FROM FIRESIDE TO TV SCREEN: SELF-DETERMINATION AND ANISHNAABE STORYTELLING TRADITIONS

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Abstract / Résumé

This paper explores the ways in which Anishnaabe oral traditions may help to realize national self-determination. Zeek Cywink relates a few stories that illustrate characteristics of Anishnaabe storytelling traditions. Cory Silverstein compares and analyzes Anishnaabe, American and Canadian War of 1812 narratives to show how historical narratives reflect and influence social and political structures, as well as national identities. We argue that not only do the contents of stories have practical lessons to impart, but also their narrative form and social function serve to promote understanding and enactment of the traditional socio-political structures that are fundamental to Anishnaabe self-determination.

Cet article présente les façons dont les traditions orales anishnaabes peuvent contribuer à la réalisation de l'autodétermination de la nation. Zeek Cywink raconte quelques récits qui illustrent les caractéristiques des contes anishnaabes. Cory Silverstein compare les récits de la guerre de 1812 tels que recontés par les Anishnaabe, les Américains et les Canadiens; il démontre comment les récits historiques reflètent et influencent les structures sociales et politiques, ainsi que les identités nationales. Les auteurs avancent que non seulement le contenu des récits offre des leçons pratiques, mais la forme narrative et la fonction sociale de ces contes servent encore à promouvoir la compréhension et la promulgation des structures socio-politiques traditionnelles, fondamentales à l'autodétermination anishnaabe.

Fireside

I was sitting in my room one day thinking about Anishnaabe storytelling. In the candlelight some red willow branches in a vase were casting dancing shadows on the wall. I was instantly transported to the memory of a scene I witnessed a few years ago at an event on Manitoulin Island. We were sitting around a sacred fire in a tent when a young boy started asking the adults to tell stories. Each storyteller acted modest and had to be cajoled before agreeing to tell one. But, in the end, many stories were told around that fire. The boy was challenged to tell one too, so he told a legend he had learned in school. Some of the other stories were legends, and some were about people and places of the area. That night the persistent young lad learned much about his place in the world, and was well on his way to becoming an accomplished storyteller. There was something about the atmosphere of the firelight that facilitated certain kinds of understandings.

Blowing out my candle and turning on the light, I contrasted the scene in the tent with my academic life, reading books at night under an electric light. Everything is still: the words on the page, the shadows—the only movement is inside my brain. In this culture, the transmission of knowledge is often a solitary experience.

It struck me that the difference between a flickering fire and the steady glare of an electric bulb provides an apt metaphor for the different kinds of understandings we have about our places in the world and what we consider significant history. One of those storytellers in the tent was Zeek Cywink from the Manitoulin region. Together we devised the following chart to highlight general contrasts between Euro-American and Anishnaabe orientations to history:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American/Canadian</th>
<th>Anishnaabe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>electric light</td>
<td>fire</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shadows stationary</td>
<td>shadows moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>objects appear inanimate</td>
<td>objects appear animate</td>
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<tr>
<td>literary tradition</td>
<td>oral tradition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>written words fixed</td>
<td>oral words moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language mostly nouns</td>
<td>Anishnaabe language mostly verbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>linear time - movements are stationary, never to return; move in a singular direction</td>
<td>cyclic time - forever moving, yet always the same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>audience - passive recipients</td>
<td>audience - active participants</td>
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</table>
The qualities of American/Canadian orientations to history listed above reflect a hierarchy of knowledge in Western cultural traditions in which the written word carries more authority than does the spoken word. Typically, authoritative histories are also based on the writings of prominent officials rather than those of common men and women. Although both oral and written histories of the latter abound, until recently their stories have been categorized as “folklore” rather than as history. The current trend toward the democratization of historical narratives has not yet filtered down to the primary and secondary grades to any significant extent. Thus, both Western “folklore” and Native oral histories continue to be conspicuously absent from the official versions of history taught to children in the classroom.

Whereas Euro-American youths might view such “folklore” as an embellishment to the textbook histories, Native youths passing through the Western educational system often experience a radical contrast between history as taught in school and that taught in the home. For example, Zeek attended a public school in Espanola, Ontario, during the early 1970s. He recalls a moment when he and his Native classmates noticed that their history textbooks consistently referred to “Indians” in the past tense. Since they were both alive and “Indians” they concluded that the textbooks must be lying. More recently, however, the boy at the fireside had benefited from progressive educational programs that incorporate Native legends in their curricula. These legends, though, are invariably myths rather than historical narratives. In this way, Native stories are introduced in the classroom without threatening the authority of the Western historical narratives.

Before considering the distinctions Anishnaabek might draw between myth and history, I would like you to imagine yourself sitting in a circle around a fire while Zeek tells us some stories.

Bebaaminojimaad ndizhnikaa, Birch Island ndoonjibaa. I’ve just introduced myself with my Native name which means, “He goes around and says it in a good way,” or “He goes around saying good things,” or “He goes around saying things in a good way”—something like that. And I mentioned where I’m from because it’s important to let people know where you’re from.

A long time ago there was this guy, his name was Nanabush. He is referred to as a “trickster”. He did lots of strange things and had lots of adventures in Anishnaabe country. He was a very poor hunter, so he had a hard time feeding himself. However, one time, he worked really hard—getting everything ready—and he got lucky—he got a whole bunch of geese. He was pretty happy with himself, but he was tired from having
gotten all these geese. They catch them down by the lake, so he was down by the water.

He was wondering how he was going to cook them up. He knew there was a beach there, so he took the geese over to the beach. There were about fifteen of them, which is a whole bunch. And he buried them in the sand, and when he buried them, he left them so the legs were stuck out, so he knew where they were in the ground. After he had them buried, he piled a whole bunch of wood over top where they were and set it on fire. That's the way you roast them, cook them that way.

He was tired from hunting, from getting these geese, so he decided he'd have a nap. But he didn't want anyone to come and steal his food, you know, any wild animals or anything like that. So, he told his ass to watch out for anyone and to wake him up if anyone came by. So, he laid down there by the fire and went to sleep. He was really tired and he slept really heavily.

After a little while, a bunch of Ojibways were walking through the woods and they looked over there and they saw a fire. "Hey, look, a fire!" So, they said, "Let's check it out." So they went that way and they came up close. They were sneaking up to see who it was, friend or enemy. And they saw someone lying by the fire, and when they looked they recognized Nanabush. "Oh, it's Nanabush." "Oh, we'd better go." "Yeah, what's he doing, anyways?" "Oh, he's asleep." That's when they saw the tire and they saw those little legs sticking out—geese feet. "Look, he's cooking." "We should go get them." So, they made a decision and they thought they could sneak up there and take those geese. So, they snuck over there and they started pulling up and digging out these geese, all cooked up.

Well, Nanabush's ass heard them and he saw them. "Nanabush, Nanabush," his butt said, "wake up, wake up, somebody's stealing your geese!!" Nanabush, "zzzzzzzz," he kept sleeping, he's so tired. "Nanabush, Nanabush," louder, his asshole is yelling, "somebody's stealing your geese!!" And the Ojibways heard this, so they started working really fast. They heard this (farting sound), his asshole talking, so they dug really fast and they got all the geese and they ran away.

