through your menopause, and you're all done with your moon, you can go to the ceremonies. You can do all the things that you couldn't do when you had your moon. So it's not like it's because you're a woman, it's because you have that medicine in you.”

Finally, one young woman lacrosse player clearly articulates the relationships in ways that poignantly connect power and medicine: "Being a woman and being able to give birth, that's a very, very powerful medicine…When a woman is pregnant, she's seven times more powerful than anybody else…There's a lot of energy right there. And it's a good medicine." It is enticing to reflect on this power and leave it in-tact as a given. Many western feminist scholars and historians have done so. However, assuming that this power has remained in-tact glosses over and has the potential to erase the particular ways in which Indigenous women’s bodies have been systematically colonized. When Haudenosaunee women hear or talk about the protocol, some reflect on that colonization in a way that haunts the use of power itself.

I first heard this protocol at a Haudenosaunee research symposium at SUNY Buffalo in 2012. Since that time, when I asked about it in interviews, it was clear that the protocol is common knowledge within Haudenosaunee communities. Some women report hearing it later in life, as when they first learned that Haudenosaunee women should not play lacrosse. Haudenosaunee women have a complicated response when they hear and reflect on, ‘women don’t touch a man’s lacrosse stick because of the power they hold inside of them. Some

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23 Interview by author, February 10, 2017.
24 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
responses demonstrate a peripheral relationship to the protocol, as though on the outside looking in on something not entirely understood, such as with:

I asked my grandma from Onondaga once why we couldn’t play, why women weren’t allowed to. She explained to me that the wooden sticks were medicinal…She said…when a woman is having her menstrual cycle, she is not allowed to touch a wooden stick because that time a woman is sacred, and she’ll put weakness on the stick.26

Others demonstrate an internalization of the protocol, a ‘feeling it inside’ as it were, as when one mother explains:

It’s a lot more than just the ability to give birth…You’re connected to the moon…that is your medicine as a woman. You have a really, really strong medicine. And if you’re around things that you’re not supposed to be, that person could get really hurt, like, say, touching lacrosse sticks, like boys’ lacrosse sticks. You don’t because they could get really hurt because they have their own medicine…It’s just natural for me to think like that…a lot of people sometimes feel offended when you’re like, you can’t touch the stick because it’s bad luck or something. I’ve never thought of it like that.27

While this explanation reflects this woman's recognition of her power in relationship to the protocol, other responses illuminate how a flat utterance of the protocol within Haudenosaunee communities can perpetuate internalized western patriarchy within Haudenosaunee communities.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, at a Haudenosaunee research symposium at the State University of New York, Buffalo, a young Cayuga man said, “I’d always heard that women don’t touch a lacrosse stick because of the power that they have to give birth.”28 The explanation he gives functions similarly to the relationship to the protocol mentioned above wherein the enunciator demonstrates a slightly peripheral relationship to the convention, indicated by the reference to having been told about it. At the symposium, in response, a young Haudenosaunee

26 Interview by author, March 13, 2012.
27 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
28 This is feedback I received after presenting, “The Best that our Tradition Has to Offer”: Haudenosaunee Women Lacrosse Players and Healing.’ Presented by author at the Haudenosaunee Research Symposium Program, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, November 13, 2015.
woman laid bare that hearing that always made her feel “tainted” and “dirty.”\textsuperscript{29} A young woman lacrosse player echoed this sentiment in an interview with, “I don’t know that our ancestors would be proud of how we’re conducting ourselves and treating women, and kind of thinking they’re bad luck or weak for touching a lacrosse stick.”\textsuperscript{30} In just this small assembly of responses to the prohibition, we can see women's traditional power and women's disempowerment through the lingering effects of colonization functioning side by side within Haudenosaunee communities.

Haudenosaunee lacrosse player Mia McKie (Tuscarora) illuminates how an unreflective reference to women's traditional power obscures disempowerment. She remarked, "There's a lot of things that they use ‘women's energy' for…And I do think that maybe there is some kind of base in that teaching but to promote it blindly is no different than Christians saying you can't."\textsuperscript{31} Mia is suggesting that a superficial relationship to what constitutes women's medicinal power obscures how that power has been colonized and romanticized. Similarly, a community leader at Six Nations Reserve stated:

We’ve found that too often our people have a very superficial understanding of what it is to be a Haudenosaunee person. So, we know we respect women, but do we know why we respect? I think every community member would tell you we have a high regard for women, but where does that value come from? How do we show that? How do we live that? We say these things, but we don’t live them. Most people know about moon time, but why do we call it our moon time? What is it connected to? How is our cycle connected to the moon? Most people can’t tell you how or why.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{29} This is feedback I received after presenting, “‘The Best that our Tradition Has to Offer”: Haudenosaunee Women Lacrosse Players and Healing.’ Presented by author at the Haudenosaunee Research Symposium Program, University at Buffalo, Buffalo, NY, November 13, 2015.
\textsuperscript{30} Interview by author, March 13, 2012.
\textsuperscript{31} Mia McKie, Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
\textsuperscript{32} Interview by author, June 30, 2017.
The particular sickness with which the settler colonial apparatus colonizes Haudenosaunee women's bodies, how this colonization has infiltrated Haudenosaunee communities and harmed Haudenosaunee women, all add layers of tension when invoking a sense of power in regards to Haudenosaunee women’s bodies. Dawn Martin-Hill names this sickness in an interview:

We are the most defiled women since they landed here, of any race. Black women were obviously defiled through slavery. But for us, it was killing us and cutting off our genitals. I mean they defiled Indigenous women in ways that other races haven't necessarily experienced that – I don’t know – sickness.33

Take, for example, the influence of Dr. Holder, an agency physician who published his ‘findings’ in The Medical and Surgical Reporter in 1890. This white man kept intimate details of the onset, duration, and frequency of menstruation for ten Indigenous girls “under his supervision.”34 In his report entitled, “The Age of Puberty of Indian Girls,” nestled between other medical doctors’ findings concerning the “Excision of Twenty-six Inches of the Ileum” and “Hot Water in the Treatment of Acne,” Dr. Holder opines:

It is presumable that the early marriage and consequent sexual excitement, with the entire absence of modesty in Indian thought and conversation, would tend to cause precocious menstruation, and facts establish this impression. Even the girls who are in school till after puberty menstruation occurs earlier than among white girls in the same latitude.35

Dr. Holder’s ‘facts’ are established through the close (and gross) examination of Indigenous girls between the ages of 10 and 14 and “the only American statistics”36 on white girls and menstruation. His work to establish the ‘facts’ of white women’s piety and virtue and Indigenous

women’s promiscuity is reflective of the cruelty with which settler society approaches Indigenous women’s bodies. Reading this study invokes feelings of absurdity, and the question, how can this be real? And yet, there sits his influence on the real, lived experience of a Haudenosaunee woman’s body when she hears about the power that she should feel, but cannot shake the feelings of filth and shame.

Far less insidious interactions with young Indigenous women color how Haudenosaunee women experience the explanation of the protocol, “because of the power they have to menstruate and give birth.” Diné scholar, Laura Tohe recalls the stark differences between her community’s approach to coming of age and the western version she learned in school:

Throughout [our] ceremony, my body was acknowledged, celebrated, and made ready for the role of mature woman. Reaching puberty was not a shameful, dirty, and dreadful experience. Celebrating puberty with the Kinaaldá ceremony ushers the young woman into a society that values her. As I recall now, how different this experience was from the seventh-grade teacher who taped black construction paper to the windows and gave the boys a longer lunch break, so that he could show us ‘The Film’ on female puberty…When our young teacher from Wyoming finally turned on the lights, his face was flushed red with embarrassment.37

Any young person learning about puberty in this way can and should have a better experience than this. But Tohe’s narrative also reflects how Haudenosaunee communities must work against a stream of western information coming at their young people at a systematic level. As one community member who has an influential role in the rites of passage ceremonies at Six Nations reserve laments, "We were actually letting western culture define what kind of Haudenosaunee person they would become.”38

38 Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
When Haudenosaunee women hear about the power that they have to give birth, that message is entwined with a eugenic history of robbing Indigenous women of the opportunity to have children, through systemically forcing and coercing Indigenous women to be sterilized during the 1960s and 1970s. There is a great deal at stake. Amber, from Tuscarora territory, tells a story that shows what is at stake for Haudenosaunee women and the eugenic undercurrent of settler nation states.

I will tell you this story…And I get so angry. When I played in the U19 World cup, so in 2007, we were in Peterborough, Ontario. And I didn't tell anyone except for Tia Schindler, who is my best friend forever, I was 14 and a half weeks pregnant. And we didn't have another goalie, and my daughter's father didn't want me to play. But I said this is my team. This is my family. They don't have anybody else. It's only a couple games. I'll be fine. I believe we were playing Japan. And I came out of my net. I had let a girl behind me. They tossed the ball over my head. I was sprinting full speed toward her, so she didn't shoot at the net. And my feet were moving faster than my body, and I fell forward, and my legs came up over my head. I stood up, and I remember seeing Tia's face on the sideline because she was our assistant coach. And she was white. But she was the only one that knew. And I got up, and I said, I'm fine. I'm good. We're okay. And I didn't feel anything I was okay…

But she wasn’t okay and needed to go to the hospital.

We went to the hospital in Peterborough, me, Sam, and Tia, and they did an exam, and the doctor pulled his glove off and said, you're probably going to lose your baby. Very nonchalant, don't care, like was just – I said, I'm nineteen years old, I'm terrified, I'm really going to lose my baby? He's like, yeah, you're probably going to lose your baby.39

I want to look at two particular moments in Amber’s narrative which begins with: And I get so angry and ends with, you’re probably going to lose your baby. The doctor’s comment uttered twice is resplendent with judgment and indifference masking subconscious cultural anxiety over Indigenous women birthing healthy babies, who will become Indigenous adults, and threaten the national fabric that relies on stolen land.40 Was that doctor immediately thinking about the

40 This subconscious settler anxiety is examined more closely in the next chapter.
security of the land he most likely owns, the land on which his employing practice and hospital sit, or on which his children’s schools sit? Probably not. He doesn’t have to. His derogatory response can be summed up within a settler narrative as a moment of at best, “being tired at the end of his shift” and at worst, institutional racism. The question of land and its relationship to Haudenosaunee women’s bodies does not have to come into play because of the settler nation state’s excellent ability to hide such discourse from its citizens and even from itself.

