

Rethinking Recognition: Mi'kmaq and Maliseet Poets Re-Write Land and Community

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Land and community are two ongoing concerns of contemporary Native American literature and literary criticism, and with good reason; if indigenous writing and theory are to remain genuinely useful to indigenous people, they must stay grounded in these two fundamental pillars of tribal culture. At the same time, given that many Native people do not live on reservations or in their traditional homelands and many individuals have unacknowledged or somehow contentious status in their tribes, we might consider how those experiences speak to indigenous territories and group identities and how they inform new indigenous writing.

This essay looks to new Mi'kmaq and Maliseet poets to see how recognition affects Native peoples' self-representation.¹ By *recognition*, I mean the formal, colonial governmental processes that acknowledge indigenous territories, identities, and self-governance. In the United States, beginning in the early 1970s, Mi'kmaqs and Maliseets were among the many tribes vigorously pursuing federal recognition. The Maliseets won recognition under the 1980 Maine Indian Settlement Claims Act (MISCA), along with the Penobscots and Passamaquoddies. The Mi'kmaqs did not receive recognition until 1991, even though they worked closely with the Maliseets on this goal.

In Maine as elsewhere, recognition has produced mixed results. On the plus side, it has enabled tribes to buy back small parts of their traditional land bases. It has opened the door to resources that are supposed to be guaranteed to Native people as restitution for those lands, especially improved housing, health services, and education. Furthermore, recognition signifies a formal, government-to-government relationship between tribes and the US, which has arguably helped bring some tribes a good deal of positive visibility and power.

On the negative side, MISCA disrupted some communities and alliances and in some cases even took away hard-won benefits. Some Maine Indians were against the settlement act from the outset. Others find today that it has actually created new barriers to the exercise of sovereignty

or that it has weakened a previous sense of community. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the settlement act, Passamaquoddy elder Madonna Soctomah remarked, “I can remember when everybody took care of everybody else and that’s how we survived. We used to gather regularly and play games. Now there’s no community life here. It’s like everybody’s a recluse” (Tuttle).² Thus, while recognition is often sought, it can also do violence to Native people, dividing them from their homelands and kin.

Competing investments in and stories about recognition are dramatically illustrated in the writing produced by Mi’kmaq and Maliseet people before and after their federal recognition cases. In this essay, I focus on a short-lived collaborative newsletter, *The Aroostook Indian*, produced out of Houlton, Maine, between 1969 and 1976. I then turn to two contemporary poets: Alice Azure (Mi’kmaq) and Mihku Paul (Maliseet). Both women presently live in urban areas of the United States, have connections in northern Maine, and have band affiliations in Canada, where most of the Mi’kmaq and Maliseet reservations are located. This pair of writers lets us ask how off-reservation Native people with varying relationships to recognition write about land and community. While there is no simple or unified answer to this question, I suggest that the poets in particular describe wider territories and more capacious communities than recognition or its implementation normally implies or fosters.

Federal recognition has been an overriding goal of northeastern indigenous people in the US since the 1960s and 1970s. Tribes can be “unrecognized” for any number of reasons. Some were officially “terminated” under the federal termination and relocation policies of the 1950s.³ In the Northeast, where settler colonialism was well-entrenched before the United States formally came into being, many tribes already had treaties and land cessions with early colonial governments and tended to remain outside of US federal jurisdiction until they started pressing for recognition in the late twentieth century.

The activists working on behalf of Maine’s off-reservation Indians in the 1970s were acutely aware of the resources they were being denied for lack of recognition. Much of rural Maine—especially Aroostook County, where the Mi’kmaqs and Maliseets are concentrated—remains grievously poor, and Indian people are often hit hardest. Substandard housing was particularly dire, according to activist Tom Battiste (Mi’kmaq). Speaking in 1973 before a state advisory committee on civil rights, he described several deaths in poor homes due to fire and other hazards: “[M]ost of the six hundred to eight hundred Indians that live up there [in Aroostook County] live . . . in picker shacks, migrant shacks, no running water, outhouses, the whole bit” (Maine Advisory 47).

Battiste also described discrimination against Indians by local housing authorities, an observation echoed by almost every other activist. In 1976, Shirley LeVasseur testified before a national American Indian Policy Review Commission that local welfare offices were routinely turning Indians away on the supposition that they got services elsewhere (United States 104). They were told, added Mary Francis Isaac, “to go back to your reservation where you belong. So the off-reservation Indian has nothing at this point” (United States 103).