Nanabush slept right through it all, he was so exhausted. Finally, he woke up and saw the fire was dying down. When those Ojibways took off, they were pretty smart. They stuck those feet back in the ground so it looked like those geese were
still there. So, Nanabush woke up and he looked over. "Oh," he says, "that was a good sleep. I'm pretty hungry." He was extra-hungry after his long sleep. So, he went over there to that first goose and he pulled on it. Well, he just pulled up legs, there was nothing else on it. "What?!" And he thought, "Well, maybe they broke off." So he dug around in the sand, but he couldn't find no geese. "Oh, what happened?" So he goes to the next one and pulls them up. Same thing happens, so he digs around again and there's nothing there.

"What happened to my geese?" And his asshole says, "Nanabush, I tried to wake you up, but you wouldn't wake up." "What!!" And his asshole says, "Well, some Ojibways came by and they stole all your geese and I tried to wake you up." "Oh, you're so bad," he says, "you should have told me. I'm going to teach you a lesson." So, he sat down in the fire to burn his bum to teach him a lesson. He forgot his ass was attached, so he sat down right in the fire, "This'll learn you," and he's sitting there when all of a sudden he realized, "OW!!" And he jumped up, "AAWW," and he's blistered all his skin. And he went running through the bush to get to the water to jump in there. As he was running through there, the blisters broke and he bled on top of these plants, and that's where the red willow comes from—that's how come they are red like that. And that's how come it grows around those wet places like that water. So, it's good to pick in the springtime, that's when it's strongest medicine. I guess Nanabush's blood must have got really hot that day! (laughter)

O.K. There's this other story about my grandfather. I say "my grandfather," but I mean my great-great-great-grandfather, or something like that—several generations away. His name's Shawanasowe, which means "Looks to the South" or "Looks Towards the South." So, Shawanasowe is an ancestor of mine and there is a painting of him in the ROM [Royal Ontario Museum] by Paul Kane. And one of the stories from my family that I know is: one day Shawanasowe, he went on a vision quest at Dreamer's Rock, which is just outside Birch Island. And he was up on the rock visioning for power. And he had a vision. In his vision he was taken east from Dreamer's Rock to the Kilarney shoreline—what is now Kilarney. On the shoreline over there he was shown a whole bunch of plants on the ground. And this spirit came to him and told him what each plant was for, what its name was and how to use it—what it was good for. And he got all that knowledge and then his spirit
returned to Dreamer's Rock, or he returned to Dreamer's Rock. And that's where he got most of his plant medicine knowledge. And there's another story where people in the village got sick—measles, small pox, chicken pox—I don't know—fever, falling down ill—possibly T.B. So, again, he wanted to help the people. So, he went on a vision quest and he was told, I suppose, to go down by Wikwemikong. So, he travelled down to Wikwemikong, to what is now called Manitowaning Bay. Manitowaning means "the Bay of the Serpent." So, he was down there 'cause that's where he was indicated to go. So, he was down there fasting by the shoreline looking for power or medicine or knowledge to help the people. And, Great Serpent came up to him. Great Serpent is a great big serpent, and this one was horned, had a horn on it. And that serpent came up to him and he put his head down so that Shawanasowe could reach up to him. And that serpent told him to scrape off some of his horn, to take some of his horn from him. So, Shawanasowe got his knife and he took some shavings from that horn and put it in a pouch, or container. And he returned to the village and dispensed it. He did his doctoring with that and saved people's lives. And that's another family story. Thank you.

As performed live, Zeek's storytelling is a hard act to follow! His aunt gave him his Native name at a public naming ceremony. This event conferred upon him community recognition as a storyteller, somewhat like getting your PhD in Western society. It is important to bear in mind the social context of Anishnaabe storytelling as fundamental to all further queries regarding its nature and functions. History unfolds even as it is told. Oral traditions move through and among living participants more fluidly than does the transmissions of history through the written word. But not all Anishnaabe stories are history.

Speakers of the Anishnaabe language distinguish between two types of stories: aadisokaan—traditional tales and legends; and debaajimowin—telling the news, personal stories about what happened.6 The categorization of history, however, differs among various Anishnaabe communities. In some places, what we would call "history" falls into the aadisokaan category along with legends. For instance, all three stories Zeek told would be in this category, but the last two would be taken as history, while the first would be understood as traditional lore. In the Anishnaabe language, there are certain linguistic markers that distinguish the legend from the historical account. The Native speaker can tell the difference, but these markers are difficult to translate into English (Spielmann, 1988:110). In this view, debaa-
*Self-Determination and Anishnaabe Storytelling*

**Jimowin** refers only to catching up on the latest news. For example, in a story told by another one of Zeek’s ancestors, a hunter’s dog tells him that a man will come the following day. When the man arrives, the two dogs *debaajimotaadiwaad*, that is, “were telling each other the news,” which happened to be that there was a bear in a certain place (Nichols, 1988:110). In other Anishnaabe communities, *aadisokaanag* are more strictly limited to sacred stories that tell about spirits in the time before the present world, while *debaajimowin* encompasses all stories that refer to events within living memory (Hallowell, 1960:26-27).

Indeed the line between myth and history is very flexible, even more so among contemporary Anishnaabek who do not speak their language due to the intervention of Western education policies. At present, the categorization of history versus myth is largely determined on an individual basis. One reason for this variability is that spiritual power is a primary motif in both kinds of narratives. The scientific plausibility of the events is not a major factor in determining the historicity of a given narrative. Rather, a foremost criterion is the proximity in time and space of the storyteller to the events told. The two stories about how Shawanasowe gained power exemplify these features. Historical narratives such as this are usually passed down within families. In this way, they pass the power of the ancestors through the generations. They answer the question of who one is by detailing relations between specific individuals, groups and locations. The integrity of these stories was at one time maintained by an injunction against telling other people’s family stories (Wolfe, 1988: xiv). Nevertheless, when events were such that they affected many families, stories could become very widespread and eventually pass into the realm of myth or legend as the specificity of time and place receded into the distance.

Precisely because of their distance from specific times and peoples, legends are held in common within Native nations and among a wide array of culturally related groups. Also, due to this commonality, they answer the question of who one is through identification with the characters. In this way, legends also teach how to recognize and use the powers in nature. In the story of the origin of red willow, for example, the listener is cautioned about the ill effects of slacking off. All of Nanabush’s powers come to no use because he is lazy. Nanabush teaches by means of negative example. Humor is a significant element in Nanabush stories because humor captures your attention and facilitates your memory. Zeek wanted to tell this particular story because, unlike most non-Native forums at which he speaks, he was sure there would be an all-adult audience. But, for an all-Anishnaabee audience this story would be suitable for groups of all ages.
The time of events in both of these kinds of story is not important. The opposite is true: the past is brought into immediate contact with the present by using features in the landscape as points of reference. Thus, Nanabush's misadventure explains the red willow. The precise locations of Shawanasowe's encounters with power are detailed. This characteristic of Anishnaabe storytelling reflects the cyclic view of time and the close relation between land and people. Geography, rather than time, constitutes the primary point of reference in Anishnaabe legends and history. For this reason, periods of rapid change in Anishnaabe relations with the land are pivotal points in Anishnaabe history more so than with other nations.

