



SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS
FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

Building Self-Reliance while Alleviating Social Isolation in Kahnawake

By Alex James Morison
Social Connectedness Fellow 2017
Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research relies on consultation with Indigenous peoples for the proposed recommendations. It focuses on causes for the social isolation of Kahnawake, a Mohawk territory 10 km Southwest of Montreal of a population of approximately 8000. As with all First Nations issues, it is important to give attention to historicity, Indigenous perspectives, and specific definitions; notably, an appropriate definition of social isolation. One of the components of this definition is Indigenous community self-reliance, the development of which is necessary for reconciliation between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous in Canada.

As an approach to overcoming social isolation, this research stresses the improvement of relations between Kahnawake and the surrounding communities within an accurate historical context and practical requisites to this interconnectivity such as strengthening Kahnawake's autonomy, political stability, economic prosperity, and cultural sovereignty. An intersectional, holistic approach must be adopted when considering social isolation. That of Kahnawake is categorized into three general sections: (1) History and events that bred animosity, including using recent incidents to illustrate the remnants of historical oppression endured by the Mohawk; (2) economic development, with special attention given to the riddance of dependencies and lack of economic diversity while cultivating *interdependencies* with other communities in the region; and (3) education, widely believed to be the most effective path to social connectivity and community self-reliance. The findings were informed by consultations with Mohawk community leaders as well as independent research.

In summary, program and policy recommendations are to:

- Improve Mohawk post-secondary attendance rates.
- Cultivate understanding of Mohawk culture in non-Indigenous communities by preventing media misrepresentation and integrating Indigenous history and knowledge into pedagogical and societal institutions.
- Improve diversity in Kahnawake's workforce and economic landscape.
- Amend legislation that is detrimental to Kahnawake's social, political and economic conditions; specifically, the Indian Act.
- Improve regional economic cooperation and strategic planning.

INTRODUCTION, SOURCES USED AND METHODOLOGY

The path of restructuring the relationship between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous of Canada is well understood, well documented, and heavily contemplated. Unfortunately, it is a path untrodden. Two works have been identified as the most universally accepted and comprehensive assessments of this relationship and path forward: The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 (henceforth RCAP), and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada of 2015 (henceforth the TRC). These two important documents address the history of oppression, current problems, residual effects of the past, and recommendations to resolve these dilemmas and mend the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. These two documents are foundational to the policy recommendations of this study and recognized as analogous to Indigenous consultation, given the extensive consultation carried out in order to compile these volumes and inform their recommendations and calls-to-action.

The recommendations expressed here have almost entirely been proposed by voices in the community. These voices have also outlined the major issues presented and are consistently used as guides throughout the text when Kahnawake is represented or assessed. Kahnawake is a unique community that faces particular challenges; the RCAP and the TRC are essential to contextualize and offer guidance when contemplating cooperation with the Canadian government and the population at large, but only Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) voices can assess the specific problems of the community as well as their relationship towards the surrounding non-Indigenous communities.

DEFINITIONS OF RECONCILIATION, CLARIFICATIONS ON ALLEVIATING ISOLATION

“Social isolation could be seen as a positive thing because Kahnawake is a very resilient community and if we’re isolating ourselves from the outside we’re building each other up and building our community together. If [only] we could find a way to bridge that and build the community to where we want it to be while being independent... but also be able to work in a partnership with our neighbours to make everyone better... Because if our community is doing well then the surrounding communities are doing well. And I think that needs to be realized by the outside communities.”

- Greg Horn, Editor in Chief, Founder of Kahnawake News

A specific understanding of the alleviation of social isolation must be utilized when considering indigeneity and Indigenous communities. Much of the Indigenous population of Canada lives in isolation from the general Canadian populace in a very concrete way; physical separation, forced segregation and coerced displacement of entire bands often to remote locations. Kahnawake is not subject to this physical remoteness. However, it is subject to social stigma, racism, and historical misrepresentation and disadvantage. There are no walls built around Kahnawake, but it is willfully reclusive. The roots of its isolation are in generations of conflict and antagonism with the surrounding non-Indigenous communities and the government. Distrust and stigma are by now cultivated and inexorable on both sides.

Before assessing the fissure and suggesting courses of redress, a few particularities must be understood. In Canadian history, there have been certain trends for 'repairing' or 'helping' Indigenous communities 'catch up' to the rest of Canadian society. Throughout the long trajectory of 'Indian Affairs' and Canada's public policy approach, it was perceived that the solution to 'First Nations issues' as well as the rift between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities was married to the ideas of control and assimilation. Sometimes, as in the instance of Residential Schools or even the creation of reserves in the first place, this was blatant and devastating. Otherwise, assimilation acquired a more nuanced quality, but not so for those being subject to it. It continues to be a source of animosity. This more recent, nuanced type of assimilation may, for example, look like the continued underdevelopment of Indigenous lands, coercing First Nations from their communities and culture in order to make a living. Some would call these affected people economic refugees. Assimilation may also take the form of the unwillingness to provide a community with sufficient resources to become self-reliant, an institution of higher learning for example. Again, this can force an individual from his or her community in order to acquire the skills necessary to provide for their family and strengthen their community.

