

**Mi'gmewey 'Politics':
Mi'gmaq Political Traditions**

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BACKGROUND

In January of 2002 a discussion took place in Listuguj, Quebec between the Mi'gmawei Mawiomí Secretariat, researchers from various academic disciplines, and community members. The focus of the discussion was Mi'gmaq land use and occupancy in the Gaspésie area. At issue was the Supreme Court's criteria for determining proof of Aboriginal title and the kind of evidence Mi'gmaq people would require to: “renew, rebuild, and repatriate an un-ceded (Gespe'gewa'gi) territory based on Mi'gmaq peoples unalienable right of jurisdiction over our traditional territory and our right to Mi'gmaq Title, which was never compromised, or abrogated, prior to and including contact” (www.migmawei.ca).

At that time, it was agreed that the various participants would gather evidence in an effort to establish the extent to which Mi'gmaq people occupied the Gaspésie (hereafter Gespe'gewa'gi) and the diverse factors affecting that occupation during the seventeenth century in general; the dates of particular significance are between 1658 and 1763, referring to French and British dates of asserted sovereignty.

As part of the research to develop a comprehensive understanding of Mi'gmaq peoples' title, the Mi'gmawei Mawiomí recommended a political analysis component in the project as a way of understanding Mi'gmaq land tenure systems and the laws that govern the Gespe'gewa'gi territory. With this in mind, our, Fred Metallic's (Mi'gmaq) and Robin Cavanagh's (Anishinaabe), direct involvement in this project is to give some understanding to Mi'gmaq polity and to identify Mi'gmaq traditional processes of governance during the early encounter era.

INTRODUCTION

In the old days, politics was just the way of life. And it's a way of life that has been tried and tried, and found true over thousands and thousands and thousands of years (Metallic, June 2000).

Relations determine who we are as Mi'gmaq, and as such you have to learn to get along with each other. From oral history we learn about our relationships in our territory of Gespe'gewa'gi and with other nations. Our leaders remind us about the protocols, agreements, and treaties that we have with, among others, the Maliseet, Penobscot, Passamaquody, and the Mohawks dating as far back as the last millennium.

In the past twenty years, scholars engaged in Indigenous thought have begun to challenge the foundation of western paradigms that are propelled by the idea that we can create a society by observing and testing our limited knowledge of the universe. Kiera Ladner, Gerald Alfred, James Sakéj Henderson, Linda Smith, Leroy Little Bear, to name a few, are actively involved in Indigenous writing and research that takes into consideration the cultural values, beliefs, and protocols of the peoples about and with who they are researching. In his work, Henderson suggests that de-constructing the myth of western society and re-constructing an Indigenous way of life must be based on our fundamental ideas, beliefs, and political principles (1997). Others also state that Aboriginal peoples must return to the cultural values inherent in traditional teachings, incorporate these values in their leadership styles, and build their political organizations around these beliefs (Alfred, 1999). We also suggest that it is fundamental for research to be informed by and conducted in light of our understanding of the past. The task is challenging: Aboriginal peoples are still impacted by past paradigms, colonial relations, and misconceptions. Nevertheless venturing on a new journey--a journey of re-

imagination--is both necessary and possible. This journey is a process that requires respect of Indigenous traditions, at the same time being mindful of the painful process of transformation.

Mi'gmaq traditions emphasize that reality is not constructed, but rather you live reality. The laws that guide Mi'gmaq people are different than the laws that direct non-Mi'gmaq people. In the Mi'gmaq worldview, ecological relations informed by spiritual law, whereby all things are already in balance and harmony, governs the world. Ladner, for instance, notes that from an Aboriginal perspective, humans are the youngest life form on earth, the most dependant and the least knowledgeable. Our gifts, however, are our ability to envision, dream, think, and learn. Traditionally, Aboriginal peoples studied the behaviour of life forms and the seasons to develop an understanding of the dynamics of creation. In this way, a lifestyle was created and practiced that was harmonious with the local ecosystem. The ecosystem in which Mi'gmaq lived was their classroom and the life forms that shared the land were their teachers. We suggest that an understanding of Mi'gmaq politics must take into consideration the ecological context in which Mi'gmaq live and with whom they share relations.

An ecological understanding of, and relationship with, the land is brought to life in the words of Joe Sark, Kep'tin of the Mi'gmaq Grand Council:

The Mi'kmaq people and other First Nations believe that this land existed before man's short stay on earth and it will exist long after we are gone. Therefore, it is something to be respected as it is a gift from the creator for us to use. As a Mi'kmaq, I believe that our ancestral territory is our home. This is where our people lived and hunted. This is where our Mother Earth is consecrated with the bodies of our ancestors (RCAP, 117).

The Mi'gmaq people in the Gaspé region consider Gespe'gawa'gi to be their home: since time immemorial they have inhabited this place physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually.

In contrast to a holistic understanding of the land is a euro-centric, objectified, understanding of land use and occupancy. In the early seventeenth century, when the European nations began granting lands to the missionaries, the conditions of their lease agreements were to cultivate the land and to create peace and friendship with the Aboriginal inhabitants. Cultivating the land was deemed necessary for the creation of property rights and to begin the process of imposing an alternative form of government within Mi'gmagi. However, the justification for dispossessing Mi'gmaq people of their lands needed to be rationalized.

European political theorists justified dispossession of land on the premise that Mi'gmaq people, similar to other Aboriginal peoples, lived in a state of “original nature” and had not evolved into a civilized society with property rights, laws, and governments (Rousseau, 29). To the European mind, life for Aboriginal people in the Americas was, as many have repeated “nasty, brutish, and short”; “civilizing” the Aboriginals and cultivating the land for property could, however, reconcile this condition. These ideas about land and government prolong the belief that Aboriginal peoples could only realize their full potential as “men” by making laws based on hierarchal relations with the land.

When the missionaries arrived in Gespe'gawa'gi, the seventh district of the Sante Mawiomi, they too did not recognize Mi'gmaq laws or how Mi'gmaq people were politically organized. For example, according to Christien Le Clercq, who worked as a missionary among the Mi'gmaq people between 1675 and 1687, and regularly reported

back to the King of France, the “Gaspeians” no longer respected the “fundamental laws” of their Elders (234). Captured in his writing is the assumption that although Mi’gmaq people at one time had respect for the ‘ultimate authority and sovereignty of their ruler’, this respect was not continued; Le Clercq notes that Mi’gmaq people had “neither faith, nor king, nor laws”(234). The belief that Mi’gmaq people were without law (and in the “state of original nature”) justified and rationalized the dispossession and displacement of Mi’gmaq lands and their systems of government.

