

waterways, these descendants of Ktsi Amiskw could locate the places where their ancestors had been. For even in their absence, the land was working as they had designed, making better beaver habitat from the resources of the forest.<sup>97</sup> Ktsi Amiskw, the Great Beaver, sits on Kwinitekw still; you can see him as you come off I-91 and turn south on Route 116. He looms above the industrial cornfields and the moribund mill towns. Ktsi Amiskw is the beaver; Ktsi Amiskw is the Abenaki and the Mohawk; Ktsi Amiskw is the English; Ktsi Amiskw is a sign of how difficult *alnŏbawŏgan* can be in Native space.

# 2

## Restoring a Dish Turned Upside Down

*Samson Occom, the Mohegan Land Case, and the  
Writing of Communal Remembrance*

Moving from the interior toward the coast, we travel downriver from Ktsi Amiskw to Pashebauk, "at the mouth of the river," where Kwinitekw empties into Sobakw, the sea. From the extensive fields beneath Ktsi Amiskw, the Pocumtuck sent corn to feed starving English settlers in the fledgling "Connecticut" colony at the mouth of the river, which in turn fed the colonists' notorious assault on the Pequot village, in which their relations, the Mohegans, participated. Generations later, the Pequots and Mohegans would serve as scouts for the former captive Joseph Kellogg at Deerfield during Greylock's War. Stephen Williams recalled that it was Mohegan scouts, not English rangers, who were able to track Abenaki warriors all the way up to Koasek after the Deerfield raid in 1704. Yet, despite their steadfast alliance with the English, the Mohegans still faced the impact of colonial dispossession, exemplified by the following petition, composed by two of its prominent leaders.<sup>1</sup>

### Dividing the Dish (Mohegan, 1789)

Writing from their village on the Thames River in 1789, "the Mohegans by the hands of their brothers, Henry Quaquaquid and Robert Ashpo," sent the following "memorial" to the Connecticut Assembly:

We beg leave to lay our concerns and burdens at your excellencies' feet. The times are exceedingly altered, yea the times are turned upside down; or rather we have changed the good times, chiefly by the help of the white people. For in times past our forefathers lived in peace, love and great harmony, and had everything in great plenty.

When they wanted meat, they would just run into the bush a little way, with their weapons, and would soon return, bringing home good venison, raccoon, bear and fowl. If they chose to have fish, they would only go to the river, or along the seashore; and they would presently fill their canoes with variety of fish, both scaled and shell-fish. And they had abundance of nuts, wild fruits, ground nuts and ground beans; and they planted but little corn and beans. They had no contention about their lands, for they lay in common; and they had but one large dish, and could all eat together in peace and love. But alas! it is not so now; all our hunting and fowling and fishing is entirely gone. And we have begun to work our land, keep horses and cattle and hogs; and we build houses and fences in lots. And now we plainly see that one dish and one fire will not do any longer for us. Some few there are that are stronger than others; and they will keep off the poor, weak, the halt and blind, and will take the dish to themselves. Yea, they will rather call the white people and the mulattoes to eat out of our dish; and poor widows and orphans must be pushed aside, and there they must sit, crying and starving, and die. And so we are now come to our good brethren of the Assembly, with hearts full of sorrow and grief, for immediate help. And therefore our most humble and earnest request is, that our dish of sucktash may be equally divided amongst us, so that every one may have his own little dish by himself, that he may eat quietly and do with his dish as he pleases, that every one may have his own fire.<sup>2</sup>

In this petition, Quaquaquid and Ashpo recalled a balanced world and grieved its loss, lamenting the fact that the common pot had been "turned upside down." Where there had been "abundance," "harmony," and land "in common," there was now scarcity, acquisitiveness, and division; misery, starvation, and death. The portrait of "one large dish" from which all could "eat together" may represent a nostalgic ideal, even strategic romanticization, as Mohegan historian Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel has suggested, but the image also evokes the genuine experience of an "altered" physical and social environment.<sup>3</sup>

The petition presents the communal remembrance of a world in which balance was the aim, even if it was not always achieved, with systems in place for dealing with scarcity, conflict, and individual desire, in striking contrast with a "time" marked by seemingly insurmountable imbalance. While Quaquaquid and Ashpo suggested that the only solu-

tion to this predicament was the division of their "large dish" into smaller, individual ones, they also expressed great regret that they were no longer able to "eat together" from "one dish." In this instance, the "dish" referred specifically to the village. As Mohican leader Hendrick Aupaumut wrote, the village was the "kettle" from which Algonquian families drew "their daily refreshment." Coastal villages like Mohegan contained planting grounds along the river, fishing sites, and inland hunting territories, as well as access to bountiful marine resources. Sachems were responsible for ensuring that access to these resources was allocated equally among families and for regulating distribution through trade in the larger network. The people indigenous to the village held the primary responsibility for maintaining the "kettle's" environment so that it would continue to sustain them. Their sovereignty rested on this responsibility.<sup>4</sup>