These two examples are present in Kahnawake. For Kahnawake, a community bordering multiple non-Indigenous municipalities, alleviating social isolation does not involve furthering physical interconnections (for example, increasing the number of Mohawks seeking work outside the community or swelling the number of non-Mohawks in Kahnawake [ie. risking assimilation]). It requires building respectful and equitable relationships with outside communities, alleviating animosity, acknowledging current imbalances, providing education of cultural histories and fostering inclusivity. It requires Kahnawake to be rid of its dependencies – to be self-reliant – in order for the municipalities in the region to become *interdependent* but distinct.

EVENTS OF THE PAST: HISTORICAL PERMANENCY AND REPITITIONS

THE OKA CRISIS AND MEDIA BIAS

In accordance with the TRC's focus on acknowledging and taking responsibility for the past, historical trauma must be met with conciliatory actions. Unfortunately, recounting the long history of Mohawk resistance to dominant culture is not possible in the scope of this text. However, a few primary elements must be mentioned. First, the intergenerational trauma of residential and Indian day schools has devastated the Mohawk language, this will be acknowledged further in the education section. Concerning conflict and events of trauma, we need not recede far into the past; there exist important examples felt by present generations. Notably, the Oka crisis.

Briefly, in 1989 the Oka Golf Club planned to expand its course and build a condominium complex on Mohawk land in Kanasatake. It was met with fierce opposition by community leaders and chiefs. After the Mayor of Oka demanded the project proceed (with the support of the courts) even in the face of Mohawk opposition, Mohawk barricades were erected. The conflict escalated and Kahnawake provided support in

solidarity, blocking the Mercier bridge and other entries onto Mohawk land which became under siege, physically isolated from surrounding communities. At the height of the conflict, approximately 4,000 Canadian soldiers with military vehicles including tanks and artillery pieces surrounded Kahnawake and Kanesatake, with 1,000 soldiers replacing the Quebec Provincial Police in the heart of the conflict.¹ One soldier, Corporal Lemay was shot and killed later from the wound. In response to the military increase, the Mohawks mobilized their populations while members of other First Nations communities came to join the resistance in solidarity with an approximate force of 600 from the Mohawk nations and over 100 from other First Nations communities.² This was the single most heated conflict between an Indigenous community and the Canadian government in the later half of the century. It was also the most publicized.

In addition to the trauma and distrust it generated within the Mohawk community, it also had a considerable effect on the larger Canadian population. Media representations of the Mohawk community and First Nations resistance was biased; skewed towards Anti-Indigenous perspectives. This misrepresentation has had lasting effects on the relationships between Mohawks and the surrounding communities. It reinvigorated racism in the region which had significant mental damage on those who lived through the experience. Greg Horn, now the editor of Kahnawake News and a leader in the community, explains: “I went to high school during a very volatile time, right after 1990, going to high school during that time wasn’t the easiest thing... we started school while the barricades were still up. Going to school and your friends from the year before didn’t understand why as a community we did what we did and then experiencing racism surrounding that”.³ A large portion of youth from Kahnawake attend high school off-reserve, some estimates are as high as 50%.⁴ Greg continues, “You have to start educating, especially the way the media portrayed 1990... How would you feel if the municipality neighbouring you wanted to bulldoze a graveyard where your grandparents are, where your brothers are, where everybody in your family is buried? For condos and a golf course? What would you do? Then they come in with guns blazing to stop you from blocking a road that’s less than six feet wide. How would you react?”⁵

Much of the racism that Greg and others in the community felt was caused by Canadian ignorance on the issue, propagated by media bias. This paired with already existing Canadian tensions and stigmas surrounding Kahnawake created an extremely volatile environment.

In an effort to measure media bias, a study by Skea in 1993 assessed 15 of the leading Canadian newspapers the week after the death of Corporal Lemay, arguably the apex of the conflict and height of media coverage. The methodology incorporated four

¹ CBC News. “South Shore mayors continue legal battle over disputed Mohawk lands.” *CBC*, 30 Aug. 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/montreal-south-shore-kahnawake-land-dispute-1.4092793>.

² Geoffrey York & Loreen Pindera. *People of the Pines: The Warriors and the legacy of Oka* (McArthur & Company, 2013).

³ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

⁴ Interview with Kyle Delisle (CEO, Tewatonhi’saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

⁵ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

indicators on which to value the articles. The first being an inclination towards a theme of law and order, which called for military or external intervention to arrest all Mohawk activities. The second was the mention of the death of Corporal Lemay, which was meant to be a somewhat neutral indicator, seeing that this information holds no inherent bias. The third concerns the use of Mohawk interpretation and perspective; a pro-Native approach. The fourth and final indicator consisted of the mention of First Nations rights and history in these media pieces; a contextualization of the resistance in wider First Nation's history, oppression and legal frameworks. This study covered 182 articles and 26 editorials to which the majority of Canadian readership was exposed. The findings suggested "that the notion of hegemony exists in the Canadian newspaper industry... Hegemony allows for the creation of ideology, or reality... Hegemonic ideology within the Canadian newspaper industry has created a biased framework on which the events of the Oka crisis were portrayed... the data indicated that most Canadians (the readership of the newspapers in the analysis) read articles that portrayed the events of the Oka crisis in an 'Anti-Native' manner".⁶ Furthermore, the newspapers in Quebec were the most biased towards the (anti-Indigenous) theme of law and order; 59.4% of the assessed articles showed this inclination. While the inclusion of First Nations rights and history was only present in 15.6%. A determining factor of this bias is the fact that the vast majority of sources used for these articles were of non-Indigenous origin.⁷

The Oka crisis is exemplary in revealing a troublesome reality: the Indigenous voice is lost in Canadian mainstream media. Mohawk perspective is no exception to this. Not only was there clear bias towards non-Indigenous perspective, but many articles contained blatant headlines like "Native Threat" (Calgary Sun, July 19, 1990) or "Less like Warriors than Thugs" (Montreal Gazette, July 17, 1990).⁸ This is a known problem. The 84th TRC Call to Action addresses media reconciliation by endorsing more Indigenous programmers and staff, news, perspective and history in the mainstream Canadian media.⁹ It is essential that the general public be sufficiently educated through Indigenous perspectives if reconciliation and the eradication of stigma is to occur.