Elsewhere, in his discussion about the early colonial years, Manny Metallic asserts that missionary reports were often exaggerated in order to maintain patronage:

The missionaries always painted a picture twice as bad as it actually was. The reason they did that was they had patrons in France. People were giving them money. Of course the worse they made it--the Indians are really, really bad. And the conditions are really, really bad. Stuff like that they got more money from their patrons. If you read Le Clercq, there's an opening letter where he writes to his patrons, some noble woman or an aristocrat woman, and he writes to her and he really pours it on (June, 2000).

As well, in the writing of early explorers it is possible to uncover European perceptions of Mi’gmaq land use and occupancy through their descriptions of trading practices. Jacques Cartier writes:

Being at ease did the savages feel in our presence, that at length we bartered with them, hand to hand, for everything they possessed, so that nothing was left to them but their naked bodies; for they offered us everything they owned, which was, all told, of little value. We perceived that they are people who would be easy to convert, who go from place to place maintaining themselves and catching fish in the fishing season for food (56).

Based on this description one could infer that Mi’gmaq people wandered from place to place in search of food for survival. This creates an image that the Mi’gmaq have no

preconceived sense of place or order in their lives. Further Cartier's words suggest that that Mi'gmaq people have no sense of property value otherwise they would not be standing there with "naked bodies." Thus Cartier, speaking about Mi'gmaq people to the King of France, both creates and emphasizes the need to develop 'civilized' governing structures within the Gespe'gewa'gi territory.

In working towards an understanding of our past, it must be recognized that two worldviews—Indigenous and European—were, and continue to be, in relation with one another. Because of the imbalances in the political relations we argue that politics must be re-imagined from an Indigenous paradigm. We suggest that it is from an ecological context, which considers our relationships with all parts of creation, that governance amongst our people in the territory of Gespe'gewa'gi must be understood. This research is informed by oral traditions; we also engaged with the work of contemporary scholars researching in the area of Indigenous knowledge; we worked through the early colonial writing of missionaries, explorers, and travellers; and finally, we drew upon interviews conducted for Fred Metallic's Masters thesis during the summer of 2000.

To begin, we provide an overview of the Mi'gmaq creation story based on the writing and oral teachings of James Henderson, Marie Battiste, and Stephen Augustine. Then, we move into four areas: spirituality, justice, extended family, and treaties, in order to discuss aspects of governance from an ecological standpoint, while also keeping in mind teachings, values, beliefs passed on to us from our Elders, community members, leaders, and those who have not yet arrived.

MI'GMAQ WORLDVIEW:

TEACHINGS WITHIN THE CREATION STORY

Let me begin the story where Mikmaq begin. On the other side of the Path of the Spirits, in ancient times, Kisukwl, the Life Giver, originated the first born, Niskam (the sun), who was brought across sk-tiekmujuawti (the spirit path or Milky Way) to light the earth. Kisukwl also sent across the sky a bolt of lightening that created wsitqamuk (the dry earth) and united the life-forces out of wsitqamuk to form the keeper of life known to the Mi'kmaq as kluskap. Legends recount that this guardian spirit lay naked on wsitqamuk, his limbs pointing in the four directions. In time, kluskap became a Kinap and a Npuoin, a powerful teacher whose gifts and allies were great (Battiste, 13).

In Mi'gmaq thought, knowledge of our past and present existence is embodied within our oral traditions. Although the creation story does not figure into everyday discussions, our traditions and worldview continue to influence our political reality. Mi'gmagi is the word used by Mi'gmaq people to describe their ancestral home, their 'land of friendship.' In this particular territory what is stressed is the voluntary political confederation of the various families into the Holy Assembly or Sante Mawiomni. For the Mi'gmaq their worldview is inherent in their language, their stories, practices, and relationships with one another and all beings of the land.

Traditionally, the territory of Mi'gmagi is divided into seven districts. The names of the seven districts represent a Mi'gmaq knowledge system that is ecologically based. Henderson describes the 'sounds' of the land that compose the districts: *Sikniktewaq* is the name for the low grinding sounds of the glaciers of the ice age as it turned a river into a gulf, this in turn created Epekwith, land floating above the water. *Epekwith and Piktukeway*, explosion, comprise another district. Piktukeway is named for the big explosion that created the harbour, finished the gulf, and separated Epekwith from the mainland. *Kwapekewaq*, last land of the people, is named for the treaty with the Mohawk

and the transfer of the land that ended the conflict. *Sipeknekatik* is known for the wild potatoes that grew there. *Eskikewag* district, skin dressers territory, is named for its green lands and large animal population, and for its fur skinning activities. *Kespukwith* is the lands ending or end of territorial boundaries. Finally, *Unamakik* is the place of fog. The naming of the territory reflects and enacts a Mi'gmaq worldview: Mi'gmaq knowledge systems are predicated on the idea that the world is alive. As such, Mi'gmaq political traditions are derived from and are a reflection of the living earth. Mi'gmaq polity is founded on Mi'gmaq systems of knowledge sourced in the natural world.

The Mi'gmaq worldview is complex and representative of a comprehensive holistic knowledge system. It is a timeless process of interrelationships through which Mi'gmaq people understand and relate to the rest of creation. Relationships and the understanding of family are central to the Mi'gmaq worldview. Mi'gmaq teachings often refer to members of the first family: the sun, moon, Kluskap, Grandmother, Martin, Nephew, and Mother. These seven family members hold for the Mi'gmaq all of the teachings necessary for the people to follow the "path of knowledge." Five of the first family members, Kluskap, Grandmother, Martin, Nephew, and Mother, were created from Mother Earth and given life spirit through either lightning or the mid-day sun. This relationship between Mother Earth, life, and spirit extends to the birth of the first seven men and women who are said to have come into being from the sparks of the Great Council Fire and its union with Mother Earth. For many of the Mi'gmaq people their relationship to Mother Earth is sacred, imbued with the understanding that they are of the earth as decedents of their ancestors who came before them.

Mi'gmaq teachings often begin with the Creation Story and the "one who came first," the sun. A description of the birth of Kluskap follows that of the sun. Kluskap is formed in "dry earth," a bolt of lightning turns dry earth into green earth giving life to the animals who in turn give life to Kluskap. Kluskap's first act upon arising was to offer thanks to the seven directions. The Creator sent Nukumi, Grandmother, to guide and teach Kluskap in life. Grandmother was created from stone as an Elder whose knowledge and wisdom was enfolded in the Mi'gmaq language. Grandmother's first teaching to Kluskap was to ask for the permission of his brothers and sisters, through the martin, to consume their flesh so that they may survive. Kluskap was granted permission by his brothers and sisters the animals, and provided with song and ceremony to honour them.