In material, day-to-day terms, living off-reservation cuts tribal people off from many of their rights and resources. The benefits of recognition, as noted above, are indisputable; in fact, it may be the very significance of these benefits that has made recognition increasingly difficult to obtain. Every year the number of tribes applying to the Bureau of Indian Affairs grows, and every year more and more tribes are deferred, even after spending years (sometimes decades) and huge amounts of money and effort on what is widely acknowledged to be a grueling, complex, and divisive process.⁴ In a compelling comparative study of unrecognized indigenous people across the globe, Bruce Granville Miller underscores a reality of settler colonialism:

States worldwide act to reduce the number of indigenes for a variety of reasons in addition to economic ones. They do so to reduce entitlement expenditures, but also out of fear of secession of indigenous groups, in the interest of promoting large-scale development projects, to reduce entanglements under international law and conventions, or simply because they can get away with ignoring peoples regarded as inferior or troublesome. (9)

One would think that recognition would be an unambiguous victory for Native people. But like so many products of the modern nation-state, recognition also has totalizing effects, and for many indigenous people, it has come with considerable costs. Recognition provides visibility for communities but delimits those as well; it produces categories of non-recognized individuals, particularly through stringent blood quantum requirements. It produces title to land, but also draws boundaries around that land. For purposes of our discussion, it is critical to note that *off-reservation* is not necessarily the same as *out of homeland*, since modern reservations are usually only a fraction of the original indigenous territories. These boundaries thus affect people’s thinking about land and identity, sometimes bolstering what Hokulani K. Aikau sees as “the pernicious notion that indigenous people who do not live in our homeland become less native the longer we are away from ‘home’” (480).

As the Winnebago ethnographer Renya Ramirez reminds us, “limiting Indian cultures and communities to distinct territories is a project not

only supported by classical anthropology, but also by national museums, the state, and other dominant discourses. The effect of these discourses is to disenfranchise Native Americans” (12). Ironically, recognition pulls in two different directions. On the one hand, it provides political and economic structures and resources necessary for people to live: acknowledgment of tribal governance, funding for health and education, bounded (and presumably protected) reservations. On the other hand, recognition can constrain Native lands and Native communities by delimiting them to smaller territories and identities.

In recent years, Native scholars such as Ramirez have offered some intriguing ways to think about Native space, including non-reservation space. Out of her work with urban indigenous activists in Silicon Valley, Ramirez borrows the concept of a “Native hub” to characterize the rich and dynamic relationships between cities and reservations. This model robs the city of its power as the site of assimilation it is often thought to be or was intended to be by federal termination and relocation policies. Rather, the hub makes the city a lively center in which people from different tribes mix and produce new experiences and new knowledge, bringing that new knowledge home and, in turn, bringing “home” back into the city again. Urban Natives, Ramirez reminds us, “bring their own senses of culture, community, identity, belonging and rootedness with them as they travel” (12). They read tribal newspapers, go home for events and family gatherings, and bring their knowledge and experience of home back to the city again.

The hub paradigm is expressly political: it emphasizes the ways Native people gather for activism, acquire new coalition-building skills, work to overcome differences, and “fight for rights to a collective sense of identity, sovereignty, and self-determination”—a struggle, Ramirez adds, that “often happens within an urban context away from tribal land bases” (14). This is preferable to thinking of cities as places where Native people somehow lose or give up their culture. A hub need not be situated in a city and radiate out to reservations. Depending on people’s geographic movements, the hub of the wheel could itself be the reservation, with non-Native communities acting as the “spokes” (as we might, for instance, think of the Mashantucket Pequot and Mohegan reservations in Connecticut, which drew families back to them during and after the federal recognition struggles of the 1980s and 1990s). A hub could be any location that Native people make their own: a traditional fishing spot, a school gymnasium, an annual academic conference, or a kitchen table.

A hub could also be a mimeograph machine at Ricker College in Houlton, Maine, where in 1969 Tom Battiste and Terrance Polchies (Maliseet) started

producing *The Aroostook Indian*. This was the official organ of their newly formed Association of Aroostook Indians (AAI), whose declared aim was to “improve the plight of the off-reservation Indian in Aroostook Co.” (“Maine Indian”). As described above, those conditions were severe. That Polchies and Battiste are said to have been the first two Native people to graduate from Houlton High School suggests the depth of the poverty and discrimination off-reservation Maine Indians faced into the second half of the twentieth century and underscores why they pursued recognition and its attendant benefits.⁵

The Aroostook Indian is an edgy, spotty, and sporadic document that decries anti-Indian stereotyping and racism, calls for educational and youth programs, describes local tribal history, and expresses hopes for the future. The need to reach out to a dispersed and dispossessed community is palpable in its pages. The editors occasionally apologize for missing an issue, but continue to call for readers to write in with their recipes, traditional stories, and concerns. One of the most avid contributors was Tilly West of Ashland, Maine, the “only Micmac on the AAI board at the time” and an “outspoken grandmother, who was on the road selling baskets by the time she was five years old” (McBride 67). She implored her fellow off-reservation Indians, “To all our people in Aroostook County. You can write, just take pen or pencil in hand and write it your way. Say what you think, what you feel. How you want to live. Say it your way. It doesn’t matter how it sounds. To me it sounds very beautiful. It’s real, it’s life that is very important to us. In order to have an Indian association, we need our people. Yes, we need you” (“Aroostook Indian”). This is an extremely capacious call (“*all our people*”), written before the distinct bands were legislated into being.