HISTORICITY, LAND CLAIMS AND DÉJÀ VU: THE HIGHWAY 30 DISPUTE

"[The people of Kahnawake] generally know about the Highway 30 issue and they know that it's caused by the mayors of the surrounding municipalities. There's actually a group of young people who just decided on their own to make a community garden... on this disputed land and at the end of the year they give the harvest up to the community elders and the community lodge. That's a good way of saying, 'No, this is our community land'".

- Greg Horn, Editor-in-chief, Founder of Kahnawake News

Among the leaders in the community consulted for this research, every last one expressed the necessity to build bridges and renew relationships with the surrounding

⁶ Skea, Warren. "The Canadian Newspaper's Portrayal of the Oka Crisis". *Native Studies Review*, vol 9, no 1, 1993-1994, pp. 29.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, 2015.

communities. Respectful reciprocity and mutual agreement are essential to strengthening bonds and generating trust. Land claims have always been a point of contention for First Nations, and rightly so given the history of reneging on settlements or simply a total disregard for treaty or claim. The process of land treaties and claims has evolved through the centuries. They may occur on a larger national scale or on a provincial scale, each having their own system to resolve disputes, but also on a smaller scale between municipalities and communities. These are just as potent as comprehensive federal legislation, and, in fact, may prove to be even more impactful on a single community concerning sentiments of isolation and distrust. Highway 30 is the most recent incident.

A brief look at history will unveil the long struggle with this area as well as the dynamic between Kahnawake and the four South Shore municipalities opposing the land resettlement to Mohawk territory. The area of dispute is entitled to Kahnawake under the Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis, the initial land claim which determined the boundaries of Mohawk territory in 1680 which has been recognized by the Canadian government. Since the original boundaries were officiated, Mohawks have been forced to cede land either by government mandate or by malpractice, violation and thievery: either through “modified... maps[,]... numerous land cessions to railway, hydro-electric, and telephone companies for major industrial projects,” or governmental misconduct.¹⁰ Much of this occurred between the late 1880s and the 1950s. Today of the 40 320 acres of the Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis, Kahnawake holds a mere 13 000 acres.¹¹ Recently some of these old, illegal land seizures have come to the fore, including that of the Highway 30 disputed land. In fact, the Quebec government agreed in the early 2000s to resettle this land but when the land was “earmarked for return in 2006[,] the provincial government announced plans to continue the construction of Highway 30, which would alienate approximately 700 acres of land from the ongoing Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis Land Grievance”.¹²

Many members of the Kahnawake community saw this as a compromise, a concession, for the improvement of the area. Greg Horn explains, “in order for them to build [the highway extension], they agreed they would transfer that much land to the community... The mayors of the municipalities that are affected by it are trying to block it because they’re worried... about their tax revenue”.¹³ The resettlement was met with fierce opposition from the surrounding municipalities. In 2013, the Marois provincial government “signed an agreement to hand the land... over to Kahnawake”.¹⁴ The mayors of the four South Shore municipalities then sued the province over the decision. This issue is never far from the surface for Mohawks. The entire community is generally educated

¹⁰ Mohawk Council of Kahnawake. “Kahnawake launches community consultations on Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis land claim.” *Kahnawake 411*, 20 November, 2014, <http://kahnawake411.com/?p=2582>.

¹¹ Joan Holmes. “Kahnawake Mohawk Territory: From Seigneurie to Indian Reserve”. National Claims Research Workshop, 9 November 2006, Ottawa. Web. <http://www.joanholmes.ca/KahnawakePaper.pdf>

¹² Greg Horn. “Turnabout’s Fair Play.” *Kahnawake News*, 10 July 2013, <http://kahnawakenews.com/turnabouts-fair-play-p2138-92.htm>.

¹³ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

¹⁴ Brennan, Andrew. “Court Rejects Lawsuit Over Kahnawake Land Transfer.” *Iheartradio*, 16 Aug. 2017, <http://www.iheartradio.ca/cjad/news/court-rejects-lawsuit-over-kahnawake-land-transfer-1.3008510>.

on the issue and it is understood that the surrounding mayors, their neighbours, were those trying to oppose it.¹⁵

For Indigenous communities, and for Kahnawake, history does not exist in a far off vacuum. This land claim dispute was an effort to correct hundreds of years of land grabbing, of lost territory; one of the main pieces of Mohawk defense in court was a land allocation from over three hundred years ago. It is important to acknowledge the history of annexation that Mohawks have endured. It is even more important to not reside in this criminal continuum as the four South Shore mayors did. Dwayne Zacharie, Chief Peacekeeper, communicates this feeling: “Highway 30 is a huge issue because the MRC communities around us filed a suit saying that we shouldn’t get the land back because it gives us an unfair economic advantage. What advantage do we have? They stuck us on this little plot of land and little by little they start taking pieces; they put the railway, the highway, the seaway, etc. If you look at the birthrate in Canada and then the birthrate in First Nations communities... we’re growing and growing and growing and bursting at the seams now”.¹⁶

