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# Doing Sovereignty in Native North America: Anishinaabe Counter-Mapping and the Struggle for Land-Based Self-Determination

Anna J. Willow

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**Abstract** Beginning with the premise that sovereignty may be most constructively contemplated not as a definable object or objective but instead as a process, this article examines counter-mapping as a way for contemporary indigenous citizens to “do” sovereignty. It surveys three Anishinaabe/Ojibwe communities’ recent use of geographical techniques to communicate their own territorial claims and counter the competing claims of others. In a 21<sup>st</sup> century context characterized by urgent extractive-industrial threats to indigenous landbases and lifeways, the cases presented here demonstrate that counter-mapping can serve as a powerful positive tool. Yet because the prevailing methods available to safeguard land-based self-determination also have the potential to undermine it, I conclude by considering some of the pitfalls that complicate counter-mapping’s ability to promote the sovereignty process. I suggest that indigenous people who choose to enact their sovereignty in this manner are indeed empowered, but only within an existing—and inequitable—socio-political system.

**Keywords** Counter-mapping · Anishinaabe/Ojibwe · Sovereignty · Land-based subsistence · Native North America

Sovereignty is the act thereof. You are as sovereign as you are.

—Oren Lyons, 1980

On a chilly November day in 2004, an Anishinaabe subsistence harvester, anti-clearcutting activist, and business owner from northwestern Ontario told me something I’ve been contemplating ever since. “Sovereignty is not something

you ask for,” he declared, “it’s something you do.”<sup>1</sup> In those powerful words, I heard reverberations of a discursive logic that has defined struggles for American Indian rights since the 1960s. *Sovereignty* is today a household word in Native communities across the continent (Biolsi 2005; Wilkinson 2005). Its utterance evokes historical political and military autonomy as well as contemporary cultural distinctiveness and independent peoplehood (Holm *et al.* 2003).<sup>2</sup> Central to indigenous rights discussions and decisions (Brown 2007), Native North Americans and their allies have embraced sovereignty as a fundamental value and incontrovertible aim.

In 1832, U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Marshall recognized Indian tribes as “distinct, independent political communities, retaining their original natural rights, as the undisputed possessors of the soil, from time immemorial.”<sup>3</sup> More recently, sovereignty has been described as “the authority and obligation of people within an indigenous polity to determine the extent and nature of their governing authority with regard to their territories and one another” (Cattelino 2010:239) and, more concisely, as “forms of autonomous control over territory and natural resources” (Field 2008:1). Although the U.S. and Canada constitute differing legal contexts (Section 35 of Canada’s 1982 Constitution Act, for example, recognizes and affirms the aboriginal and treaty rights of indigenous peoples, but the tribal sovereignty doctrine that has been upheld in the U.S. since the 1970s does not exist in Canada), the colloquial usage and

<sup>1</sup> Fieldnotes, November 8, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> The “peoplehood matrix” outlined by Holm *et al.* recognizes sovereignty as *inherent* to being a distinct group of people united by a common language, ceremonial cycle, sacred history, and territorial knowledge (2003:17).

<sup>3</sup> Marshall made this often-cited statement regarding the 1832 *Worcester v. Georgia* case (31 U.S. [6 Pet.] 515, at 559), the same opinion in which he famously but ambiguously declared American Indian groups “domestic dependent nations.” Bringing Marshall’s vision into the 20th century, Felix Cohen’s *Handbook of Federal Indian Law* (1942) posited tribes’ inherent powers of unextinguished, albeit limited, sovereignty as the fundamental principle of Indian law.

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fundamental conceptualization of sovereignty appear to cross this international border—and others—with ease. For the purposes of this article, sovereignty serves as shorthand for the right to self-determination and the correlated ability to independently make key decisions concerning land, livelihood, and the opportunities available to future generations.<sup>4</sup>

The body of literature that examines federal policy and formal legal dimensions of sovereignty in the continental U.S. is extensive (e.g., Deloria and Lytle 1984; Wilkins and Lomawaima 2001; see Biolsi 2008 for a concise review), but far less attention has been directed toward understanding how sovereignty is locally exercised and experienced (Cattelino 2007; Fowler 2007). Beginning with the premise that sovereignty may be most fruitfully contemplated not as a definable object or objective but instead as a *process* that is diversely enacted by contemporary indigenous citizens compels a shift away from questions of historical and legal precedent to questions about how indigenous Americans are “doing” sovereignty and the implications of their actions. In other words, rather than attempting to elucidate what sovereignty *is*, I am interested in exploring *how* it takes place.

One notable way that indigenous communities around the world have recently chosen to enact their sovereignty is by mapping their traditional territories.<sup>5</sup> Using geographical techniques to augment awareness of unique relationships to inhabited landscapes, get territorial claims recognized by dominant settler societies, and challenge disadvantageous political circumstances has come to be called *counter-mapping* in the social scientific literature (Peluso 1995). While observers and participants have most often applauded map production efforts, the degree to which mapping actually advances indigenous peoples’ long-term struggles for self-determination remains to be seen. Drawing on three instances in which Anishinaabe communities (in Wisconsin, Ontario, and Manitoba) employed

mapping as a strategic component within wider campaigns to assert rights to traditional territories and ensure continued access to the resources and cultural connections these territories represent, I consider whether mapping is in fact a powerful tool for the promotion of land-based self-determination or, alternatively, whether such endeavors problematically perpetuate an unjust socio-political status quo. Ultimately, I suggest, counter-mapping necessarily and simultaneously impedes as well as enhances the sovereignty process.

### Indigenous Counter-Mapping

The production of maps has most frequently functioned to reinforce the worldviews and status of already empowered individuals and groups. For centuries, cartography has been “used by governments and elites to stake claim to valuable land and resources,” often at the expense of indigenous peoples (Chapin *et al.* 2005:622). Lest we write this off as merely historical, critical analysts remind us that government-sponsored mapping projects continue to offer states an attractive means for asserting control—notably by augmenting prospects for “surveillance” (Foucault 1979) and “legibility” (Scott 1998)—over local peoples, territories, and resources (Brosuis and Russell 2003; Vandergeest 1996). The customary use of mapping as a tool for the perpetuation of power implicates maps as political devices that are “neither neutral nor unproblematic with respect to representation, positionality, and partiality of knowledge” (Harris and Hazen 2006:101; see also Sletto 2009). Yet, because they depict a subjective and specific view of the world rather than any objective external reality, maps can also be used to challenge dominant ways of conceiving the landscape and the socio-political interests they represent.

The counter-mapping phenomenon arose from this premise. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, land use and occupancy studies originated in far northern Canada as part of the aboriginal land claims negotiation process (Chapin *et al.* 2005; Freeman 2011; Usher 2003). Designed to refute Western misconceptions that “unimproved” land was unused and therefore available for development (Cronon 1983), these initial counter-maps most commonly took the form of “map biographies”—maps that locate and explicate indigenous uses of land within living memory—in order to clearly demonstrate long-standing and enduring utilization of traditional territories (see Brody 1981; Freeman 1976; Usher 1990). Perceived as a promising pragmatic technique, indigenous communities and advocates around the world have since adopted counter-mapping and adapted it to meet a variety of needs and circumstances.