The first family continued to grow with the birth of Kluskap's nephew, Netawansum. He came into human form through the foam of the ocean, sweet grass, and the mid-day sun. Netawansum brought Kluskap teachings and gifts of the underwater realm as well as the ability to see for great distances. Kluskap, in honour of his nephew's arrival and the gifts he received, offered thanks and held a feast.

Following the birth of Netawansum, is Kluskap's Mother, Nikanakanimqusiwsq. She came into being from the leaf of a tree, the morning dew, and the mid-day sun. Nikanakanimqusiwsq brought with her the teachings and gifts of the cycles of life, and the ability to foretell the future. The mother also brought love and colour to the world, and shared with Kluskap the teachings of the earth and knowledge of how to maintain peace and harmony with all life forces:

Nukumi told Kluskap to honor and respect Nukumi's wisdom, the spiritual power of Netawansum and the strength and cycles of the earth revealed to them by Nikanakanimqusiwsq. Honor and respect for all these things

would provide a way to knowledge and spirituality and, in this way, the people would flourish (Henderson, 1997, 14).

After living together for a great period of time Kluskap told his mother and nephew that he and his grandmother would be leaving to travel north. Kluskap told them of the great Council Fire that would send out seven sparks that, upon uniting with Mother Earth, would create seven men, and then repeating itself would create seven women. Together they would become the first seven families who would eventually divide again into seven more families and disperse into seven directions. The first people would ask Kluskap to be their teacher and show them how they should live:

As it was Kluskap who taught them their first lessons, he is often called the “one who is speaking to you” or the “teacher creator.” When Kluskap had to be away, Nikanakanimqusiwsq or Netaswansum taught the people (Ibid, 14).

The teachings provided by Kluskap, Nikanakanimqusiwsq, and Netaswansum guided the generations to follow towards the path of knowledge. From these teachings generations of Mi'gmaq learned how to live and communicate with the rest of Creation, live in harmony with their world, hunt and fish in a respectful way, and perform ceremonies to harvest the medicines of the earth.

SPIRITUALITY

Mi'gmaq beliefs about spirituality are central to the organization and continuance of their worldview. Spirituality is the foundation of all Mi'gmaq teachings and their relationships with creation. The spiritual relationship with their brothers and sisters--the animals, the plants, the sun, the moon, Kluskap, Mother Earth, and other nations--creates an organized, holistic, ecological family. Through ceremony, spirituality forms a

foundation that ensured peace and harmony, which guided relations in Mi'gmagi. A discussion of Mi'gmaq spirituality must draw from the Mi'gmaq creation story, which teaches that all life is composed of three aspects: the body, which eventually decays and returns to the earth; the life soul, which passes to the land of souls after death; and the guardian spirits, which aid individuals on their life path.

According to Henderson, all parts of creation derive from the sparks of the great Council Fire, have a spirit and are considered sacred:

No single human can possess all the forces within him- or herself, nor can people control the forces of other living beings or the stars, sun, moon, wind, water, and rocks. Yet the Mi'gmaq belong to these forces; they are in awe of them and ask them for assistance (Henderson, 1997, 15).

The sacred aspect of all life is continually acknowledged and respected by the Mi'gmaq people during their seasonal ceremonies and by the regular use of tobacco, which is offered to Mother Earth before taking from her. The spiritual link between the Mi'gmaq and the rest of creation is also exemplified in vision ceremonies and through the use of the pipe. Mi'gmaq spirituality must not be considered separate from the rest of life, but rather - with the proper teaching - integral to the life process; Henderson notes, "each life-form begins with the potential for being. As it develops, the life soul finds allies in the other forces and manitu around it" (Ibid, 15).

The Mi'gmaq recognized the value of prayer and dreams in the replenishment of the body and spirit. For many, visions they received provided guidance, not only for themselves, but also for the nation. A significant example is the Mi'gmaq teaching of the three crosses. The teaching of the three crosses - pre-dating the ice age - comes from an Elder's vision during a time of great famine for the Mi'gmaq people. In a vision, the

three crosses are given to the Elder by a young man who informs him that if used properly, the crosses will benefit the people. The Elder shared the teaching of the three crosses and their associated symbols with the people; they were widely accepted and shared amongst Mi'gmaq families, and the famine soon lifted. During the time of the ice age, the teaching of the three crosses aided the Mi'gmaq on their long journey south to avoid the cold. In the south the Mi'gmaq shared and learned from the many other nations they encountered. When the cold receded the Mi'gmaq eventually returned to their homeland, seeded the land with new seeds, and mastered the art of coexisting with their environment. Guided by the regularity of spiritual practice in everyday life, Mi'gmaq people ensured that their knowledge continued for succeeding generations. They flourished and grew into seven groups known as a "nation of cross bearers." The families remained familiar with the land, with their brothers and sisters, and Mother Earth. The Mi'gmaq maintained a relationship with, and named, the trees, rivers, and lakes.

Henderson suggests that for the Mi'gmaq people the teaching of the Three Crosses offers guidance in a time of need:

One of the crosses would serve the people in times of conflict with nature and with others. Another would grant them safety on their long voyages and in new experiences. The last would serve them in the deliberations of councils and aid them in making decisions for future generations (16).

In his writing Le Clercq concurs with the significance of the teaching of the Three Crosses, noting that it is essential to any decision made by council and that the symbol was placed on Mi'gmaq canoes before any trip was taken. Yet, after proclaiming the significance of the teaching of the three crosses to the Mi'gmaq, the same documentation

in contradiction states “the use of the cross died out” and the only reason for its resurgence were his own efforts in Le Clercq’s religious work (149,152).

Mi'gmaq people maintained a complex and organized culture premised on spirituality and a connection to the land that was central to their relationships, organization, and governance. By drawing upon teachings remembered in the creation story, it is possible to draw out aspects of Mi'gmaq worldview from the writing of early missionaries. The historical literature, meant to debunk early Mi'gmaq culture as unorganized and superstitious, provides documented examples of a complex and organized cultural process. For instance, in his writing Le Clercq observes that the Mi'gmaq believe that all life is composed of three aspects: body, life soul, and the guardian spirits. However, in the context of the time in which he writes, this belief is equated to a "false premise" and "foolish fancy" that everything has a soul (212). Despite the negativity of the comments, reflective of the majority of writing at the time, it is possible to piece together a complex and comprehensive Mi'gmaq worldview from missionary writing.