**Intervention 2: Exposing Internalized Sexism in Haudenosaunee Communities**

*If you don’t want it touched, put it away…It’s like telling our sons not to rape…and to take care of their sexuality, to be honorable men, to honor women….And in order for him to honor women, he’s got to honor himself and his own stuff, to be able to take care of his own equipment and put it away.*

*Louise Bear*

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Sexism in Ceremonial Space

In “Race, Tribal Nation, and Gender: A Native Feminist Approach to Belonging,” Renya Ramirez argues that without engaging gender as a category of analysis, and the very real sexism within Indigenous communities, western impositions of patriarchy remain in-tact. In an interview, Mohawk scholar, Dawn Martin-Hill spoke of the profound degree to which Haudenosaunee communities have internalized western patriarchy:

> What's so stinging about it is that it is coming from our own people. It's not coming from white men or white society. We can't blame them. They're not doing this to us; it's our own people doing this. And my theory is that they've been so acculturated, subconsciously absorbing for the last 300 years the way in which our women are diminished in their authority, diminished in our power, diminished in our rights. I don't even think they're consciously aware that they're now carrying out what the oppressor had begun – they’re finishing the job.

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41 In response to my statement, “[The protocol] feels like a distraction from some other more important issues.” February 5, 2016.

A young Haudenosaunee man echoes this. “We have patriarchy in our communities...years of being impacted and influenced by it...It’s not just men. There are women who have taken it on...I really find myself trying to take a step back and think. And who do I go to? I can’t even go to my gram because she’s internalized it. Who do you go to?” The challenge becomes to pull apart strands of Haudenosaunee tradition and colonization, separating which affirms Haudenosaunee tradition in contemporary life from that which changes it at its core.

Dawn Martin-Hill illuminates the difficulty of this work – holding onto what is truly traditional, accepting superfluous changes, and deciding what to reject as a western imposition:

We evolve, and we change...but the roots are very deep and strong on the positions and the values, and the protocols are all in place. But you can’t necessarily do what you need to do for a certain ceremony because those things you need are just not accessible. So you replace it with something else. But in the last couple hundred years, they’ve replaced it with western thinking. That’s the danger, where the value of women, the value of Clan mothers, the diminished authority that they now have to almost be subordinate to the chiefs. And all of that is not traditional.

It is within these strands – the core of tradition, how tradition has necessarily changed, and western impositions – that questions about the ceremonial aspects of lacrosse arise.

This colonial influence informs how women are treated in the Longhouse and Haudenosaunee communities more generally. When men are the ones in a position to teach girls and women how to be and become Haudenosaunee women, the role of mothers, aunties, grandmothers, and Clan mothers is usurped. Take for example in 2006, when the Haudenosaunee Women's Lacrosse Team went before a council of Haudenosaunee chiefs from across the entire Confederacy at Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. One mother describes the scene as one of drama, whereby leaders from Onondaga Nation in New York were trying to convince those at Six Nations not to approve these young women to represent the Iroquois Confederacy at the

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43 Interview by author, June 30, 2017.
World cup in Prague. The good feelings the young women had at the moment of approval were layered with colonial impositions of virtue. One mother describes and then points out the double standard:

You’re feeling all good…All the parents are in Longhouse feeling relieved. And then [the chiefs] get up and give them a lecture…if they travel with the flag, they must be virtuous. They must not embarrass, be ambassadors, basically don’t drink, don’t sleep around was more or less the subtext of what they were saying. So, they reprimanded them in a really fierce way. And we all know when the men go play lacrosse anywhere, they're drinking. They're sleeping around. And they don't get told, ‘you're embarrassing the nation by your behavior.’ So, it was like, you just felt good and then boom you got clobbered. [The team] didn't like it. They knew it was wrong. But the bigger win was there, so they said, okay and promised they were going to be good.  

This moment in the Longhouse represents a long history of colonial influences of sexism and misogyny that has been internalized by Haudenosaunee communities. A group of elder men telling young women how to behave – with virtue – conflicts with ceremonies such as Ohero:kon, where aunties and grandmothers claim and enact the responsibility of leading girls into womanhood.

The contemporary work of Haudenosaunee women to eradicate sexual and physical abuse within their communities elucidates how Indigenous women work to deal with these issues using methods and methodologies that come from their traditions and stories. Rematriation magazine, an online story forum involving over 200 Indigenous women, released the short film, An Indigenous Response to #MeToo (2018) whereby four Haudenosaunee women, one Haudenosaunee man, and one Chichemeca woman shared their work to eradicate sexual and physical abuse from their communities. First, to situate the discussion within Indigenous women’s contexts, Hermana del Sur, Janet Flores (Guachichil de La Gran Chichimeca) names a more relevant hashtag to Indigenous women as being #We’veBeenHere. She states that "even

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though we have not had the cameras in front of us where the public can hear what we're saying, we have been having these conversations,” the implication being long before the #MeToo movement. Chelsea Sunday situates the discussion within a Haudenosaunee context with a set of challenging and provocative questions:

We talk a lot about who we are Onkwhonwe people, as Haudenosaunee people. In our community right now across our communities, people are being abused. We need to talk about this in a real way that acknowledges that these are real people. These are our brothers. These are our uncles. These are our grandfathers. These are our leaders. These are our spiritual leaders. These are people running our ceremony. Would we be ready to have this campaign come to our community if we were to unload a list of all of those men who raped? Abused? Who hurt our people? Would we be ready because it would be the people we love? And it would rip apart our families. So, do we be quiet because it is somebody we love? Or do we say it because it will save somebody else from being hurt? How do we still create space for these women still to be heard? We need to listen and grasp what it means to be Haudenosaunee people. All of that. But put it in the real world of what's happening and come up with real solutions that address everybody who is being affected by abuse.

Chelsea Sunday names how challenging it is to call out abusers within a colonized setting, where spiritual leaders are needed to regenerate and revitalize culture, and Haudenosaunee men have through colonization been dispossessed of their ability to provide and protect. She also is calling out a superfluous understanding of Haudenosaunee women's power without dealing with real, contemporary lived experiences involving violence.

Wakerakats:te, Louise McDonald, refutes the romantic idea that rape was ‘unthinkable’ in Haudenosaunee communities and demonstrates that there are tools within the community to

deal with it again: “I think I have to consider the voices of our grandmother and know that at one time this issue reached the place of non-existence. And if we can ever look for an antidote or a remedy for this particular issue that happens in our communities, is that we have to be reminded that at one time it didn’t exist.”

Here, Louise McDonald articulates the strong intergenerational relationship with ancestors and elders as knowledge-holders, hinting that physical and sexual violence has been a problem within Haudenosaunee communities at various times and that there are also ways that communities have so successfully dealt with the problem that it didn’t exist. Not existing is attributed to the powerful ways in which women have come together to restore balance. Louise McDonald makes the case that it was eradicated before and it can be eradicated contemporarily.

**Intervention 3: Clearing a Path toward Participation and Meaning-Making**

This last intervention connects two seemingly disparate strands: representations of Haudenosaunee women within western feminist discourse and the power that Haudenosaunee women claim in naming and defining lacrosse in their lives and for their communities. Representations in western feminist discourse largely position Haudenosaunee women as politically powerful – in the past. When their power is named contemporarily, it is often done so in a way that diminishes their colonized realities. Haudenosaunee women naming and defining lacrosse intervenes in this static and romanticized version of their power, claiming representational territory.

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Western feminism

In working to understand at a deeper level the difference here, I asked one Haudenosaunee woman, “Is it possible that certain things that Haudenosaunee women don’t do is not about restriction, but about power?” To which she responded, “And about balance…And I think a lot of modern feminism doesn’t understand that well and positions it as a restriction for women in our culture when that’s not how we understand that. Some people might misconceive that as well because they’re not fully familiar with a lot of the roots of these teachings.”

Here are two different models of gender and power: one that allows for differences situated within a logic of balance, and one that sees any gender difference or prohibition as necessarily disempowering. Indigenous communities work to center their understandings of coming of age in the midst of western influences. Tohe states, “Now that I am an adult, I am beginning to understand the fuller significance of the Kinaaldá and how it continues to affect my life. Like my mother and other Indian woman who grew up in a matrilineal culture, when we cross into the western world, we see how that world values women differently.”

Two Haudenosaunee women report on the rub they experienced in college in trying to understand western perspectives on power:

I had a very hard time…I wasn’t exposed that much to the western kind of thinking…I really had a hard time understanding how their religion was and how these wars were started over religion…I just could not grasp that way of thinking. I try to explain to everybody I see, because women aren’t allowed to touch a man’s lacrosse stick, and they’re like, ‘well why not?’ And it’s like, well you don’t understand. It’s not a bad thing. I don’t know why you would even think of it as a bad thing…I’m not offended by it.

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48 Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
50 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
Another describes her professor’s ‘ah-ha’ moment when she was able to begin to see the cultural differences between western notions of gender equality and Haudenosaunee understandings of power and gender balance:

I never felt growing up as a Haudenosaunee woman that I was any less than a man. Actually, I was made to feel that we have so much more to bring to the people as women. I'll never forget my first-year women's studies professor, and when I would try to articulate some of things to her, she looked at me puzzled. And it wasn't until the end of the term when she figured it out, and she was just, ‘you really come from a different way of understanding, of being a woman.’ And I said, yeah.51

The starting place for understanding the role of this protocol is that it is meant to come from a place of gender balance. Based on the logics of Haudenosaunee gender constructs are a relationship of balance, as distinct from a gender construct organized around hierarchy, as in settler logics. However western impositions of patriarchy have been internalized within Haudenosaunee communities, through boarding schools, for example. As such, when adages of Haudenosaunee women’s power are invoked, there is the risk that the internalization of western patriarchy will be obscured. This protocol sits at that juncture between the lived, real, cultural political, economic, and social power that Haudenosaunee women hold and how that power is undermined, even as it is heralded. To call Haudenosaunee women’s power “traditional,” without critical examination of how that power continues to be undermined both within and outside of Haudenosaunee communities, threatens to maintain a western hierarchy of gender.

The next section examines western feminist representations of Haudenosaunee women, and how those representations tend to obscure the contemporary struggles of Haudenosaunee women to reclaim their authority.