Based on a broad review of relevant literature, Harris and Hazen define counter-mapping as “any effort that fundamentally questions the assumptions or biases of cartographic conventions, that challenges predominant power effects of mapping, or that engages in mapping in ways that upset

<sup>4</sup> Although self-determination and self-government are sovereignty’s closest synonyms, scholars and Native leaders draw a critical distinction between true sovereignty and the deliberately diluted powers delegated to indigenous entities under the auspices of self-government. For example, Deloria and Lytle argue that *nationhood* (which they associate with sovereignty and self-determination) and *self-government* refer to two very different positions; while “nationhood implies a process of decision-making that is free and uninhibited,” self-government “implies a recognition by the superior political power that some measure of local decision making is necessary but that this process must be monitored very carefully so that its products are compatible with the goals and policies of the larger political power” (1984:13–14). Further, they suggest, self-government tends to isolate political considerations, while self-determination extends its reach to culture, religion, and other elements of Native life (Deloria and Lytle 1984:264). For the purposes of this article, I take *sovereignty* and *self-determination* to be roughly synonymous. I do not use the term *self-government*.

<sup>5</sup> Additional key enactments of sovereignty include tribal education and justice systems, the use and management of natural resources, gaming and other economic development initiatives, and a diverse array of language and cultural programming (see Wilkinson 2005).

power relations” (2006:115). While a wide range of activities has been carried out under the counter-mapping label (Hodgson and Schroeder 2002), maps have played prominent roles in attempts to defend indigenous rights to traditional territory and ensure continued access to land-based economic and cultural resources. As Nancy Peluso suggests in her pioneering discussion of Indonesia’s counter-mapping movement, the fundamental change and challenge posed by counter-mapping lies in its “re-insertion of people on resource maps” (1995:386).

Supporters of counter-mapping argue that maps help indigenous peoples claim territory that is rightful theirs.<sup>6</sup> As Peluso posits, the practical effects of mapping are far-reaching; maps enable local communities to “appropriate the state’s *techniques* and *manner of representation* to bolster the legitimacy of “customary” claims to resources” and thereby redefine and reinvent “claims to standing forest resources and harvestable products as claims to the land itself” (1995:384). Furthermore, observers have found that counter-maps allow local people to participate as stakeholders in ongoing conversations about conservation (Brosius and Russell 2003), facilitate the “re-description” of social and natural communities in ways that assert local control over natural resources (Brosius *et al.* 1998), provide the level of detail required to succeed in negotiations with governments (Wildlands League and Manitoba Wildlands 2005), and offer new ways to document, safeguard, and transfer traditional knowledge across generations (Rambaldi *et al.* 2007).

Many indigenous groups have embraced counter-mapping for these perceived benefits. Hugh Brody’s Beaver Indian consultants in northeastern British Columbia, for instance, chose to support his mapping project because they recognized (as one local elder put it) that “there is no longer time to wait...if Indians are going to continue to be Indians in this place, in these places, in this whole region, then their presence must be known to everyone everywhere” (1981:12). Numerous communities have since made effective strategic use of maps which, when presented according to state/scientific standards, have been accepted as *prima facie* legal evidence in high-profile land claims negotiations and court cases. As well, groups like the Aboriginal Mapping Network have developed to promote information and capacity sharing among Native North Americans seeking to utilize GIS and other geographic technologies.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Academic participants in counter-mapping projects often quote Bernard Nietschmann’s pointed assertion that “more indigenous territory can be reclaimed and defended by maps than by guns” (1995:37).

<sup>7</sup> The Aboriginal Mapping Network (AMN) website features links to numerous mapping projects (see <http://nativemaps.org/>, accessed January 25, 2012). But, as Johnson notes, while the AMN facilitates communication among indigenous users of mapping technologies, it “presents a relatively mainstream approach to GIS as a tool in dealing with government, other users, and administration of indigenous reserves or homelands” rather than critiquing dominant paradigms of territorial representation (2010:188).

While conversations about counter-mapping have to date been dominated by proponents of the practice, the phenomenon has also attracted critical scholarly attention. David Natcher (2001), for example, shows how indigenous land use research is sometimes applied in ways that do not serve indigenous interests. Used to identify areas of potential conflict between First Nations groups and industrial developers in Canada, such studies ostensibly satisfy the government’s legal obligation to consult impacted Aboriginal groups. Problematically, Natcher argues, land use studies have too often replaced “the direct involvement of communities themselves” (2001:120). Others have underscored the dissonance between new methods of spatial and territorial representation and traditional understandings of the land, which tend to emphasize the human experience of moving through the landscape (rather than abstracted aerial views) and comprehend places as seasonally dynamic and unbounded (as opposed to fixed points and delineated plots) (Johnson 2010; see also Desbiens 2007).

More broadly and profoundly, Wainwright and Bryan draw on case studies from Belize and Nicaragua to evaluate the implications of mapping projects undertaken to “advance legal recognition of indigenous land rights”—what they call the “cartographic-legal strategy” (2009:154). Ultimately, they argue,

The cartographic and legal ‘representation’ of indigenous clients is *always already* conditioned by unequal relations of social power...When indigenous communities and their allies produce maps and lawsuits, they do so under conditions *not of their choosing*. These struggles unfold within an already-mapped world where one cannot elect to live outside of sovereignty, territory, or the law (2009:156, emphasis added).

In other words, not only does the act of mapping customary lands locate indigenous peoples within the Western grid of intelligibility—which has the convenient consequence of facilitating the extension of taxation, policing, and other state functions into indigenous communities (Brosius and Russell 2003)—but it also securely positions them as unequivocal citizens, however beleaguered, of modern nation-states.

In Central America, Wainwright and Bryan conclude, “the cartographic-legal strategy transformed the possibilities for recognition without changing the persistent inequalities that the claims were partly intended to address” (2009:169). Thus, although counter-mapping can assist indigenous and other marginalized groups by democratizing cartographic techniques and translating territorial claims into a “language of property” understood by representatives of modern nation-states (Nadasdy 2003:236; see also Tsing 2007), serious questions remain regarding the extent, scope, and type of empowerment counter-mapping is liable to provide.

## Using Maps to Do Sovereignty: Three Anishinaabe Examples

For countless generations, Anishinaabe people have carved their livelihoods from the vast region encircling the Lake Superior basin. Surrounded by the stark beauty of the boreal forest, a seasonal cycle of land-based subsistence has provided the material base for Anishinaabe culture, language, and life. In the past, families moved to successive locations to take advantage of resources as they became available. Like other indigenous Americans, Anishinaabeg (the plural form of Anishinaabe) now live in year-round settlements on reservations (in the U.S.) and reserves (in Canada) or in urban areas (in both countries). Still, many individuals continue to participate in traditional subsistence activities and often travel extensively for this purpose. In the bitter cold of winter, Anishinaabe harvesters trap beavers and other furbearers and fish through holes in the thick northern ice. In spring, they hunt migratory waterfowl and tap maple trees for their sweet sap. Open water fishing begins when the ice melts and continues during the moderate weather of spring, summer, and autumn. As summer draws to a close, Anishinaabeg gather wild rice from the shallow lakes that dot the region and collect blueberries from forest clearings where they thrive. Autumn brings intensive hunting of large game animals—mainly moose and whitetail deer—and the storage of wild foods for the coming winter.