**War of 1812 Narratives**

In general, historical narratives of all kinds are about identity. They are "an integral part of the process of social reproduction through which a society reflexively defines itself" (Turner, 1988:279). This is why they are an important part of self-determination. To have power over the representations of one's identity is to have power over one's place in the world and the possibilities inherent in those places. In the political discourse surrounding land claims, one often hears the term "self-determination" used with reference to something that must be given by another, usually the government. As Zeek has often said, however, "self-determination is inalienable." In this usage, self-determination arises from within individuals and becomes a political force when such individuals unite in action. But individuals and groups must learn how to exercise it. The process of storytelling empowers through the expression of identity. The contents of the stories also teach methods of practicing self-determination. Because historical narratives are about identity, they also tend to reflect and reinforce, or challenge and transform, established social structures. From Anishnaabe stories we may learn details of traditional social and political structures that may be useful in present political struggles.

Analysis of narratives of the War of 1812 is helpful to illustrate the relationship between historical narratives and self-determination. Anishnaabe territory covers the entire Great Lakes area, including significant portions of Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Manitoba and Ontario. Plains Ojibway (Saulteaux) territory extends into North Dakota, Saskatchewan and Alberta. But British and American ancestors cut the final slice down the middle of these territories in 1815. At that time American national identity was reinforced, Canadian national identity was born, but Anishnaabe national identity was seriously compromised. In view of the intimate relation between history, identity and land, the division of the national territory constituted one of the most pivotal points in Anishnaabe history.
Whereas in the above section, Zeek’s oral performance becomes the written text, in the following section, I deal exclusively with oral sources that are already in written form. I have analyzed twenty-two War of 1812 narratives, thirteen of which arise from Anishnaabe oral traditions. Six others represent American and Canadian schoolbook histories. Further comparative perspectives are provided by three Canadian and American women's oral histories. Clearly, Anishnaabe narratives written in English are far from their original context and it is therefore necessary to take into account factors such as the relationship between teller and transcriber. As well, the geographical/historical circumstances of the transcription may point to political or other agendas that either the storyteller or the transcriber may have had. Nineteenth Century Native authors also had their own particular biases which influenced their accounts. I have taken these factors into consideration in the categorization and analysis of the Anishnaabe narratives. I have also compared the latter against ten written accounts of oral battle narratives from the Ojibway/Iroquois and Ojibway/Dakota wars.

It is not the purpose of this paper, however, to isolate characteristics of an imagined “pure” Anishnaabe storytelling tradition. Rather, as with Zeek's stories above, the cross-cultural contexts of these narratives serve to facilitate cross-cultural understanding of their content, as well as to reveal aspects of contemporaneous cross-cultural views and relations. At the same time, they maintain a sufficient degree of cultural integrity to demonstrate the general comparisons Zeek and I wish to emphasize.

First, we must recognize that all of the narratives under consideration are stories. That is, the Western historian weaves a tale as artfully as does the Anishnaabe storyteller. This becomes apparent when one compares American and Canadian textbook versions of the War of 1812. The selective inclusion and omission of certain phases of the war are really quite humorous. An American version, for example, omits the first three British victories at Ft. Mackinac (July 17, 1812), Ft. Detroit (August 16, 1812) and Queenston Heights (October 13, 1812) (Currant and Goodwin, 1980: 182-183). Canadian versions, however, note that the taking of Mackinac intimidated the American General Hull, who subsequently surrendered Ft. Detroit to General Brock before the fighting began, even though his troops greatly outnumbered those of the British. The circumstances of this surrender, as well as those surrounding General Brock’s death at Queenston Heights, are detailed at great length.

Conversely, the American textbook quoted above recounts the American victory at the Battle of New Orleans in great detail (Currant and Goodwin, 1980: 183). On December 24, 1814, the Treaty of Ghent established peace between the British and the Americans. This news, however,
did not travel fast enough to inform the commanders who engaged in battle at New Orleans on January 14, 1815. Nor had the treaty been ratified by the American Congress at this time. Thus, three Canadian textbooks conveniently end their narrative with the signing of the peace treaty, thereby omitting this battle. Wrong (1923:206) covers the British victory at Washington (August 1814) and their defeat at New Orleans in one sentence, while Finlay and Sprague (1979:98) mention New Orleans as a "needless encounter" but do not indicate the outcome.

The reader generally bears no intimate relation to the story in these Canadian and American historical narratives. In fact, the structure of Western historical accounts discourages intimacy. As the primary point of reference, time functions to distance the reader from events that are represented in a past that will never recur. With regard to the War of 1812, Canadian and American accounts generally begin with the reasons for the war, which are invariably remote in geographic distance and also in their significance to the average citizen. Reified national entities called "the Americans" and "the British" had altercations across the ocean that were side-effects of the war with Napoleon. Equally remote causes were the "unsettled" affairs of the Indian Territories in the interior (Currant and Goodwin, 1980:181-182; Marsh, 1990:220-221).

Once this background is established, Canadian and American versions introduce the heroes and villains of the particular battles that carry the national storylines. Canadian heroes include General Isaac Brock and Laura Secord. As noted above, Brock was the commander who defeated General Hull at Detroit and died heroically at Queenston Heights. The essence of his heroism was his bravery in exposing himself to danger, which promptly led to his demise. Similarly, Laura Secord was a soldier's wife who is said to have suffered danger and hardship to inform the British of an impending American attack on Beaver Dam (June 24, 1813). This episode, however, seems only to have become part of the historical canon on account of Secord's persistent publicity and lobbying strategies. She apparently promoted her own heroism in an attempt to gain financial support from the British government after her husband died in 1841 (Marsh, 1990:13). Secord's story is a good example of how the national hero approach to historic narrative serves to place honor in "appropriate" places, rather than where it might rightfully belong. The troops Secord allegedly warned of the American attack arrived on the scene of battle after the Mohawk and Mississauga forces had already subdued the Americans, yet Secord and the British officer at Beaver Dam, Lieutenant Fitzgibbon, received the honors (Dickason, 1992:221-222; Schmalz, 1991:112-113). Fitzgibbon supported Secord's story because he rightly believed that it
bolstered his own role in the victory. It appears that a story that would normally be considered “folklore” entered the cannon because it served the Canadian national storyline better than would the actual facts of the Native victory.

Canadian villains include Governor General Prevost, General Proctor, and the American General Hull, all of whom were cowards who lost battles. Prevost’s refusal to authorize timely aid to both land and naval war efforts is frequently avoided in Canadian textbook accounts. Wrong (1923:192), however, describes Prevost as “timid and incapable of decision” during the war. As a result, Wrong continues, he was facing a court-martial when he died. This passage serves as a prelude to Brock’s heroism. General Proctor was elevated to Brock’s position as primary commander of land operations after the latter’s death. During the ensuing year, the Americans succeeded in re-taking the areas around Detroit. Proctor’s failure to retain Detroit and achieve results from his advance into Ohio, his cowardly retreat from the American advance from Detroit, his poor strategy during the subsequent battle, as well as his consequent flight and surrender at the Battle of the Thames, or Moraviantown (October 5, 1813), all contribute to his status as a Canadian villain. These cowardly deeds similarly provide a contrast to the heroism of Brock, as do those of the American General Hull. As noted above, the latter surrendered Detroit to Brock without even putting up a fight.