During their lifetime, Quaquaquid and Ashpo experienced a decrease in the availability of resources in the village space and an increase in colonial control over their usage and distribution. Colonization created the physical division of land within the territory and the subsequent political division of the Mohegan community into two "parties" that occupied separate "towns." Predictably, the two parties emerged from a conflict between acquiescence with and resistance to the Connecticut colony's authority over Native land. Quaquaquid and Ashpo were born into leadership families from opposing towns, but both men participated in a movement from within to reclaim the ideal of the common pot and operate as "one family" that would act "for the benefit of the whole" in all political and legal matters. Under the conditions of escalating colonization, however, it seemed that the only way these leaders could envision a fair distribution was to equally divide what remained of the dish itself.<sup>5</sup>

Unlike chapter 1, which explored the dynamics of division and reconstruction within the common pot as an extensive network of relations, this chapter focuses on the common pot of the village dish. The bounds of this space and the families within it may alter over time, with gradual changes in geographic and social configurations or with sudden rupture, as exemplified by the events surrounding the Pequot War. The village can be moved or reconstructed from within. This chapter explores the complex dynamic between unity and division, dispossession and reconstruction at Mohegan, from the seventeenth century wampum wars that divided the Mohegans from the Pequots to the division of the body politic during a critical eighteenth-century land case to the Mohegans'

attempt to reconstruct their “family” and reclaim the whole of their dish. Most important, this chapter reads these events through a series of petitions like the one of Quaquaquid and Ashpo, authored by Mohegans themselves.

### Origin Stories: The Power of Wampum

*The Dish “Turned Upside Down” (At the Mouth of the River, 1630–1643)*

In order to understand the dynamic between division and unity at Mohegan, we have to look back to the origins of the village, to the Mohegans’ split from their Pequot relations during the “time” in which the pot was being turned “upside down.” This rift was rooted in the competitive discord that arose in the network of wampum-makers on the coast under the initial onslaught of European colonization.

The Abenaki story “The Origin of Wampum” tells us that wampum came from the mouths of powerful *medeolinowak*. The purple and white beads, hand crafted from quahog shell, held the potential for transforming relationships in Native space (See Figures 5 and 6). As the story relates, “Whenever they want to make a treaty, two nations exchange wampum beads worked into a belt.” Such belts made the agreements between nations manifest and bound leaders to the promise that there would be no more “fighting” between them — that they would refrain from “hunting one another forever.” Wampum was exchanged to create and maintain relationships as well as to reverse the destructive dynamic of war. It was instrumental to achieving social balance in the network of relations. Yet its power, like that of writing, was ambivalent. For the story also tells us that black wampum, which often symbolized war, had the power to enable one *medeolinu* to take all from the others, even though they may have possessed more than he did at the start. Thus, wampum held the potential for both making peace and making war in Native space, and the key to its power was in the process of exchange and distribution.<sup>6</sup>

All wampum originated in the sea into which Kwinitewkw emptied. The wampum-makers who inhabited the region “at the mouth of the river” (*pashetbauk*) had an obligation to send the carefully crafted shell-beads upriver in the trade that enabled peace (see Maps 2 and 6). Wampum traveled north along Kwinitewkw’s extensive route of exchange, passing through the villages of the Mattabesic, Wagunk, Paudunk, Tunxis, and Paquanaug and then through Woronoco, Agawam, and Nonotuck to reach



Figure 5. Quahog shell. Photograph by the author.

Pocumtuck, the land of the Great Beaver, where the trade continued to the north, east, and west. To the west of the mouth of the river were the territories of the Hammonasset and Quinnipiac, which connected Kwinitewkw up with Wappinger country to the west, eventually moving through the Housatonic River to the Muhhekkunnutuk (Hudson) River and on into the Haudenosaunee Confederacy to the northwest. To the east of the mouth of the river were the Niantics, the Mohegans/Pequots, the Narragansetts, and the Wampanoags on the southeast coast. Directly to the south, on a narrow island across the sound, were the Montauks and Shinnecocks, who were also significant participants in the wampum trade. All of these nations were intimately linked through the kinship and trade networks that connected the interior forests to the coast. However, as these networks were ruptured by disease and warfare, wampum’s value as a means of rebalancing grew, fostering an excessive demand for the shell-bead, especially among the Haudenosaunee, who required wampum for ceremonies of condolence and adoption.<sup>7</sup>