Long before they encountered Westerners and their cartographic practices, Anishinaabeg employed spatial representation techniques well-suited to their seasonally-mobile way of life.<sup>8</sup> Based on research conducted in the 1930s among the relatively uninfluenced communities living along Manitoba's Berens River, A. Irving Hallowell found that Anishinaabeg possessed a rich collection of toponyms that guided both their movements through the landscapes they inhabited and the myth-historical significance of homelands that often spanned hundreds of square miles. Although Hallowell was impressed by his informants' detailed knowledge of local landmarks and terrain, he noted that they seemed to have little awareness of more distant places that were not actively and experientially known. For Anishinaabe people, Hallowell concluded, mental maps are "deeply imbedded in the "active" experience of the individual" (1955:194). Based on his observations, Hallowell argued for the pre-contact existence of rudimentary maps that were composed of "a succession of landmarks and correspond[ed] closely to the actual experience of traveling about the land" (1955:195).

<sup>8</sup> As Pearce and Louis note, "all cultures engage in some form of mapmaking" (2008:110), but when diverse traditional indigenous cartographies are "removed from the context of their knowledge space and placed in colonial conditions, Indigenous maps do not convey the same level of power and authority naturally conveyed by the Western maps" (2008:109).

Contemporary Anishinaabeg continue to emphasize personally experienced places and toponymic social memory, but they also transpose this emplaced knowledge onto standard printed maps. Between 2002 and 2012, I spent time in four different Anishinaabe communities. The Anishinaabe adults I know have no problem reading physical and road maps, and many consult these regularly for the purpose of planning land-based subsistence trips and other excursions. I have seen dozens of individuals—usually in response to questions about the location of a particular landmark or the site of an event—spontaneously sketch maps on paper, in the sand, and even in the air. Some of the most interesting maps I have encountered use purchased published maps as a base, but superimpose layers depicting indigenous language toponyms, favored hunting areas, and paths of environmental pollution.

The use of maps to represent physical landscapes is thus a familiar undertaking, but it is only recently that the distant, abstract boundaries of political maps have attracted Anishinaabe attention. In the past—when Anishinaabeg had less access to Western education and information circuits and when boreal forest resources were less coveted by resource-extractive industries—it made little sense to defend traditional territories by this means. But times have changed. Facing new threats to customary lands and the land-based cultures they sustain, Anishinaabe citizens have begun constructing maps that communicate their own territorial claims and counter the competing claims of others. In the pages that follow, I describe how contemporary Anishinaabe communities are incorporating counter-mapping projects into ongoing efforts to define their own territories and determine what takes place within them. As we will see, mapping obliges indigenous participation in dominant patterns of information transmission and territorial representation, but concurrently increases the likelihood that ecological conditions will continue to be conducive to the practice of land-based subsistence and culture.

### The Sokaogon Community's Mushgigagamongsebe District

Anishinaabe people arrived at the headwaters of northeastern Wisconsin's Wolf River in the second half of the eighteenth century. Oral tradition holds that twin boys were born to a respected chief at Madeline Island, the historic hub of Anishinaabe settlement in the Western Great Lakes region. Although the disposal of one twin was customary, the chief insisted a midwife take one son to find a new land that, like the area surrounding Madeline Island, was rich in wild rice. Accompanied by representatives of seven clans, the midwife and infant entered a productive region at the junction of today's Forest, Langlade, and Oneida Counties. After displacing Dakota groups from the region, the Anishinaabeg prospered.

Known today as the *Sokaogon*, they came to occupy a rough circle approximately 20 miles in diameter (Nesper *et al.* 2002:8). The small Sokaogon band was left out of the 1854 treaty negotiations that demarcated four Anishinaabe reservations in Wisconsin. In 1855, the Sokaogon signed an agreement with U.S. officials that promised them a 12-square-mile reservation, but the agreement was never ratified (Satz 1996). After years of petitioning and living as “squatters” on their own lands, the Sokaogon were acknowledged as a separate tribe in 1936 (Wisdom 1936). In 1939, their rights to a 1,731-acre plot, known as the Mole Lake Reservation, were finally recognized. Mole Lake served as a base from which members of the Sokaogon community continued to hunt, fish, trap, and gather in the surrounding area (Nesper *et al.* 2002).

Only 37 years later, Exxon Minerals announced the discovery of a major copper-zinc deposit adjacent to the Mole Lake Reservation. Given the challenges of mining in an area as hydrology complex as northeastern Wisconsin, even Exxon’s engineers admitted that contamination of local waterways was probable (Gedicks 1993:63). The Sokaogon opposed the mine from the outset. Any potential decline in the quality of water that nourished their wild rice beds would jeopardize their sustenance, traditional economy, and cultural traditions (Vennum 1988). From a Sokaogon perspective, “the environmental and social impacts of the proposed mine were inseparable” and “contamination of the area’s surface or groundwater was a threat to survival” (Gedicks 1993:63). Tribal members were also concerned about disruptions to their customary hunting territory, impacts on medicinal plants, the drying and contamination of ceremonial springs, and the auditory and visual effects of the proposed mine.

Early on, the Sokaogon hired a lawyer, formed a tribal mining committee, and promoted partnerships with environmental and sportfishing organizations. The Sokaogon and their allies’ tactics ranged from petitions and local referenda to media campaigns and shareholder resolutions. Citing economic reasons, Exxon withdrew its permit application in December 1986.<sup>9</sup> The respite was short-lived. Exxon and its new partner—a Canadian company called Rio Algom—resumed efforts to mine the deposit in 1993. In the intervening years, the Anishinaabe-environmentalist coalition had grown stronger and smarter. Making use of Clean Water Act legislation, environmentalists attained an “Outstanding” classification for the Wolf River, which required the mining company to prove its discharge would not lower water quality in the Wolf River and its tributaries (Gedicks 1993). The tribe also took legal action to protect the water

that flowed through the Mole Lake Reservation. In 1987, the Clean Water Act was amended so tribes could obtain Treatment as State (TAS) status, thus allowing them to enforce their own water quality standards.<sup>10</sup> The Sokaogon’s petition for TAS status was approved by the federal Environmental Protection Agency on September 29, 1995 (O’Brien 2008:116).

In subsequent years, the proposed mine changed hands several times. In 1998, Rio Algom bought Exxon’s share of the mine and, in an effort to remake a troubled public image, promptly changed the subsidiary’s name from Crandon Mining to Nicolet Minerals. In 2000 the Australian BHP Billiton purchased Rio Algom, thus inheriting the proposed mine. Through these changes in ownership, the Sokaogon and their supporters continued searching for ways to impede the mine’s permitting process. In 2002, the Sokaogon commissioned a study to determine the eligibility of portions of its customary landbase for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) as a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP).<sup>11</sup> If eligible, it would oblige federal agencies to take the mine’s potential impacts on Sokaogon cultural resources into account when making regulatory and permitting decisions (King 2003a). Like the Wolf River’s Outstanding classification and the tribe’s TAS water quality status, this strategy was designed to make the mine’s permitting process prohibitively difficult.