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51 Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
There is a history of western feminists romanticizing the power held by Haudenosaunee women. There is also a history of dismissing that power, or not seeing it at all. What seems necessary here is to clear the space that western feminism might take up in this discussion, whether it be to romanticize, dismiss, or not see. My western feminist perspective was called out during an interview when I asked how the community reconciles the high regard with which women are held and the undermining of their decision-making. Dawn Martin-Hill, the mother and grandmother of lacrosse players, replied with:

We can focus on that, or you can focus on the fact that if you go anywhere, to any institution on Six Nations, economic development, the council of chiefs, post-secondary education, health services, you're not going to meet a single man who's a director or CEO…The doctors at the health clinic, the health clinic itself, Six nations Health Services – all women. So, I think those moments tell me, no matter what you say about this stuff, we are still very powerful in our communities.\(^52\)

It is, in part, western feminists who have discussed to a mainstream audience the power that Haudenosaunee women hold in their communities. Sally Roesch Wagner’s work calls attention to the history of Haudenosaunee women’s power as it was in relationship to early American feminists such as Matilda Gage. With western impositions of patriarchy and sexism having been internalized within Haudenosaunee communities, has she illuminated this history to Haudenosaunee people themselves? Roesch Wagner’s work brings recognition to early American feminists who were written out of the record while foregrounding Haudenosaunee women who have been misrepresented or written out entirely. As such, she is an important historian for Haudenosaunee people. The benefits of her work for Haudenosaunee communities is complicated, however, as discussed later.

\(^{52}\) Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
What does it mean to learn about your own Haudenosaunee culture from a western historian? Is there potential for partnership between Haudenosaunee people who are working to revitalize their communities and historians who are heralding their traditions? One Haudenosaunee man conjures the complications with this relationship:

I’m following Sally Roesch Wagner’s work. I kind of take it, and I’m like, okay, that’s cool. But if you want to put us up as these traditional people who were so great, then why are we [disrespecting women]? We’re not who we used to be. That’s where a lot of western scholars, I feel that Sally Roesch Wagner falls into this, oh, they treat women so differently. She says that about today, and I’m like, we don’t treat women the way that we used to treat them.53

Here, we can see how a representation of Haudenosaunee women’s power fixed in the past discursively colonizes contemporary realities. The interlocutor suggests that the problem it is not merely the historicizing of Haudenosaunee women’s power, or that Sally Roesch Wagner does presentations with Haudenosaunee women contemporarily, but that her lack of critical critique of how colonization plays into that power lends to confusion about the role of internalized patriarchy.

When western feminist historian Sally Roesch Wagner offers accounts of Haudenosaunee women, she works to distinguish herself from previous accounts of the Haudenosaunee in order to work towards women’s inclusivity into the academic and scholarly fold. In doing so, she engages the same sources as euro-western men have, speaking exclusively historical terms (erasing contemporary relevancies), and homogenously representing Haudenosaunee women and communities. In this way, Roesch Wagner’s work on Haudenosaunee women bolsters western feminism. She seems to use white women writing about Haudenosaunee women as a way of demonstrating how white women were excluded from white men’s world of producing historical

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53 Interview by author, June 30, 2017.
accounts. For example, when describing the work of ethnographers such as Alice Fletcher and Erminnie Smith she states, “Several dozen of these women often wrote with a depth of understanding which would no doubt, have been recognized and respected into this century had they been men.”\textsuperscript{54} It seems that she is suggesting that if white women’s accounts were more a part of the record, the western historical and anthropological records would more accurately reflect the lives of Haudenosaunee people.

Roesch Wagner is part of a growing collection of western feminists who highlight a model for women’s power through the example of Haudenosaunee women. By and large, this is done exclusively through an historical lens, with euro-western sources (read: white men) providing the backdrop against which ‘new’ theories are wrestled and posited. For example, in her chapter, “Iroquois Women: An Ethnographic Note,” Ranya R. Reiter engages many of the same sources as historical accounts of the Iroquois, dominated by euro-western men, in order to come up with a new thesis.\textsuperscript{55} Reiter disagrees with previous anthropological accounts which give credit to Haudenosaunee women’s powerful roles in the community because of “considerable contribution to the subsistence of the tribe, or to this in addition to the practice of matrilineality and matrilocality.” She concludes instead that Haudenosaunee women had strong political, economic, and social roles and important economic roles around food distribution because of their high status.\textsuperscript{56} Reversing the causation, that high status leads to the important roles, versus important roles leading to high status, still fixes this power in the past. Reiter aims


\textsuperscript{55} Reiter’s sources include previous anthropological accounts by euro-western men, early Jesuit missionary accounts, and Mary Jemison’s captivity narrative.

to correct the historical record that euro-western men put forward in the nineteenth and twentieth century while looking from a western feminist lens toward what could be a hopeful model of women’s societal agency. Like Reiter, Martha Harroun Foster demonstrates concern for the historical record as it pertains to Haudenosaunee women in her 1995 article, “Lost Women of the Matriarchy: Iroquois Women in the Historical Literature,” stating that, “If historians have ‘lost’ Iroquois women, widely recognized to hold positions of power in their society, how can we hope to find other Indian women, with less obviously powerful roles?” Harroun Foster’s corrective to ‘losing’ the Haudenosaunee woman, is to ‘find’ her by engaging in the ‘study of Iroquoian women’ using a plethora of more contemporary sources about (but not by) Haudenosaunee women.

Like Reiter and Harroun Foster, Roesch Wagner historicizes Haudenosaunee women toward western feminist ends, relying in Sisters in Spirit upon a monolithic representation of women’s rights – that being the story of the 19th amendment and liberal democracy. Linking two moments, the present day with first wave feminism, Roesch Wagner gives exclusive credit for our present day feminist goals to early twentieth century women. She states, “From a campaign for equal pay for equal work to a demand for an end to marital rape and battering, activists a hundred years ago articulated most of the demands of the current feminist movement.” Roesch Wagner’s project is to augment the historical account of nineteenth and twentieth century feminism by isolating these two moments in time. However, in doing so, Roesch Wagner erases decades of push back on white western feminism by Indigenous women, women of color, and

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women from the global south. This move erases Indigenous feminists’ work of decolonizing their bodies and communities. At the same time that Roesch Wagner ignores these more recent contributions, she relies on the ways in which Haudenosaunee women informed the 19th century feminists in order to bolster contemporary feminist goals.

These examples are part of a collection of work that focuses almost exclusively on an historical perspective of Haudenosaunee women. Roesch Wagner paints a simplistic understanding of gender relations among Haudenosaunee, for example calling rape and battery among the Haudenosaunee ‘unthinkable.’ This romantic take portrays a stagnant and a-temporal representation of the Haudenosaunee. It does not take into account the contemporary struggles regarding physical and sexual abuse that Haudenosaunee women face within their communities. If there was no need for tools within the culture to deal with issues such as rape and battery, there is the possibility of portraying a culture as void of these tools for present day and future issues. In portraying the Haudenosaunee gender relations of the past as easy and romantic, she erases internal struggles – or that there could be internal struggle – required to reach and maintain gender balance. This portrayal runs the risk of perpetuating an attitude that once the damage is done (colonization imposes western gender constructs), there are no skills within the communities to regenerate desired constructs of gender. It is tempting to relax into a representation of Haudenosaunee women’s power that is all at once powerful and a-temporal. However, leaving the presumption of this power in-tact without further investigation, threatens to place that power as a quaint relic without contemporary struggle or political currency. The prohibition has the potential to perpetuate internalized sexism within Haudenosaunee communities if gender balance is not restored and abuse against women eradicated.
Defining lacrosse

The increase of Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse necessitates communities making distinctions between what is and is not medicinal lacrosse, and this discussion continues to root the game within Haudenosaunee culture. One mother talks about this distinction when I asked about the differences between the wooden and plastic sticks: “There’s a lot of difference. The wooden is made right from a tree…it’s cut right down and made right into a lacrosse stick which, if you do play traditional lacrosse – and which my daughter would never do – the men all play the medicine game and it’s played for the creator.”69 Another mother makes a further distinction between the traditional and medicinal game: “There’s two kinds of lacrosse [girls and women] wouldn’t play. One is in the Longhouse. It’s a medicine game…They’re not trying to play that. And then the second one is the traditional game with the wooden sticks. That’s still somewhat of a medicine game – clan against clan. Those are still revered as belonging to the men.”60 One young woman who played at the college and international level echoes this distinction with: “I’ll never touch a wooden lacrosse stick. I never have and I never will. I’ve never played with one. I don’t even touch my husband’s or my son’s.”61 Where Haudenosaunee men quite seamlessly claim the contemporary game as their traditional and medicinal game, Haudenosaunee women work to make clear distinctions, both as a way of claiming the game as a Haudenosaunee game, and claiming their space within that game. Haudenosaunee women need to parse out these distinctions in a way that Haudenosaunee men do not. This set of questions around how to define the game they are playing, and agreements women make to their

69 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
60 Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
61 Interview by author, July 18, 2017.
communities to respect lacrosse as a Haudenosaunee game necessitates that women hold the disparity and challenges, and hence are at the center of articulating medicine.

In this present moment, regarding women playing lacrosse, it seems that the more community members are engaged in the set of questions regarding what constitutes medicinal lacrosse, the more deeply they are woven into the fabric of their culture. An Onondaga mother of a lacrosse player (who both reside at the Oneida Nation) – who makes sure to state that her daughter is not playing any kind of medicinal game – talks about her daughter’s relationship to her culture through playing:

I really think it did help her choices when she was thinking about playing…and to really mentally think about the consequences of playing it, and really kind of grow up a little. And her culture – it brings her close because, ‘does this really mean a lot to me?’ It kind of makes her question herself as a woman and her roles that she’s going to play in her Nation in the future.”

An Onondaga man, who has been involved in many conversations with women about their playing, points out the caveat women claim in order to stay close to their culture: “It’s safer to say, I respect the game if you’re a woman lacrosse player. In my interviews, that’s what I’ve gotten, ‘but I respect the game, though.’ ‘But I respect the stick, though.’”

Not all see it this way, demonstrating how the same set of questions can invoke very different answers. Some link a separation from Haudenosaunee culture to women and girls playing lacrosse. Tonawanda Seneca Clan mother, Berdie Hill says, “They don’t know. If they knew they wouldn’t play,” another echoing that they play, “because they weren’t from the very beginning of their life given that core feeling, that love of spirituality, of who we are, our very
existence.”65 One mother says that after learning her culture more she probably wouldn’t let her daughter play if she had it to do over again.

