The Haudenosaunee and the Resilience of Culture
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I. Introduction

Inattention to "primitive" societies is a great failing of written history. This failing derives from a particularly European chauvinism that views "undeveloped" societies as inert, motionless, an attitude typified by the words of E.E. Rich. "The Indian way of life was old and deeply ingrained. It did not change as the white men drove their own trade over the Rockies and into the Pacific slope (Rich, 1960, p. 40; emphasis mine)." This idea that the Native way of life is static and unchanging, even in the face of the massive onslaught of European trade, technology, warfare and disease, is at best an oversimplification. Although Native traditions and cultural patterns may well have shown remarkable resilience to the Europeans’ influence, they were certainly affected by the newcomers and all that they brought with them. Societies live not in isolation, but in relationship to nature and to the other societies with which they come into contact. The degree of one society's effect on another may well be related to the degree of novelty, power, and aggressiveness of that society, three characteristics that the Europeans invading the North American continent had in good measure.

One cannot hope to capture an entire society's fabric in a few pages, but an attempt to tease out some of the more salient features of Haudenosaunee society at the time of contact and to trace their development should include the influence of contact and trade with Europeans. The effects of the fur trade on the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), one of many societies in North America at that time, and one of the most powerful, were widespread, pervasive and transformative, but they were absorbed and dulled by the resistance of the Haudenausaunee. The diplomatic task of playing off two imperial powers against each other is a fundamental feature of the story and helps us to understand the ability of the Haudenausaunee to survive. An effort to tell such a story first requires some basic foundational concepts to be laid out, their meanings defined and their use justified. These concepts include community, clan, nation, and the kin-ordered mode of production.

By community, I mean the group of individuals living within one location or village, usually comprising several longhouses, each of which may house several families, all of the same clan (see more
on clans below). I attempt to avoid using the word “tribe”, since it carries so much rhetorical and mythological, not to mention academic, baggage. The term has many different meanings for many different people (as is true of many terms, of course), especially as regards Euro-American constructions of Native American societies. “Rather than reflecting the realities of Iroquois social and political life it is, at best, an index of Euro-American perceptions of an indigenous minority (Campisi, 1982, p. 182).” According to Campisi, “[F]ew if any tribes existed in North America at the time of European contact; they were created and subsequently evolved in response to Euro-American political requirements (p.165). Although the Haudenosaunee are generally divided among five distinct groups (the Mohawk, the Oneida, the Onondaga, the Cayuga, and the Seneca and later, six with the addition of the Tuscarora), and these are sometimes referred to as tribes, I will refrain from this characterization, in favor of the term “nation.”

Clan, as I will use it here, refers to a grouping of matrilineages according to descent (along the female line), which share common traditions. This structure exists within and across communities, i.e., more than one clan resides in a community, and clans reside in more than one community. The origin of clans in Haudenosaunee society, based on the cosmogonic myth and ethno-archaeological conjecture, was probably previously independent communities that later came to live together but kept some sense of difference (Richter, 1992, p.15). The incest taboo operates here, making an important distinction that will be elaborated below: members of the same clan could not marry.

“Nation,” as I use it here, will mean a group of communities in one area that share a common distinct language and that identify themselves as a distinct people (Campisi, 1982, p. 172). I use these criteria to separate the Mohawk from the Oneida, for example, who were located next to each other at the eastern end of the Great League, shared cultural traditions and weltanschauungen and spoke related languages, but thought of themselves as distinct from each other, even though the ideological underpinnings of the Ganonsyoni (literally, "The Lodge Extended Lengthwise", what Europeans would call the Great League) held that the two nations were connected as brothers even though they spoke languages that were not mutually intelligible. Note, however, that this definition of nation differs from the Euro-American conception in that it says nothing about political organization or ties of obligation. It is
also important to note that the extent of the cultural variation among the five nations requires further study before the proper distinction can be drawn between them.