American heroes include Major General Andrew Jackson and General William Harrison, both of whom were not only commanders who won battles, but also politicians who won elections (Current and Goodwin, 1980:232, 238). The “old Indian-fighter”, Andrew Jackson, gained military fame for his success at the Battle of New Orleans mentioned above. This fame led to his election to the presidency in 1828, after which he proceeded to implement the infamous Indian removals of the 1830s in direct defiance of the ruling of the American Supreme Court (Ibid.: 13-14,232). Nevertheless, his status as American hero remains intact. Harrison was another well known “Indian fighter and military hero” who was distinguished for his massacre of Tecumseh’s followers at Prophetstown, Indiana (November 7, 1811 (Ibid.:238). He was also the commanding officer at Moraviantown on the occasion of Proctor’s defeat and Tecumseh’s death (Ibid.:182). The link between military and political heroism is particular to the American accounts because the War of 1812 served to reinforce the democratic ideals Americans associated with independence from Britain. In contrast, Canada was still a colony led by officials appointed by the British government.

American villains include General Hull and “Indians”. Little more need be said about General Hull beyond the fact that, like Prevost, he was
court-marshalled for "neglect of duty and misconduct," in other words, cowardice (Sugden, 1997:304). Although the death sentence was withdrawn on account of his former services, his villain status was permanently established. With the exception of "Indians," individual heroes and villains represent their respective nations. Common soldiers are referred to by regiment, if at all. The heroes and villains act out their roles as characters on an otherwise empty stage. Of course, the exact dates of the battles and the figures of the dead and wounded are faithfully reported, but there is no sense of the experience of the event. Even the tale of Laura Secord often fails to give a sense of her as an individual participant in the war (Errington, 1998:135).

Because of the shared values between the two nations at war, a coward is a villain no matter which side he is on. But, from the American point of view, such is not the case regarding "Indians." In contrast to the commanders, who are made to stand for the group, the "Indians" are an undifferentiated group: the category obscures the individual. Also, in American textbook narratives "bad Indians" are those who win battles. Conversely, "good Indians" are those who stay peacefully out of the way of citizens, preferably leaving behind their traditional lands and moving as far away as possible. The Americans had no notion of nation-to-nation alliance. Indians were to be subdued. They advised Anishnaabek within their territory to remain neutral in the war (Warren, 1984 [1885]:375). While these Anishnaabek considered themselves equal allies with the Americans, from the American point of view, they were but momentarily subdued "Indians".

Contemporary Canadian attitudes towards "Indians" differ from those of the Americans because the British used Native allies extensively in the War of 1812. Canadian textbook versions, however, increasingly downplay the role of Natives in the war as the events recede into the distant past. In 1861, Peter Jones (1970 [1861]:209) was able to assert, "...it is generally believed, that had it not been for their [Native peoples'] efficient and timely aid, Canada would have been wrested from the crown of Great Britain." Sixty years later, although Natives in general are portrayed as "undisciplined savages," Tecumseh is elevated to the rank of war hero (Dickie and Palk, 1928:284-286; Wrong, 1923:197). This trend continues into the 1950s (Avison, 1951:47, 49-51). More recent versions barely mention Native allies, but instead glorify the heroic efforts of the ill-prepared Canadian militia (Finlay and Sprague, 1979:99; Marsh, 1990:221). While not villains, Native allies are effectively erased from the record. This is particularly the case with the Anishnaabek, whose "efficient and timely aid" is not reported in any of the standard texts I consulted.
Not surprisingly, Anishnaabe historical narratives of the War of 1812 proceed in a completely different way. Because they start out as personal stories, most narratives relate the exploits of particular individuals in particular battles, rather than an overview of the whole war. Yet, Frances Densmore (1979 [1929]:135) quotes an Anishnaabe informant as saying, "the leader of the war party gets all the credit if it is successful." The seeming disparity between this statement and the individualistic nature of most battle narratives is easily reconciled. During the 19th Century, an individual's career as a warrior began with small acts of bravery, which he recounted during performances of the war dance (Kohl, 1985 [1860]:19-21). When his deeds of bravery were sufficient to persuade others to follow him he might aspire to lead a war party. His success, like that of any other Anishnaabe endeavor, would depend solely on his degree of spiritual power. When successful battles involved large numbers of warriors the renown of the party's war chief was recounted widely and shortly became part of the repertoire of professional storytellers and tribal historians (Schoolcraft, 1977:51, 176; McKenney and Hall, 1933:59). In this way the individual stories of the successful war chiefs became national property, so to speak. The stories of his followers, however, remained their personal possessions. The stories under consideration here represent both types of battle narrative.

Whether individual or national, Anishnaabe War of 1812 narratives encourage an intimate relation between the subject of the story, the teller and the listeners. Geographic features are used to establish a close relation between past and present; subject and listener. The opening element to the stories, which is absent from Canadian and American versions, is almost invariably an account of how a person or group answered the call of the British to take up arms. Among Anishnaabek the War of 1812 did not begin overseas, or even in other regions of Indian territories. Rather, it began at a meeting between individuals and was based on the specific concerns of one's own community, or even one's self. For this reason, Anishnaabe reactions to British overtures were varied and at no point did they enlist as a national body. These stories show that local self-determination took precedence over that of national unity.

The inclusion of treaty councils as an essential element to the stories reflects a general focus on contractual relationships. Many stories, not just those of the War of 1812, begin with a council. The Anishnaabe storyteller is not so much interested in establishing individuals as national heroes as he or she is in establishing the nature of the relationships between and among the various parties in the story. This takes the specific form of recounting in detail what was said and done at the meeting of the parties.
Thus, not only do the stories recount the outcome of the exchange, but also the process through which agreement or disagreement has been reached. This characteristic of Anishnaabe narratives is serviceable for a nation whose political processes demand consensus among designated individuals before group action can be sanctioned.

The treaty portions of these narratives also throw light on British strategy that is generally bypassed by Western textbook accounts. It appears that the British essentially militarized their fur trade personnel who had already established mutually beneficial trade connections with Anishnaabe. This gave the British an immense advantage over the Americans, whose manufacturing capacity was only in infancy, and who were in fact dependent upon British and other European trade goods in their dealings with Indians.\(^1\) My analysis of Anishnaabe narratives reveal that the British used a “4Ps” approach: promises, propaganda, presents and prestige. In two accounts, the British told Anishnaabek that the Americans would make slaves of them (Sagatoo, 1994 [1897]:141; Bourgeois, 1994:125). As well, the Yankees would steal their land, while the British would give it back (Petrone, 1991:41). At the same time, the British gave expensive presents of trade goods.\(^1\) They also made “friendly Indians” into chiefs by giving them medals and chiefs’ coats. In some cases, this was a simple matter of generalizing the powers of individuals who had served as trading chiefs under the Anishnaabe political system of specialized leadership roles. In other cases, military authority was given to individuals who had no recognized power within their own communities. Many of these “made chiefs” later signed away land to both British and American governments (Warren, 1984 [1885]:371-372).

Despite the somewhat devious measures taken by the British, their claims made sense to the warriors in lower Michigan. Several years previous the Americans had already negotiated the first land treaties, which forced many Anishnaabek to remove to other parts. Chief Saginaw noted in 1840 that the British had not done that (Cook, 1983:80). British claims also made sense to Shingwauk of Sault St. Marie, since he was closely related to the influential trading families who were now mobilized into the tasks of officers. Surprisingly, Tecumseh was not instrumental in any of the enlistment narratives I read. He may possibly have enlisted Chiefs Saginaw and Noonday of lower Michigan, since they were reportedly with Tecumseh before the Battle on the River Raisin near Frenchtown, Ohio. Unfortunately, Darius Cook’s rendition of the story does not include an account of their enlistment (Cook, 1983 [1889]:78). Tecumseh, however, may actually have influenced the Southwestern Anishnaabek in Minnesota not to participate in the war. Many of them had followed the teachings of Tecumseh’s brother,
the Shawnee Prophet, Tensquataway. But the latter was discredited when a great number of Anishnaabek fell ill in his camp in the winter of 1808-1809 (Chute, 1998:26-27), and when his promise that his medicine would protect the warriors from bullets failed to be effective at the battle at Tippecanoe Creek in 1811 (Mooney in Catlin, 1975: 54). When the British came to meet with their leaders, the Southwestern Anishnaabek firmly refused to become involved in “Whiteman’s quarrels,” despite British threats and insults (Warren, 1984 [1885]:368-377).