Because only physical *places* can be eligible for inclusion within the NRHP (King 2003a), utilizing this legislation demanded the existence of a material, mappable area. Essential components of the TCP strategy thus entailed thoroughly documenting areas of historical and current significance to the Sokaogon people, the toponymic formulation of something called the *Mushgigamongsebe District*, and the graphic representation of this area (Fig. 1).<sup>12</sup> The report that analyzed the region’s eligibility for NRHP inclusion described and mapped a number of individual elements, but indicated that “the Mushgigamongsebe District is more than merely the sum of its parts” (Nesper *et al.* 2002:56). Given that “without a close and dynamic relationship with the District, the Sokaogon

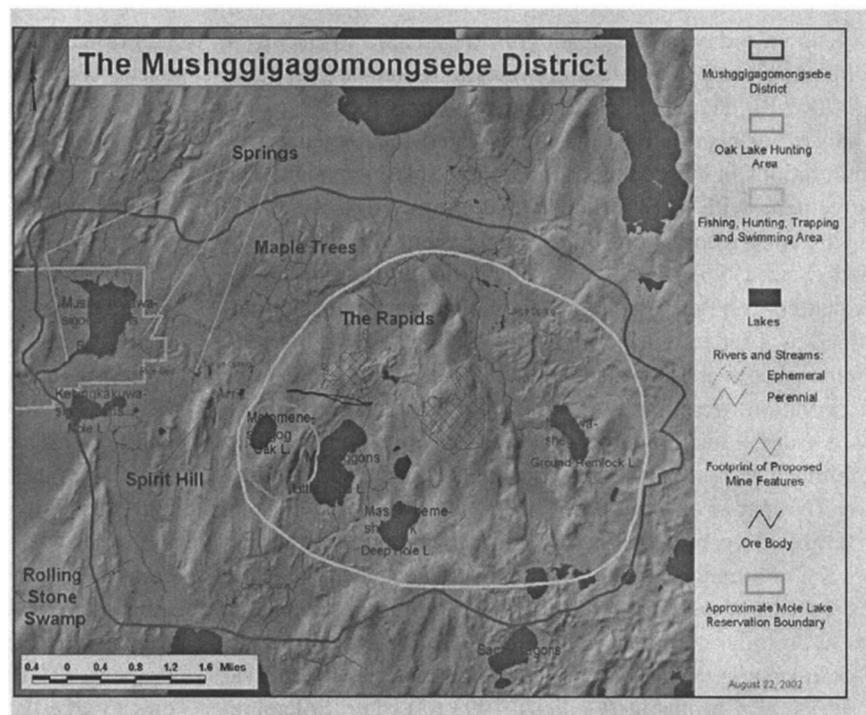
<sup>10</sup> The original Clean Water Act became federal law in 1972.

<sup>11</sup> The company was directed to undertake a variety of environmental impact analyses. Because the tribe was unwilling to trust the objectivity of the company’s hired experts, it chose to conduct its own impact analyses. Along with cultural anthropologist Larry Nesper and historic preservation expert Thomas King, I served as a consultant on this project and visited the Sokaogon community in June and August of 2002. Our goal was to translate “the band’s variously articulated collective, historical experience of the landscape into a claim that these lands qualified for some level of federal protection under the National Register of Historic Places” (Nesper 2011:157).

<sup>12</sup> *Mushgigamongsebe* means Little River of Medicine in the Anishinaabe language. Also known as Swamp Creek, this marshy river flows through the heart of the Sokaogon customary land and into the productive wild rice beds of Rice Lake within the Sokaogon’s Mole Lake Reservation.

<sup>9</sup> As has been the case elsewhere, environmental socialist Al Gedicks points out, the company was unwilling to admit that grassroots organizing was actually a factor in its decision (1993:78).

**Fig. 1** The Mushgigagamongsebe District (from Nesper *et al.* 2002:5)



community would cease to exist as a distinctive, traditional group of Ojibwe people” (Nesper *et al.* 2002:53), the report’s authors deemed the area eligible for inclusion in the NRHP.<sup>13</sup> The Army Corps of Engineers—the federal agency responsible for granting permits necessary for the mine to proceed—agreed (King 2003b).

The Mushgigagamongsebe report was part of a multi-dimensional opposition strategy that ultimately succeeded in making mining the deposit unprofitable and convincing the company to divest itself of the problematic property (see Nesper 2011). In October 2003, the Sokaogon and neighboring Forest County Potawatomi tribes were able to purchase the site and its mineral rights for \$16.5 million, thus bringing a 28-year-struggle to an end.<sup>14</sup> It is unlikely that the Sokaogon would have succeeded in defeating the mine had they been unwilling or unable to state their claims in ways considered convincing by key federal agencies and other non-Native entities. In this case, the designation of the Mushgigagamongsebe District enabled tribal members to clearly demarcate their area of concern and allowed them to identify a specific set of adverse impacts that would degrade that area’s natural and cultural resources if the mine were to be built. Drawing the District also forced the Army Corps of Engineers, the state of Wisconsin, the mining company, and the general public to acknowledge the fact

that Sokaogon claims to and uses of the land extended beyond the tiny Mole Lake Reservation into a much wider portion of Wisconsin’s ceded territory.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, mapping the area in question—and thereby demonstrating the existence of a physical property that could be considered for inclusion in the NRHP—made it possible for the Sokaogon to utilize federal historic preservation legislation to advance their campaign against the mine’s construction.

The creation of the Mushgigagamongsebe District augmented the Sokaogon’s ability to influence the trajectory of their customary landbase and thus the future of their land-based livelihood, beliefs and practices, and cultural identity, but it necessarily did so by translating Anishinaabe interests into an externally-imposed legal discourse. A delimited domain like the Mushgigagamongsebe District has little in common with traditional representations of the resources and homelands that have sustained Anishinaabeg for generations. Although the TCP report’s authors were careful to remind readers that the boundaries they identified “are only meant to indicate the general area in which Sokaogon people interact with the landscape” (Nesper *et al.* 2002:58) and argued that “this area is by no means the only place within the Tribe’s traditional territory that is of historical and cultural importance to the Tribe” (Nesper *et al.* 2002:1), it remains possible that outsiders and future Anishinaabeg alike may construe lines on a map as necessary elements of emplaced connections and claims. Still, in the scheme of Sokaogon history, stopping the Crandon Mine was a

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the process and criteria used to make this determination see King (2003a).

<sup>14</sup> Because the Potawatomi tribe operates a profitable casino in Milwaukee, it was able to raise its share of the payment, but the Sokaogon ended up with an eight million dollar debt to BHP Billiton. In May 2006, the company forgave the tribe’s debt (O’Brien 2008).

<sup>15</sup> The treaties of 1837 and 1842 reserved Anishinaabe rights to hunt, fish, and gather throughout the ceded northern third of the state.

significant step toward ensuring the local continuance of land-based Anishinaabe livelihood and culture. Instead of a mine that would pollute their waters and wild rice beds, exclude them from customary hunting and gathering areas, and prevent access to spiritual sites, the designation of a TCP-eligible district helped to ensure that future generations of Sokaogon citizens will be able to utilize the land adjacent to their reservation and contribute to decisions concerning what takes place there.