In order sensibly to define or discuss the kin-ordered mode of production, one ought first to discuss kinship. Like Eric Wolf I use as reference point for the definition of kinship Claude Levi-Strauss’ indicator, the incest taboo (Wolf, 1975, p. 90). Kinship among the Haudenosaunee is categorized by maternal lineage affiliation. Since within a longhouse all the families are of the same lineage (ohwachira) and since the practice of adoption from external peoples was a commonplace (see the discussion of mourning wars below) kinship, at least among the Haudenosaunee, derives from coresidence as well as genealogy. Because marriage cannot take place between members of the same maternal lineage nor the same clan, we have in the ohwachira the basis of the incest taboo (Richter, 1992, p. 21). My discussion of the kin-ordered mode of production will therefore necessarily be at the level of the lineage, although it will include discussion of interactions between clan members within a community as well.

In order to avoid confusion, I should say why I choose to specify a kin-ordered mode of production rather than a primitive communist mode, as others have for Haudenosaunee society. I do not believe Haudenosaunee society can be properly called communistic, since the producers of surplus are not the appropriators of surplus. The production and appropriation of surplus in Haudenosaunee society is based on kinship ties and gender roles within that framework, and so, following Wolf, I shall refer to kin-ordered mode of production as the appropriate one. This is quite similar to Sahlins’ domestic mode of production (Sahlins, 1972, pp. 76-7).

But why talk about modes of production at all, when we discuss Haudenosaunee history? By selecting a tool with which to analyze Haudenosaunee society, I am also imposing a particular framework on the society in question, imprinting that society with my own stamp. The history of concrete societies must be constructed by specifying the concrete processes and their inter-relationships within those societies (Amariglio, 1984, p. 9). Which processes to focus on is therefore an important question, the answer to which casts the history in its own particular light. As such, I do not claim that this is the only way to view Haudenosaunee society and its changes in the years in question.
Rather, I find that an analysis of the mode of production, its class and non-class processes and their interactions both within Haudenosaunee society and with the European and Native societies with which it was in contact throughout this period is most useful for my purpose, since it is based in what is an important human activity in any society: the process of providing for the means of survival. I shall trace the changing patterns of Haudenosaunee life through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in a Marxian framework. I shall argue that the kin-ordered mode of production was dominant in Haudenosaunee society at the time of contact, that this mode of production was a complex set of processes, some of which were deeply altered by the interaction between the Haudenosaunee and the Europeans and some of which showed remarkable resilience in the face of incredible changes in the world in which the Haudenosaunee lived. Further, I will contend that, although the changes brought about by the advent of the Europeans and the expansion of the fur trade were numerous and wide-ranging, they altered neither the foundation upon which Haudenosaunee society was built nor the mode of production itself, but altered the form of that foundation. I shall submit that it was not until this foundation, constructed from cultural traditions embodied in the Cosmogonic Myth and the Deganawidah Epic, was directly attacked by Quaker missionaries that the dominant mode of production in Haudenosaunee society was in danger of being supplanted.

I have made use of secondary sources throughout the paper. The organization of the paper is as follows. In section II, I will briefly sketch the history of the fur trade through the eighteenth century. Section III outlines the political economy of the Haudenosaunee roughly at the time of contact. In section IV I will analyze the fur trade's effects on the Haudenosaunee political economy. Section V contains some concluding remarks and thoughts about the influences upon and the changes of Haudenosaunee society.

II. The History of the Fur Trade

The Dutch originated the fur trade near the Great Lakes after Henry Hudson's voyage up the river that now bears his name. Establishing themselves at Fort Orange (modern-day Albany, New York), the Dutch West Indies Company was content to trade with the Natives in the vicinity and through mutually developed practice, kept good relations with them, unlike their brethren in the southern part of modern-day New York State who busied themselves with expanding their domains by
slaughtering the Native populations. At that time the Haudenosaunee were “a relatively weak and unimportant group, but very well situated to trade with the Dutch (Wesler, 1983, p. 645-6).” After conquering the colony the British picked up the trade and expanded it, eventually reaching Lake Ontario, where they ran into competition with traders from New France (Norton, 1974, p.6). This competition for the fur trade and for empire in the New World was to be highly beneficial for the Haudenosaunee, at this point the strongest local Native confederacy.