A typical Anishnaabe battle narrative continues with three further elements: strategy, attack and outcome. Most commonly, the strategy is determined by a dream. The story of Shingwauk’s role in the taking of Fort Michilimackinac is typical. Members of Shingwauk’s family told it to Johann Kohl (1985 [1860]:377-378), a German travel writer, a year after Shingwauk’s death in 1854. The British commander asked Shingwauk for advice as to how best to take the fort. Shingwauk replied that he would dream about it. That night he dreamt of fog encompassing the island of Michilimackinac. His warriors disembarked unnoticed on the side of the island behind the fort, while the British troops approached by water from the front. When the Americans were drawn out to the front, his warriors would surprise them from behind. The British commander said he dreamt likewise and they would make it so. Things transpired just as the dream predicted. At the decisive moment, Shingwauk’s warriors appeared in the rear and the Americans surrendered.

One might wonder that the British commander had such faith in Shingwauk’s dreams. This is not so implausible, however, when we consider that their communication was mediated by John Askin Jr., son of a fur trader, raised in Indian country and probably Shingwauk’s cousin (Chute, 1998:25, 27). Kawbawgum, a descendent of another warrior in that battle, confirms that Shingwauk’s warriors disembarked at British Landing, from which there is a path to the back of the fort (Bourgeois, 1994:124). Wright, a descendent of a Mètis woman who was at Mackinac at the time, relates that the Americans had time to remove the women and children to safety before the fighting began (Wright, 1996 [1917]:24). This kind of personalized, eye-witness detail appears in none of the Canadian or American textbook accounts that I read. In fact, in the grander scheme of the war, the taking of Mackinac is noted primarily for its effect on the outcome of a subsequent battle that Westerners pay more attention to, that is, the British victory at Detroit.

Canadian and American versions never neglect to mention the cowardice of General Hull, whose surrender of Ft. Detroit I have already described. But there is much that these official accounts do not relate. For example,
Ottawa, a chief of the Ojibway in the region near Saginaw Bay, Michigan, related the following story to his daughter-in-law, an American woman who married into the Band around the middle of the 19th Century. The British told Ottawa that the Yankees would make slaves of the Indians. Ottawa would never be a slave; therefore he joined the British. One of the American generals had displeased him and he was anxious to deal out just punishment. One night, he dreamt that he was lying on the bank of the Detroit River and saw the general and some of his men pass around the bend in a canoe. He told the dream to his warriors and, believing in his dream, they made haste to the river and lay waiting for the enemy. Sure enough, about midnight they saw a boat coming around the bend with five men in it. They put out in their canoe and succeeded in capturing the boat. One of the men turned out to be a general. He was kept for future torture, while the others were put to death on the spot (Sagatoo, 1994 [1897]:141-142).

Our historical sense tells us that this “general” could not have been a very important official. Given Tecumseh’s efforts to cut off the supply route to the fort during the weeks preceding the surrender (Sugden, 1997:285-299), it is extremely unlikely that a high commander would be travelling with such a small entourage. Ottawa’s story seems to be discredited. It may be a case, however, of exaggeration, mistaken identity, or even of one of those episodes that is conveniently left out of the textbook accounts. In any case, we find not a large scale battle, but a small ambush on the supply route to the fort. The narrative of a woman settler provides another example. She relates how, months before Tecumseh arrived on the scene, her widowed mother and seven siblings narrowly escaped being scalped in their farmhouse along the shores of the same river. After Hull surrendered, Proctor moved into the former home of Col. Cass and put out a standing offer of $5 for American scalps (Massie, 1993:124-127).

Taken together, these two narratives show a picture of continual and widespread violence in the area around the fort, both before and after Hull’s surrender of the fort. Furthermore, they show that there were Anishnaabe allies of the British who were acting independently of Brock and Tecumseh. Individual self-determination is an important aspect of Anishnaabe social protocol. This characteristic of Native warfare was one of the things that terrified the Americans. The Indians played by different rules. There is no reason to believe, however, that Native warriors were any more violent than their European and American counterparts. On the contrary, Odawa Chief Blackbird (the Elder) complained to the British that the Americans cut the bodies of their dead warriors into pieces and even dug up their graves to throw their bones about (Schmaltz, 1991:115).
The third battle that figures prominently in Anishnaabe accounts is the Battle of the Thames (Moraviantown), in which Tecumseh died. General Brock had been killed the year before and Proctor had taken up his command. After retreating inland away from the approaching American troops, Proctor finally gave the order to fight. The positioning of his soldiers, however, left them fully exposed, whereas Tecumseh's warriors were hidden in the underbrush opposite them. In short order, the British line was broken and Proctor fled with what remained of his army. Tecumseh and his warriors stayed to fight, but it was not long before Tecumseh was slain and the battle ended (Sugden, 1997:368-375). With some notable exceptions, the death of Tecumseh was the end of Anishnaabe participation in the war. Although he had not been instrumental in their enlistment, they were fighting for Tecumseh's cause—for their land. Proctor's behavior did not inspire confidence, as had Brock's, and hopes of successful armed resistance died with Tecumseh. The three battles discussed above appear to be the most significant to Anishnaabe history, yet are the same three that the American textbook omits. While Canadian and American War of 1812 narratives continue on to the official end of the armed conflict, Anishnaabe narratives take a turn away from the war to focus exclusively on the fate of Tecumseh.

The account most popular with the American public has Tecumseh die instantly with a final shot in the breast executed by Richard Mentor Johnson. The American soldiers, it is said, skinned his body and stripped it for souvenirs. Beginning in 1830, Johnson used his claim to have killed Tecumseh to bolster his political campaign as a potential presidential candidate. His supporters eagerly sought witnesses who could testify that they saw the deed (Sugden, 1997:375, 379-380). One such account was obtained in an interview with Ojibwa Chief Noonday, and was published in a Michigan newspaper around 1840 (Cook, 1992 [1889]:85-87). As evidence of his authority on the matter, Noonday showed the author Tecumseh's pipe and tomahawk, which he claimed he had taken from Tecumseh after he and other warriors had taken his dead body from the field. Noonday's removal of Tecumseh's regalia after his death seems highly suspect because normally those items would be buried with the dead. Notably, however, Noonday's explanation of the fate of Tecumseh's body differs from that of the accepted American versions. Several decades later in Northern Michigan, Odawa Chief Blackbird (the younger) disputed Noonday's story in the every detail (Blackbird, 1993 [1887]:23). According to oral traditions in his area, Tecumseh, having been wounded in the leg, told his warriors to flee while he took some fatal shots at the enemy. The warriors' last sight of him was with American soldiers swarming around him. All other Native accounts that I read have Tecumseh's body ultimately in the hands...
of Native warriors, although in some a few days pass before they retrieve the body (Sugden, 1997:379). I suspect the Odawa warriors did flee the battle scene, perhaps under Tecumseh's orders. But, unlike other Native warriors, they did not return.