The protocol also has the potential to open up space to ask where it is that medicine resides within the game of lacrosse and how women are engaging, and in some cases re- visioning medicinal space, yet it does so within the history of the gendering of sports in mainstream society. In many ways, the stick used informs the kind of iteration of lacrosse being enacted. One young woman asks, “What’s the game of lacrosse without the stick?”66 She began playing on a girls’ field lacrosse team in high school and her coach could spot right away by her handling and cradling that she had played boys’ box lacrosse until that point. Her mother continues the distinction based on stick use: “Field is different…They’re not playing with woodies. They’re not playing against other men. There’s no physical hitting in the girls’ team so they’re not jeopardizing their bodies.”67 So while Haudenosaunee communities work to articulate where medicine resides and women’s participation in medicine, they must do so amidst the ways in which sports has been organized around a gender hierarchy in settler nation states. For example, the argument that women should not engage in sports because it could jeopardize their bodies was used to exclude women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Discussions of Haudenosaunee women upholding the integrity of their bodies are entwined with these histories, further complicating the already loaded discussions.

The distinction between wooden and plastic lacrosse sticks works to identify where medicine resides and is a gendered conversation. One Haudenosaunee man who plays the medicine game articulates this gendered distinction this way: “[The game women are playing is]

67 Interview by author, March 1, 2012.
not the medicine game. Even that’s a fine line. Some people will say you give thanks every time you go out on the field. That’s true. I do. But then I also heard perspectives on the medicine is in the stick. I heard the medicine is in the woody…But I also heard from a dad…that the medicine isn’t actually in the stick until the ceremony begins.”

The lacrosse stick is one location whereby Haudenosaunee male players seamlessly claim the contemporary iteration as both their traditional and medicinal game, where women who play use the stick to point out the distinction between the traditional and medicinal game, and what they are playing. This does not mean, however, that women are claiming no relationship to the medicine of the game. In some ways their conflict over playing illuminates that very medicine. Lacrosse is not just a sport, though Haudenosaunee women cannot and do not claim they are playing the medicine game, but they do name it as more than other sports in their lives. The gendered structure of the game creates room to ask where medicine resides and the ways in which Haudenosaunee women are reinforcing, and reinterpreting, the medicinal properties of the game.

The wooden stick functions as a preservation of tradition and the location of medicine. And in this moment of flux, with more and more women playing, Haudenosaunee communities are working to articulate precisely where medicine resides. The seamlessness with which Haudenosaunee men play the contemporary game and identify its medicine can skirt some of the important questions regarding tradition. That Haudenosaunee women have to tease out these meaningful distinctions puts them at the critical juncture of working to maintain and articulate tradition, as well as work to clarify it in ways that do not violate it. Louise McDonald gives this articulation of medicine, locating it inside of and beyond the stick:

68 Interview by author, June 30, 2017.
And with the evolution with how the stick is made and it’s more plastic and aluminum now. Does it make it less sacred? The medicine is in the Indian not the arrow…It doesn’t matter what you’re holding in your hand. It comes from within. I think it becomes a medicine in how it is that they hold each other, because lacrosse is a team. And if one is in pain, everyone is in pain. And if one fails, everyone fails.69

This more expanded version of where medicine resides functions to name the medicine of lacrosse as connected (not separated from) women’s bodies, their connectedness to creation, their need for healing, and their inherent value in Haudenosaunee communities.

Louise McDonald connects the medicine of lacrosse with that which is already firmly recognized within Haudenosaunee women’s bodies: “It’s just like the connectivity of our monthly moon time. Women are connected that way.”70 One mother and player explains that women are not supposed to play the medicine game because they carry the gift of life, but plays the game as a way to stay healthy for her son.71 One mother of a lacrosse player points to the “dire circumstances” that Haudenosaunee women are in as the reason why “to take something away from our girls right now is not going to be tolerated.”72 Again, here, Louise McDonald reorients the location of medicine, tying together the present conditions, the ability to give birth, and the cultural connection to lacrosse:

A woman can play the game if it’s a medicine for herself. Living in the current conditions…I think for young women to pick up the stick and play lacrosse for a medicine for herself is absolutely right…It doesn’t hinder her ability to give birth. If anything, it helps because obesity is probably the number one thing that prohibits a healthy birth. So, when you have a healthy fit mother, her odds of having a healthy pregnancy and delivery is greater. And when you have a young girl who has a belief embedded in her bloodstream, how can you deny her?73

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69 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
70 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
71 Interview by author, February 13, 2012.
73 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
Finally, one mother connects the healing women experience through playing to the healing of Haudenosaunee communities: “Those relationships are their medicine. The fact that all the parents go out and support these kids, you become this mentoring support network. So that’s medicine, all out supporting for life.”\textsuperscript{74} This collection of Haudenosaunee women’s experiences defines medicine in particular ways. First, medicine serves individual Haudenosaunee women’s bodies to heal from the dire circumstances women find themselves in due to colonization and the associated intergenerational trauma. Moreover, the medicine of lacrosse leads to Haudenosaunee women being in top physical condition, better serving their ability to give birth and parent with health and energy. Finally, healthy Haudenosaunee women mean healthy Haudenosaunee communities.

When Haudenosaunee communities uphold a protocol in order to protect ceremonial space, they do so amidst a history that has attacked this space through near linguicide, diminishing the land base upon which these ceremonies can occur (making it necessary for people to travel great distances), and the westernization of a ceremony that presents to the world as a sport. As distinct from the traditional game of lacrosse, and historical game played between clans, the medicinal game remains an important traditional ceremony for Haudenosaunee communities that includes men and women. The question is not whether or not women are a part of lacrosse, since the ceremony was given to the people, but in what ways women are and will participate in its medicinal aspects. Communities are most in agreement that a particular iteration of the medicinal ceremony of lacrosse is played for the community by men. An expanded articulation of medicine opens up the ways in which women, whose bodies are under siege in

\textsuperscript{74} Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
settler nation states find, experience, and articulate medicine, while asking why would this particular medicine be necessary for Haudenosaunee women and girls.

**Conclusion**

That increasing numbers of Haudenosaunee men and women play the contemporary iteration of lacrosse works to solidify the protocol. Until recently, the contemporary games of box and field lacrosse that are played at the high school, college, and international level were dominated by white men. It is important to acknowledge the ways in which Haudenosaunee men playing contemporary box and field lacrosse are part of a larger cultural claiming of the game for Haudenosaunee communities. When non-Indigenous women play the game, they fight western patriarchy, along the trajectory of women making gains in male-dominated arenas such as sports, but colonization remains in place. The convention that Haudenosaunee women are not to touch a man’s lacrosse stick functions as a remembrance, whispering into the contemporary iteration of the game played on colonized spaces, tying lacrosse to Haudenosaunee space and place, making it possible for Haudenosaunee women to play with cultural integrity, protecting the sport from being dislodged from their culture. Haudenosaunee women’s engagement with the protocol that women do not touch a man’s lacrosse stick allows for the decolonization of sexism in both western and Haudenosaunee communities, making particular kinds of claims on and decisions about lacrosse.
Chapter Four

*Embodied Sovereignty: Towards a Definition*

The final chapter focuses on young Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players and how they are embodying sovereignty through the decisions they make about lacrosse, how they shape and define lacrosse through their travel, and what they embody when their bodies are in motion for the sake of lacrosse. In effect, the first three chapters are meant to clear the space necessary for this chapter where they can speak freely about how they represent Haudenosaunee nationhood for their communities and make determinations representations of Haudenosaunee people on the world stage. The first chapter names both what Haudenosaunee women are up against in settler society, as well as what is available to them within Haudenosaunee philosophy to combat these social ills, including lacrosse. Chapter two names and contextualizes the controversy in ways that include Haudenosaunee women as active participants in their traditions. Chapter three names the ways that Haudenosaunee women are working inter-generationally to intervene in internalized sexism within their communities, western representations of their power that miss the colonization of that power, while they clear a path for themselves to define what is healing about the game they are playing. Throughout the chapters, I have demonstrated how older and younger generations of women sometimes work together to clear a path for Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players to illuminate (1) the ways in which they embody sovereignty through their decision making within colonized spaces, (2) their connection to their Haudenosaunee communities, (3) and their responsibility to represent their nationhood. There have been many narratives throughout the dissertation of Haudenosaunee women clearing a path through settler colonialism. I begin chapter four with one more.
A Love Story

*It was hard. I cried. I played consistently for 15 years. I never took a summer off. I cried at night. My husband knew; he knew it was hard for me because I loved it so much.*

Ashley Cooke, Mohawk, Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, reflecting on her decision to stop playing after her first child was born.

I was able to squeeze in a quick interview with Ashley after she was part of the panel presentation, “Together We Rise: Indigenous Female Athletes and Contemporary Issues,” held at McMaster University in Ontario Canada as part of the 2017 North American Indigenous Games (NAIG).¹ What became evident in the short space of our interview is that Ashley's 15 years of lacrosse play has been full of decision-making, none of which have been easy. Ashley's decision to play lacrosse for McMaster University in Ontario and the experiences she had there - leading to her decision to stop playing for that team - reveal and disrupt settler logics, further clearing a path for what this chapter focuses on: What Haudenosaunee women feel and represent when they travel internationally to play lacrosse.

Being one of the top scorers on the teams for which she played, Ashley could have attended a Division one school in the U.S., most likely on scholarship. Instead, in order to be close to home, Six Nations Reserve, in 2005, Ashley began playing lacrosse for the McMaster women's lacrosse team, just 45 minutes away. I asked Ashley if McMaster recruited her. "I just walked on."² The following narrative is both shocking and not shocking, wholly embedded within the logics of settler colonialism:

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¹ The North American Indigenous Games are held every two to three years in various locations in Canada and the U.S. The 2017 games were held in Toronto, with athletes primarily housed at McMaster University. Much of the programming was held at McMaster, as well. Between 500 and over 100 Indigenous nations compete, with as many as 10,100 athletes playing 16 sports, including swimming, badminton, soccer, and lacrosse. The next NAIG is in 2020.

² Ashley Cooke, Interview by author, July 19, 2017.
I didn’t have a good experience. It was my first time playing with a different team, other than my team that I grew up with on the reserve. So it was a risk I was taking, venturing out…It wasn’t very welcoming…I thought it would be okay…They’re probably going to like me because I am going to score a lot of goals for their team…But I was very secluded. I was very alone. The coach never, he never respected me as a player or as a person…I sat alone on the busses to our games…During practices and games, [the coach] would create a lot of plays for a lot of girls, who I felt that he wanted to be the superstars of the team. And they couldn’t fulfill that role. And I just played the game that I know. And I was the top scorer on the team and he’d give me no praise or congratulate me or thank me for my contribution to the team.³

To contextualize this narrative, I again turn to Mohawk cultural theorist, Audra Simpson:

“Settler colonialism requires an Indigenous elimination for territory.”⁴ Simpson points to the ways in which Indigenous women have “historically been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous, kinship and governance, an alternative to heteronormative and Victoria rules of descent.”⁵ Cultural theorist Anne McClintock (1995) points not to the lack of value, but the anxiety over land that must be subdued, demonstrating how the ‘terrifying' black woman's body is mapped onto the land, understood as female so naturally subordinate based on Victorian codes of gender hierarchy, and raced as black, exotic, foreign, and frightening. Land functions dually within settler logics: it is at once imperative and sought after, depended upon for its sustenance, required for the value it offers the colonizer's appetite for resources, immeasurably valuable, yet also positioned as Indigenous women are and have been – less valuable, rape-able. The land itself is abjected: desired for what it can provide, policed, held close, diminished in value as compared to the humans who subjugate it and craft their identity over and against it.