This is not to say that they might not have been better off had the Europeans never arrived, but merely to point out that this rivalry allowed the Haudenosaunee to play one foreign entity against the other for a time, making the best of a bad situation, and to stave off being overrun by one or the other as had the Natives to the south by the Dutch in the seventeenth century. In fact the Haudenosaunee maintained their grip on the trade with frightful devastation of their own. Beginning in the 1640s, they made war on the Huron, the Erie, the Neutrals, the Petuns, the Susquehannock and the Illinois, destroying them utterly and driving the remnants westward. In 1677, when the treaty of the Covenant Chain ended warfare within the Northern British colonies, the Haudenosaunee could concentrate their efforts northward and westward. In the late seventeenth century, however, they attacked the Ottawa whom they could not defeat, and this failure marked a turning point in the Haudenosaunee militant phase, after which they would be very much on the defensive. According to Norton, retaining middleman control over the fur trade is an inadequate reason for the aggressive Haudenosaunee militancy since it ignores the fact that Haudenausaunee warfare was enabled by firearms obtained from the Dutch (Norton, 1974, p. 10). Even an explanation including firearms is inadequate, however, as detailed below in the description of the changes brought about in warfare by the Europeans and the fur trade.

In the late seventeenth century, Haudenosaunee diplomatic policy aimed to secure the right to hunt north of the Great Lakes and to ensure the ability to act as middlemen between Albany and the tribes to the north and west (Norton, 1974, p. 17). By 1700 there was a turnaround in policy, as a result of the Haudenosaunee's inability to maintain active warfare on their rivals and to defend themselves against the French incursions into their territory in the late 1690s. The Haudenosaunee finally made peace with the Ottawas, whose trading fleets were still in jeopardy from Haudenosaunee war
parties. The Ottawa could now travel through Haudenosaunee land to get to Albany, and the Haudenosaunee could hunt in the west (Norton, 1974, p. 21). In 1701, the Haudenosaunee made treaties with New France and Albany which enabled them to stay neutral in wars between the two imperial powers while gaining recognition of Haudenosaunee hunting grounds from the French and at least the obligation to protect them from the English (Norton, 1974, pp. 24-5). This diplomatic feat was to serve the Haudenosaunee well and enable them to regain their strength, after the previous century’s devastation (see section on demographic changes below).

There were two keys to the Haudenosaunee position. Because they were the only thing that stood in the way of cheaper British goods’ competing with French goods in the west, the French needed the Haudenosaunee where they were to protect French access to furs in the north and west. On the other hand, because of geography and the French, the British could not prevent the Haudenosaunee from playing the middlemen between them and other peoples. After the defeat of the French in the 1760s, however, the Haudenosaunee were isolated in the midst of a great expanse of British territory and so lost their power in dealing with the British, who could now easily circumvent them to gain whatever trade they would. The Haudenosaunee mostly sided with the British in the War for Independence but were so divided that many moved to Canada after the American victory. American independence would mark the end of the Haudenosaunee’s effectiveness in maintaining their own independence.

Having briefly surveyed the history of the fur trade as it involved the Haudenausaunee, we may now move on to consider Haudenausaunee society as it was at the time of contact. The initial period of contact and the fur trade left Haudenausaunee society transformed, but in particular and interesting ways.

III. Haudenosaunee Political Economy

The Cultural Construction of Gender Roles

We must first remember that societies assign gender roles to individuals in accordance with the individual’s sex and the society’s gender ideology (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 2). Thus the categories woman and man are created by a society. Bonvillain goes on to specify that it is the "sexual division of labor
which assigns roles to individuals on the basis of their biological sex and thereby transforms them into women and men (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 2)." I would hasten to add that the sexual division of authority and responsibilities also plays a part in constructing these roles. These roles are distinct from the strictly biological categories, male and female; there is no necessary one-to-one correspondence between male and man, female and woman. There were and are always exceptions to these assignment rules.

Gender roles, then, as with many things in Haudenosaunee society at the time of contact, were elaborated in the Cosmogonic Myth. As Bonvillain points out, "Myths of origin and the qualities of supernatural beings also reflect cultural attitudes toward human females and males. Religious symbols are especially powerful modes of reinforcing gender concepts, since they are virtually unquestioned - coming, by definition from divine sources (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 4)." The Cosmogonic Myth, as recounted by Richter (1992, pp. 9-11), tells the story of the creation of the earth and has many aspects of Haudenosaunee society encoded within it. It tells the story of the Sky Woman who was pushed through a hole in the sky and fell to the water below, where the Turtle let her lie on his back. With the Muskrat's help, Sky Woman created the earth on top of the Turtle's back. It gives the basis for the geographical layout of society in the longhouse, with pairs of families living across a fire from each other, just as the Sky Woman lived with her husband on either side of a fire, fires being spread out along the length of the longhouse. It provides the basis of the matrilocality and matrilineality of society. And it assigns the economic and political roles to each gender in society. It is the women who take and distribute the product, both of their own cultivation and gathering activities and of the men's hunting. Clan and ohwachira mothers in Haudenosaunee society also appoint (and dismiss) chiefs, tell warriors when to go to war, and decide the fate of captives (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 15; Fenton, 1986, p. 38; Shoemaker, 1995, p. 8).