Land claim disputes continued to breed noncooperation between communities and escalate polarization. Fortunately, on August 2nd, 2017, the Quebec Superior Courts rejected the demands of the South Shore municipalities and dismissed the case.¹⁷ This very recent development affirms Mohawk claim over the disputed area and is a victory for Kahnawake. However, the dispute has already hurt relations between Kahnawake and the surrounding municipalities; the damage is done. It is worth noting that this will be the first land dispute since Mohawk boundaries were established by France in the 17th century in which Mohawk territory has expanded.¹⁸ Their boundaries have continuously eroded and this year marks the first victory in over three hundred years. Even so, if future land reclamation efforts are marred with animosity and hostile political bouts, social divides will deepen. Diplomacy, an understanding of historical antecedents, and open communication must characterize future disputes.

PURSuing ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND SELF-RELIANCE

“In a nutshell, to sum it up, we’ve moved from this insular view that we can do it by ourselves, generate all these jobs on our own; community owned businesses and enterprises that can hire Mohawks and give them a living wage and everyone will be happy without learning French or travelling. Well that’s a pipe dream and we knew it and we had to actually convince people to go to school and get a job. What we got back from our political leadership was, ‘No, we want you to make jobs to suit the labour force, we want you to start a company that hires unskilled labour and that’s profitable’. This is a futile course. All these factors conspired to say, ‘this is wrong, we have enough resources to

¹⁵ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

¹⁶ Interview with Dwayne Zacharie (Chief Peacekeeper of Kahnawake). June 20, 2017.

¹⁷ Daniel Rowe. “Judge Rules in Kahnawake’s Favour, Council in Quebec City Today.” *The Eastern Door*, 15 August 2017, <http://www.easterndoor.com/2017/08/15/judge-rules-in-kahnawakes-favour/>. Accessed 18 August 2017.

¹⁸ Joan Holmes. “Kahnawake Mohawk Territory: From Seigneurie to Indian Reserve”. National Claims Research Workshop, 9 November 2006, Ottawa. Web. <http://www.joanholmes.ca/KahnawakePaper.pdf>

bring good jobs into the labour force here'. The real problem is we don't have enough Mohawks that are skilled enough to take those jobs. That's the bigger problem. We have well over 1000 non-Natives working in Kahnawake, with Kahnawake people looking for work".

- Bud Morris, COO of the Tewatonhi'saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission

MUTUAL INTERESTS AND RECIPROCATION

Before analyzing the economic problems that Kahnawake faces in order to become self-reliant and thus interconnected with the surrounding economies in a balanced and respectful way, there must be an understanding of some of the actions taken by non-Indigenous communities. Racist predispositions or even distrust based on race has continued to surface, worsening existing relationships. Bud Morris recounts a recent case: "A good example is our most recent attempt to regionalize our economy by starting a wind farm in Saint Cyprien. Seventy-one percent of the people that they polled said they did not support the project because there were Mohawks that were a project proponent... How do we build bridges together, or at least start a dialogue? So three years ago we had a strategic project planning meeting, we invited the whole region more or less and we had really good dialogue... And with the mayors, we've had varying degrees of success with the mayors but they've actually sabotaged that by launching a lawsuit preventing the transfer of lands to return to Kahnawake". Here Mr. Morris is referring to the aforementioned Highway 30 dispute. This wind farm would have strengthened relationships with other economies and companies as well as improved the entire regional economy. Non-Indigenous municipalities need to address racial bias in these decisions.

ECONOMIC AND WORKFORCE DIVERSIFICATION

For Kahnawake itself, the economy is unique. It is a First Nations reserve economy, which means it is subject to the Indian Act, but it is also urban and close to major economic centers, notably Montreal. That being said, it has much of the same problems as isolated reserves. The challenge most frequently referred to is the lack of economic diversity. In the past sixty years or so, the Kahnawake economy has been dominated by the iron working and tobacco industries. The remaining private sector jobs are "basically unskilled labour [with] very few knowledge industries... two of the largest employers are playground poker: the largest single employer [of around] 450 employees, all unskilled labour, a few in management positions and ninety percent aren't from Kahnawake. The other is center solutions back office operations for design, marketing, [and] HR: 350 employees, 40 or 45 from Kahnawake", explains Bud Morris.¹⁹ The tradition of the iron work and tobacco industries contributes to the low rate of education. Again, Bud Morris clarifies, "You're making 30 dollars an hour in tobacco industry and you don't have a high school diploma, dropped out in grade 8, [why would you] now you want to work for 11.25 [after graduating university]". However, the economic landscape is