Le Clercq writes that the Mi'gmaq have no religion “other than their worshipping of the sun” (143). In yet another example, an author describes a great veneration for the moon remembered in this prayer: “thou haft concurred to make us spring out of that earth we have inhabited from the first ages of the world. Thou regardest us, in truth as thy children” (An Account of the Customs and Manners, 47). The words of the missionaries acknowledge one small part of a complex process of relationships and responsibilities to family expressed through spirituality and practiced in everyday life. The sun represents the first born of the first family. The moon, Grandmother Moon, controls the seasons and

tides. Both are representative of the Mi'gmaq creation story, which provides a foundation for Mi'gmaq spirituality and relationships. The documentation of missionaries describes prayers consistently used by the Mi'gmaq to honour and give thanks to the moon; to acknowledge the moons relationship to the first family; to acknowledge how the Mi'gmaq were born from the earth; and to request continued support for Mi'gmaq women, and is consistent with Mi'gmaq teachings of the first family. It is even noted that the moon is acknowledged as the spouse of the sun (Ibid, 47-48). As well the significance of spirituality and Mi'gmaq people's relationship with their ancestors is noted by Le Clercq, "in their revels and feasts they always serve a portion to these souls which are walking, say they, in the vicinity of their wigwams and of their friends" (214). The writing of foreigners, consistent with Mi'gmaq teachings, demonstrates that spirituality was an integral aspect of life, denoting roles and responsibilities and emphasizing interdependence and respect within Mi'gmaq relationships with the land, each other, their ancestors, and all beings.

An essential aspect to the Mi'gmaq process of maintaining peace and harmony involved their belief in ceremony to educate and to guide them in all their relations. One such ceremony was the Pipe Ceremony, conducted, for example, at the beginning and end of council meetings and other important events. The Pipe Ceremony represents an awakening of, and invitation to all of Creation to bear witness - and to participate in a good way - in the deliberations and decisions of the Council. The ceremony drew all those present to a good mind, and asked the spirit helpers and ancestors to participate and grant guidance to those deliberating in the council. Through the Pipe, the Mi'gmaq could draw upon the wisdom of their ancestors, and all of their community knowledge, to come

to a decision in a honourable and respectful manner. The Pipe brings together the members of the first family through the stone used for the bowl, the wood used for the stem, the seven medicines burned, and the sweet grass lit by the spark of life from the Great Council Fire, which in turn lights the pipe.

A Pipe Ceremony is described in the mid-seventeenth century writing of a French Abbot; the author recalls that an Elder, after a feast, called for the pipes (calumets) to be brought in. Once the pipe had been lit, a speech of thanksgiving was delivered in honour of the one hosting the feast. The host's generosity is praised, "he compares him to a tree, whose large and strong roots afford nourishment to a number of small shrubs" (An Account of the Customs and Manners, 7); his family lineage, through the actions of his ancestors is recognized "how great art thou, through thy great, great, great, grand-father, whose memory is still recent, by tradition, amongst us, for the plentiful huntings he used to make!"(8). In turn, other members of the council recall the host's lineage and pay respect to all the great actions of his family. Following the speeches is dancing and drumming. This ceremony is representative of Mi'gmaq people's first teachings. All are acknowledged and present, and in this way it is demonstrated that "in these ceremonies and rituals lie the path to knowledge and the wisdom of the spirits of the ancestors" (Henderson, 18). It is through the pipe ceremony and others, such as gift giving, fasting, and sunrise ceremonies that the Mi'gmaq peoples applied their complex and comprehensive knowledge system: a lived worldview that maintained peace and harmony within their respective territory.

Many Mi'gmaq ceremonies teach that all things have spirit, and reinforce the practice of reciprocity, for instance offering thanks when taking from Mother Earth. The

Mi'gmaq worldview teaches that each individual enters creation with a unique gift, a spark. Individuals through guidance, support, experiential knowledge, and ceremony, explore and actualize this gift based on their desire and choice to do so. Among the Mi'gmaq some are granted the gift of "big heart" and are taught by the Elders how to follow the "good road" (Henderson, 18). The good road may include - but is not limited to - a thorough understanding and ability to communicate the Mi'gmaq creation story, teachings of the three crosses, the pipe, feasts, socials, dancing, the sweat lodge ceremony, as well as the many protocols and procedures necessary for maintaining peace and harmony within the nation. The gift of big heart also provided individuals the ability to communicate with the shadow souls of the forest, the streams, the meadows, and the oceans; Henderson writes, "Their special responsibility is to provide for the community by hunting, fishing or teaching others. Traditionally, these few typically became the leaders (alsusultikikw) of families and clans" (1997, 18). Individuals with the gift of a big heart were spiritual and on many occasions were great healers as well. They utilized their gifts, the wisdom of the Elders, and community knowledge to survive and prosper in an ever-changing environment

As noted earlier, the documentation of early writers confirms a Mi'gmaq spiritual worldview; within "The Superstitions of the Gaspesians" this paradox is found: "Criminal maxims and ridiculous observations. Among the Gaspesians, who observe in the impostures of their jugglers all of the empty observations and superstitions" (Le Clercq, 215). Although this description is full of negative words and phrases--barbarians, the devil, imposters, criminal juggleries, jugglers bag, and master frauds; nevertheless, the writing also exemplifies (albeit distorted) Mi'gmaq teachings. It is possible to

understand that these “barbarians” and “devils” were Mi’gmaq medicine people and healers--gifted and trained by Elders-- recognized by their community as individuals with "big hearts."

Mi’gmaq spirituality, documented in the writings of the Jesuit Missionaries in the 1600s, also notes the regularity of Mi'gmaq procedure and protocol in every decision. In one example, a Mi’gmaq man has a vision of war, which is brought to Council, discussed, deliberated, and decided upon. Additionally, the missionaries note that ceremonies are held prior to the men leaving for battle and upon their return: “the act of war was not taken lightly by the Mi’gmaq people” (Thwaites, 29). Upon their return with a prisoner, of whom the missionary's wanted possession, another Council of Chiefs was held and gift giving was required in order for the prisoner to be released. The missionary states that after the meeting his worry for the prisoner was gone, "once a decision was made in the “council of chiefs” the Mi’gmaq would never go back on it" (Ibid, 29).