The newsletter also reported on an AAI household survey about people’s needs, which presumably informed the association’s emphasis on youth, education, alcohol treatment, and other poverty programs. Additionally, *The Aroostook Indian* provided a forum for and connection to relatives living elsewhere: thanks from Nova Scotia friends passing through for the hospitality they received; dispatches from Mi’kmaq living in Boston; invitations to send letters to a community member serving in Vietnam. As a native hub, the newsletter represented the physical movements of Mi’kmaq and Maliseets across their traditional homelands and beyond and sought to strengthen the affiliations among these people in motion, in diaspora, and at home.

Although *The Aroostook Indian* calls for “recognition,” it hardly ever does so in the language of self-governance, acknowledgment by the US of nation status, or clearly demarcated land bases—the common language used among recognized tribes today, including the Mi’kmaq and

Maliseets. For example, the current home page of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs emphasizes “the complex legal maneuvering and political lobbying” that “finally achieved Federal Recognition,” an act that “provided the Community with acknowledgment of its tribal status in the United States.” Their neighbors’ Web site reminds visitors that “the Houlton Band of Maliseets has been federally recognized as a government by the United States of America,” and that “[t]his federal recognition gives HBMI a unique government to government trust relationship with the United States” and assures them “the ability to govern [their] own Tribal Affairs” (Houlton).

Compare this lofty political diction to Tilly West’s more humble across-tic submission in March 1970:

R ecognize Aroostook Indians.
 E nvalope [sic] all my people.
 C hildren, all Indian children.
 O pen your hearts to my people.
 G ive my people your help.
 N one shall be forgotten.
 I ndians are people.
 T ime has come to change.
 I ncome for my people.
 O nly change will bring results.
 N ations will be recognized.

Recognition obviously encourages identification by tribal specificity, a usually welcome gesture; but while individual contributors to *The Aroostook Indian* sometimes mentioned their tribal affiliations, the paper as a whole preferred the regional term. It emphasized the material conditions (“I ncome for my people”) of “*all* my people,” of “*all* Indian children.” The assertion in this case that “N ations will be recognized” expresses a hope for unity—an “enveloping” of many people over a vast territory with an eye to larger, border-crossing tribal nations and alliances, not a fragmentation into distinct and isolated bands.

Working outside of recognition and clearly delineated land bases, the Aroostook Indian Association was first and foremost concerned with social and economic justice. This is not to say that discourses of sovereignty, self-determination, and land title are not critical. Rather, pre-recognition Mi’kmaq and Maliseet writers framed their aspirations more in terms of unity and wide geographic terrain and less in terms of band autonomy or political parity with a colonizing nation-state. In this, they anticipate philosophers such as Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien’kehaka), who has called for

thinking sovereignty outside the whole structure of the modern nation-state, or the indigenous women activists invoked by Andrea Smith, who she says base their ideas of sovereignty on “interrelatedness and responsibility.” Smith contends, “In opposition to nation-states, which are based on control over territory, these visions of indigenous nationhood are based on care and responsibility for land that all can share” (312). They also benefit, undoubtedly, from the historic framework of the Wabanaki Confederacy, which united Mi’kmaq, Maliseets, Penobscots, Passamaquoddies, and Abenakis, and which still finds expression today in such intertribal organizations as the University of Maine’s Wabanaki Center, the Four Directions Development Corporation, the Union of New Brunswick Indians, and other formations that provide collaborative opportunities for traditionally united peoples.⁶

Despite such structures, too many factors worked against the AAI and the promising intertribal project of *The Aroostook Indian*. Ricker College closed in 1978 under financial strain. The Maliseets received recognition as a late addition to MISCA, which not only excluded their partners, but also divested the Mi’kmaq of their aboriginal title and the benefits and services they had managed to accrue by that time (Prins, “Visual” 64). The AAI disbanded in 1982, and a separate Aroostook Micmac Council formed.⁷ The language of Wabanaki hubs and off-reservation, inter-tribal community had to find another home.

Mihku Paul’s Maliseet Remappings

Mihku Paul was raised in Old Town, Maine, close to the seat of the Penobscot Nation; she lives now in Portland, Maine, and identifies as a member of the Kingsclear Band in New Brunswick. Thus, we could say that Paul is a traditional Maliseet, inhabiting a large—and traditionally Maliseet—geographic territory that spans national, state, and tribal borders. Maliseet call themselves Wolastokiyik, or “People of the Beautiful River,” i.e., the St. John, the tributaries of which cover Quebec, New Brunswick, and large swaths of northern Maine. Paul’s poetry traverses this watershed to do the cultural work of reimagining and reconnecting Maliseet land and community.