¹⁹ Interview with Bud Morris (CEO, Tewatonhi'saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

changing and these in industries will no longer support the community as they once did. Another tier of the economy are social services, which are comprehensive in Kahnawake; as Mr. Morris says, they'll take care of you 'from womb to tomb'. A majority of these jobs go to women.²⁰ The remaining tier is unemployment and social assistance. Twenty years ago, when the Economic Development Commission started, this remaining portion was much smaller. Kyle Delisle contextualizes: "Between 1995 to 2005, things were really going great. There was no issue. If people were looking for a job they could find a job. The tobacco industry was booming. A third of our workforce was employed in the tobacco industry, a third in the public sector and roughly a third in the private sector. The EDC was created in the midst of this booming economy with really a mandate to create revenues in the community".²¹ However, in 2016 that mandate changed from producing higher revenues to providing employment opportunities for the community; this means education, vocational training and career advising.²²

In 2011, one in three females between the ages of 15 and 24 necessitated social assistance.²³ Unemployment for men is heavily dependent on market fluctuations for the iron work and tobacco industries but hovers around a similar figure.²⁴ Government assistance and lack of economic diversity are the defining features of First Nations communities suffering from injurious economic dependency. One of the main difficulties in attracting new industry and providing economic stimulation - apart from an overwhelmingly unskilled workforce - is the impact of the Indian Act on First Nations reserves.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE INDIAN ACT

"We don't technically own the land, we possess it, and a bank can't seize land because a non-Native can't own the land. So it makes it very difficult. That's part of the economic disadvantage you know so it's about trying to find ways to move past that but without giving up our rights. These are rights that were fought for and that we exercise on a daily basis so it's a big issue and very difficult to try to move around that".

- Greg Horn, Editor-in-Chief of Kahnawake News

"The government structure here is not seen as legitimate. They can pass a law, half the community is not going to obey it, they can't enforce it. You can pass a commercial law; no one will follow it. They aren't seen as legitimate because the government system was imposed on us. It doesn't reflect culturally how we select our own leaders".

- Bud Morris, COO of Tewatohi'saktha Kahnawake
Economic Development Commission

²⁰ Interview with Kyle Delisle (CEO, Tewatohi'saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Kahnawake Economic Development Commission. *16th Annual Report*. (Kahnawake: Kahnawake Economic Development Commission, 2016). Web. http://tewa.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Tewa-ANNUALREPORT-2015_16-FINAL_WEB.pdf

²³ Personal Correspondence with Kyle Delisle. "Re: Kahnawake Education Statistics". Received by Alex Morison. 20 July 2017.

²⁴ Interview with Kyle Delisle (CEO, Tewatohi'saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

The Indian Act dominates conditions for First Nations across the country; it defines the term Indigenous, chooses who *is* Indigenous in the eyes of the government and law, and provides restrictions, legalities and rights to those individuals. This dichotomy – determining Indigenous regulations while offering them additional rights – presents a dilemma: The Indian Act cannot be dissolved for all of its iniquities because the rights exercised by the Indigenous, their economic systems and their governance structures used for generations would then cease. For our purposes, the Act’s land and taxation provisions weigh heavily on economic development efforts. To start, “reserve lands are not subject to seizure under legal process... In addition, the real and personal property of an Indian or a band situated on reserve is not subject to charge, pledge, mortgage, attachment, levy, seizure... or execution in favour... of any person other than an Indian or band”.²⁵ This may be seen as favourable for First Nations, however, this also, in effect, reduces “access to financing for economic development” since land or property cannot be used as capital or collateral against a loan.²⁶ Furthermore, reserve lands may be expropriated for public purposes by a province, municipality or corporation, provided it is authorized by Parliament or provincial legislature.²⁷ In other words, a provision that has the illusion of good intent effectively deprives on-reserve First Nations’ access to financial capital while still allowing the government to justify land expropriation; the very thing the Act claims to protect against. The RCAP summarizes:

*“The Indian Act removed Indian lands and property from the Canadian economic realm and set them aside in enclaves. Here, creditors and bankers are reluctant to enter because they cannot exercise their rights in case of default; provincial governments are reluctant to enter because it is an area of exclusive federal jurisdiction; individual entrepreneurs are reluctant to enter because they perceive that reserves are inhospitable to their interests; and band councils have experienced considerable uncertainty and restriction in terms of their capacity to regulate the business environment”.*²⁸

In addition, on-reserve First Nations are not subject to taxation. This provides further rationale to stay on-reserve while dissuading non-Native businesses to enter; in other words, a reinforcement of economic isolation.

The Indian Act also dictates band governance structures and defines the council’s powers.²⁹ This exterior imposition of government left many communities regarding the council as illegitimate and has in fact brought considerable corruption to band councils across the country. Kahnawake is no exception; testimonials of rejecting council authority and leadership were numerous. In addition to illegitimacy, there exists substantial political uncertainty in Kahnawake which discourages corporate and outside business interest.

²⁵ Georges Erasmus and René Dussault. *Volume 2, Restructuring the Relationship: Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. Ottawa: The Commission, 1996. Print. Pp. 780-81.

²⁶ Ibid., 781.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 783.

²⁹ Indian Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. I-5). Retrieved from the Justice Laws website: <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>

Kyle Delisle explains: “You can’t live in a bubble. We need to continue to reach out and build these relationships, and quite frustratingly, we tell the council this... we need to be politically stable, and they’ll agree and [then] they’ll turn around and go against what we need to do”.³⁰ The council has authority over the Economic Development Commission; the economic mandate and allocation of capital funds of Kahnawake comes from the council. This has proven to be a difficult relationship and somewhat one-sided; many of the recommendations from the Economic Commission has been met with deaf ears. Inner strife obstructs economic interconnectivity with other communities. Without harmony and political unity, the community cannot pursue economic paths to incentivize foreign investment and businesses to participate in Kahnawake’s economic development.