Spirituality was essential and interconnected with all of life's roles and responsibilities from the individual finding guardian spirits to aid on his or her life journey, to the belief in and commitment to spiritual ceremony used in all decisions from war to maintaining peace and harmony. Spiritual ceremonies such as giving thanks to the sun or moon may be linked to the traditional belief and understanding of the values taught to the Mi'gmaq through oral traditions, ceremony, and songs, as taught by Kluskap and the first family. In giving thanks

to one, the Mi'gmaq understand that thanks was extended to the entire family of creation.

JUSTICE

Within the Mi'gmaq extended family there exist principles of justice that relate to concepts such as: honour, sharing, relationships, forgiveness, peace, and harmony. Mi'gmaq principles of justice are drawn from the teachings of the First Family and are passed on to children at a young age by the grandmothers of the community. The creation story tells us that each of the seven members of the first family carries teachings relating to seven areas of justice. The sun teaches about the spirit found in and through all life and the importance of honour through the Great Council fire. The moon teaches us about sharing and balance in relationships. Kluskap teaches us about peace and harmony through the many stories and songs of his journeys. Grandmother teaches us about the wisdom and guidance offered by our Elders and the importance of language. Martin teaches us about forgiveness, gift giving, and the importance of ceremony. Nephew holds teachings on the use and importance of spiritual powers and respect. The mother carries teachings on strength, the cycles of life, and the natural law of Mother Earth.

The original teachings of the seven members of the first family provided the principles that guided a contextual justice system that was family based; this system was reinforced through stories, songs, teachings, ceremonies, symbols, and experiential learning within the community. Protocols - rules that govern customs, traditions, ceremonies, as well as community life - were shaped by Mi'gmaq principles of justice. Teachings helped guide the development of protocols in a holistic manner that recognized

that strength was not without forgiveness; honour was maintained in a respectful way; sharing was balanced with wisdom; and that peace and harmony were maintained through the guidance of our Elders. Protocols guided the processes by which individuals acquired knowledge, skill and ability to interact with the world in a healthy and balanced way. When an individual was not familiar with, or chose not to abide by, protocol it became difficult for him or her to function in a good way.

The Mi'gmaq process described above represents a balanced spiritual approach to justice which ensured that healthy relationships were maintained and restitution was granted to restore harmony to all who may have suffered an injustice. Matters of injustice were normally addressed by the families' headmen, Elders Councils, and Councils of Chiefs when issues were broader in scope. Moreover, the values of individual autonomy and collective responsibility created a legal obligation for every individual to be held accountable for their actions and for families to respect and adhere to such law. Although disruptive behaviour was considered a family issue, it was understood that individuals seek peace and restitution, and that the family was obligated to accept a retaliatory act as part of the peace making process. The guiding principle of peace maintains social order within the family system. Under Mi'gmaq law the guiding principle of maintaining balance and harmony prevents the potential for any cycle of violence from being perpetuated.

The Mi'gmaq process of ensuring peace and harmony; the adherence to principles of justice enforced by notions of individual, family, community, and nation responsibility is partially recognized by Le Clercq, "As they have neither police, nor taxes, nor office, nor commandment which is absolute (for they obey, as we have said, only their headmen

and their chiefs as it pleases them)” (Le Clercq, 242). Although to some it may have appeared that the Mi'gmaq people maintained no formal law aside from the rulings of a lead "headman" or "chief" in fact the opposite is closer to the truth. Elders played a key role in conflict resolution. In extreme cases, such as murder, an Elder's Council is summoned by the families to handle the matter (Ibid, 236). However, most cases involving internal quarrels were resolved privately between families and friends. The principles of justice were utilized by those best suited to handle the situation at the time of the offence. Raised within a participatory and contextual justice system the Mi'gmaq individual understood and was intimately familiar with his or her roles and responsibilities within his or her family, community, and nation. The Elders recognized that each family member was responsible for just relations within Gepe'gewa'gi and that justice system must encourage appropriate behaviour as opposed to punishing inappropriate conduct. Relationship between beings is vital to the maintenance of Gespe'gewa'qi. Henderson describes and links the strength of these relationships in relation to issues of land tenure:

This system of kinship relations unites everyone in a web of complimentary rights and responsibilities. Each person is simultaneously a parent, child, uncle, aunt, or cousin to others (1995, 235).

Similarly, the extent to which principles of justice, and the concept of family, influenced the roles and responsibilities of the Mi'gmaq in everyday life is noted in this statement by Le Clercq:

The strong take pleasure in supporting the feeble; and those who by their hunting procure many furs, give some in charity to those who have none, either in order to pay the debts of these, or to clothe them, or obtain for them the necessaries of life. If there is any widow who is unable to support her children, the old men take charge of them, and distribute and

give them to the best hunters, with whom they live, neither more nor less than as if they were the actual children of the wigwam (117).

The principles of--honour, sharing, forgiveness, peace, harmony, and responsibility--within relationships is further evident in the assessment of what is considered to be criminal. For example, in the case of theft, if it was found that an individual stole out of need or poverty, the extended family/community was criticized for not taking care of its members, and the individual was not punished (Henderson, 1995, 236). In fact, incidences of theft were rare as the Mi'gmaq held individual and community honour as sacred and in the highest esteem.

Concepts of honour played a large role in an individual's sense of responsibility to his or her family, community, and nation. The honour of an individual represented the honour of his or her nation. The extent to which an individual held his honour in the highest of esteem is evident even in the smallest mishaps. This is humorously captured in a Mi'gmaq man's humiliated reaction when he is accidentally knocked by a maid with a broom: "Ah, I prefer to die ! What shall I look like, in the future, when I find myself in the public assemblies of my nation? And what esteem will there be for my courage and my valour when there is question of going to war?" (Le Clercq, 248).

On a different note, an understanding of their roles and responsibilities gained through teachings of the first family, Mi'gmaq people understood that forgiveness and sharing are intrinsically linked. Peace is maintained by an acceptance of reproach from those who have been offended and, further, it requires that all parties take responsibility in the restoration of peace within the community. The sharing of gifts and acknowledging responsibility for the offence, restores balance and harmony:

They even make considerable presents to those who punish them severely for their misbehavior, in order, say they, to remove from the hearts of the former all the bitterness caused by the crime of which they are guilty (Le Clercq, 244).