Haudenosaunee women thus had much more authority and were given much more respect than were European women at the time (Shoemaker, 1995, p. 2). This is important to remember when perusing accounts left by European visitors, almost all men. The accounts of these Europeans condemn the role of women in Haudenosaunee society, since this did not fit their own patriarchal view of advanced society. The sources of women's independence and authority are the principle of individual autonomy, the importance of women's work, the special relationship women had with the earth itself and
the authority in the community brought about by women's childbirth and child care responsibilities (Shoemaker, 1995, p. 7). It was not until the Euro-Americans attacked such bases for women's authority that this authority was eroded.

**The Social Division of Labor**

Gender, age, and kinship were the three primary determinants of individuals' identities and roles in most Native societies (Shoemaker, 1995, p. 5), certainly including the Haudenosaunee. In general, economic tasks are assigned to each individual on the basis of their sex (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 14), thereby, as argued above, assigning gender. Thus, hunting, fishing, clearing land and trading are tasks men perform, while cultivation, gathering, distribution (of their own products and men's) and cooking are tasks that women perform. These roles of each gender are related in the Cosmogonic Myth (Richter, 1992, pp. 19-20). An individual might take on the gender not culturally associated with their sex. As Shoemaker argues, gender is crucial in Native society, but it is also "flexible and variable (Shoemaker, 1995, p. 5)."

Age also differentiates roles, since "old men or ancients full of wisdom have long since graduated from the warrior class, as have the matrons from the younger women (Fenton, 1986, p. 25)." So with age comes a change in roles, both economic and political. Older men do not participate in the hunt, and older women move on to supervisory roles in agriculture.

**The Cultural Basis of Economic Relations**

In Haudenosaunee society it is the ohwachira matron (the oldest woman, generally) who receives the produce of the ohwachira, both the fruits of the hunt and the trade and the harvest from the fields. This appropriation is not the matron’s receiving her personal property for her own use, as Euro-Americans might have perceived it but her receiving common property for distribution as a trustworthy caretaker. Thus there is a class relationship here: older women receive the fruits of younger men and women's work and distribute it on the basis of need as well as position in society. Class positions are not fixed, at least not among women. Younger women can expect to become the appropriators of the surplus as they become older, while men cannot attain this class position. In addition, women supervised field work done by teams, sometimes including men (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 69). "Men often had more
visible public roles but that does not mean they were necessarily more powerful ... [w]omen and men had complementary roles of equal importance, power and prestige (Shoemaker, 1995, p. 5).” Young men went hunting and joined war parties, and these were important activities. Men could be appointed chiefs or sachems when they became older and participate in the community and league councils, always contingent, of course, on their representing the wishes of the community, especially the clan matrons.

All economic relations in Haudenosaunee society are based on the concept of reciprocity. Thus, the two families that lived across from each other in the longhouse shared not only a fire but also their food. Some of the product was distributed to other clans. This reciprocity operates at all levels in society, up to the level of the Ganonsyoni. Property is not private, as in Euro-American society but common, and it is distributed on the basis of need (Richter, 1992, p. 21). Yet the decisions about the distribution of produce are made by the women and in this process we see the imprint of the kin-ordered mode of production, where food is produced, given to the mothers to distribute and distributed by them. We see that this society is not, strictly speaking, communist, if by communism one means not only the production but also the appropriation and distribution of the surplus by the collective as opposed to for the collective.