THE URGENCY OF EDUCATION

“Ninety percent go to elementary school in Kahnawake, about 50 percent go to school in high schools outside Kahnawake. So we have half of all high school kids that don’t know many people from outside Kahnawake and it breeds this jingoism, nationalism, ‘we’re better than them’, ‘they’re out to get us’”.

- Kyle Delisle, CEO of Tawatohi’saktha Kahnawake
Economic Development Commission

“Education. I really believe we need to educate ourselves to get to know our neighbours. It’s easy to say ‘I don’t like them, oh they speak French’... but if you get to know somebody and you get to know where they’re coming from, you get to open up a dialogue. I think there isn’t enough discussion, I think we’re all still living in our silos still and we’re not really cohabitating”.

- Dwayne Zacharie, Chief Peacekeeper

Finally, education is perhaps the most important aspect to Kahnawake’s social isolation. Every member of the community consulted for this study established education as the most effective vehicle to alleviate stigma, mutual antagonism, economic disadvantage and other components of social isolation. Kahnawake has a unique relationship with education. It was one of the first Indigenous communities in Canada to have independent education. In 1978 the Kahnawake Survival School (high school) was opened and continues to this day.³¹ Focusing on “cultural and linguistic immersion and academic excellence, [this school was] community funded, the infrastructure was built by the community and... has created its own curriculum”.³² In addition, Kahnawake has recently embarked on resolute efforts to revitalize the Mohawk language. Mohawk is now part of school curricula and Kahnawake offers full-time, intensive adult community programs. This effort to produce Mohawk speakers is essential to community identity; it cannot be omitted from any further efforts to improve education or inter-community bonds. The community’s pride in culture and cultural sovereignty is in fact a necessary element to strengthening relationships outside Kahnawake; as Greg Horn says, “the language and

³⁰ Interview with Kyle Delisle (CEO, Tawatohi’saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

³¹ Chelsea Vowel. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues in Canada* (Highwater Press, 2016). Pp 280.

³² Ibid.

culture goes hand in hand”.³³ The implication here is that this is an additional workload for students and adults alike when considering curriculum modifications.

RESISTANCE AND RECONCILIATION THROUGH LANGUAGE

“When I was growing up you never went to Lachine alone and you never went alone at night. Conversely, if you were from Lachine you never came here. So there was always this French-Mohawk tension. And it certainly didn’t help in 1990. The prejudices that were hidden away for centuries were not far from the ground, or hidden from the ground.”

- Bud Morris, COO of Tewatonhi’saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission

“The stories used to be in Lasalle and Lachine, ‘don’t go out at night the Mohawks are going to get you’. But it’s the same way here, ‘be careful of those French people you know because they might get you and might change who you are’. But it’s 2017 now and there are many, many things that have changed and for our youth it’s important that they learn to exist in the world that we have today. It’s important to know your culture but also to know your neighbour and know their language and their culture.”

- Dwayne Zacharie, Chief Peacekeeper

Perhaps the most unambiguous and recognized cause of Kahnawake’s social isolation is the language barrier. Unfortunately, the solution is not so straight forward. Mohawks in Kahnawake generally speak English and Mohawk with few pursuing education in French. Much of the unwillingness to learn French, the dominant language of the periphery, has historical roots. There were two major social phenomena occurring simultaneously throughout the 20th century: tensions escalated between Mohawks and French authorities and society; and the primary form of employment, ironworking, brought increasing numbers of Mohawks to English speaking regions in the United States. Bud Morris sums up the concurrence: “As soon as we lost economic commonality we didn’t seem to get along as well”.³⁴ The preference to work in America rather than Canada is itself a form of protest of Canadian injustice. Dwayne Zacharie explains, “there are a lot of people who don’t want to go work in Montreal they’d rather go to the U.S. and work in iron work. People don’t want to have anything to do with Quebec or Canada for that matter.”³⁵

The introduction of French into Kahnawake curricula has failed in the past. Again, Dwayne Zacharie communicates the Mohawk perspective: “People from Kahnawake are very strong willed, very strong spirited and very proud... when someone comes around and says ‘you have to do this, you have to learn this language’, people they fight against that...I know when I was in school everyone refused to learn French because it was forced on us. To this day, French is struggling to be taught here”.³⁶ There are many similar testimonials. Greg Horn summarizes the problem, “No matter how much French you give people, they aren’t going to be a French speaker because you are forcing them.”³⁷

³³ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

³⁴ Interview with Bud Morris (COO, Tewatonhi’saktha Kahnawake Economic Development Commission). May 30, 2017.