#### Grassy Narrows First Nation's Traditional Land Use Area

Grassy Narrows First Nation is a semi-remote reserve community located a slow and scenic 50 miles north of Kenora, Ontario.<sup>16</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Anishinaabeg in northwestern Ontario were active fur trade participants. Extended family groups moved to take advantage of seasonally available resources and trapping was a central element of economic life. As trading posts operated by the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) entered the area, Anishinaabe groups became associated with the posts where they most frequently traded their furs for firearms, traps, and other provisions. The post at Lac Seul—located up the English River from present-day Grassy Narrows—attracted a confederation of Anishinaabe families under the traditional hereditary leadership of a chief named Sakatcheway (Shkilnyk 1985).

In 1873, Chief Sakatcheway and the forefathers of 27 other Anishinaabe First Nations signed the third of Canada's numbered treaties. Although the original intent—and therefore the contemporary interpretation—of Treaty Three is debated (see Willow 2012), the official version guaranteed that the Anishinaabe would “have right to pursue their avocations of hunting and fishing throughout the tract surrendered” (Canada 1966 [1871-4]:5). In the years following Treaty Three and the 1876 passage of Canada's Indian Act, the government established a reserve for each group of signatory Indians, including a 14-square-mile tract at Grassy Narrows. In the early years of reserve life, the people of Grassy Narrows remained highly mobile and relatively autonomous from Euro-Canadian influence. They sold furs and berries annually and a small HBC store operated on the reserve, but their subsistence and lifestyle remained predominantly forest-based. As recently as the 1950s, many families wintered on remote traplines and contacts with Euro-Canadians were limited to intermittent visits from Indian Health Service physicians and Indian Agents.

In the 1960s, life at Grassy Narrows began to change rapidly. Promising an on-reserve school, power and sewer

infrastructure, and the expedited delivery of other services, the Canadian government consolidated Grassy's formerly dispersed population in 1963. Relocation dramatically altered the community's physical and social structure.<sup>17</sup> Then, in 1970, mercury was detected in the English River. Over the previous decade, approximately 20,000 pounds of the toxic substance was released by a pulp and paper mill in far upstream Dryden, Ontario. Once in the river, the mercury bioaccumulated in the tissues of fish and in the bodies of Anishinaabeg who consumed it. Compounded by the effects of mercury poisoning, the disturbing social trends that followed relocation—skyrocketing involvement with drugs, alcohol, and the criminal justice system—worsened, resulting in what researcher Anastasia Shkilnyk perceived as “a community destroyed” (1985:chapter 1).

By the end of the 1970s, Grassy Narrows was the subject of a mediation panel created to consider potential solutions to the problems plaguing the community and explore the possibility of compensation for damages. In May 1979, Grassy Narrows Chief Simon Fobister addressed representatives from the Ontario provincial government, the Canadian federal government, and the corporation responsible for the contamination. Declaring that land, not money, was the key to Grassy Narrows' future, Fobister asked the government

to return to the people of Grassy Narrows the exclusive use of, or the control over access to, land and resources that have traditionally been relied on for food or barter, on which a substantial portion of the population still depends for a livelihood, and which are the key resources for the future economic and social development of the community (Vecsey 1987:298).

During the presentation, Fobister outlined a large area called the Grassy Narrows Traditional Land Use Area (GNTLUA)—which paralleled the more than 2,000-square-mile area held by Grassy Narrows community members as registered traplines—and proclaimed that autonomy over this area was necessary to the community's social and economic well-being (Vecsey 1987). The government never recognized Grassy Narrows' self-governing authority over the GNTLUA; when compensation for mercury contamination finally came in 1986, it took the form of a \$16.6 million fund rather than an expanded landbase (Canada 1986). Today, the GNTLUA remains officially Crown land, publically owned and managed by the province.

In the late 1990s, members of Grassy Narrows First Nation began publically opposing the industrial logging that was

<sup>16</sup> According to Canadian census records from 2009, just over 1,300 members belong to Grassy Narrows First Nation, with approximately 850 residing on the reserve.

<sup>17</sup> Other First Nations in Canada, including the Davis Inlet Innu (Penashue 2001, Samson 2003) and the James Bay Cree (Niezen 1998) have also experienced the disastrous consequences of Canada's relocation policy.

intensifying throughout northwestern Ontario and irrevocably altering their boreal forest homeland. Searching for a concise way to describe their geographic area of concern, spokespersons for the First Nation's nascent anti-clearcutting movement returned to the GNTLUA designation. Arguing that clearcutting impeded their ability to pursue land-based subsistence and thus violated their treaty rights (Grassy Narrows Environmental Group 1999), alarmed community members wrote numerous letters to logging companies and government agencies, participated in peaceful public protests, and even initiated a lawsuit in 1999. Still, the clearcuts grew larger and drew closer. On December 3, 2002 community members erected a blockade on a logging road five miles north of their reserve community to prevent the passage of logging trucks and equipment. After the blockade's establishment, a prominent sign at the site referenced the GNTLUA's status as aboriginal territory (Fig. 2).

Grassy Narrows residents and dedicated supporters maintained a full-time presence at the blockade site for nearly a year and, although no longer continuously occupied, the blockade's symbolic presence continues to this day.<sup>18</sup> As the anti-clearcutting campaign progressed, the First Nation's direct action activists and elected leaders referred to the GNTLUA frequently and casually, as if it had existed forever. Although it is indeed true that Grassy Narrows Anishinaabeg have moved throughout, utilized, and valued the area now called the GNTLUA since time immemorial, the formal toponymic and geographic delineation is a phenomenon of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. While most elders (and more than a few others) at Grassy Narrows still prefer to think of "the land" more simply, the GNTLUA designation is an intrinsically political product of a resource-colonial era.<sup>19</sup> It was developed in response to one urgent threat to the community's ability to sustain its way of life (mercury) and more recently amplified in response to another (industrial logging).

By serving as a catalyst for transformative discussions about aboriginal and treaty rights, the GNTLUA served an educational role within the community, but it was from the outset also directed at external audiences. In this context, the designation became a powerful political tool. It provided media personnel with convenient terminology for summarizing the complex motives behind Grassy Narrows' bold actions and made it more difficult for the political dimensions of the community's struggle to be overshadowed by romantic images of "ecological Indians" (see Willow 2009). Used to identify an ongoing violation of indigenous rights, the GNTLUA designation allowed Grassy Narrows to tap into



Fig. 2 Sign at the Grassy Narrows blockade, February 2004 (photo by author)

an energetic national and international human rights agenda and thereby attract outside supporters (see, for example, Amnesty International 2007). Delineating a specific area of past and present "traditional" land use also allowed citizens of Grassy Narrows to convincingly communicate their deep roots and authentic connection to the northwestern Ontario landscape and to contest by contrast the territorial claims made by relatively recent non-Native newcomers. Finally and most significantly, although a product of strategic self-defense rather than an autonomously inspired undertaking, the GNTLUA defined Grassy Narrows' area of interest in a way that outsiders—whether sympathetic or opposed to their claims—accepted as logical and legitimate.