A related story of note is that of Chief Oshawana of Walpole Island, Ontario. Oral traditions relate that, after his first wound, Tecumseh gave Oshawana the tomahawk and belt medal he had received from Brock. By this act, he transferred his command to his second-in-command. Upon Tecumseh's death, Oshawana's warriors took the body from the field and buried it near the site. Later, he moved the bones to a secret location (Cumberland, 1904:57). The tomahawk and medal in question are now in the collections of the Royal Ontario Museum, having been collected at Walpole Island around the turn of the century by Mohawk collector Dr. Oronhyatekha. After World War I a Native veterans association at Walpole had Tecumseh's bones re-buried and a monument erected. The location of the bones were said to have been kept secret until that time by a succession of chiefs (Nin.da.waab.jig, 1987:26). Meanwhile, Shawnee oral traditions relate that warriors removed Tecumseh's body from the field and buried it near the site. But when a Shawnee party returned later to remove the bones for re-burial in Tecumseh's traditional territory, they could not find them (Ray, 1996:139). It seems Oshawana appropriated Tecumseh's power from the Shawnee for the benefit of the Anishnaabek. Whatever the "true" story, a monument now stands on First Nation's land commemorating Tecumseh's life and death.

The effects of the war were greatly different for the Anishnaabek on either side of the newly cemented border. On the Canadian side, stories of the War of 1812 appeared frequently in Anishnaabe official speeches in order to emphasize their loyalty to the British, and the consequently reprehensible betrayal by the British after the war (Jones, 1970 [1861]: 129; Petrone, 1991:60). Before the war the fur trade had been of primary concern to the British interests. The Native market was a crucial factor in England's economy, especially since war had disrupted trade with the continent for most of the previous century and the American Non-importation and Embargo Act of 1807 had cut off exportation to the States (Lord Sheffield, 1814:313-314, 318). The Anishnaabek also had some leverage due to the British need for their military aid. Brock's promise, however, of establishing Upper Michigan and parts of Ontario as an Indian Territory was summarily dismissed at the Treaty of Ghent. Moreover, now that peace was permanently established, massive invasions of settlers dictated that lands and mineral resources were paramount. In short order the practice of making treaties for land became the norm.
On the American side, Native narratives of the war were seldom heard outside Native circles for the simple reason that, despite American overtures of peace (Tanner, 1987:120-121), the American war against the Natives did not end with the ratification of the Treaty of Ghent. In 1814, the colonial government of Illinois Territory issued an offer of $150 for Indian captives or lives (Vanderburg, 1977:238). The first Removal Act was signed in Congress in 1832. Thousands of Potawatomi, Menomini, Winnabego, Mesquakie and others in and around the Great Lakes were forcibly removed from their lands. In Michigan during the 1840s troops were sent out from Fort Detroit to round up all Natives who refused to move (Massie, 1993:203-204).

During this period, many Odawa, Ojibwa and Potawatomi migrated from Michigan and Wisconsin to the Canadian side. These migration stories form a large portion of community historical lore in Ontario. For instance, another one of Zeek's ancestors was a Michigan Potawatomi who migrated to the Manitoulin region after serving with the British in the War of 1812. Family history relates that he and his party smuggled a stranded British officer across the border with them. A King George III silver medal that he received for his service is presently in the possession of one of Zeek's uncles. In a migration story from Parry Island, Ontario, the War of 1812 and the 1832 American Removal Act are represented as continuous Yankee aggression against the British allies:

My grandfather was a Potawatomi, they lived in Wisconsin. And the whites made a proclamation, all the Indians living there are to leave... [some scouts surveyed the new territory and, disliking it, decided to try to stay in the original area]... but some of the Indians said, "As for us, we won't stay here—you people will be abused," and they came away. There were six families, and they stopped along the way to go hunting, intending to get food for the children. When they arrived at Kilamey [Ontario] they told the women to pound the com so they would have flour in order to make bread. And also they left a young man to be a lookout way up on top of a rock where he was to sit down. And then reportedly this boy saw two boats sailing towards them, they were American soldiers intending to fight the Canadians... (Nichols, 1988:72-73).12

The view that the Americans continued armed aggression towards British North America after the war may not be so far-fetched. Canadian oral traditions reveal similar instances. For example, United Empire Loyalist, Grace Fraser, told of an American invasion across the St. Lawrence River at Prescott, Ontario, in 1838. An American military force, called the
“Hunter’s Lodges,” crossed over and took possession of a windmill tower near her house on the British shore. Their mission was to “free the people” of British domination and to destroy the “Royal Dominion in North America.” A British gunboat and a detachment of the Royal Artillery made short work of the invaders (Collard, 1955:152-156). The windmill tower is now an historic site.

Some Anishnaabek on the American side apparently also had difficulty comprehending the implications of the Treaty of Ghent. This is evident in the story of Sessaba’s defiance of Gov. Cass at Sault St. Marie in 1820. Sessaba appeared at council with the Americans in his British chief’s coat, raised a British flag in his camp and incited warriors to avenge the death of his brother at the hands of the Americans. The situation was critical. Elders of the assembled bands of Anishnaabek exerted themselves greatly in order to impress upon him that his British allies would not support his protest against the American intention to build a fort at that location (Schoolcraft, 1992 [1820]:506-508).

Many Anishnaabek who remained on the American side, however, went to considerable length to demonstrate their unswerving allegiance to the American government and to peace. Anishnaabe historian, William Warren (1984 [1885]:368-377) of Minnesota, for example, devoted a whole chapter of his book to disclaiming Anishnaabe involvement in the war. The necessity of establishing status as “good Indians” is dramatically demonstrated in the following story of events that took place in 1840:

Capt. Rhodes said, “he was glad to be present here. He like good Indians; liked to hear the words of Noonday, how he would help the Americans in another war. Saginaw he go to Canada, he help the British—("No, no!" said Saginaw)—he then be a bad Indian, but he say no, then he be a good Indian and he like Saginaw and all the good Indians. He would always be good to them and he was glad to meet them” (Cook, 1992 [1889]:80-81).

Despite the huge impact the War of 1812 had on the Anishnaabek on both sides of the border, there are relatively few stories about it circulating today. In Ontario Anishnaabe communities there are much more lively oral traditions about the wars with the Iroquois. In the western regions of Anishnaabe territory stories about the Sioux and Mesquakie wars are prominent. After British betrayal following the War of 1812, participation in the conflict was no longer a mark of honor, which might explain why few stories are remembered today. On the American side concern for safety apparently dampened enthusiasm. Even as early as 1855 Johann Kohl (1985 [1860]:367) quotes an elderly storyteller as saying:
I have lost my memory. The Ojibways have all lost their memory. The Americans have made them weak. Our people do not talk so much about their own affairs now as they used to do. They no longer feel the same pleasure in telling the old stories, and they are being forgotten, and the traditions and fables rooted out.