The Mourning War

Before the advent of the Europeans, warfare served a specifically and almost exclusively cultural purpose. The mourning war was a way of dealing with the death of members of the community, in both an emotional and a physical sense (Richter, 1983, p. 532). The emotional release provided by captives was the ability to wreak vengeance on some of the captives through ritual torture and execution. After this cathartic experience, in which the whole community took part, the mourning members of the community could begin to reenter the normal routines of daily life, from which they had been abstaining, according to tradition. Though vengeance was certainly a motive, the main objective of the mourning war was to obtain captives to replace deceased members of the community. Thus loss of life in battle was neither desired nor glorified but infrequent and stigmatized (Richter, 1983, pp. 534-5). Before contact with Europeans, battles were fought in open confrontations, using wooden armor and stone weapons, and the combat was highly ritualistic. It is highly probable that before contact the Five Nations fought amongst themselves frequently, until the arrival of Deganawidah.
The Interaction Among the Five Nations

The Haudenosaunee are not a nation as such; rather there is a Ganonsyoni, composed of five nations connected by bonds of friendship and ritual, perhaps formed in response to warfare among the five nations (Richter, 1992, p. 31). The Deganawidah Epic details the teaching of rituals, such as the giving of strings of shell beads, wampum, and the speaking of Words of Condolence, to Hiawatha (not the Hiawatha of the Longfellow poem) by the Peacemaker, Deganawidah. These rituals are an alternative means to achieve the mourning war's emotional healing aspect, and eventually, five nations joined together to apply these principles and achieve peace among themselves. Ironically, the Hurons, of whom Deganawidah was one, never accepted the teachings of the Peacemaker and were later destroyed by the Haudenosaunee. The Ganonsyoni, an extension of the traditional living patterns of Haudenosaunee communities, was a great metaphorical longhouse stretching from the Seneca Nation in the west to the Mohawk Nation in the east, with the council fire at Onondaga in the center. This confederation played an important role both in the interactions of the Haudenosaunee with their new European neighbors as well as their Native neighbors and in the European approach to dealing with the Haudenosaunee.

The Ganonsyoni was a loose organization of nations, meeting annually at the council fire at Onondaga. It was the clan matrons who select and advise the sachems who attended the council and spoke for their communities. The Ganonsyoni discussed matters of foreign policy and mediated internal disputes (Wesler, 1983, p. 649). Although decision-making was based on unanimity, there was no power within the Ganonsyoni to enforce decisions, and individual nations or communities could and did act in defiance of decisions made in council (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 63). European negotiators assumed the council spoke for the Haudenosaunee and comprised a “super-ordinate political structure” (Campisi, 1982, p.169). Thus just as they did with gender roles, the Europeans saw Haudenosaunee society through the filter of their own ideology and decided that they were dealing with a state on the European model. This view of the Ganonsyoni as a nation-state was oddly contradictory to the idea that the Natives were not the equals of the Europeans in terms of civilization (Campisi, 1982, p. 173).

The Ganonsyoni is divided in terms of kinship into two moieties, with the Mohawks, Onondaga and Seneca as the Elder Brothers, and the Cayuga and Oneida as the Younger Brothers. One side
would carry out the Condolence ritual for the other side when it had suffered a loss (Campisi, 1982, p. 168; Fenton, 1986, p. 24). Reciprocal obligations were the underlying foundation of the relationships and interactions at every level of Haudenaunee society. The Europeans could not imagine such relations working effectively but were confronted with the fact that among the Haudenosaunee they worked to perfection (Fenton, 1986, p. 25). In dealing with the Haudenosaunee, misunderstanding and ignorance of the true nature of the Ganonsyoni would cause consternation for the Europeans.

IV. The Effects of the Fur Trade

The Nature of the Trade

Networks of exchange existed in North America and Europe long before cultures from the two continents came into contact. For example, the shells used in early wampum by the Haudenosaunee were obtained from the Connecticut coast, copper from the western Great Lakes. Europeans traded with the Orient for spices over long inland routes. The social context and cultural meanings of exchange in the societies of the two continents were quite different by the time trade relations first became established between them. The Europeans were not interested in the kind of trade that the Haudenosaunee, for example, engaged in. The Haudenosaunee and other natives were not economic agents in the sense that Europeans, especially Dutch and British, understood. For the former, the principle of reciprocity regulated most social and economic interactions. In fact, as Rich says, "[T]here was] a persistent reluctance to accept European notions or the basic values of the European approach" on the part of the Natives (1960, p. 45). Indeed, at least the initial trade was in terms set by the Natives, not by the Europeans (Wesler, 1983, p. 643).