While the conversations that ensued were not always fair, the GNTLUA made important conversations possible. By 2012, Grassy Narrows' activists and leaders had accomplished some of what they set out to do. In 2008, Grassy Narrows First Nation and the province of Ontario agreed to commence formal negotiations—expected to take up to 4 years—to resolve the dispute over logging in the region. Stating that waiting this long to ascertain the future of logging in the contested region did not make economic sense, the company permitted to log much of the GNTLUA voluntarily relinquished its license shortly thereafter (Gorrie 2008). For Grassy Narrows, the pullout meant a hiatus from industrial logging. In August 2011, the lawsuit initiated by Grassy Narrows residents 11 years earlier received a favorable decision in Ontario's Superior Court. The ruling implied that the province of Ontario lacks legal authority to issue forestry licenses that interfere with the First Nation's treaty rights, which is an area of federal jurisdiction (Babbage 2011).<sup>20</sup> With other companies eager to exploit the region's timber and a recently released provincial forest management plan

<sup>18</sup> Between 2003 and 2005, I conducted 11 months of full-time ethnographic research in northwestern Ontario with the goal of learning as much as I could about the blockade at Grassy Narrows and the cultural, political, and historical factors that inspired it.

<sup>19</sup> Fieldnotes, January 6, 2004.

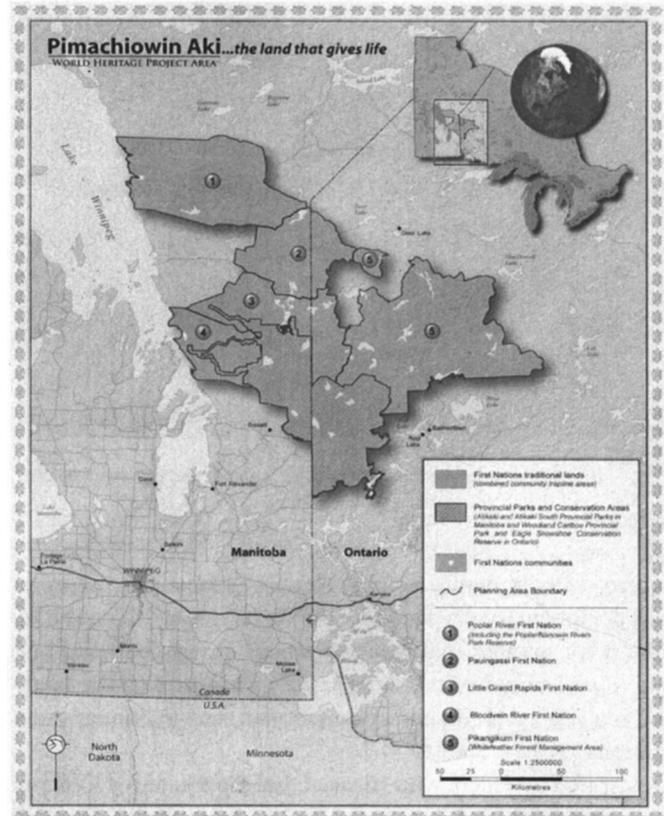
<sup>20</sup> The provincial Ministry of Natural Resources appealed this ruling and the case appears destined for the Supreme Court of Canada (Talagu 2012).

that leaves doors open for more clearcutting within the GNTLUA, citizens of Grassy Narrows worry that their victory will be only temporary (Thompson 2011).

Grassy Narrows waged a remarkably successful campaign against a multinational logging company. While the creation of the GNTLUA did not lead to the direct legal protection or ownership won by the Sokaogon in northeastern Wisconsin, the designation advanced the community's immediate goal of removing loggers from its territory, thus ensuring that residents could continue—at least for the time being—using the remaining undegraded portions of their homeland much as they saw fit.<sup>21</sup> Recognizing the land as an essential foundation for Anishinaabe existence, the people of Grassy Narrows have been fighting for decades to regain control of their landbase. For them, decisions about livelihood, individual and community well-being, and cultural survival are expressed and experienced as decisions about land. At Grassy Narrows, doing sovereignty means undertaking actions deemed likely to enhance decision-making authority concerning the land and the way of life it enables, whether this means speaking to government and industry representatives, physically blocking the passage of logging trucks, or drawing a political map of one's world.

Poplar River First Nation's Asatiwisipi Aki and the Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage Site

*Pimachiowin Aki* means the land that gives life. This is the name chosen for a 20,753-square-mile area of intact boreal forest nominated for World Heritage Site status. Since time immemorial, Anishinaabe people have made their living and their lives on a traditional territory that extends east from Lake Winnipeg's northeastern shore and up *Asatiwisipi* (Poplar River). Like other Anishinaabeg, the people of Asatiwisipi lived according to a seasonal subsistence cycle and participated enthusiastically in the historic fur trade. Theirs is the northernmost territory within the Pimachiowin Aki project area (Fig. 3).<sup>22</sup> Although traditional subsistence has been partially replaced by a cash and commodity



**Fig. 3** The Pimachiowin Aki World Heritage project area (<http://www.pimachiowinaki.org/the-land>, accessed July 7, 2012)

economy, many Poplar River residents retain close ties to a rich landbase that they inherited from their ancestors and that they, in turn, safeguard for future generations.<sup>23</sup> As elder Abel Bruce explained, “The creator has given us this land to take care of. That’s what we are here for. We’re not gonna be here long enough, but [the young people], they have to stand on their own two feet and look after this land.”<sup>24</sup>

To this day, the water of Poplar River runs pure and the unlogged boreal forest teems with wildlife (Fig. 4). While many Anishinaabe communities in the U.S. and Canada have already experienced logging, mining, and/or hydroelectric power generation, Poplar River’s relative inaccessibility has discouraged resource-extractive development. Yet residents have watched other indigenous communities—some nearby and known firsthand, others more distant and known only through media reports and word-of-mouth—face the detrimental effects of industrial activity. As a result, they have grown increasingly concerned about the future of their own land. Contrasting the health of their homeland with the degradation evident in more southerly locales catalyzed Poplar River’s proactive

<sup>21</sup> The GNTLUA is officially designated as publically-owned land and is overlapped by multiple competing non-Native interests whereas the Sokaogon confronted a series of single private landowners. As well, the GNTLUA encompasses the entire area traditionally used by Grassy Narrows Anishinaabeg whereas the Mushgigamongsebe District was a strategically selected portion of a larger Sokaogon homeland. While the Sokaogon were able to purchase the contested land through a fee simple transaction, this is extremely unlikely in northwestern Ontario.

<sup>22</sup> An adhesion to Treaty Five of 1875 (which covers most of central and northern Manitoba), the First Nation now has approximately 1,200 members, with over 900 residing on a remote reserve (Poplar River First Nation 2011:2). Accessible by winter road from January to March, the First Nation is reachable only by supply barges and a gravel air strip the remainder of the year. I visited Poplar River in August 2012 to learn about the community’s conservation initiatives and alliances.

<sup>23</sup> Fieldnotes, August 3, 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Interview, August 5, 2012.



**Fig. 4** Rapids along the pristine Asatiwisipi (Poplar River) (photo by author)

stance; as community activist Sophia Rabliauskas narrates in a documentary produced by the First Nation, “We used to take it for granted that the land would always be here, but when we learned of the threats, we had to protect the land. We made a commitment to protect the land for future generations” (Clark 2008).