Meanwhile, however, a great deal of *debaajimotawaad* has been going on! New themes have arisen. Removal, migration, residential schools and other versions of displacement stories are now common. New tales of heroic achievements are also being enacted—history in the making. But much of the form of the stories has stayed the same. Rather than creating heroes who personify the national interest, Anishnaabe historical narratives are about ancestors whose actions have affected the family and the community. Heroes, yes, but heroes who bear intimate relation to the listeners and whose actions may be emulated by them. These characteristics reflect the egalitarian society of the ancestors. In contrast, not only do the contents of Western histories reflect hierarchical social relations, as evident in their exclusionary focus on Great Heroic Men, but forms of history are also hierarchical. The Western histories I referred to above are textbook histories, which are less authoritative than academic history and more authoritative than popular history. But the latter is a force to be reckoned with.

Besides an abundance of Western oral traditions, there is a significant popular history movement in the United States and Canada in which participants re-enact historical battles. Whereas the greater part of these re-enactments focus on the American Civil War, this popular movement does not neglect the War of 1812. Zeek and I recently attended the re-enactment of the Battle of the Thames that took place in Chatham, Ontario, October 2 and 3, 1999. The extensive research and resource network of these re-enactors was fully evident in conversation with them and also in the proceedings. Unfortunately Native involvement in the re-enactment movement has been practically non-existent. To their credit, the hosts of this particular event welcomed the new Four Directions Flint and Feather group which is headed by George Thomas of the Six Nations reserve in Ontario (The Long Point Advocate 1(1):6). Thomas hopes to attract Native participants and to raise awareness of Native history and culture among the non-Native participants, many of whom regularly adopt a Native persona. While the re-enactment movement is steadily growing in popularity, it has nothing like the widespread influence enjoyed by the medium of television. Among youth especially, the power of the latter is quickly replacing the authority of the written word. For this reason, it poses
a uniquely effective venue for the transmission of historical narratives for both Westerners and Native peoples.

**TV Screen**

While I was writing this paper, it happened that TV Ontario broadcast a four-part series on the War of 1812 which was informed by the most enlightened of contemporary scholarship. Tecumseh, played by a Native actor, figured prominently in the first two parts as one of the most noteworthy heroes of the war. His death is portrayed very sensitively. As the camera pans over Tecumseh’s dead body, an actor reads from the journal of an American soldier who praised Tecumseh for being “as noble in death as in life.” The scene changes to a group of fringe-clad warriors carrying Tecumseh’s body through the woods while Native drumming may be heard in the background. Even though, in true Western historical narrative fashion, Tecumseh is portrayed as a Canadian national hero, and the warriors are undistinguished by individual or tribal traits, this popular history has at least succeeded in raising awareness of Native contributions to the formation of the Canadian nation. This type of revisionist history, especially at the popular level, is necessary to dispel popular stereotypes that ensued from the Western textbook histories discussed above.

Recalling the metaphor with which I began this discussion, I note that the realm of popular history on television participates in a form of *moving light* invented and produced by Western culture. It is vicariously participatory and therefore much more engaging for the average person than is the solitary pursuit of knowledge through reading. As well, it mimics the social interaction and intimacy of oral history traditions. These qualities of the television medium have not escaped the attention of the First Nations in Canada. Beginning in September of 1999, the new Native channel, APTN (Aboriginal People’s Television Network) began broadcasting on basic cable. This means that viewers who subscribe to cable automatically receive this channel—about seven million households across Canada. APTN’s mandate is for Aboriginal people to use their own voice to tell their own stories. A spokesperson for APTN said, “Those who hold tools of communication hold power.” “TV,” she continued, “reflects self and empowers people” (Jennifer David). The philosophy of APTN links storytelling directly to self-determination, with the suggestion that it is as powerful as direct political action. In keeping with egalitarian principles, most of APTN’s programming will be the work of independent, rather than in-house, Native Canadian producers. But since a stipulation of the contract states that 90% of the programming must be Canadian content, American Anishnaabek will...
be excluded. This policy asserts: Canadian first, Anishnaabe second. The legacy of the War of 1812 still divides the nation.

Colonial policies of taking land and drawing borders have displaced and disoriented the Anishnaabe nation. Whereas only selective aspects of Anishnaabe history have been retained in the oral traditions, the same may be said of American and Canadian histories. In fact, selectivity is a key factor of self-determination when the selections arise from cultural principles within a group. Unfortunately, Anishnaabe oral histories have suffered many intrusions from without. Yet integrity of form and function remains intact in significant ways and the traditions have thus withheld the seeds necessary for the continual integration of new elements. Through the self-renewing process of telling and retelling, Anishnaabe history lives and enlivens. More Anishnaabek are reclaiming their stories than has been the case for at least a century and the possibilities for widespread dissemination are unprecedented. Through the medium of television we will be seeing an outpouring of Native oral history that will teach what Native histories are about and how to hear them. Stay tuned—you may witness Native self-determination in action.

Discussion

As I have said, the value of Anishnaabe storytelling for self-determination is twofold: in the process of telling and in what is told. At the fireside, or any other social context of telling, empowerment comes with the expression of identity and the social solidarity of shared experience. These functions are both reduced and magnified in the context of television. They are reduced in the sense that sharing is removed from the social context, but magnified because the sharing reaches out to more individuals and groups. Television provides a cross-cultural forum for the expression of Native individual and national identities, thus establishing Native “voices” in society at large. For many viewers this will transform First Nations from an abstract, and potentially hostile, category to a human presence of positive value. It will also stimulate the expression of stories within Native communities and thereby circle back to the power of social solidarity.

Stories also empower through the practical knowledge they express both in form and in content. As I see it, the following four questions address the central challenges for Native nations attempting to exercise self-determination: 1) what exactly were the original egalitarian and decentralized political and social structures? 2) what were the strengths of these systems that enabled them to function for thousands of years, and may yet enable them to function within the surrounding centralized state? 3) what do the national storylines of decentralized and egalitarian social structures look
like and what do they have to offer today? and 4) by what processes do historical narratives fulfill their function of passing the spiritual power of the ancestors through the generations? I will not pretend to know the answers to all of these questions, but may offer a few insights that the substance of this paper suggests.

The historical narratives of centralized nations employ individual heroes as symbols of nationhood, whereas Anishnaabe historical narratives express the autonomy of local individuals and groups. Therefore one will not often find national storylines in Anishnaabe historical narratives. One will find, however, explicit details about traditional political and social structures and how individuals and groups made decisions within them. Written narratives that have frozen the time of telling on the page are particularly useful for this purpose because they retain details that are often lost in contemporary tellings. This is because the social context of oral history demands the intimacy of shared experience to fulfill its function. The storyteller therefore creatively employs a dynamic between adherence to the version he or she originally heard and relevance to the immediate situation of telling. Stories that have been preserved on the page reflect this dynamic as it was at the time of telling. While one must critically assess how a story came to be written, it is possible to deduce social and political forms and circumstances that were practiced and relevant at the time.

Written versions of historical narratives are also helpful because, in these times of rapid change, stories may cycle in and out of relevance. Although the relevance of the War of 1812 narratives diminished during the past two centuries, they are again relevant to today’s challenges. While not everyone will agree with the conclusions I have drawn in my analysis of the War of 1812 narratives, I hope that the methodology will suggest a model for further inquiry into the nature of “traditional” governance and how it may be applied in a contemporary context. With regard to the latter, Zeek is of the firm conviction that American and Canadian Anishnaabek need to actively engage their common nationhood by sharing more of their local histories than is presently the case.¹⁴

The application of the knowledge in historical narratives also requires an understanding of the role of stories in national identity. This challenge hinges on the last two questions of what national storylines look like and how stories pass the spiritual power of the ancestors through the generations. Whereas Anishnaabe historical narratives generally recount more or less local histories, Nanabush legends are common to the entire Anishnaabe nation. This is because Nanabush is one of the original ancestors of the Anishnaabek. Although his behavior is not to be emulated, on a deeper level he embodies the essence of Anishnaabe nationhood along with
language, material culture, spiritual precepts and various other cultural expressions. In many stories, he is responsible for originating the cultural patterns that make the Anishnaabek who they are. In a nation without centralized governance and codified law, culture functions as the bond that adheres national unity.