Euro-Americans were then and are still prone to impose their own ideology about what motivates people in economic decision-making onto cultures that are decidedly different from their own. John McManus, for example, attempts to characterize the trade behavior of the Montagnais-Naskapi, who lived in the north, by the Saint Lawrence River, in terms of the postulates of neo-classical economics, and he thus discovers rampant irrationality. The problem McManus wants to explain is why the Natives depleted their stock of beaver, forcing them to go in search of new hunting grounds in order to trade. This behavior would be understandable to McManus if hunting grounds were non-exclusive
collective property. The problem then reduces to the tragedy of the commons. But individual Natives had exclusive rights to hunting grounds (McManus, , pp. 38-9). He finally decides that it must be that hunting grounds were not *enforceably* exclusive (which, admittedly may be true), and so, given that knowledge, Native hunters decided to get what they could while they had the opportunity (McManus, , pp. 43-4). But the assumption that the Native hunter was out to maximize some notion of their own welfare is ad hoc, at best.

Seen from the Native point of view spirits, human and otherwise, inhabit the world around us and individuals participate in relationships involving everything around them, including beavers. Economic decisions are made in an entirely different context than the cold, calculating market and so there is no reason to assume that, in hunting, the Native was making an investment decision. And not making the assumption does not take away from Natives in their own environment, does not imply that they were unsophisticated or uncivilized. As Sahlins reminds us, "Economic Man is a bourgeois construction...it is not that hunters and gatherers have curbed their materialistic ‘impulses’: they simply never made an institution of them (Sahlins, 1972, pp. 13-4)."

In trade as well, it is important not to make the mistake of imposing impersonal market dynamics onto interactions that the Natives conceived as very personal exchanges of gifts, and in which natives took part en masse, not as individuals. Abraham Rotstein points out the importance of politics in the fur trade, since "[t]rade was embedded in established political procedures and casual trade between individuals of different tribes did not exist (1972, p. 13)." And "Indian trade was a collective, i.e., tribal or clan activity rather than an individual activity (p. 23)." Rotstein does well to point out these factors, but he claims, inappropriately, that "[e]conomic life had not yet been differentiated as a separate and relatively independent sphere of social existence as in modern society (p. 1)." Of course, this view is more a misconception about modern society than of Native society.

An alternative explanation of the depopulation may be built upon the concept of reciprocity that dominated relations in Haudenosaunee society. Since giving away items was a means of attaining status, via reciprocity, perhaps the ambitions of individual Natives required a steady stream of trade goods that the local beaver population could not sustain. Such an approach avoids the problematic assumption that the hunting of the beaver stock was an investment decision, as the Euro-American economic tradition
The Euro-American construct is couched in a world with personal property rights and does not describe Native society. The alternative explanation above may be wrong and certainly needs some more thought and elaboration, but it has the redeeming quality of being based on the cultural foundations of the actual society in question, rather than the cultural foundations of the investigator.

The Growth of Dependence on European Trade Goods

When E.E. Rich says, referring to the late eighteenth century, "[T]here could be no denying that without trade with Europeans the Indians would have been denied something which was essential to their way of life (Rich, 1960, p. 35)," one must wonder whatever he might mean. Could it be that he thinks Europeans had always been there to provide this unnamed essential ingredient to the Native way of life, or perhaps that Natives were slowly dying out when the Europeans came along to rescue them? If his statement is true of the latter part of the eighteenth century, then it must indicate a radical change in the patterns of life in Native societies since the period before they made contact with Europeans. Unaware of this contradiction, Rich, however, gives no indication of any such dynamic, seeing Native ways of life as static (see quote in section I, above). In fact, the only evidence he gives of this dependence is the willingness of the Native to trade for European goods. But willingness to trade does not economic dependence make. Perhaps the problem is that, as Sahlins notes, "We are inclined to think of hunters and gatherers as poor because they don't have anything; perhaps better to think of them as free (Sahlins, 1972, p. 14)." Sahlins goes on to point out that in many hunter-gatherer societies, people had more leisure time than in our own society.