The concept of the nation as “imagined community” is well-known to scholars and teachers of American Studies. As Benedict Anderson posited, “all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined” (6). Though members of communities, be they Christians, Red Sox fans, or—Anderson’s chief area of interest—the citizens of modern nation-states, can never know all their

fellow community members, they nevertheless feel themselves part of a “deep, horizontal comradeship” (7). Anderson specifically linked the rise of contemporary nationalism to the rise of print culture and mass dissemination of texts such as newspapers and novels, but he left the door open to consider a wide range of “imaginings” of affiliations beyond political states and ideologies.

Mihku Paul’s first major publication was not mass-produced, but was—appropriately enough, for a border-crossing artist—a traveling exhibition of poetry and visual images. *Look Twice* opened in 2009 at the Abbe Museum, a venue in Bar Harbor, Maine, devoted to Wabanaki culture; in 2010, it moved to the University of Southern Maine’s Glickman Library. The exhibit arranged Paul’s poems, historic photographs of Wabanaki people (including Paul’s relatives), drawings, and other visual motifs in panels along the wall in what Paul called a “river motif.”

A haunting sestina titled “Return” places the poet “travers[ing] Katahdin’s rocky spine” (line 35), referring to the mountain that is sacred for all Wabanaki groups and the location of many creation histories. “Address to the American Government” is a political villanelle, a highly regulated form not generally celebrated for its urbanity or contemporary engagement. The refrain, “White Father, your treaties are all lies” (1, 6, 12, 18), pointedly annotates a 1970s photograph of Mi’kmaq border protests against violations of the 1794 Jay Treaty, which allows Wabanaki people to move freely across the US/Canadian border.

Maliseet people continue to move back and forth from Maine to New Brunswick, often living and working on either side of the line. But those borders, like so many others, have also had deleterious effects on Maliseet lives, even more so after 9/11. It is understandable, then, that Paul decries the violence of state and national boundaries in “20th Century PowWow Playland” as “separation, renaming territory, viciously tamed, / Carved and claimed, settled, the state of Maine (4-5). Spitting out hard vowels, she sonically yokes *Maine*, romantically invoked on “Welcome to Maine” road signs as “the way life should be,” with settler colonialism’s ruthless and ongoing “tam[ing]” and “claim[ing].” Instead, like other Maliseet and Wabanaki people, she reserves the right to move freely within Maliseet homeland and into abutting tribal homelands.

Maliseet homeland is based on the Wolastoq watershed, which spans international and state/provincial borders. Thus, in her introduction to *Look Twice*, Paul describes her work as based on a “river motif” that “reflects the importance of these waterways to my people, and is symbolic of time-flow, history and memory as they function to both create and maintain identity.” But she goes further than a motif, rivers having become such overused and explicitly nationalizing tropes employed by colonialist writers from

Henry David Thoreau to Joseph Conrad. Paul's St. John is neither an elegy to the pre-industrial past nor a vehicle of romantic self-actualization. It is a Native hub, "support[ing]," in Ramirez's words, "a consciousness that crosses large expanses of geographical terrain, which can bridge not only tribal but also national-state boundaries" (11). With "The Water Road," a title that knocks together the metaphors of travel and escape, Paul immediately reclaims the Native name of the river, "Wolastoq" (6), elevating it over the colonizer Samuel Champlain's 1604 appropriation: "The naming taken, baptized in ink and parchment" (8).

Looking at a map of Paul's homeland, non-Maliseets might focus on the vast St. John watershed running north to south, as the Maine/New Brunswick border so closely parallels it. Indeed, colonial interests have generally conceived of rivers as frontiers or dividing lines. As the historian Micah Pawling has shown, Wabanaki people have steadfastly resisted such divisions, whether through continuing to engage in seasonable mobility after borders were drawn or through collaborating with Euro-American surveyors and cartographers to create maps that reflected an indigenous, river-oriented perspective. Mihku Paul's fellow Wabanaki writer, the historian Lisa Brooks (Abenaki), likewise insists on viewing rivers as places of gathering and exchange, critical conduits for networks of relations. Strategically, then, Paul's "Water Road" runs not north to south, but east to west, along a specific set of boundary-crossing tributaries of the St. John known as the Meductic Trail.

This historic route is a way of crossing from the village of Meductic, just south of Woodstock, New Brunswick—another Maliseet hub—to Indian Island in the Penobscot River. It covers a long and sometimes dangerous series of smaller rivers and lakes, and it includes long portages that were supposed to be very elusive and the subject of much speculation among non-Maliseets.⁸ Indeed, "the Old Maliseet Trail" has been a romantic challenge for non-Native wilderness adventurers from Thoreau onward, and Paul is acutely aware of its connotations: "Nomads, they called us / citing 'most ancient evidence' of our passage" (13-14). But for the poet, who was raised away from her family's original Maliseet home in Penobscot territory ("where a girl became a woman" [22]), this route is also "the map flowing inside our bodies" (19), a way of imaginatively rooting herself and other Maliseet people to a homeland that traverses national and tribal boundaries.