While culture provides patterns for social action, ancestors may pass spiritual power through the telling of stories in a more direct form of spiritual agency. Spirits usually inform Zeek's choice of stories at any given event, but their motives are not always clearly apparent. Thus, I sought to meditate upon the relevance of the story of the red willow to the question of self-determination. The following possible interpretation, with which Zeek is in agreement, resulted from that exercise. In another legend, the body of Nanabush is said to be sleeping in the form of the peninsula that shelters Thunder Bay, Ontario. The story relates that when Nanabush awakes, the Anishnaabe nation will again arise to its original strength and glory. The structure of a centralized state has often been represented as a human body of which the mind is the central authority to which all other parts submit. How apt, then, that the embodiment of a decentralized nation should have body parts with autonomous volition!

Putting these two stories together in the context of Anishnaabe history, we may imagine that Nanabush fell asleep shortly after the War of 1812 determined the borders of the colonizing nations. Various groups within the Anishnaabe nation (i.e. Nanabush's "ass") were charged with the duty to guard the interests of the nation (i.e. Nanabush's geese). These groups performed their duty as best they could. Yet he did not awake when the Europeans, represented in the story by a group of Ojibways, stole his sustenance. When he did finally awake to find his geese gone, which in historical perspective may be seen as concurrent with the new political consciousness that began to take root in the early 1960s, he blamed and punished his behind only to find that it was inextricably part of himself.

One effect of his slumber was that he fell prey to the deception of the "divide and conquer" strategy of the thieves. The real culprits got away with the geese. Like ceded land that has been permanently transformed, these geese were consumed and cannot therefore be returned. Thus, the nation bled. This bleeding may be seen as all the many stories of displacement, oppression, injustice and injury that arose during the building of the colonizing nations that are now coming to be voiced with the new national consciousness. And when Nanabush cooled his "butt" in the lake, his hot anger was dampened, his body (the nation) was reunified and his lost blood turned to medicine in the form of the red willow. Stories of pain are transformed into means of healing through the purging of anger. Only then
will ancestral wisdom point the way to stories that show how to use that medicine.

The process the above interpretation suggests is one that is occurring on a wide scale at this time, and one that must occur if self-determination is, as Zeek suggests, to be founded on traditional Anishnaabe precepts. Whether we look backwards to the oral histories of the ancestors, forward to the stories of healing the ancestors will reveal, or in that indeterminate time of the national legends of the original ancestors, the powers of self-determination may be found. It is in the nature of these oral traditions to forever defy singular interpretations and instead to present a landscape out of which individuals and groups may ascertain their own bearings on the world in which their lives unfold. As these stories come to the attention of the public it is important for all of us on this continent to gain a better understanding of them, and for each of us to determine what lessons they may convey to us for our roles in the newly emerging social mosaic.

A concept that we should seriously consider is that of "covering the dead." This term refers to the Anishnaabe custom of accepting presents, in lieu of blood revenge, from those who are responsible for the death of a relative (Alexander Henry, quoted in Redsky, 1972:18). This is not simply a matter of buying forgiveness from the aggrieved parties. Rather, the presents embody both the value of the loss and the weight of sorrow felt by the relatives of the offender. The power of decision lies with the bereaved family (Radin, 1913:26-38; Tanner, 1975 [1830]:242-243). Much of what Euro-Americans have taken from Native peoples, such as land and religion, cannot now be returned to its original state. In effect, this is analogous to death. It is not within any of our powers to bring the dead back to life, but the essence of the dead may be restored through alternative methods of compensation. Every time we come together in "council" it is within our power to negotiate the forms of these compensations, which should include, but not be limited to, those of a material nature. We can also share in Native efforts to oppose Western cultural elements, such as capitalism and imperialism, that lead to resource exploitation and racist oppression. As powerful as historical narrative may be in facilitating self-determination, it is the stories we enact today that determine our course for the future. The responsibility self-determination entails rests with us all.

Notes

1. Whereas Cory Silverstein was the actual writer of this paper, the ideas discussed herein were developed mutually between Cory and Zeek Cywink over many years. Zeek has also discussed and edited the paper throughout the process of its writing. The use of the pronoun "I" refers to sections researched primarily by Cory, while the use of the
pronoun "we", and Zeek's name, indicate sections that were written mutually.

2. The Anishnaabek, as they call themselves, are called the Chippewa in the United States and the Ojibway in Canada. "Anishnaabe" without the final "k" functions as an adjective or as the singular form of the noun, while "Anishnaabek" is the plural form of the noun. The spelling of Anishnaabe names and terms vary throughout according to the sources and conventions.

3. See Young (1971) for legends used in classrooms with Native youth and Elston (1985) for legends collected from Native youth in the classroom.

4. Zeek performed these narratives in conjunction with a shorter version of this paper presented at the annual meetings of the Organization of American Historians (OAH), April 22nd 1999 in Toronto, Ontario.

5. Paul Kane (1996[1859]:11-16) also recounted a story he heard about Shawanasowe. Zeek feels that Kane's story is not accurate, since nothing like it has been preserved in the family or community traditions.


8. See Avison (1951:47-48); Dickie and Palk (1928:277-281); Marsh (1990:221); Wrong (1923[1921]:192-199).


10. In 1795 the American government established a factory system by which they sought to monopolize the Indian trade. Their goods, however, were so inferior that in 1807, the year the American government enacted the Non-importation and Embargo Law, the Superintendent of Indian Trade, General John Mason, was rejecting American-made goods he knew would not sell in Indian country and sending samples of imported goods to American manufacturers to be copied (General J. Mason, letters of November 21 and December 9, 1807, M16, NARA).


12. This story was recorded in the Anishnaabe language. In the second sentence the term "Zhaagnaashag," which historically denoted the British only, is here translated in its contemporary Canadian usage to connote "whites" in general. On the other hand, the reference to the
Americans in the last sentence is rendered from the term “Gchi-mookwmaan” (literally “big knives,” but generally translated as “long knives”), which is used among American Anishnaabek to designate “Whites” in general, but historically referred to Americans specifically. The English term “Canadians” was used in the original Anishnaabe version, there being no term in Ojibway to designate Canadian nationality. This is also a contemporary usage, since during the 19th Century European and Euro-American authors used the term “Canadian” to indicate French Canadian or Métis ethnicity, while Anishnaabek used the term “Wemitigoozhiwag” (from “mitig,” meaning “wooden” and referring to wooden boats) to designate the French and French Canadians.

13. Author’s handwritten notes from an information session on APTN held at First Nations House, University of Toronto, Wednesday March 24, 1999. Jennifer David is Director of Communications for Television Northern Canada, the parent company of APTN.

14. Zeek drew this conclusion when, during a six week tour of Anishnaabek communities in Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota in 1998, we discovered that many young American Anishnaabe were not even aware that there are Anishnaabek in Eastern Ontario.

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