³⁵ Interview with Dwayne Zacharie (Chief Peacekeeper of Kahnawake). June 20, 2017.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

The solution reveals itself in history. Again, Greg Horn explains how French was once a dominant second language in Kahnawake until “iron work took root as the dominant career and iron work took people outside of Kahnawake for work in places like New York, Boston and Detroit and on the west coast, [then] English became the dominant language”.³⁸ The successful and voluntary adoption of a foreign language has always been for economic reasons. This exemplifies the necessity of a holistic, intersectional effort to alleviate Kahnawake’s social isolation. Once economic interdependence and interconnectivity - as opposed to dependence - occurs, the desire to learn French will be a natural contingency without the quality of imposition. That being said, there exists an additional consideration and obstacle. Greg Horn explains and historicizes:

*“[We] started losing Mohawk because of the residential school experience. Parents who suffered through residential school or even Indian day school in Kahnawake started being beaten [for] speaking our language. Parents consciously didn’t teach their children our language... there has been a push since the 70s to revitalize Mohawk, almost like a cultural revolution going on with the Mohawk language. But now people are starting to see that you also need French. They started a French immersion program at a catholic school as a pilot program to see how it would translate, but at the same time you are sacrificing the kids’ Mohawk time”.*³⁹

The commitment imparted on the individual to complete the current adult Mohawk language programs in order to become a fluent speaker is substantial; akin to a full-time job of two or three years. Correspondingly, the commitment to produce a tri-lingual community is burdensome. Though Mohawk is now part of school curricula in Kahnawake, adding French to this workload is a difficulty that has yet to be surmounted.

POST SECONDARY FIGURES AND IMPLICATIONS

Kahnawake’s high school dropout rates are well below Canada’s First Nations average: 12% of Mohawk young adults between the ages 20-24 do not possess a high school diploma.⁴⁰ In stark comparison, a Canada-wide 2016 report concluded that only four in ten First Nation young adults living on-reserve possess a high school diploma.⁴¹ In 2011 Kahnawake’s high school dropout rate was twice that of the present figure, situated at around 24%. The reason for the decrease is “due in large part to having the Regional Adult Education Center located within Kahnawake where people can get their high school diploma while prior to 2012 they would have had to go outside of Kahnawake”.⁴² The beneficial effect of having educational institutions on reserve is unequivocal and supported both in the TRC and RCAP recommendations.

³⁸ Interview with Greg Horn (Editor-in-Chief, Kahnawake News). June 13, 2017.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Personal communications with Kyle Delisle. “Re: Kahnawake Education Statistics”. Received by Alex Morison. 20 July 2017.

⁴¹ Barry Anderson and John Richards. “Students in Jeopardy: An Agenda for Improving Results in Band-Operating Schools” *C.D. Howe Institution Commentary*, no. 444, 2016. Pp. 1.

⁴² Delisle, Kyle. “Re: Kahnawake Education Statistics”. Received by Alex Morison. 20 July 2017.

Though Kahnawake is not in such dire circumstances as other First Nations communities concerning high school completion, stronger associations between secondary school and postsecondary institutions in the surrounding areas is necessary. In addition to this, having post secondary institutions on reserve would also be extremely effective, though costly. Post secondary completion is essential to increasing economic self-reliance - once again, being a necessary component to improving relations with surrounding communities - as well as mitigating jingoism and stigmas. The figures concerning higher education in Kahnawake are a little more troubling. Kyle Delisle explains: "Regarding post secondary, in 2011 for the ages between 25 to 29 years old, 51% had graduated from a trade/vocational school, 28% had graduated from CEGEP, and only 7% had graduated with a Bachelor's degree (0% for Master's or PhD). In 2016, for the ages between 25 to 35 years old, 29% had graduated from a trade/vocational school, 16% from CEGEP, 9% had a Bachelor's degree, and 4% had a post-graduate diploma".⁴³ These low rates are concerning considering the national average of university graduation (the possession of a university degree) hovers around 25%.⁴⁴

Providing further funding is not, however, the crux of the problem. The effort to try to increase these numbers must take into account the existence of Mohawk anxiety and discomfort in these institutions. Furthermore, Indigenous courses, Indigenous teachers, Mohawk language courses, safe-houses and clubs for First Nations, easy access and transportation to off-reserve institutions and other initiatives which will be addressed in the recommendations section. These low graduation rates are also part and parcel to Kahnawake's economic landscape; lack of opportunity to acquire required training on-reserve lowers incentive to pursue a variety of professions. Once again, a holistic approach must be adopted to strengthen Kahnawake's economy, breadth and level of scholarship, and self-reliance in order to alleviate disadvantageous or prejudiced associations with other communities and provide interconnectivity between them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TO THE CANADIAN GOVERNMENT

- Additional funding for First Nation houses and clubs on campus to alleviate well-documented and detrimental anxiety and depression, felt by a sizeable portion of First Nations students studying off-reserve.
- Subsidized, accessible, and efficient transportation to and from institutions commonly attended by First Nations students with the aims to allow students to continue to live on-reserve while studying off-reserve. In Kahnawake's case, this access refers to institutions in Montreal and surrounding municipalities.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Statistics Canada. "Education." Statistics Canada, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/12-581-x/2016000/edu-eng.htm>. Accessed 25 August 2017.