This map is not merely imaginative, nor does it evade the political and economic realities of riverine exploitation, for the St. John has long been subject to the pollution, damming, re-routing, and other types of degradation visited on rivers everywhere. Taken together, Paul's river poems employ what Lawrence Buell calls a "watershed aesthetic"—"a luminous

aesthetic-ethical-political-ecological image” (247) that can highlight “the arbitrariness of official borders . . . common dependence on shared natural resources . . . and an imagined community defined by ‘natural’ rather than governmental fiat” (246).⁹ But colonial, if not “governmental,” fiat still applies. Thus, Paul examines the history of Maliseet response to riverine exploitation in “The Ballad of Gabe Acquin,” paying homage to the man who founded the St. Mary’s reserve in New Brunswick. Like many other Wabanaki men, Acquin hired himself out to white tourists as a river guide and interpreter. Paul first situates him uncomfortably close to the reality Tom Battiste described in the 1970s. She writes:

One hundred years ago and more
 a boy was born within a shack
 where winter’s biting wind and ice
 bore witness to his family’s lack. (1-4)

Poverty, brought about by settler destruction of his traditional subsistence territories, prompts Acquin to negotiate creatively, working for “Those men with rifles costing more / than Gabe earned in a year” (61-62). In *Look Twice*, Paul sets this poem alongside an 1862 photograph of Acquin, in which he appears segregated and several steps below his white customers in front of Fredericton’s Old Government House. In both text and image, she shows that Buell’s potentially romantic notion of the watershed aesthetic is shot through with competing forces: colonial exploitation of Native people and Native resources, creative indigenous responses to that exploitation, and one Maliseet woman’s search for connections across time and space:

I found him in a picture
 while I looked for my own story,
 and he was staring out at me,
 in his simple, fierce glory. (105-09)¹⁰

Bringing these issues forward, the poem “Trade in the New Millennium” takes on the harvesting of fiddlehead ferns. Fiddleheads—the tender green curled tops of ferns that are available only for a short time each spring—are a traditional Maliseet food item. Maliseet people gather them throughout Maine and the Canadian Maritimes and began trading them to settlers as early as the 1780s (von Aderkas 15). Though the industry in canned and frozen fiddleheads remains relatively small, it still causes problems. Sue Young, Natural Resources Director for the Houlton Band, says, “Pollution has had an impact on tribal health. Areas where the Maliseet traditionally

subsistence hunted or gathered wild plants such as fiddleheads have been impacted so they can't do that as much any more" ("Environmental").

Paul's refrain asks about the future of the watershed aesthetic: "When fiddleheads cost eighty dollars a pound / Will Indians get a fair price?" (1-2). Her witty choice of form for this poem is the triolet—a lesser-known, rhyming eight-line stanza dating back to thirteenth-century France and also popular in nineteenth-century Britain. It thus reads like a little contact zone, putting Maine's and Canada's European settlers in struggle with indigenous people who reserve first rights over fiddleheads despite any familiar complaints about indigenous entitlement: "They might think the Indians aren't being nice" (7).

Fiddlehead harvesting—conducted irrespective of borders in multiple locations along the watershed—is an example of how Maliseet people and poets continue to think their sovereignty outside of reservation boundaries. Similarly, the Mi'kmaq people in the pre-recognition documentary *Our Lives in Our Hands* speak of how they maintain their basket making (an enterprise that is economically adaptive as well as traditional), requesting permission from private landowners to harvest ash trees, leaving branches behind for firewood. Barry Dana, former chief of the Penobscots and a well-respected environmental activist, echoes this practice more recently: "I've tried to gather birch bark on tribal lands, but Native woodcutters have harvested this wood to sell. So, I don't gather on tribal territory, but I do gather on my indigenous territory. I've worked out deals with landowners to have access to this material" ("Environmental").

Reservation borders thus provide some empowerment (allowing the Penobscots, for example, to harvest and market their own timber) but they also require constant circumvention (forcing an artist to look elsewhere for his birch bark). An off-reservation poet such as Mihku Paul works out similar "deals," expressing her affective ties to indigenous territory, moving on and off that territory and bringing her understanding of colonial poetic forms and colonial exploitative practices home.