We must look elsewhere for a broader viewpoint of Haudenosaunee society. Perhaps, as Kit W. Wesler asserts, "Reaction to the influx of exotic items brought changes not only in the material culture of the recipients, but also in their technology, social structure, and ideology, until in many cases the entire way of life was altered beyond recall (Wesler, 1983, p. 641)." The Haudenosaunee traded beaver skin for everything, but especially gun powder, woolens and rum, the last of which they would often be given as presents before the trading began, so as to better be able to take advantage of them (Norton, 1974, p. 33). Perhaps, it was the replacement of traditional skills by European trade goods that produced dependence on those goods by the middle of the seventeenth century (Richter, 1992, p.
By the end of the 1670s, European trade goods dominated Haudenosaunee culture, so the Haudenosaunee had very likely already become dependent on the European trade (Wesler, 1983, p. 651). This dependence and the need for new sources of beaver may have increased women’s power and control (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 64). This is because it was the women who controlled the stocks of food, vital necessities for war and hunting parties. Of course, it also made the role of men more important as well, since for the most part they were the ones doing the hunting and trading.

**Demographic Change and the Character of Warfare**

By the 1640s, mortality rates (defined as percentage of pre-existing populations killed) from diseases brought by Europeans were as high as 50%, and climbed to 75%, perhaps stabilizing at 90-95% in the ensuing decades (Rausch and Schlepp, 1994, pp. 57-8; Stiffarm and Lane, 1992, pp. 31-2, Richter, 1992, pp. 58-9). These population losses added urgency to the demographic and spiritual motivations for the mourning war (Richter, 1983, p. 537; Richter, 1992, pp. 53-8). Also, a crisis of leadership resulted, as old men and women died, thinning the ranks of experienced leaders faster than they could be adequately replaced (Fenton, 1986, p. 38), and depleting the diplomatic ability of the five nations to mediate conflict and avoid warfare.

As early as the 1610s, economic incentives had joined demographic and spiritual motives for mourning wars (Rich, 1960, p. 36). Rich claims that the Haudenosaunee fought other Natives as well as the French in order to control the fur trade as middlemen. Wesler agrees, adding that the Haudenausaunee also sought new hunting grounds after their own had been depleted of beaver (Wesler, 1983, p. 646), whereas Eccles asserts that the Haudenosaunee wanted to dominate the entire region: "[W]hat they sought was power ... rather than mere commercial advantage (Eccles, 1983, p. 343)."

The arrival of firearms from the Dutch at Fort Orange in the first half of the seventeenth century gave the Haudenosaunee a great advantage over their relatively poorly armed neighbors (Wesler, 1983, p. 646). However, when their enemies, also acquired firearms the tactics of warfare were altered forever and casualties were no longer so rare in battle (Richter, 1983, p. 538). The increase in fatalities added fuel to the military fire, since now the mourning war was increasingly providing the motivation for further mourning wars, as well as being unable to keep pace with the losses from warfare, migration and disease (Richter, 1983, p. 542).
It is clear that the arrival of the Europeans and the imperatives of the fur trade added new incentives to, and radically changed the character of, Haudenosaunee warfare. In comparison we have Rotstein's assessment: "Whatever wars the fur trade was later to generate, it is safe to assume that the patterns of war and peace, and the intertribal institutions for dealing with them had already been set (Rotstein, p. 4)." Once again we encounter a static view of Haudenosaunee society that is all too limited, especially for a historian.

Daniel K. Richter gives a more satisfyingly complete description of the changing role of warfare. "By 1675, European diseases, firearms and trade had produced dangerous new patterns of conflict that threatened to derange the traditional functions of the mourning war ... warfare would cease to be a sporadic and specific response to individual deaths and would become instead a constant and increasingly undifferentiated symptom of societies in demographic crisis (Richter, 1983, p. 537)." By the end of the seventeenth century, the mourning war was no longer a viable option, since it was no longer keeping up with the population loss (Richter, 1983, p. 553). The Haudenosaunee turned away from war on the French and their allies and to diplomacy to secure their future existence.

**The Changing Gender Relations in the Community**

In any discussion of Native societies after contact it is important to remember that these societies cannot be presumed not to be profoundly changed by contact. As noted above, traditional societies changed over time and as their relations with other societies changed. So, by the time any European could record what they observed of Native societies, colonial processes had already altered gender relations (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 1). And, as noted before, these Europeans’ assessments of Haudenosaunee society were distorted by their own background in European patriarchal gender relations.