Gift giving as restitution is a part of the protocol of peace negotiation. The honour of the nation, and how it conducted itself factored strongly into whether or not wars were declared. Additionally, the wisdom of the Elders in these circumstances was highly respected: “War, however, is never declared except by advice of the old men, who alone decide, in the last resort, the affairs of the country (Le Clercq, 265).” Even during times of war, the guiding principles of sharing, forgiveness, peace, harmony, and responsibility in relationships are applied. Peace and harmony, maintained through a familial justice system in the community remind Mi’gmaq people of the values of honour and respect, and the principles within the teachings of the First Family. In the case of injustice, the need to restore relationships receives priority over the need to punish. Forgiveness is at the heart of restoration, and in many cases gift giving is exercised to restore balance to relationships. Maintaining harmonious relationships is the responsibility of the individual, family, community and nation. Elders and Elder's Council may take the role of arbitrator and at times handle decisions relating to war and the honour of the nation. Throughout, the focus is the restoration of balanced and healthy relationships premised on the core principles of justice to ensure peace and harmony within the family.

EXTENDED FAMILY SYSTEM

Family and Creation

Through their teachings on the first family, the Mi'gmaq people understood that all things derive from Mother Earth and are instilled with spirit through the Creator. The Mi'gmaq made no distinction between themselves and the first family, to harm Mother Earth would be to harm family. Family was and remains central to the Mi'gmaq worldview. The family is linked to an extended kinship system that is interrelated and interdependently linked to “ugs'tqamu,” which translates into English to mean forces of creation. From a Mi'gmaq perspective, we are connected and therefore all of us must depend on each other for our survival. Battise and Henderson note that it is “unconceivable to a Mi'kmaw that a human being could exist without a family or a kinship regulation” (55). Our Elders say that we as Mi'gmaq are part of a family and if we do not take care of each other--including animals, birds, fish, trees, and medicines--then we as Mi'gmaq will not survive.

Our relationship with all beings serves as the foundation to our extended family system and provides us with the knowledge to govern our relationships in that “Mi'gmawey.” For instance, in Listuguj the Mi'gmaq people refer to the salmon as their brother. When the salmon decides to spawn and enter the river system they affect the social and political system of the extended family. The salmon determines which family will have the honour and prestige of sharing the salmon with others in the community. The families pay respect to the salmon by celebrating through a feast and recognizing the contribution of the salmon to the family's physical and spiritual sustenance. In Mi'gmaq thought there is no distinction between the life of the salmon and the rest of Creation;

rather what is recognized is the contribution made to the cycles of life. In this instance, the extended family system is strengthened through its relations with the salmon. Ugs'tqamu is respected and peace and harmony is maintained in Gespe'gewa'gi.

In each part of the Gespe'gewa'gi territory there are unique ecological relations that affect the social and political realities of those areas. For example, families in the communities Gesgepegiag and Gespeg also have relations with the salmon, yet their political vision will differ because of their respective ecological contexts. Each family system in the territory is influenced by the flux of ugs'tqamu. Mi'gmaq people believe that there is a spirit in everything, the plants, medicines, rocks, streams, and forest, the interactions of these spirits influences the nature of our extended family systems. When ugs'tqamu shifts, so too does the political ideology of our extended family system.

Language

Mi'gmaq visions of land, or ugs'tqamu, are based on “systems of knowledge founded on the experience of individuals and collective understandings of that ecology and peoples relationship to the natural world”(Ladner). Further, it is through this knowledge of the natural world that languages form and social relations, such as governance, are maintained. According to Battiste and Henderson, the Mi'gmaq language describes a worldview that is steeped in relationships enacted through language. Language, is not separate from the natural world it describes, instead the sounds may be thought of as the points of connection between the speaker and the natural world:

In the Indigenous worldview, humans perceive the sensuous order of the natural World through their eyes, noses, ears, mouths, and skins (Abram 1996). Perceptions of the sensory world unfold as affective sounds and rhythm. As these sounds become words, humans participate in "singing the world"

(Merleau-Ponty 1962). Since people enter language through their sensory relationships with the natural world, languages cannot be understood in isolation from the ecologies that gave rise to them (25-26).

The language is the foundation of Mi'gmaq oral traditions and worldview. This has been the traditional way of transmitting knowledge since long before the arrival of newcomers: through language, children learn about their history and politics. Significantly, the Mi'gmaq language is described as being verb based. Through the use of prefixes and suffixes the verb assumes multiple meanings. My grandmother, for example, would say “amujpa wantaqoltioq,” which translates into English to mean we have to be quiet. In a different context, however, this word has also been used in treaty negotiations as “wantaqoti,” meaning peaceful relations. We agree through treaty to be at peace with each other and ourselves. The language describes relations within creation; through stories Elders teach our children the values embedded in the language.

Sharing stories is a natural process and in a similar way the earth shares sounds that shape the Mi'gmaq language. Isabel Knockwood, a Mi'gmaq Elder, remembers that when she was a young girl, the Elders would come over and tell stories:

the stories were ancient, and the language in which they were told was even older. According to my mother, Deodis, the Mi'kmaq language evolved from the sounds of the land, the winds, and the waterfalls (15).

For Mi'gmaq people sharing the land, through our language, also means we share the knowledge that comes from our experiences with ugs'tqamu. We learn from our Elders and through oral traditions about ways of living in accordance with flux and change. The Mi'gmaq language is critical in the transmission of oral tradition and knowledge (Battiste and Henderson). However, we can no longer take for granted the cultural context in

which our oral traditions are transmitted. Understanding our processes of governance, through an understanding of the Mi'gmaq language, enables us to affirm and recognize Mi'gmaq political traditions that are reflective of our values, beliefs, and ways of living.

'Naming' and understanding relations

Children are born into an extended family system and they are raised based on the values of caring, kindness, sharing, and respect. The family, aunts, uncles, godparents, grandparents, all participate in the transmission of culture and knowledge necessary for that child to understand the importance of interrelationships and interdependencies and how they are fostered through these traditional values. The extended family members, for instance, will observe the behaviour of the child to determine what name to give the child. Naming of the child begins the process of acquiring knowledge about his or her identity. It is through their name that they begin to know who they are, and how they are known. Additionally, there are principles embodied within the spiritual name and the individual carrying the name must be allowed to live out those principles. All names are to be carried in a sacred manner; therefore the individual carrying the name must live according to the principles of the name.