Alice Azure's Mi'kmaq Mobility

Alice Azure has spent more of her life further from ancestral homelands than has Mihku Paul, but she nonetheless offers a powerful poetic (re)construction of Mi'kmaq community along multi-tribal lines. In her memoir *Along Came a Spider*, Azure says that her family always spoke of its Native heritage, though with few specifics. She studied at the University of Iowa with Hunter Gray (Mi'kmaq/St. Francis Abenaki/St. Regis Mohawk), who recognized her as Native and encouraged her to

look into her heritage. She recalls, “I did go back to my father, sisters and brother—asking them if they knew our tribe. As it turned out, they did” (94). She joined a Native group, the Inter-Tribal League of American Indians, and started to seek out her ancestry in the 1970s. In the 1990s Azure worked with Native American Education Services (NAES College) in Chicago. In 1994 Azure became a member of the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers and started publishing.

What is striking in Azure’s work is her emphasis on travel, especially around ceremony and among urban areas where other Native people reside. Her peripatetic life directly informs the poetic hubs of her chapbook, *In Mi’kmaq Country*. The first piece, “Someday I Will Dance,” acts like a hub anchoring her many locations and affiliations. It sets its speaker in an unnamed but distinctly urban, Midwestern space described as “This world of asphalt grids” (18). From that vantage point, she catches a glimpse of colorful fall foliage, which gives her occasion to travel imaginatively across space and time, to join “the People” in a dance (25-26). She pictures them in a quatrain that begins in the Midwest and travels back to Mi’kmaq homeland:

Do they dance at old Saukenuk,
At the capes of North and Blomidon?
Do their voices rise above Katahdin,
Around the harvests of Gaspé? (10-13)

Saukenuk, once the principal village of the Sauk nation, is now an Illinois State Park. It purportedly pays homage to Black Hawk, one of many Native leaders who have been re-appropriated for American mythologies: a brave hero who ultimately and inevitably lost his fight with settlers, thus ushering in colonial progress and ushering out the vanishing race. A visit to this kind of site is one of Azure’s signature poetic gestures. Her latest book, *Games of Transformation*, is a reflection on the Cahokia Mounds, also in present-day Illinois.¹¹ There, as in her reimagination of Saukenuk, she subverts the US national imaginary by calling into being a Native community and a Native future.

The next three lines (tracing capes North and Blomidon, Mount Katahdin, and the Gaspé peninsula) triangulate Mi’kmaq aboriginal territory, doubling back and forth across the international line as though the speaker is exercising her rights under the 1794 Jay Treaty. Azure moves from Cape North on the northeast portion of Cape Breton Island (allegedly the first point of land John Cabot saw) to Cape Blomidon on the northern side of the Nova Scotia in the Bay of Fundy, over to Mount Katahdin in the interior of Maine, and up to the Gaspé peninsula of Quebec, the northernmost part of Mi’kmaq territory. She repatriates herself by cover-

ing places with significance in traditional histories of the Wabanaki hero Glooscap—Blomidon was once called “Glooscapweek,” or “home of Glooscap” (Hornborg 86). She traces an international, cosmopolitan trajectory, moving among Native communities constituted before the current framework of nation-states and still understood outside that framework.

Travel from urban spaces to the reservation and back (especially to and from Boston, which developed a large Mi’kmaq community, or to and from areas such as Presque Isle, where Mi’kmaq people could find work picking potatoes or blueberries), hosting traveling family members, and gathering for purposes of ceremony are deeply Mi’kmaq ways of hub-making. *The Aroostook Indian* often printed notices and letters about such gatherings and exchanges. The Mi’kmaq scholar Marie Battiste describes the power of such exchanges in a discussion of one of the most important tribal events, the annual St. Ann mission, which she says “provides many instrumental linkages sanctioned by the tribe of how one becomes and remains a good Micmac. . . . [It] serves to renew kinship ties, alliances, introduces new allies and new people, makes truces. But most of all, this event becomes the scene of the transmission of, recruitment to, and maintenance of the Micmac person; it reaffirms one’s roots, confirms an identity, and develops a common mental experience—a kind of moral communion” (4).

Like the participants in the St. Ann mission and the contributors to *The Aroostook Indian*, Azure achieves “moral communion” through travel and assemblage. Sometimes this travel and assemblage are imagined, as in “Someday I Will Dance.” But just as often they are literal, as in her “Repatriation Soliloquy” for Hunter Gray. The poem charts the travels of a portrait of Gray painted by his brother. Azure bought the painting, recalling, “For nearly a decade your image hung central in my homes / from Rock Island to Washington, DC, and back to Chicago” (24). Not only does Gray’s image travel from Native household to Native institution to Native household again, but it also provides multiple occasions for people to create and renew alliances, as Marie Battiste might say, from the NAES students who “daily passed / under [its] confident, laid-back calm” (25) to the family and friends in Azure’s—and the painting’s—current location, “enjoying camaraderie / and those cups of early morning coffee” (26). Azure attributes this power to Gray’s own personality and activism:

a great oak, unperturbed by winds
 always fighting for grass roots people—
 miners, migrants, Native Americans,
 Black citizens caught up
 in the Jackson, Mississippi lunch counter boycotts. (24)¹²