It seems clear that men's hunting became more important in relation to their other activities as dependence on European trade goods grew, since it was their hunting that provided the beaver fur that was to be traded, and that therefore it was "necessary to economic viability of the community and made possible because women were engaged in subsistence agriculture (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 71)." One small footnote to this observation might be that hunting was necessary, after a point, i.e., after the erosion of traditional skills brought about by European trade goods had created the dependency on
those self-same goods. In addition, since women controlled the furs that were brought in and distributed them to trading parties, women's authority in these matters became more important relative to their other power roles. So we see that the fur trade itself, rather than radically altering the gender relations of Haudenosaunee society, served to shift the balance between them so that this balance now relied on different roles from those on which it had previously relied.

The Constancy of the Social Division of Labor

Although the fur trade and European contact in general had an immense impact on Haudenosaunee society, the division of labor remained as it had been, even reinforced by the increased dependence on trade and increased warfare, which made some of both women's and men's roles more important and interdependent (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 16). As noted above, the fur trade itself strengthened certain gender roles for men and women. Also, the greater absence of men from their homes may have increased women's control over domestic production (Bonvillain, 1989, p. 23). The kin-ordered mode of production, then, initially survived the great upheaval of European contact and the fur trade.

V. Conclusion

European trade did not fundamentally transform Haudenosaunee culture. Rather, trade goods were put to traditional uses (Richter, 1992, pp. 75-9). Even new goods, such as alcohol, were incorporated into traditional ways (e.g., alcohol was used to induce spiritual states and visions; Richter, 1992, p. 86). As Bruce Trigger notes, "[I]nstead of breaking down the traditional redistributive system, this new wealth enhanced it (quoted by Wesler, 1983, p. 656)." Other novelties discovered via contact with the Europeans were also appropriated for use in Haudenausaunee culture. Even Christian symbols were selectively appropriated by Haudenosaunee women, without accepting the Jesuits' patriarchal plans for remaking Haudenausaunee society (Shoemaker, 1995, p.20). Important in this context are the similarities between Haudenosaunee and Christian theology, especially the common symbol of the virgin birth, but also the very important place of women in both theologies.

So, although initial contact with the Europeans brought great demographic upheavals and changes in the way of life and death of the Haudenosaunee, and the fur trade brought many new items into use in Haudenosaunee society, these factors did not ultimately break down the cultural basis of
Haudenosaunee society. And these impacts did not alter the mode of production dominant in Haudenosaunee society, rather, they altered the form of the kin-ordered mode of production, which was dominant at the time of contact and remained so throughout the period in question. The impact of the fur trade was to alter the relative importance of production for use and production for exchange (commodity production), the latter becoming more and more important as dependence on trade goods grew. Exchange had always been a factor in Haudenosaunee society, and although its importance changed, its character did not for the Haudenosaunee (as has been noted, the Euro-Americans were at times unaware of the nature of the exchange, as perceived by the Haudenosaunee). The activity whose purpose changed the most was hunting, which became geared towards commodity production. This shift in focus to commodity production was the major change in the form of the kin-ordered mode of production in Haudenosaunee society brought about by the advent of the fur trade.

The inability to maintain autonomy after the defeat of the British in the War for Independence was the death knell of traditional Haudenosaunee culture as it had been. The Quaker missions, beginning in the late eighteenth century, had as their chief aim the imposition of the Euro-American notion of progress: male farming, which would produce the love of private property, and therefore, civilization. Women, of course were to be relegated to household work (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 73). "Assimilationist policies that were explicitly about education, land ownership and religion also called for aligning Indian gender roles to fit Euro-American expectations and intended to restructure the extended family into a patriarchal, nuclear unit (Shoemaker, 1995, pp. 9-10)." Of course, the Jesuits had tried much the same program themselves and been unsuccessful. Resistance to this program was seen as laziness or conspiracy (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 78). Although the Quakers pressured the Seneca to divide their land and institute male ownership, the Seneca hold their land in common to this day (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 79). However, in 1848, women lost the right to choose sachems, in favor of elections from which they were excluded until 1964 (Rothenberg, 1980, p. 81; Bonvillain, 1989, p. 17). In addition, the Haudenosaunee increasingly were forced into wage labor, as their hunting grounds shrank, and the game disappeared. Whether or not this process of attempted assimilation into Euro-American society has entirely surplanted the kin-ordered mode of production is another question.
References