³ Ashley Cooke, Interview by author, July 19, 2017.
It is these layers that make up the space of a lacrosse field, onto which Ashley walks and exquisitely plays. She is at once exotic and threatening, her value to the team erased in order to make sense of anxiety. As Simpson posits, she has “been conflated with land and thus contaminating to a white, settler social order.” She disrupts settler space and contaminates the very land that has been rendered god-given through manifest destiny. The idea of conflation explains the settler perspective, but it is based on actual, lived realities of Indigenous women and connections to their land. They are indeed inextricably linked, and thus, that which must be disentangled from land in order for settler society to function. However, the land will not have it, continuing to reach out to her and inform her memories. That space between Indigenous woman and land is that which is most threatening to settler society. If she is conflated with land, she is ever part of the settler national project. Killing, raping, disappearing her is the violent ripping her from settler land. However, she can never be entirely dislodged from that relationship.

Moreover, 1200 missing and murdered is a lot, but it is not all or even most Haudenosaunee women. That means that the majority interact with members of the settler society who do not quite know what to do about them, or do, but are law-abiding enough not to. Violence against Indigenous women is a continuum, and the best that an Indigenous woman can hope for within the reality of settler society is to be ignored and erased. Anxiety over keeping stolen land courses through the soil.

Ashley's corporeality walking onto a lacrosse field, which is part of an institution of higher learning, only possible because of the dispossession of Indigenous people from their land, represents a trace; that which settler society must contend. Critiquing constructs of identity

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coming out of the Enlightenment, which dominate understandings of identity, Radhika Mohanram demonstrates how Locke relegates the body to the realm of animals, the excess or trace body is displaced onto the poor, the Indigenous woman. Mohanram articulates, “I want to suggest that it is within the context of displacement and trace that the black body comes into being…the visible body is located as bestial, perverted, or feminine.”\(^7\) The idea of trace suggests smallness; diminished population and diminished land-base. What ‘trace’ cannot capture is the largeness of life, the excellence in Ashley's performance on the field, her journeys away from and back to her home, the deepness with which she loves her game, her community, her children.

Simpson talks about the "strangulation of Indigenous governmental forms, philosophical practices, and gender roles."\(^8\) It is despite existing within settler constructions of identity as ‘trace,' and the resulting ‘strangulation' of being, that Haudenosaunee women and communities negotiate and embody sovereignty.

To discuss the pinched off, strangulated, diminished space through which Haudenosaunee women embody sovereignty, I turn to black feminist theorist, Katherine McKittrick. There are essential connections between McKittrick's theory of how space is controlled, constructed, and how black women produce space in spite of these controls and constructs, and how Indigenous women decolonize space with their bodies in motion and in relationship to land. McKittrick theorizes black women as shaping geography right in the heart of the most tightly bordered spaces. Through her analysis, McKittrick conclusively demonstrates that domination is not ever absolute and that black women are producers of space even though dominant mapping and

\(^7\) Radhika Mohanram, *Black body: women, colonialism, and space* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 51.

geography are set up for them not to be. Thus, Ashley takes back and decolonizes the space of the lacrosse field, playing the game that she knows – her ancestral game – within and outside of the boundaries determined by the modern rules of the game. McKittrick demonstrates the ways in which black women’s bodies are mapped as all at once placed (restricted) and placeless (erased and without the capacity to shape space), through their raced sexuality, stating, “Once the racial-sexual body is territorialized, it is marked as decipherable and knowable – as subordinate, inhuman, rape-able, deviant, procreative, placeless.”9 In the case of Haudenosaunee women, they are not placeless, but their racialized sexuality managed through the reservation system functions as a way to encapsulate Indigenous women’s bodies onto marked, bordered space. Ashley then is ‘out-of-place’ on the strict boundaries of the field from a settler logics perspective, and very much in relationship to space and land from a Haudenosaunee reality. Pushing past boundaries has consequences, as McKittrick states, "Challenging these knowable bodily markers – asserting, for example, that blackness does not warrant rape-ability – was/is punishable.”10 In Ashley's case, asserting herself as a Haudenosaunee woman who has deep connections to land, community, and all of creation, demonstrating her prowess on the field and the love for her game, all become punishable.

I begin with Ashley's narrative for how it exposes the settler logics that are layered throughout the land onto which Haudenosaunee women travel and play lacrosse. Her story helps to open up the questions: How do Haudenosaunee women embody sovereignty when they travel throughout their ancestral homelands to play lacrosse? How is this sovereignty experienced when


they play on Turtle Island outside of Haudenosaunee ancestral homelands? When they play on a
different continent? What kinds of obstacles do Haudenosaunee women experience in these
diverse locations and how do they mitigate them? In the case of overt racism and an environment
that worked to diminish Ashley's value, on her ancestral homeland and so close to her present-
day home, Ashley decided to stop playing for that team, stating, "After a while, I just couldn't do
it,"\(^\text{11}\) turning her attention instead to playing with the Haudenosaunee Women’s team preparing
for their first world cup.

As stated in the introduction, by 2009, when Haudenosaunee women played for the first
time at the world cup, the international competition had been underway for women's teams for
27 years. By the time Haudenosaunee women began playing in the World cup, there were 14
teams, and to date, that number has doubled with more teams joining the competition soon.
Given the settler logics that works to render Haudenosaunee women's three-dimensionality non-
existent and an internal controversy that is a very real part of their decision-making, what it took
for that first team to make it to Prague was nothing short of remarkable. Dawn Martin-Hill
(Mohawk), Ashley Cooke's mother, went with the team to Prague and said, "They had enough to
go, the plane tickets, their equipment and all that. They just didn't have any money to see
anything."\(^\text{12}\) Dawn laments the lack of community support the women’s team received that first
year, even though “that team won gold after gold.”\(^\text{13}\) Dawn was worried that they would be
“stuck in that room for the whole time and [eaten] at McDonald’s,” so she reached out to
contacts she had from the Czech Republic who “were always going to South Dakota.”\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{11}\) Ashley Cooke, Interview by author, July 19, 2017.
\(^{13}\) Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
\(^{14}\) Dawn Martin-Hill, Interview by author, June 29, 2017.
shared her concern about reaching out to them, but then found it to be an important learning moment for the team about connecting with people from different parts of the world from the space of knowing who you are:

[The men from the Czech Republic] knew [Lakota] and there was this big conversation about, are they co-opting our culture? Are they pretending to be Indians? And so, I was so shocked when I…[met] them. Where you thought you were not going to like them and they're…just these gentle sweethearts. And you wanted to hate them and say you are co-opting our culture. And then I just decided…I know the people in front of me are good people. So, I called [them]. Since they love us so much, now they can actually help us.15

The two men rented vans and brought the team around Prague seeing sights and going to peoples’ houses for dinner. Dawn explained to the team what a significant gesture this was:

I tried to explain [ ] to the girls; this is a year's worth of money they're spending on us. They're not out of communism yet and so for them to do – the artwork they gave me, the beadwork they gave me – they could have sold for a lot of money. They were really generous, and I think it was a really good teaching moment for everyone involved. They don't have much, but they game everything they have.16

Even without much material support that first year, Haudenosaunee women playing on the world stage marked a poignant moment for Haudenosaunee sovereignty, a sovereignty connected to Haudenosaunee grandmothers, nationhood, community support, and visual sovereignty. These young women, their coaches, and supporters knew who they were, and what and to whom they were connected. By 2009, Haudenosaunee women had been engaged in a struggle to play their game since the 1960s, if we begin with Sandy Jemison's narrative of carving out space at college and then bringing it back to her community at Cattaraugus Seneca Nation. These next few narratives illuminate some of the components of sovereignty attached to the Haudenosaunee Women's team participating in their first World cup.

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I connect an event that took place four years prior to the World cup in Prague for the way it demonstrates an emerging, but tenuous, representation of Haudenosaunee nationhood that Haudenosaunee high school girls carried with them to the World cup in Baltimore, Maryland. The team, which called themselves the First Nations team, were not yet officially involved in the games but were able to go and compete in exhibition games. The team did not yet have the endorsement of the Confederacy to carry the flag and represent their nationhood. As such, this story is about a girls' Haudenosaunee team on shaky ground, having tenuous support from their communities. As described in the introduction for this project, by 2005, over 60 Haudenosaunee women were prepared to try out for the exhibition games at the Women's World cup in Maryland. This number was cut to 18, demonstrating just how strong girls and women's lacrosse was by 2005. The team proudly (though tenuously) walked into the arena with the Haudenosaunee flag, and it was hung with the rest of the nations' flags. Sandy Jemison described the disappointment when they were asked to take it down:

The woman who was president of the [Federation of International Lacrosse] put it up. The second day, all those darn rules, because we were not technically members of the federation, we couldn’t have our flag flying. So, they took our flag down. And we watched the USA and Canada team as they took the flag down. So, we all went out there with our little cameras taking pictures of it. And they took it down. And it was a sad time. And they brought the flag over to us.  