For Azure, as for Mihku Paul and the contributors to *The Aroostook Indian*, writing is a critical way to plot these travels and reconvene these communities. The last page of “Repatriation Soliloquy,” which describes one of the most modern forms of writing and most varied kinds of community (a “web-based tribute from your friends— / students, colleagues, comrades-in-arms, family and the rest, / hundreds banded together” [26]) faces a much shorter poem, “Mi’kmaq Haiku,” which celebrates one of the oldest forms of writing at a distinctly tribal hub: “Kejimkoojik / cliffs, old sweet fern petroglyph / still keeping us calm.”¹³ The hundreds of petroglyphs at Kejimikujik Lake, now part of a National Park in Nova Scotia, hold a romantic fascination for non-Native visitors. Early European recorders assumed they were pre-contact and esoteric; but according to Edward J. Lenik, archaeologists now believe that most were etched into the slate ledges around the lakes by Mi’kmaq families in the mid-nineteenth century (19-20). This haiku, this most transnational of poetic forms, repatriates Azure by traveling to a Mi’kmaq hub, a gathering spot for Mi’kmaq families and part of an old and well-traveled canoe route from the Bay of Fundy to the Atlantic Ocean.

The second two lines pay homage to a deceptively simple plant that has personal meaning for Azure and enables her to imaginatively travel between her Mi’kmaq home and her place in Wisconsin, where sweet fern was abundant. This resonates with Cherokee literary critic Sean Kiccumah Teuton’s compelling “realist theory of indigenous place”: “American Indian somatic place,” he asserts, “is maintained in a social practice that perpetually re-integrates bodies with the world through ceremonial movement” (55). Writing from off-reservation and, often, off-homeland, Azure shows how some of these critical social practices can be maintained in writing. As if to stress the continuity of writing forms—poetry and petroglyphs—she includes a stylized, curly drawing of a fern on the page.

The constant movement Azure enacts—from interracial and intertribal affiliations across the US and Canada to imagined excursions to ancestors and “home” and back again—is reminiscent of the hub-making Ramirez found in the Silicon Valley. Brooks notes that indigenous people have historically used writing to remap and reclaim their territories. For Brooks, this mapping is “not merely an academic exercise . . . not an abstraction, a theorizing about a conceptual category called ‘land’ or ‘nature,’ but a physical, actual, material relationship to ‘an ecosystem present in a definable place’ that has been cultivated throughout my short life, and for much longer by those relations who came before me” (xxiv). Ramirez’s hubs, Brooks’s maps, *The Aroostook Indian*, and new Mi’kmaq and Maliseet poetry—are all engaged in a process that resists the more constraining

impulses of federally defined tribes and reservations.

As with other areas of ethnic studies, the focus of Native American studies has oscillated between the local and the global. On the one hand, Craig S. Womack (Creek) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) insist that literary critics attend rigorously to tribal specificity. To understand or analyze Creek literature, Womack claims, one must be grounded in Creek history, politics, and culture. Shari M. Huhndorf and Chadwick Allen advocate for more transnational or comparative studies. These two broadly sketched approaches are far from mutually exclusive.¹⁴ On the contrary, attention to tribal specificities can yield new insights into tribal interconnections. When we ask, for instance, what tribal frameworks, landscapes, and motifs inform Maliseet poetry or Mi'kmaq letters to the editor, we find that Wabanaki people's understanding of themselves has never been about boundaries and exclusion.

Colonially driven models of nationhood, however, are about those things. In his comparative research on nonrecognized groups, Miller observes that tribes and individuals in various geographic locations and over a range of time wound up buying into the same exclusionary tactics and essentialist discourses used on them by the state in order to disenfranchise others. Wabanaki people face these problems and pressures on both sides of the international border.¹⁵ The Central Maine Indian Association (CMIA), for instance, finally yielded its original mission, its constituency, and even its name. In 1999 it became the nonprofit organization Wesget Sipu, or "The Fish River Tribe." Where the CMIA was a pan-Wabanaki political group working to secure resources for off-reservation Indians, Wesget Sipu is, in the words of its Web site, "dedicated to the preservation of our traditional beliefs and our way of life," which includes genealogical research and "compiling proof of Native culture." For better or for worse (most indigenous activists would say for worse), the politics of recognition have ushered in new concerns with the colonial construct of genetic blood quantum, often at the expense of collective activism for more material and community-sustaining resources.