Inspired by elders who stressed the importance of looking after the land and motivated by a deep desire for the community’s youth to experience culturally-distinct ways of living and learning on the land, Ray Rabliauskas (Poplar River’s lands management coordinator) explained that community members “felt it was important that we get recognition from the government. And get control of the land back so that Poplar River makes decisions on what happens.”<sup>25</sup> For 20 years, dedicated residents worked to make this happen. With assistance from supportive outsiders, Poplar River completed land use and occupancy studies, memory mapping, and archeological investigations.<sup>26</sup> This research provided irrefutable evidence that Algonkian-speaking peoples have lived in the vicinity for at least 2,500 years and demonstrated that generations of Poplar River Anishinaabeg have made use of their vast homeland (Poplar River First Nation 2011). The area ultimately delineated as the Asatiwisipi Aki Traditional Territory (AATT) covers some 3,328-square-miles.

The most tangible culmination of Poplar River’s efforts to reclaim the past, present, and future of its landbase is the *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan*, an 86-page living document that combines Anishinaabe ecological knowledge

<sup>25</sup> Interview, August 5, 2012.

<sup>26</sup> Partnerships with environmental NGOs, including the Canadian Boreal Initiative, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society were important sources of funding, technical and legal advice, and moral support. Funding for land use planning also came from the Province of Manitoba and the Metcalf Foundation.

and Western science to offer a comprehensive vision of land protection designed to “sustain the culture and very life of the community” (Poplar River First Nation 2011:3).<sup>27</sup> The plan contains over a dozen highly detailed maps that illustrate much more than just the AATT’s boundaries. Full-color maps depict landscape features, soil types, hydrological features, and fire history. Elders’ recollections of places they once gathered wild rice, fished, trapped, and hunted are shown as points or blocks within the larger AATT. Contemporary land use patterns are similarly documented. As Ray Rabliauskas attested, no one can argue with the clear data these studies—and the maps derived from them—provide.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years, Poplar River residents have employed a variety of strategies to complement the land use planning process and advance their conjoined goals of environmental protection and cultural renewal. In 1999, the First Nation took advantage of new provincial regulations to successfully nominate the bulk of its territory as a protected provincial park reserve, thereby temporarily prohibiting logging, mining, and hydroelectric development.<sup>29</sup> In the summer of 2000, Poplar River began hosting healing camps at *Pinesewapikung Sagaigan* (Weaver Lake)—located upriver from the modern community and in the heart of the First Nation’s traditional territory—which provided a much-needed forum for elders and youth to share stories, goals, and teachings. With three neighboring Anishinaabe communities, Poplar River entered into a Protected Areas Accord in 2002 to promote a shared vision of land protection and mutual support.

Years of working to educate Manitoba’s provincial government about First Nations knowledge, culture, and rights has begun to pay off. Not only was Poplar River able to achieve interim protected status for its landbase, but the community has also succeeded in convincing provincial officials that Asatiwisipi Aki is rightfully theirs to manage. Within this recognized landbase, future generations of Poplar River citizens will retain the option to learn—and live—traditional Anishinaabe culture. In 2008, the Manitoba Legislature passed Bill 6, known as the *East Side Traditional Lands Planning and Special Protected Lands Act*, which enables “First Nations and aboriginal communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg to engage in land use and resource management planning for designated areas of Crown land that they have traditionally used” (Manitoba 2008:2). The bill accommodates initiatives undertaken by

<sup>27</sup> The final version of this plan is available at [http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/lands\\_branch/pdf/pfm\\_management\\_plan\\_18may2011.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/lands_branch/pdf/pfm_management_plan_18may2011.pdf) (accessed September 10, 2012).

<sup>28</sup> Fieldnotes, August 3, 2012.

<sup>29</sup> Interim protection remained in place until Bill 6 (see below) was passed in 2008. At this time, the *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan* also became law (Ray Rabliauskas, personal communication, September 25, 2012). The plan unequivocally communicates Poplar River’s opposition to future industrial development and the community is currently working toward implementation.

Poplar River and neighboring communities and provides legal backing for the implementation of the *Asatiwisipi Aki Land Management Plan*. Significantly, the passage of Bill 6 indicates that outsiders are beginning to recognize the AATT as Anishinaabe land.

Poplar River's proactive environmental leadership has been widely celebrated.<sup>30</sup> In an era of climate change and widespread ecological degradation, the people of Poplar River have come to recognize the global significance of their boreal forest (Poplar River First Nation 2011:3). At the same time, they see strategic value in increasing the visibility of their agenda to others working to stop destructive development and in augmenting their land management plan with additional levels of environmental protection. Poplar River has taken a lead role in documenting the cultural and natural significance of Pimachiowin Aki—the land that gives life (Fig. 3). A World Heritage Site nomination was submitted in January 2012. If successful, a project area comprised of four First Nations' traditional territories and two provincial parks will be added to UNESCO's World Heritage List.<sup>31</sup> The Pimachiowin Aki nomination broadcasts the exceptional beauty of Asatiwisipi Aki to audiences around the world. This global visibility implies that if Canada or Manitoba authorizes industrial development that degrades the region, both the responsible industry and the government will be held accountable (see Niezen 1998).

Poplar River's leaders recognize the magnitude of their accomplishments, but are frank about the political paradoxes posed by mapping and formally managing their land. One initial problem arose from the need to draw fixed boundaries around the AATT, a process Sophia Rabliauskas characterized as going “against everything we believe in.”<sup>32</sup> Whereas traditional Anishinaabeg never considered the land in terms of ownership or exclusion, she explained, the overlap of customary use areas caused a new kind of conflict with neighboring First Nations.<sup>33</sup> Even more egregious, Anishinaabe people have survived on the land for thousands of years. They know how to manage their own land and their own lives, Sophia said, and would have preferred to continue doing so free of outside interference. Instead, they have been forced to abide by government policies that sought to strip them of their language, culture, identity, and relationship to the land. Sophia

put it mildly when she told me, “There is a bit of resentment when you have to do that.”<sup>34</sup> Given the history and continuing reality of colonialism and loss, it is not surprising that community members sometimes worry that land use planning is merely the latest in a long series of outside impositions.

That finding the best path forward for their communities means confronting such quandaries points to pervasive systemic inequity. Why should indigenous people have to convince government agents of things they themselves have always known? Why should they be required to fit their knowledge, beliefs, and ways of understanding the world into frameworks considered credible by a politically dominant settler society? Even as Sophia lamented this sad state of affairs, the imperative need to preserve Poplar River's landbase and lifeways supersedes her sense of injustice. At Poplar River, Ray stated, converting community members' memories and knowledge into data, delineating a bounded management area, and presenting this information as a series of authoritative maps *worked*. With this complex context in mind, he concluded, “everything we've done has been worth it.”<sup>35</sup>

## Conclusion

Access to land and the ability to determine its uses are essential to—many would even say constitutive of—American Indian sovereignty. For Iroquois cultural and political leader Oren Lyons, sovereignty means “the action of a people in a territory, the ability and willingness of a people to defend that territory, and the recognition of that ability by other nations” (1980:171). In order to function as autonomous self-determining units, Native North American communities require undegraded landbases on which to carry out traditional subsistence economic activities and sustain distinctive interrelationships of culture, language, and spirituality (Berger 1991). Fittingly, each of the counter-mapping endeavors described above originated as a response to the actual or anticipated encroachment of resource-extractive industries onto Anishinaabe homelands.