The team was able, however, to share their nationhood with the team from Japan uniquely and importantly. The Haudenosaunee and Japanese teams were not scheduled to play each other. Japan sought the First Nations team out to express their disappointment that they were not on the schedule to play each other. The two teams decided to play a pick-up game, finding a field – just

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17 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
like Sandy and her colleagues found a field, decades earlier at college – claiming space. Sandy describes:

At one point Japan’s coach came to me and said through a translator, we want to play you, but you’re not on our schedule. So, she goes, let’s play at this time. Do you have a game then? And I said, no. She said, let’s find a field, and we’ll play. Okay! So, we found a field, and we found an official who said she would come with us. And it was way off somewhere in the back part of the games in the park. And we played and about halfway through the field, all of a sudden, a woman comes running out and says, you can’t play this game! And we were like, why not? She said, because it’s not a scheduled game, there’s no insurance for you. If anyone gets hurt – and they started to take the goals away on us. And we said, no just leave the goals. We’ll put them back. Yeah, right. So, we waited until the woman left. We had sat down amongst ourselves with the Japanese players trying to understand them. And we sat among them. And as soon as the woman left, we all looked at each other and said, let’s play! So, we got up, and we played some more. We didn’t know the score. But we were just playing and having such a great time. And we decided it was time enough and so we all sat down among each other, and we just tried to talk to each other, even though we couldn't understand. But they knew limited English, and we knew no Japanese. But they were just so excited to be able to talk to Natives, and they just thought it was the greatest thing. And they asked us a lot of things about our culture. How we lived and where we lived and what was it like? And it was just such a fun time.¹⁸

This is a story about finding a field and playing anyway. It is the hundreds of Haudenosaunee girls and women who played anyway who worked to clear the way for a full endorsement to carry the Haudenosaunee flag from the Confederacy in 2006. They would not have been endorsed if they waited to play and they would not have played if they waited to be endorsed. Countless Haudenosaunee women and girls told their communities, it is time. We can be here. On this hidden field, uninsured and unendorsed, young Haudenosaunee women made meaningful international exchanges with young women from Japan – through translators. Japanese to

¹⁸ Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
A Language Story

This narrative demonstrates the work of Haudenosaunee women to root lacrosse more deeply into their communities, defining lacrosse as Haudenosaunee through language. When Haudenosaunee women travel far from their homelands to play this sport that has been taken up by the world, it is the work that is rooted in Haudenosaunee homeland that keeps these strong connections going.

In June 2018, I was invited to sit in during an immersion language class at Cattaraugus Seneca territory, a program of first years that began in January 2018. The eight students involved attend the program five days a week, from 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM. The six women and two men, ranging from the 20s to 50s, went through an admission process whereby they were tested on their ability to translate 20 verbs from English to Seneca and 20 verbs from Seneca to English. One of their instructors, Gayanëö:wi' Jacky Snyder, a mother of four who has played lacrosse since she was five, says that the program is foregrounding the group's total comprehension instead of strict time frames, moving to the next lesson only when everyone is ready. As such, this group of first years will roll into the second-year program on no particular timeline and continue indefinitely.

There were two elders, first Seneca language speakers, in the class I observed. Participants took turns sharing a narrative in Seneca based on what the instructor had written on a small piece of paper they drew. When language learners had questions, they directed them (in
Seneca) to the two instructors, who, if they did not know, or needed clarification, asked the two elders. Jacky told me after the class that the two elders are sisters, that one is silly and the other more serious, and that they balance each other. Their role as keepers of knowledge was palpable in the room. Those who are teaching and learning Haudenosaunee languages are dependent on that knowledge. After the class, Jacky told me that learning her language saved her life. As such, she feels indebted to the elders who help her learn it, which means she sits deep within the questions of what it means to play lacrosse and become more entrenched in her tradition through language acquisition. Jacky shared a narrative of being in an immersion experience and struggling to tell the story of her lacrosse game from the night before and how she got slightly hurt. She looked to the elders in the room to help her with the language to describe it, but they would not. Jacky says there is a woman lacrosse player in her class who speaks of her playing in Seneca. The two elders in the room do not like it, but they do not stop her or refuse to help her when she needs it. Jacky, who has been playing lacrosse since the age of five, decided this year not to play, feeling that going deeper into the language, and working more closely with elders, means that she more adequately understands why women and girls should not play. Because she understands this in the Seneca language, adequately explaining it in English seemed to fall short, nor did I ask her to. This, however, does not mean that she is not involved in lacrosse, but rather that she has found ways to integrate lacrosse and the Seneca language more deeply for her community.
Jacky says lacrosse is her life. Jacky has decided to incorporate lacrosse into her life in ways that involve her passion for revitalizing the Seneca language, announcing local lacrosse games entirely in the Seneca language. In the photo above she is holding an award that her community gave her for doing so. She has expanded this to teaching her students to announce, as well as saying the code of conduct all in Seneca (below).
Figure: Code of Conduct read before lacrosse games. Translation by Jacky Snyder.

Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players connect to community and elders who hold languages. Yes, there is controversy over girls and women playing within the acquisition of language. Jacky's story demonstrates the inherent struggles and that Haudenosaunee women are not looking to disassociate themselves from their communities even as some do not support their participation. Assimilation is not the better option; sitting with the difficulty of the questions is; it is part of the way that they hold onto their nationhood and communities as they travel internationally to play. Jacky's voice and perspective carry tradition into the future, along with the set of questions about how Haudenosaunee women and girls are involved and will be involved, in lacrosse. Rather than a linear progression toward increased support for their playing, Jacky's decisions regarding lacrosse – not to play, but to be increasingly involved through
language – is part of the richness of this set of questions. Cattaraugus Seneca Nation is revitalizing the language, holding Longhouse, and offering quite a bit of community support for girls and women playing lacrosse. Jacky Snyder says that Haudenosaunee tradition is full of contradictions. So, this next narrative is about a girls' team that came out of Cattaraugus Seneca Nation in the early 1990s. What was required from their community in order for the team to travel and play is part of what makes a field of questions where there were none before. The question that Haudenosaunee women have to struggle with should I play or should I not is only possible because of the Haudenosaunee women who have fought to play. The next narrative is about the right to exist.

‘We Can Be Here’

In the early 1990s, the Seneca Girls Lacrosse club played weekend tournaments in several states, the seeds of staking their claim in the growing lacrosse world. These young women made decisions on behalf of their communities that they were valuable. It was not easy. They were right on the cusp of near full support from their community, but there was still quite a lot of opposition. Throughout this project, I have relayed how contemporary Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players name the respect they have for older generations who hold onto the culture as purveyors of knowledge. This group of lacrosse players is part of a larger group of players from the time who held onto lacrosse by their fingertips, against great odds and opposition and helped bring it into the present and future.

Sandy Jemison has seen many fits and starts with Haudenosaunee women and girls playing lacrosse. After the team that was asked not to play in the 1980s disbanded, Sandy started the Seneca Girls Lacrosse club at the Cattaraugus Seneca Nation. In 1991, through some finagling, Sandy helped the club team join the Midwest School Girls Lacrosse Association,
playing as many as five games a weekend in Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Maryland, and New York. At that time, in the early 1990s, there was very little in the line of financial support from the Cattaraugus Seneca Nation for girls and women's lacrosse and so all of the money they needed for uniforms, equipment, and travel, they earned through fundraising. Some parents were in opposition of their daughters playing and would refuse to participate in fundraisers or pick up their daughters from practices. The team still practiced eight months out of the year and found creative ways to outfit themselves. Sandy shares the following narrative about putting together the uniforms and equipment on a dime:

Now we needed uniforms. We had no money…So we had the job program. They had welding classes, carpentry classes, plumbing. So, we asked the welding class if they could make us some goals…They welded us six by six goals. And up until about three years ago, we used those goals. We've used them all these years…And the nets – someone donated the nets. And then we needed uniforms. I didn't know where you get uniforms…What are our team colors? What's our team name? Well, we never had a team name. We were just Seneca. Seneca Girls…So I started on a hunt and went up to Nichols [High School]) Not very far from the school, just a couple of blocks, there was a warehouse…They had clothes that would come in from schools, like boarding schools or prep schools…And they had kilts, skirts back then, and Polos…And I said I can't believe it! I asked what they had the most of. And the shirts at that point were two dollars each, and the kilts I think, were three dollars each. They had kilts just like you see the other teams wearing. So, I bought them all…And I came back, and the girls were so excited…But then I couldn't afford the kilts, so I took the kilts back, and one of the mothers said, we could make some. So, I went and got a pattern and material…And at my house, we sat there and made kilts…And we had about three or four sewing machines around my dining room table…And then the girls needed shoes. And we found out when we were playing in the mud that we needed cleats…So we played at Nichols one day, and after the game, I took all of the girls in different cars…So we went to this warehouse, and they were just thrilled. There was a little section filled with cleats. And they had [] all different colors. They didn't care, as long as they fit them.¹⁹

The tournaments were held primarily at private schools, and the Seneca Girls Team had to contend with noticeable class differences, the teams being "fully clothed with matching knapsacks and matching stick bags, and matching socks,” about which “the girls used to say,

¹⁹ Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
they probably have matching underwear.” Sandy emphasized how stiff the competition was, that the girls kept an intense practice schedule eight months of the year, in order to successfully compete with privileged teams with girls who went to elite camps. "And here we are – we can't afford – we're fundraising just to get gas money.”

The Seneca Girls Club team is responsible for shifting the perspective at Cattaraugus Seneca Nation regarding girls and women playing lacrosse. Early on, the girls would get dropped off at the practice fields and Sandy would drive them home, with some parents refusing to pick them up. Sandy recalls, “I constantly had to explain the game and the differences from the men’s game.” A shift occurred in 1991 when the team won the division two championship. At that time, the Seneca Nation of Indians began matching their fundraising efforts; Sandy recalls, when that happened, "we became more popular and acceptable in the community.” This shift in support was evident two years later when the team won the division one championship.

At one particularly large tournament with nearly 30 teams playing, the Seneca Girls Team entered the winner’s bracket and into the semi-finals. Over 50 parents of the girls drove to Ohio to see the girls in the final games telling Sandy, “Get us a room. We’ll find a way to pay for this.” Sandy continued:

We were all bunked up together. And we sat down, and I told the girls look, this is the biggest event you've ever gone to, biggest thing for the Seneca. We represent the Senecas, and we've got to show them the good side. They have all these perceptions of us being Seneca. Indian. And what it's like…We're gonna show them that it's not like that. We can be here. And we can play at the same level. We may not have all the fancy things you have but we have that skill, and we have the commitment and dedication.

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20 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
21 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
24 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
In this moving narrative, Sandy leads us through a journey of what it was like for these girls and those supporting them to start something from nothing, to find the material requirements necessary to be part of something that is rooted within their Creation narratives, and then to travel to and be part of space, and to make the statement, *WE CAN BE HERE.*

The next part of the narrative was devastating to hear, but Sandy shared it with a calm resolve, perhaps because she was able to begin our interview with a long list of girls she had coached who now still play, or their children play, or they have an All American from college play, or all three. In 1993, they won the Midwest School Girls Lacrosse Association championship:

> And here we were, the big 1993 Seneca School Girls won the Midwest championship, which was a huge deal. Huge. And I’ll just never forget that time. It was just the culmination for what we’d worked for – and we did it in such a short amount of time. So teams coming after that had a big deal to live up to.