Mi'kmaq historian Daniel N. Paul has rigorously documented how Canadian federal policies have sought to break up the Mi'kmaq and Maliseet First Nations into distinct bands that must then compete with each other for scarce resources.¹⁶ One unfortunate byproduct is sometimes lateral racism, which rears its head in arguments over blood quantum, documentation of ancestry, and enrollment. A Maliseet man named Solomon Polchies criticized these exclusionary processes in 1963, saying, "[The St. Mary's Band chief] should have helped that Indian, so that he could have enrolled in this Indian community, instead of everyone going

against him. (We shouldn't all be against one another, in our difficult situation" (LeSourd 141). Even when Wabanaki people do unite, confidently using their own systems and structures, they face the surrealism produced by arbitrary borders, as for example, when Wabanaki people are asked to decide whether a particular archaeological finding is "American" or "Canadian."¹⁷

What Ramirez, Brooks, Teuton, and other scholars have begun to offer are critical regionalisms that can help mediate the twin concerns of land and community. "Native senses of rootedness," asserts Ramirez, "can be transported" (13). Contemporary Maliseet and Mi'kmaq writings suggest that the transportation of rootedness is not new, but is in fact a longstanding way of *being* Wabanaki. The arrival of national borders, bounded reservations, tribal politics, and federal recognition has not stopped that transporting, though it has complicated it in material ways.

Notes

1. I use the spelling currently most widely used in scholarship, *Mi'kmaq*, unless referring to the Aroostook Band, which uses the older spelling, *Micmac*, or quoting directly from an author using an alternate spelling.
2. For coverage of tribal responses to the thirtieth anniversary of the act, see Eric Russell. For a discussion of MISCA from the point of view of a tribal politician, see Donna Loring.
3. For a history of termination, see Donald Fixico.
4. James Clifford introduced this issue in 1988 with his essay on the Mashpee Wampanoag's then-frustrated bid for recognition (277-346). The Mashpee have since been successful, but countless other tribes still fight for recognition. More recent studies of particular tribal struggles for recognition include Mark Edwin Miller's *Forgotten Tribes*. See Cherokee sociologist Eva Marie Garrouette for an account of how the recognition process produces Indian identities—and how indigenous people embrace and contest these processes.
5. See James D. Wherry.
6. Like many coalitions, Mi'kmaq-Maliseet relations have been described as both contentious and cooperative. Harald Prins's book-length ethnography includes a discussion of the fur-trade-fueled Mi'kmaq-Maliseet war of the early seventeenth century, culminating in the Mi'kmaq murder of the Maliseet leader Bashaba in 1615. Solomon Polchies, a Maliseet from St. Mary's Reserve in New Brunswick, recounted in 1963 for the linguist Karl Teeter a story of a heroic Maliseet woman who tricked the Mi'kmaqs over the Grand Falls of the St. John River, when they would have pushed the Maliseets out of their home (LeSourd 138-39). On the other hand, Mi'kmaq elder Bernard Jerome insists, "Wabanaki people are all relatives. Different groups split off in the past, but we share the same ancestors" (Jerome and Putnam 309).

7. Tom Battiste, originally from Nova Scotia, continued working with a range of Native groups from New Brunswick to Washington, DC, until his death in 2009. I have been unable to trace Terrance Polchies.
8. For more on the specific routes and history of the Maliseet Trail, see David S. Cook.
9. Remapping has been a critical political strategy for tribes trying to gain recognition. Working with the Maliseets on recognition, Wherry provided a fascinating remapping of Maliseet homeland showing Houlton at the center. The US-Canadian border and the vagaries of reservation-making, whereby the US refused for years to grant a Maliseet reservation, have made Houlton appear marginal to some observers. Wherry found that Houlton was a practical stopping place for canoes traveling north, as the St. John would have been too powerful to paddle against. Well before MISCA, in fact, locals called Houlton “the reservation,” so long had it been a hub for Maliseet families, culture, and commerce (Rolde 321).
10. For a more critical reading of Acquin’s “striving to imitate the colonizer in language, manners, and preferences,” see Maliseet historian Andrea Bear Nicholas.
11. For an intriguing discussion of nineteenth-century Native writers’ recasting of moundbuilder myths, see Meghan Howey.
12. Under the name John R. Salter, Jr., Gray wrote a book about his experiences in the civil rights movement: *Jackson, Mississippi: An American Chronicle of Struggle & Schism* (Krieger, 1987).
13. Variations in Native-language orthography are common. Alice Azure uses a spelling variation for Kejimkujik Lake.
14. These two approaches to Native American studies are not mutually exclusive, even though Elvira Pulitano and others claim that Craig S. Womack’s approach is essentialist. For many in the field, this has become a tired debate; see Michelle Henry’s defense of Womack. Shari M. Huhndorf admits that “alliances also find a place in nationalist criticism” including Womack’s (14, n4).
15. Bruce Granville Miller points out that in both North American nations, “At present there is no clear administrative route for nonrecognized bands to achieve recognition without the splitting of resources with an existing recognized band” (133).
16. In addition to Daniel N. Paul’s book, see the discussion on his Web site of how Mi’kmaq people are prevented from moving freely among reserves at <http://www.danielnpaul.com/Mi%27kmaqFirstNation.html>.
17. See Bernard Jerome and David E. Putnam.

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