Likewise, in Mi'gmaq traditional thought the extended family system represents a system of collective knowledge about the territory and its history. In the Listuguj area certain parts of the territory are named after families. This does not, however, mean individual or collective "property" ownership. Based on conversations with community members, they say that the name implies that the family is using the territory for now and they are responsible for the maintenance of that territory. Maintaining the territory can be

as elaborate as having ceremonies for days, or can be as simple as offering tobacco to the spirits for what has been shared. Henderson speaks about land tenure systems and how families maintain knowledge about certain places and how this information is necessary for the governing of relationships within Mi'gmagi (Henderson, 1995). Similarly, Manny Metallic notes that we need to remember that each place in Gespe'gawa'qi was named before the arrival of the Europeans. These names teach us about the history of the place and how Mi'gmaq people experienced their relations within an ecological world. The respect we have for this relationship is embedded in our way of life and in our philosophy as Mi'gmaq people. In turn, we learn how to live, how to be governed, through the 'processes' of life.

In contrast to a contextual understanding of 'naming' is a static perception of the land. The image of a man's physical body, fixed in the land, is embodied in Silas Rand's description of Mi'gmagi:

Megumaage, Micmac-Land, or *Country of the Micmacs*. They divided it into seven districts, each district having its own chief, but the chief of Cape Breton, which comprised one district, was looked upon as head of the whole. As marked on the "wampum belt", C.B. is at the head. To the right stretch away three districts with their chiefs, and the same number to the left. These two arms of the country are named from two prominent points (Ganong, 256).

Rand's words fix the political boundaries and create the idea that there is a hierarchal division between the districts; Cape Breton, he writes, is the "head of the whole" territory. Although the names describe physical places, it is important to remember that 'naming' represents knowledge systems. In Mi'gmaq ecological political thought knowledge about the territory is in continuous flux, and as such 'individual' districts do not have political authority over the affairs of the nation. Because the political philosophy

of the people is based on un-centralized power and authority, it is also possible to understand that leadership is contextual. Words, “marked” in the Wampum are not static but will continue to change and carry different stories about areas in Mi’gmagi and of territorial leadership. The political unit, we need to remember, is not individually based but is joined through our extended family systems. The extended family system--understood through ideas about Creation, language, and naming--bring understanding to ways that we, as Mi’gmaq people, govern in a Mi’gmewey.

TREATY AND MI’GMEWEY

Treaties as sacred covenants

In Mi’gmaq political thought we operate on the extended family system ideology whereby we enter into sacred agreement for the purpose of extending our interconnectedness and interdependency with each other. When the first extended family came into being in Gespe’gewa’gi they too had to enter into agreement with creation. They also needed to know how to live with each other and how they could help each other to realize what they had to offer as gifts to creation. Treaty making is a part of our sacred ordering and every time a treaty is made we are adding to this order, in essence we are adding to our extended family. We are all brothers and sisters in the creation of life. Treaties are covenants to that order and guide us in our relationships.

Our creation story teaches that our first treaty establishes a relationship with the animals, while the second recognizes a treaty with the fish beings. Each relationship requires an understanding about the context in which we live and how each being may help one another. Remembering, for instance, to only take what we need and thus agree

to manage our lives according to that need. The first treaty orders land tenure while the second treaty establishes a water tenure system. It is through this treaty process that the Mi'gmaq agree to share legal responsibility for the land and water. By renewing our treaty responsibility through ceremony every year at each fishing and hunting station we secure our relationship with creation and our way of life. In the words of our Elders, we have to learn how to protect, defend and live by our treaties. We protect ourselves by ensuring that the land and water systems are properly managed, that the animals and fish are not over harvested, and that we continue to seek guidance from the creator, the eagle, our grandmother and Kluskap's nephew about how to live as Mi'gmaq people.

Similar to other Indigenous nations, the Mi'gmaq nation recorded their treaty relationships, proper rituals, and agreements in their own symbolic literacy through wampum belts and strings. During the early encounter era the British and French governments recognized the oral and written political traditions of Indigenous peoples in their written treaties and transcripts. For example, the written treaty of Montreal in 1701 contains a recital of the delivery of prisoners and the giving of calumets. The transcript highlights differences between nations who delivered calumets as a record of peace and those who delivered wampum, both methods recognize the spiritual and sacred link to the concept of peace (Henderson and Barsh, 1995). Further, for the Mi'gmaq these proceedings are formalized and sealed by the smoking of the pipe. Elders would not sign or agree to any treaty without the smoking of the pipe. To the Mi'gmaq, when the pipe is joined and the tobacco is lit, we are in essence unifying the physical and spiritual realms of our territory. When Mi'gmaq people smoked the pipe and gave life to the sacred treaty agreement it was understood and agreed by the parties that we were creating a new vision

for the territory based on a shared legal meaning. The pipe and the sacred agreement would create for Mi'gmaq people and the rest of creation a new vision of politics within Gespe'gewa'gi.

Delegates chosen for treaty negotiations: processes of governance

When the Elders summon a council meeting to deal with matters (whether it is land distribution, crimes committed, or affairs of war and peace between nations), the Elders open the meeting with a ceremony and then one of the chief's is asked to speak to the issue at hand. Leadership in this sense unfolds through a process established by the people present for the council. For the Elders, choosing a suitable candidate to negotiate affairs between families and nations is taken seriously. Delegates are not chosen randomly or elected by the majority, rather they demonstrate to the Elders why they would be suitable candidates.

The process of choosing a suitable candidate is observed and commented upon by Le Clercq during his religious tenure in Gespe'gewa'gi: "the chief would name, and would cause to enter the circle, that one of the young men whom he considered the most suitable for the execution of the project" (148). When a young man has been chosen by the Elders in Council to act as a delegate he is informed publicly of his task by the chief. The chief will recite the proposed agreement, along with a speech to confer the terms of the agreement made by the Elders in council. Le Clercq writes that the young delegate would then depart from the council and upon completion of negotiations, he returned; the council reunited and in a similar ceremony to the one conducted at his departure, he recited the report of his voyage.

The decision making process that Le Clercq describes in his observation of Mi'gmaq politics within the Gespe'gewa'gi district highlights key aspects of Mi'gmaq political thought. Although ideas of accountability and consensus building are described as important political values in Mi'gmaq political thought, not often discussed are the processes through which we practice these values and beliefs. Consensus and accountability are essential when considering all those affected by our decisions. As Le Clercq observed during his stay in Gespe'gewa'gi, the business of the Elder's Council and their responsibility to ecological governance has strict procedures and each individual is reminded publicly of the importance of seeking consensus and being accountable for their decisions.