And then two years later, in a move reminiscent of the elimination of Haudenosaunee men from competing internationally for 100 years, they changed the rules allowing club teams to participate and they eliminated the Seneca Girls Team. I asked Sandy if she thought it had anything to do with their success, to which she responded, “Oh yeah. I’m sure it did. Yep.”25 The message was clear; *YOU CANNOT BE HERE* if you are going to win games and make our elite teams not have the championships on their record. The 1980s and the 1990s are two decades in which Haudenosaunee women were holding onto their ability to play lacrosse by their fingertips. Mia McKie (Tuscarora), who played in the 2009 World cup, for Cornell University, and recently completed her Master's degree at University of Victoria said, "I don't feel like we're holding on by our fingernails anymore.”26 Of the generation of Haudenosaunee women coming up, Louise

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25 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
26 Mia McKie, Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
McDonald contends, "There's no doubt they're going to be great. And they're going to be remembered because they had the courage. They had the courage. And so for me, that tells me that the ancestors are telling us it's time. It's time to usher in a new consciousness…And those girls are leading that new consciousness in."  

Three decades before the 2009 World Cup, Haudenosaunee girls were forging their parents' signatures in order to play, scraping together uniforms and gas money, practicing for countless hours, playing without endorsement, and traveling far and wide to play anyway; to demand that their communities, mainstream society, and the international teams picking up the stick see them valuable. Through this stumble and others, Haudenosaunee women kept playing lacrosse, and a decade later, a team came together that prepared to play in their first women's world cup. It is the grandmothers who hold onto the culture for younger women, and the actions of these girls and women inform how the culture will be held into the future.

They do all of this with not nearly the recognition as the men's teams. The Haudenosaunee Women's team has an official endorsement from the Confederacy to carry the flag and represent their nationhood. This does not mean that they are recognized as contributing to Haudenosaunee sovereignty to the same extent that the Men's Iroquois Nationals team is, paralleling some of the sexism in sports that we see in mainstream society. In 2010, England denied the Men's Iroquois Nationals team entry with Haudenosaunee passports. In 2015, Scotland denied the U19 (Under 19) Haudenosaunee Women's team entry with Haudenosaunee passports. Both teams made the decision not to travel on U.S. or Canadian passports, forfeiting their place in the games, making pointed statements about Haudenosaunee sovereignty. In 2010, there were over 200 newspaper articles about the Men's Iroquois Nationals team and their

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27 Louise McDonald, Interview by author, September 9, 2015.
statement of sovereignty. In 2015, there were two newspaper articles about the U19 Haudenosaunee Women’s team and their statement of sovereignty. This cursory glance at the media coverage of both events speaks to the sexism in sports coverage in general, but also to the emphasis on men’s participation in lacrosse, and engagement with lacrosse as a platform for sovereignty, both within and outside of Haudenosaunee communities. Below is the official statement from Kathy Smith, Haudenosaunee Nation Women’s Lacrosse Board Chairman:

After months of trying to find a way into Scotland that was acceptable to both the United Kingdom and our Haudenosaunee Confederacy, we have been unsuccessful. This is a long-standing political issue based on the lack of recognition of our Haudenosaunee people as a sovereign nation by some countries. The United Kingdom, being one of these countries, required our team to travel on Canadian and American passports. This is unacceptable to the Confederacy because we are not Canadian or American citizens. Our ancestors were on Turtle Island, known today as North America, before Canada and the United States were created. We continue to exist today as a separate, sovereign nation and we cannot undermine this position by using other countries' passports. However, we understand and respect the right of the United Kingdom to protect their country and citizens.28

Smith’s is a clear statement representing the Haudenosaunee’s stance on passports and sovereignty. When I asked Corinne Abrams about women being discouraged from playing in general, she situated the conversation within this moment of sovereignty:

The under 19 division was supposed to send a team to Scotland. And they had everything set up. All the funding was done. The team was set up. They had been playing in tournaments and really, really doing well. We have a lot of talented girls who are playing at the college level, so they are extremely talented, representing their Nations. And [team managers] did not send them because they weren't allowed to go with their passports to Scotland...And there's always the argument from the other side, that we're just not letting these women – or we're limiting them in their abilities. But I think, more importantly, we're looking farther down the line to the future generations and what we want for our people as a whole, not just the one group who's playing lacrosse.29


29 Corinne Abrams, Interview by author, September 21, 2015.
Corinne illuminates that Haudenosaunee girls and women, now having full endorsement from the Confederacy to represent nationhood, carry community responsibility. Clear in Corinne's statements is that Haudenosaunee communities look to these Women's teams to enact sovereignty, even as mainstream society, and at times Haudenosaunee communities, diminish this contribution.

In 2005, when the girls’ First Nations team played in exhibitions games in the Women’s World cup, they had to take down their flag. When this happened, a representative of the Federation of International Lacrosse [FIL] approached Sandy: “The woman who was president came to me and said, would you be interested in joining the federation? Because of your level of play, we think you can do it. And that you can play as a country. And we will recognize you as a sovereign nation. And I was like, are you kidding?… And I said, we would love to. I told the girls all about it.”

It was because of their skill and dedication, hours upon hours of practice, that the Seneca Girls club team shifted the perspective at Cattaraugus Seneca Nation. It was for that same prowess that the FIL extended an invitation for them to join, leading to their seeking and gaining endorsement from the Confederacy and playing in the first world cup four years later. These narratives define embodied sovereignty as a connection to nationhood and community and in direct response to the logics of settler colonialism which Haudenosaunee women work tirelessly to disrupt in order to clear paths. Embodied sovereignty is also positioned within a deep love for land, homeland, and the game of lacrosse.

30 Sandy Jemison, Interview by author, June 27, 2017.
Conclusion: Lacrosse as a Bridge

I began this chapter with Ashley’s narrative as a way to clear the path, and I will end with her narrative as a way to demonstrate how love for the game connects Haudenosaunee women to their land, and a growing community of lacrosse players. Haudenosaunee women who play lacrosse are not going to sit by while people from all over the world take up the stick. Instead, they pick up the stick and share their game with the world. This final narrative is about a Haudenosaunee woman’s love for lacrosse as a bridge. Ashley attributed her horrible experiences playing for McMaster University as the coach’s and team’s lack of love for the game. She places her experience of being erased from the team alongside an experience she had a few years earlier, playing one summer for her rival team:

I also played one year for [], who is our rival, and the other top competitor in the league – and who were also very racist to us in our early years… the coach loved me and loved the way I played and always applauded, loved watching me play against them, and in the league as well. And the one year we didn’t have a team they asked me to play…and I went…They treated me amazingly well. They understood that I had to travel two hours just to go to practice out there. And they were just so welcoming and happy and would pass me the ball and set up plays. They utilized my strengths, which a coach should do. We set up plays around [my strengths]. They knew where my strengths were, and they took advantage of them. And it was amazing. That was my first time playing for a different team. And I was the only Native on that team.31

In both this and her experience at college, Ashley represents a connection to land and culture through her love of lacrosse. She is willing to share that space with others (keep showing up and scoring goals) who love the game. Love for the game becomes the bridge, the intersection between this team of non-Haudenosaunee players and Ashley’s ancestral game.

To understand how love for the game holds decolonizing potential, it becomes necessary to name and then dispute Ashley as merely serving western feminist goals having to do with a

31 Ashley Cooke, Interview by author, July 19, 2017.
history of women and participation in sports. This happens, for sure, when Ashley participates on this non-Haudenosaunee team, indeed, but that is not her primary focus or necessarily her non-Haudenosaunee teammates' focus. Whose relationship to land is central when Ashley plays for this team has to do with how motion and space are conceptualized. So this brings us back to Mohanram who raises questions about Indigenous people bound to a particular place, and thus imprisoned by relationship to a particular land. And yet, Ashley's decision-making processes regarding for whom she will play and how far she will travel, as well as the traveling to and from itself, are acts of sovereignty, sovereignty that she takes with her across land and concerning a history of colonization. Unclear in Mohanram's understanding of the indigene imprisoned by the perception of being bound to land, is how the Indigenous woman experiences her relationship to land.

When Ashley makes the decision not to drive 30 minutes to be punished for being Indigenous, female, and stellar at her game, is she then imprisoning herself? When she decides to travel two hours for practice each day, does she become less attached to her Haudenosaunee identity? To invert Mohanram’s use of Liisa Malkki’s quote – “And one wonders, if an ‘Indigenous Person’ wanted to move away, to the city, would [he or she quit being indigenous]?”32 – Does the decision made by a Haudenosaunee woman to stay within the boundaries of the reservation make her more Indigenous? The answer to both questions, is of course, no, so the question becomes, how is sovereignty embodied during these journeys? It is a relationship to land, and the land's sense of love and being, that move through Ashley's journeys, calling (or not) non-Haudenosaunee players and coaches into a relationship with the

ceremony that originated on Turtle Island. To articulate this set of realities, I turn to Mark Rifkin's analysis of Cherokee poet, Qwo-Li Driskill's poem, "Stolen from our Bodies." In this poem, Driskill centers the Cherokee's embodied emotional realities of removal, their land's response of mourning to losing them, and the welcoming that the new land offers its new Cherokee inhabitants. In centering embodiment, Rifkin demonstrates Driskill's suggestion of the lived reality of feeling – the erotics of feeling – that calls into question state-sanctioned/dominant articulations of Indigenous national sovereignty. I want to engage two pieces of Rifkin's analysis and relate them to Ashley's cyclical journeys from and back to her home reserve of Six Nations, and what she embodies when she moves through these spaces and makes these decisions. The first piece has to do with centering feeling, and the second with the feelings that the land might have, in other words, how the land might experience Ashley's journeys and movements.

Like the ways in which Indigenous women's bodies are mapped onto and omitted from settler space, so too are their emotions mapped in particular ways, mainly, as irrelevant, invisible, private, and a "collective subjectivity rendered unintelligible." According to Rifkin, this mapped emotional field is perpetuated by the “somewhat hollow recognition of Native presence in U.S. policy,” which certainly can be extended to the logics of other settler nation-states, such as Canada. By centering physical sensation and affective relation to a relationship to land and space, "the primacy of lived connections to land and one's people" replaces "a view of self-determination as primarily the administration of a jurisdictional grid (one that follows U.S.