In a 21<sup>st</sup> century context characterized by urgent extractive-industrial threats to indigenous landbases and lifeways, the concrete benefits of counter-mapping in these cases appear to outweigh more diffuse detrimental effects. Given the realistic alternative of being left *off* the map—both literally and figuratively—and thus having claims to traditional territories obscured and landbases further reduced and/or degraded (Peluso 1995; see also Hodgson and Schroeder 2002), counter-mapping has effectively promoted land-based self-determination for the Sokaogon, Grassy Narrows, and Poplar

<sup>30</sup> Sophia Rabliauskas has been honored at the provincial (Order of Manitoba, 2008), national (Earth Day Canada, 2012), and international (Goldman Environmental Prize, 2007) levels.

<sup>31</sup> The provinces of Manitoba and Ontario as well as all four Protected Area Accord signatories are party to the nomination process. For more information of the Pimachiowin Aki project, see <http://www.pimachiowinaki.org/>.

<sup>32</sup> Fieldnotes, August 5, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Similar problems have been noted by observers in other parts of the world; Bryan points out regarding Miskito mapping projects in Honduras that requiring the resolution of overlaps and the delineation of boundary lines “ran at cross purposes with the very forms of customary use and occupancy they were intended to protect” (2011:41).

<sup>34</sup> Interview, August 5, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Fieldnotes, August 3, 2012.

River Anishinaabe communities. I worry, though, that the immediate success of the counter-mapping strategy could lead indigenous leaders, environmental and human rights advocates, and other decision-makers to disregard less-obvious and longer-term dangers. While the particular problems that may someday arise as a result of today's mapping efforts are impossible to predict (cooptation and misuse of decontextualized information by outsiders, contestations with neighboring communities that hinder the formation of political alliances, and the replacement of direct experiential knowledge of the landscape with detached data are some of the most foreseeable detriments), the process' intrinsic paradoxes apply in Anishinaabe country and beyond. In a recent analysis of the interrelationship between Indian gaming and sovereignty among the Florida Seminole, Jessica Cattelino argues for the applicability of Gregory Bateson's idea of the "double bind"—a situation in which "competing possible paths to overcoming [a] dilemma negate one another, posing a contradiction and leading to no possible resolution" (2010:236)—to the case of American Indian sovereignty.<sup>36</sup>

Regarding indigenous mapping initiatives, two principal predicaments must be factored into the equation. First, indigenous citizens who embrace mapping and its associated technological procedures run the risk that outsiders will declare them "inauthentic" or "illegitimate" and, some non-Native critics will declare, consequentially no longer deserving of the "special" legal status and benefits associated with indigenous identity. If they choose not to map, however, they conversely risk being denied acceptance as full and coeval participants in the modern world, thereby reinforcing stereotypical expectations about what Indians should or should not do—such as manage their own affairs (P. Deloria 2004). Following centuries of colonization, indigenous ways of understanding and experiencing the landscape have changed in significant ways. Counter-mapping is certain to further alter indigenous views of the land (Johnson 2010) and, in some cases, to increase the perceived similarity of indigenous people's perspectives to those of the Western societies from which they seek to demonstrate difference. Used to establish rights to territory *within* surrounding settler states, the counter-mapping process situates indigenous actors securely within the milieu of modern citizenship, thus ensuring that even as claims to territory get communicated clearly, claims to historical and cultural distinctiveness—and to the rhetorical indigeneity they signify—are rendered less effective. Given

the prevalence of popular media (mis)representations and the recent resurgence of termination-style policy prescriptions in Canada (Diabo 2012), these concerns confound optimistic evaluations of counter-mapping's outcomes.

Second, and equally disconcerting, when indigenous citizens participate in mapping projects, they are obliged to fit their knowledge, values, and visions into an intellectual and cultural framework that they did not create and do not necessarily endorse (see Nadasdy 1999). Yet if they refrain from constructing the kinds of maps Westerners accept as unambiguous declarations of interest in particular territories, they face further disempowerment and territorial dispossession within a system that has proven all too eager to disregard indigenous claims. In short, counter-mapping concurrently promotes and constrains indigenous claims to land-based self-determination; indigenous people who choose to enact their sovereignty in this manner are indeed empowered, but only within an existing—and inequitable—socio-political system.

In none of the Anishinaabe cases considered here did counter-mapping imply an attempt to declare sovereignty over and against surrounding nation-states; rather they echo indigenous leaders throughout the Western Hemisphere who call for "the reconfiguration of the existing nation-states in such a manner as to recognize and affirm indigenous cultural identities and sovereign status" (Field 2008:168; see also Brown 2007). All three examples illustrate how contemporary indigenous communities are integrating current legal frameworks into attempts to achieve the greatest possible degree of autonomy over their traditional territories: The Sokaogon made use of U.S. historic preservation legislation, Grassy Narrows productively argued for provincial recognition of rights guaranteed by their treaty relationship with Canada's federal government, and Poplar River benefited from a changing provincial regulatory climate as well as international law's support for indigenous cultures, lands, and rights.

Although necessarily limited in scope, the cases presented here suggest that counter-mapping—carried out in diverse ways and with diverse objectives—can empower indigenous people within existing social and political structures. Whether counter-mapping is taken as an affirmative means to an end of indigenous sovereignty or as a detrimental affront to true autonomy reflects deeper disagreements that frequently complicate indigenous politics; within and between American Indian communities, striking differences are apparent in how individuals believe sovereignty should be enacted in the present, even when the ultimate goal is similarly envisioned (Deloria and Lytle 1984). Some individuals opt to work pragmatically within an admittedly imperfect system to achieve incremental gains through negotiation and compromise. Others more idealistically insist that the only way to move beyond an unjust and imposed order is by refusing to participate in it. Proponents of the latter strategy are likely question the value of counter-mapping.

<sup>36</sup> Summarizing the double bind of "need-based sovereignty" and the Indian gaming economy, Cattelino argues that the exercise of sovereignty requires an economic base, which in recent years has increasingly flowed from gaming operations afforded by Indian tribes' status as sovereign governments. Within North American settler society, however, the legitimacy of indigenous sovereignty is challenged by displays of economic prosperity and exercises of economic power.

The creation of maps is an inherently political act. For indigenous inhabitants of North America—as for historically colonized peoples worldwide—struggles to control land and life are inevitably contoured by the unequal power relations that characterize postcolonial situations. My motive for discussing the dilemmas associated with counter-mapping is neither to endorse nor to disparage the strategy and the communities that have made good use of it. Rather, I hope that decision-makers can be prepared to make well-informed and carefully-considered choices and that the diverse audiences of indigenous counter-maps are better able to appreciate the pressures and constraints that influence their production. Because the prevailing techniques available to safeguard land-based self-determination also have the potential to undermine it, Native North American groups considering deploying mapping as a strategic component of their sovereignty process must negotiate a path that is undercut by potential pitfalls on both sides.

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