Wampum protocol and diplomacy recognized the importance of patience, respect and sharing as being essential values within the traditional way of governing. The delegates who were chosen by the Elders to carry the wampum or treaty messages to and from the nations were generally the youth. In this way the youth were instructed and educated on wampum records, procedures, and protocols. The knowledge and skills necessary for negotiating and managing diplomatic relations were inscribed in the wampum procedures and protocols. Young men who demonstrated this knowledge and skill later assumed their responsibilities as "Putus" or as "Samgoneese," critical diplomatic roles necessary in the maintenance of peace and harmony within a territory.

Treaty knowledge and oral tradition

Mi'gmaq children become knowledgeable about their political ecology through their experiences, observations and teachings provided by family member and Elders. The Elders inform the children through oral traditions about what they need to know concerning the history of their territory. For instance, when Mi'gmaq people signed the Treaty of 1726 "an important component of treaty signing was the presence of not only elders and sakamows, but also of younger men who would eventually assume the leadership positions" (Wicken, 1995, 151). For these young men to become family leaders they would have to recite and recall oral and written traditions of that treaty and assume the responsibility of keeping the spirit and intent of the treaty alive. However, Mi'gmaq children who remember the event through oral history would soon have their traditional understanding challenged and reinterpreted by the courts.

In 1928, Grand Chief Gabriel Sylliboy was charged for hunting muskrats out of season in the district of Unamaki. He was brought before the Nova Scotia court and charged by the government for hunting illegally, under provincial law. Sylliboy defended his right to hunt based on the 1752 treaty, saying that "since I was boy heard that Indians got form king free hunting and fishing at all times" (Ibid, 158). In the same court proceeding the Deputy Grand Chief "heard that according to treaty we had right to fish and hunt at any time. I can not read, heard it form my grandfathers. Heard that King of England made treaty with micmacs" (Ibid, 161). The court's position was that the treaty did not affect Sylliboy because he was not a "band member" of the territorial district of Shubenacadie where the treaty was signed. Secondly the Court added that Sylliboy would have been found guilty because "the Mi'kmaq did not have the status to enter into treaty as they were not then an independent power" (Wicken, 1995, 145). Although the judge

decided to hear written and oral submissions, at the end of the day the Judge ruled in favor of the province. Sylliboy's knowledge of the treaty as passed on to him by his ancestors through oral tradition would be no match against the Judges euro-centric thinking that treaties are fixed not only in time but also in place.

Oral tradition as a means of expressing our knowledge about ecological relations within a particular territory is often set aside and treated as being non-authentic knowledge in comparison to the written tradition. In this way the written historical records are privileged over oral traditions thus influencing how we understand our political relations within the territory. Privileging the written record as the basis of our political systems allows people within our territory to deny 'nature', and justifies hierarchal relationships between 'man' and the land.

Treaty relations and contemporary protocol

The relationship between the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Malecite and Mi'gmaq and the formation of the Wabanaki confederacy is said to have begun in the mid eighteenth century (Speck, 494). Henderson draws on oral evidence to argue that Mi'gmaq people in Mi'gmagi have been in a relationship with Mohawk people dating back one thousand years. Although this raises issues about written and oral traditions, the privileging of certain "texts," and what constitutes legitimate knowledge, we cannot dismiss the point that Mi'gmaq people have a unique and distinct political relationship with other nations; within their confederacy; and within the broader Indigenous political community.

The ongoing situation in Burnt Church illustrates the manner whereby Mi'gmaq people govern themselves and the protocols of treaty making both inside districts and between nations. The Mi'gmaq leadership in Burch Church, a territory located within the Gespe'gewa'gi district, felt strongly that treaty rights and responsibilities signed with the crown in 1760-1761 provided them with enough political protection to govern their fishery based on local protocols and procedures. However, the representative for Canada, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, did not agree and proceeded to impose sanctions in an attempt to persuade the Mi'gmaq of Burnt Church to accept Canadian protocols and agreements as the foundation of their fishery.

In the summer of 2000 the situation in Burnt Church escalated to the point that outside assistance was needed to maintain peace and harmony the Burnt Church leadership called upon their brothers and sisters of Listuguj for assistance. It is protocol that when one member of the family requests assistance we are obligated to assist. However, before Listuguj could provide political and human resources, a protocol agreement had to be negotiated between the Listuguj and Burnt Church leadership. The protocol agreement outlined the political framework for each district's roles and responsibilities in the matter. When the situation again escalated, whereby other Indigenous nations had to be called, the Mi'gmaq leadership within the Gespe'gewa'gi district asked their brother the Mohawks to assist. After the Mohawk delegation arrived, and long after the blockade was established along the neighbouring highway, the delegates of Burnt Church, Listuguj and Kahnawake, held a council meeting with the Canadian representative, Department of Fisheries and Ocean, to discuss peace and harmony within Burnt Church. After the council meeting ended without resolution, the

delegates from Burnt Church felt that the barricades should be removed as a symbol of good gesture. The Kahnawake delegation however, reminded the council representatives that removing the “barricade from the highway” would require consent from all the delegates at the council meeting. The Kahnawake delegate spoke of political protocols that must be respected when other districts or nations are asked to intervene in local affairs. Each council within the district is obligated to respond and provide support to each other like brothers and sisters within a nation. Just as Listuguj had to follow protocol to enter the Burnt Church territory, the hosting territory must also respect international protocols when inviting outside nations. As the Saqamaw of Listuguj said, “when one of our communities [or nations] calls for help we have a responsibility to help.” This is the protocol between families, districts, and nation which dates back to time immemorial.

CONCLUSION

Elders and Indigenous scholars say that we need to return to traditional teachings and use traditional values and principles as the basis of our political systems. The values of honesty, kindness, sharing, and caring have always been central to our way of governing. Creation has given us relations within our territory that serve as the foundation to our language, our families and our way of life. These are the values that serve as the foundation of our relationships within our home (Gespe’gawa’qi). In our territory children are taught to respect and care for all beings within the territory and the importance of maintaining the well being of our home.

A holistic ecological examination of politics in our territory provides an understanding of governance. Mi'gmaq people, by renewing and honouring their relationship with creation, continue to trust and believe that the land in which their ancestors are buried will continue to provide the necessary knowledge to govern in that Mi'gmawey. Systems of governance that are based on the knowledge of our ancestors and their ecological relations creates respectful and healthy relations for future generations.

Traditional teachings speak about various human families and how each one is gifted and powerful in its own way. Each family has something different to contribute to the achievement of peace and harmony. Our elders say we must remember we are humans first and Mi'gmaq second. As Mi'gmaq we are part of a family with our own contribution to peace and harmony. Politically and spiritually we have to get along and we are all obliged to respect each other's 'gifts' or responsibilities.

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