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[and Canadian] principles, just on a smaller scale).” Moving through and over colonized land, with what are supposed to be private feelings – love for land, community, self, and game – makes visible and re-maps deep feelings about Haudenosaunee sovereignty. Through her love of the game and her excellent ability, Ashley disrupts the boundaries and grid marks laid out for her. Those who play her game, who appreciate her prowess, who set up plays based on her skill, are drawn into her project of decolonization, however unwittingly. And in these journeys, these sets of movements, the land is a subject that also feels. Ashley moves and embodies sovereignty because she is connected to a collective memory of what is held in the land. These memories "do not remain buried, safely sealed into a then fully sequestered from now." The ongoing memory of removal, of torched villages, of displacement and bordered reserves, as well as the un-bordered (by time or space) ancestral game of lacrosse, all sit within the land, sharing love with Ashley as she moves through space on and off the field, inside and outside of a game played. Her body traveling through and around Turtle Island, maps Haudenosaunee sovereignty, disrupting colonized borders.


Conclusion

Lacrosse is deeply important to Haudenosaunee peoples: how it is represented, how it is claimed. When the Onondaga Nation hosted the 2015 World Indoor Lacrosse Championships, the Onondaga, Oneida, Cayuga, Mohawk, Seneca, and Tuscarora were able to share the origins of lacrosse, artistically and visually, on a world stage. Through dance, beautiful lighting, and music, Haudenosaunee people enacted a telling of their creation narrative, which included a depiction of two men playing with wooden sticks. The connections that the Haudenosaunee made for an international audience was that the game the 13 teams were about to play originated as a medicine game. The Onondaga Nation built a $6-million arena for this competition. Many resources are going toward the claiming and representation of lacrosse, and that funding represents a particular point of view. When Neal Powless went to Haudenosaunee communities asking for money to fund *Crooked Arrows* (2012), none were willing to fund it if an Indigenous woman scored the winning goal at the end of the movie. When talking about the Iroquois Nationals, it is possible to make broad statements such as *Lacrosse is essential to Haudenosaunee communities*. That is because whole communities support men playing. I was not able to secure any interviews with Haudenosaunee women during WILC. Everyone was excited that this was taking place at Onondaga Nation. Men's participation in international lacrosse marks a considerable shift in their omission for a hundred years, and an important claiming for Haudenosaunee sovereignty.

However, the same cannot be said for Haudenosaunee women’s lacrosse. It is not possible to make broad statements about supporting lacrosse when invoking the Haudenosaunee Women's teams that presently play in the Women's World Cups. Some of this has to do with the reality of sexism in sports in both the U.S. and Canada across the board. That women have less
monetary resources allotted to them than men is not entirely due to Haudenosaunee people's lack of support. What becomes necessary to ask in the context of Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse is: How does Haudenosaunee women’s participation in lacrosse intervene in the social ills that Indigenous women experience in settler nation states? How does their participation lend to the understandings of tradition and medicine? How does their participation speak to sexism within Haudenosaunee communities and speak back to western feminist representations of Haudenosaunee women’s power? How is this engagement in lacrosse connected to a larger project of sovereignty, decolonization, and rematriation? In this project, I represent the space that Haudenosaunee women lacrosse players are carving out for themselves, how they are claiming the space to play, how community leadership is responding by clearing space for them to define what they are doing and why it is essential. There is a dialectic relationship between Haudenosaunee women's bodies in motion as they play lacrosse and the words and actions leadership is taking in clearing a path for them to name and define what they are doing.

Ultimately it was Clan mothers through chiefs who endorsed the Haudenosaunee women’s teams to represent the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and carry the flag. Mia McKie (Tuscarora) reflects:

What we were told was that when the decision came from the Clan mothers at Six Nations, was that lacrosse was given to all of our people and not just the men. That was their thoughts on it. I haven't heard good arguments to refute that. I just haven't from the people who don't want women to play. I'm not completely sure on their perspective.

She later added:

I think you have to be allowed to question some things. You have to be secure in that. I'm from a different generation where I don't feel we're holding on by our fingernails anymore. I think that I'm allowed to ask, why? What's the teaching behind that? Where does it come from? And how was it impacted by colonialism?¹

¹ Mia McKie, Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
Mia makes a note of this endorsement by the Clan mothers and her ability to ask these questions as being reflective of a more stable time for Haudenosaunee culture and identity, more than previous generations who "may not have been able to ask because their concerns were not being massacred by the church." Part of what makes this field of questions possible is the stable ground that the regeneration of ceremonies such as Ohero:kon creates.

Discussions of self-determination are always clouded by dominant perceptions, based on settler logics. When Haudenosaunee women move through space, creating intersections of love centered around the integrity of women’s bodies, embodying sovereignty that connects their decisions to their homelands, communities, and traditions, they work to diminish the roar of colonial boundaries and prescribed identities. In Make a Beautiful Way, Winona LaDuke says, it is the grandmothers and place that determine identity. In 2005, a group of grandmothers, mothers, and aunties from Akwesasne came together to revitalize a coming of age ceremony they had not practiced for many generations. Concerned about the struggles their young people were facing, and the way in which western society seemed the loudest voice in determining young Haudenosaunee peoples’ identity, Clan mother Louise McDonald worked with her community to bring back Ohero:kon (Under the Husk). In the 2016 documentary Keepers of the Game, Louise is shown sewing the dress her daughter will wear after her four day fast. As she stitches, she says that the dress she is making is not only for her daughter, but for herself, her mother, and her grandmother, who were denied or beaten for engaging Haudenosaunee ceremony. Ohero:kon begins with young people, building them up while holding them close, leading them on a journey, a movement that brings them inward to identify their place in their communities.

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2 Mia McKie, Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
Ohero:kon works to restore balance, healthy communities, and embodied sovereignty.

The revitalization of Ohero:kon began at Akwesasne and has traveled north to Kahnawake and east to Six Nations. Six territories practice it in their communities, with some traveling to participate. In 2006, eight young people participated, and today over 300 young people have gone through the ceremony. Each participant is asked to secure four supporting adults, aunties or uncles, meaning that to date, approximately 1800 people have participated. The focus is on language revitalization, self-governance, food sovereignty, reproductive justice and health, and community health. The impact on the young people is profound. One young participant reflects, "I'm very proud of myself for completing my three day fast and overcoming my fears. I'm very proud of my family and being a part of Ohero:kon….It has kept me grounded and secludes me from all of the negative things that are around my community."3 Another young woman says:

Ohero:kon is really important to me. It’s helped me in a lot of ways I didn’t know I needed help. It’s helped me learn a lot about myself and my culture, and my traditions….We’re the next generation of leaders in our communities and it’s really important to learn our languages, our songs, and our teachings….It’s taught me a lot of courage, respect, and empowerment.4

Ohero:kon works to dislodge the grip that western society has on young Haudenosaunee people’s lives, drawing instead on Haudenosaunee philosophies, particularly around balance.

Part of the trick of colonization is that the impositions onto Indigenous communities, and their effects, end up being what dominant perceptions of Indigenous people are based on. The ways in which boarding schools have disrupted Haudenosaunee gender relations, healthy parenting, and community health lead to negative images perpetuated by dominant society. One woman from

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Six Nations, who has grandparents and great-grandparents who went to residential schools, talks about the effects as being not knowing how to parent. “Some of them were verbally, sexually, and physically abused. And that leads to drug and alcohol abuse. There are all of these side effects that have come from that one generation of people that have continued to trickle down to children, to the youth today.”

A mother of a Haudenosaunee woman lacrosse player from Oneida Nation, whose mother, aunt and uncle went to boarding schools says:

A lot of things that happened in the boarding schools that people can't get over. They can't forget it. And when they were let out of the boarding schools, these children didn't receive counseling they would now…And when they got out of the school, they were sent home to the reservation and expected to raise a family. They didn't receive any love or affection at these schools, so when they came home, they didn't know how to give love or affection to their children. So we grew up with this generation of children who really received no love or affection from their parents.

This colonized reality then informs the negative images and perceptions put onto Indigenous peoples by dominant society. Young Haudenosaunee people see their communities struggling, and then see, hear, and feel the negative perceptions, compounding the difficulty. Dawn Martin-Hill describes the double bind of this colonized reality, and the resulting perceptions affecting her daughters and students:

My daughter, many young women, my students from Six Nations, or other Native young women – they tell me constantly that if I google search Native women or Aboriginal women, all I get is missing and murdered women, raped, drug addicts. I can’t find one positive story about an authoritative, modern woman. The only women we can find are in history, and these women are women who helped white men colonize…Why can’t I open a book and see a love story between a healthy Native man and a healthy Native woman? Or a healthy family?

Ohero:kon is decolonizing bodies, kinship models, impositions of western patriarchy, and reclaiming Haudenosaunee space and time.

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5 Interview by author, December 10, 2012.
6 Interview by author, March 14, 2013.
Dawn Martin-Hill’s use of the word “sickness” works to capture the insidiousness with which Indigenous women’s bodies are harmed within settler colonialism. Present within the logics of Haudenosaunee creation narratives is the importance of lifting up the people through ceremony, and that includes lacrosse. Lacrosse is functioning in many Haudenosaunee women’s lives as a form of healing, of medicine. That Haudenosaunee women play lacrosse, that they invoke protocols around protecting the medicine game, works to safely tether lacrosse to Haudenosaunee communities, which in turn, clears a path for their playing. Haudenosaunee women playing lacrosse has meant healing, leadership, and working with other women. Mia elaborates:

And so those types of lessons that the game itself provided us – being leaders, being able to take direction, working together, working towards a common goal, not tearing each other down – to me that was the most empowering aspect of the whole experience because so many times, even apart from a racialized understanding of womanhood, women are pitted against each other in certain ways. Through this sport there were opportunities for us to work together, come of one mind and encourage each other along the way.  

The engagement with decolonization has taken multiple forms. Women picking up lacrosse sticks and staking a cultural claim for a Haudenosaunee game in their own communities is but one of many actions that Indigenous peoples are taking to regenerate their own cultural values, understandings, and actions. This dissertation works to represent a slice of those decolonization efforts, positioning these young women as active agents of rematriation, embodying sovereignty and articulating definitions of tradition and medicine, in the midst of ongoing settler logics which work to silence them, disrupt their communities and negate their voices and bodies. This rematriation and decolonization is represented in many mediums, including art, film, political action, ceremony, lacrosse, and daily activities that are that are too

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8 Mia McKie, Interview by author, June 28, 2017.
numerous to mention. I have done my best to represent the voices of these women and men who are at the forefront of cultural production in Haudenosaunee communities from within an Indigenous framework of understanding. Those involved in these multiple sites of decolonizing action continue to craft an engagement with their ancestral homelands, calling out to the next seven generations of children to come back to their homelands and join their efforts.
Bibliography