- Greater single-student and infrastructure funding from the Canadian government in order to optimize continuation from secondary to postsecondary education. The source for this recommendation is Kahnawake’s official statement in reaction to the failed First Nations Education Act and multiple statements of the council and Kahnawake Education Centre. Chronic underfunding has greatly affected Mohawk high school drop out rates and postsecondary attendance.⁴⁵⁴⁶
- Commitment to total consultation and joint strategy with Indigenous peoples to generate new legislation and funding practices that will eliminate the educational and employment gap between First Nations and the general population in Canada as well as the gaps between on- and off-reserve First Nations (paraphrased from sections 7,8,9 of the TRC).
- In line with the 57th TRC Call-to-Action, provide subsidized education for public servants and educators on the “history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties, and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism”.⁴⁷
- After satisfactory consultation with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake, community members, and board members of the Economic Development Commission, fund and develop a strategy and proposal for constructing a post-secondary institution on-reserve.⁴⁸ The programs offered should be determined by the consultations as well as practical, economic needs of the community.
 - The institution should be largely staffed by community members, this requires training for the education, administration and maintenance staff. It is also important to provide “competitive working conditions so communities do not need to rely on unseasoned staff... and an unsustainably high turnover among staff”.⁴⁹
- Provide further subsidy for on-line, vocational and co-op programs that allow Mohawks to study in Kahnawake.
- In line with the 84th TRC Call-to-Action, provide programs to train Indigenous for positions in the Canadian media while providing non-Indigenous in the media educational courses on Indigenous history and culture so as to improve Indigenous representation in the mainstream media.
- Make amendments to the Indian Act concerning the technicalities of the ‘possession’ of land (sections 20, 56, 57, 58) in which First Nations may use their land as capital in

⁴⁵ Kahnawake Education Center. *Kahnawake Education Responsibility Act*. Kahnawake: Kahnawake Public School System, 2000, <http://kecedu.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Kahnawake-Education-Responsibility-Act-2.pdf>

⁴⁶ Kahnawake Education Center. *Kahnawà:ke Position on the First Nations Education Act*. Kahnawake Public School System, 2013, <http://www.kahnawake.com/org/docs/KahnawakePositionFNEA-StatementFINAL-Dec18-2013.pdf>

⁴⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, 2015. Web. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

⁴⁸ It is a common understanding that the lack of on-reserve institutions has been a factor in the “tragic deaths of too many First Nations students over the years”. - Chelsea Vowel. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues in Canada* (Highwater Press, 2016). Pp 279.

⁴⁹Chelsea Vowel. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit issues in Canada* (Highwater Press, 2016). Pp 279.

order to access financial capital. These amendments must be approved by Indigenous councils and must be regionally specific. The safeguard of current Indigenous land rights is of the utmost importance; the implications of these amendments may operate outside of the conventional Canadian ownership and taxation structure. Alternatively, there may also be amendments to sections concerning federal loans to First Nations (section 70) in order to confront the difficulties of providing financial capital to on-reserve First Nations to create a more competitive business environment.

- Make amendments to the Indian Act concerning the imposition of governance structures, regulatory powers, and election methods of 'Indian bands' and councils (section 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81) in order to impart legitimacy to 'Indian' governments. These amendments should be regionally and band specific and only implemented after satisfactory consultation with the First Nations of the respective region.

TO THE REGIONAL AND SURROUNDING MUNICIPALITIES

- Commit to the 57th TRC Call-to-Action summarized above.
- Commit to recognizing the Seigneurie of Sault St. Louis territorial claim and consult it before taking stance or opposition to future land disputes and resettlements.
- Commit to regional economic strategy and cooperation meetings to integrate the regional economy in a respectful, balanced and prosperous manner with focus on joint projects with satisfactory consultation with the Mohawk Council of Kahnawake and the Kahnawake Economic Development Commission.
- Fund anti-racist campaigns in high schools and public service institutions.

TO OFF-RESERVE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

- Provide Mohawk-centric courses. This will encourage Mohawk youth to attend those institutions while continuing their own cultural education.⁵⁰ However, the most important effect of incorporating Indigenous lifeways, pedagogy and language in off-reserve institutions is educating non-Indigenous students of other cultures and histories. Program content may include the history of land expropriation and claims, diplomas and degrees in local Indigenous languages (in line with the 16th TRC Call-to-Action), and history of individual Indigenous nations, including that of the Mohawk. This will help alleviate stigma, ignorance, and misrepresentation by the non-Indigenous community.⁵¹
- Employ Mohawk and other First Nations professors in off-reserve postsecondary institutions to teach Indigenous-centric and Indigenous linguistic courses.

⁵⁰ This is supported by the expansion of New Zealand's Wananga programs (Indigenous postsecondary institutions teaching Indigenous knowledge, by Indigenous and for Indigenous students). They include a large, central institution that is almost entirely Indigenous but also offer smaller satellite campuses in association with other institutions; a model that could easily be applied to institutions in Canada. Between 2001 and 2006, the period of Wananga implementation, there was a 72.8% increase in Maori (Indigenous of New Zealand) bachelor degree or higher qualification attainment because of the programs. - Silta Associates. *Comparison of National Strategies in Indigenous Postsecondary Education: Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America* (Silta Associates, 2010).

⁵¹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Winnipeg, 2015. Web. http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

CONCLUSION

Fostering connectedness between Kahnawake and the surrounding region necessitates a holistic restructuring of relationships. The foundational element of this reconciliation is Kahnawake's self reliance; Mohawk sovereignty and cultural autonomy is paramount in generating respect and trust. The region is polarized and conflicted, marred by events of the past and current inequities. This history must be acknowledged and met with conciliatory action. Economic interdependencies, the eradication of education and wage gaps, and mutual support will benefit Kahnawake and the surrounding municipalities alike. Open dialogue and genuine Indigenous consultation are necessary to enact the above recommendations. The mistakes of the past are plenty but from them come clear lessons; antagonism and inequity weakens the whole while cooperation and connectedness elevates it.

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