While the demand for wampum increased in the interior, European traders and settlers were establishing sites along the coastal waterways. First the Dutch, then the English, began trading at the mouth of the river, acting as middlemen in the wampum-pelt exchange. The English

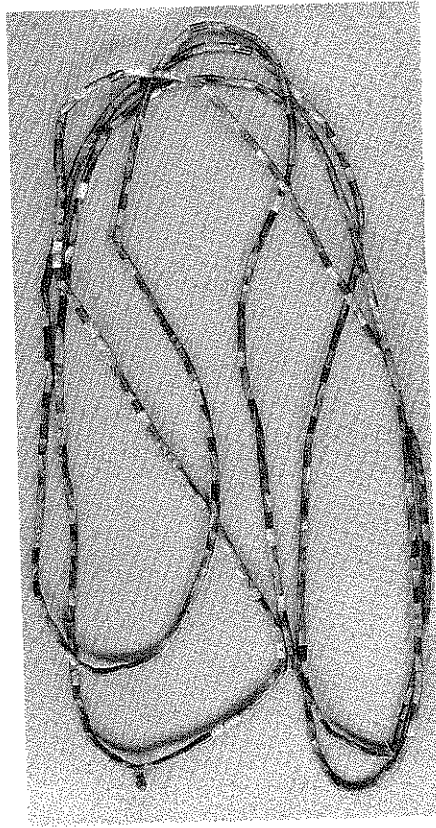
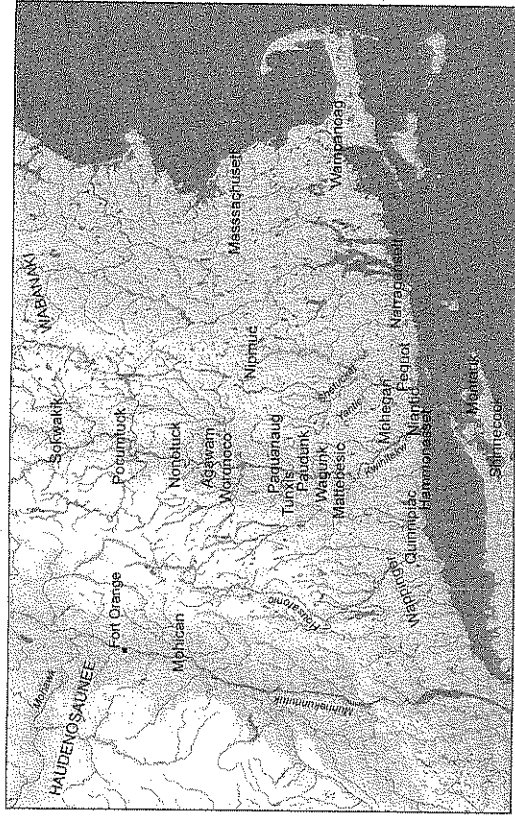


Figure 6. Wampum string. Copyright 2007 Harvard University, Peabody Museum, 99-12-10/53011 N34998.

took the name of the river for their fledgling colony at its mouth. The existence of these newcomers in Native space presented two more reasons for a rise in trade: the need to create and sustain relationships with these “strangers” and the influx of new goods into indigenous networks. The Europeans also brought their own desire for fur, for which wampum was often exchanged, and an economic perspective that applied a very different symbolic value to the shell-bead, a value that may have invoked the potential for its destructive power.<sup>8</sup>

Two indigenous nations assumed an intermediary role in the developing wampum trade on the coast. The Narragansetts, who had acquired prestige in the region for demonstrating resistance to disease and displaying diplomatic skill with neighboring communities and English newcomers alike, “obtained their hegemony” on the eastern part of the coast (according to historian Neal Salisbury), “through persuasion rather than violence.”<sup>9</sup> The Pequots, with their Dutch trading partners, monopolized distribution in the trade between the Pawcatuck River and Kwinitekw, transforming their geographic “access” to wampum from a position within a system of reciprocal relations to a situation through which they might acquire power over others. The Pequots took in vast amounts of wampum from the surrounding nations to trade to the Dutch, from whom they received European goods that they distributed to neighboring communities. The Dutch, in turn, carried the wampum west to Fort Orange to trade for the furs brought to them by the Mohicans, then the Mohawks. The Dutch also transformed the function of wampum to that



Map 6. The environs of Mohegan, showing the location of the Mohegan village and the territories of neighboring Native communities, from the “wampum-makers” on the coast to the inland Wabanaki and Haudenosaunee.

of currency in colonial trade networks, and they encouraged their Native partners to adopt this practice as well. The wampum trade transformed geographic space as production stations sprang up on the coast and islands, and it transformed political space as the Pequots expanded their control to the islands and the southern stretch of Kwinitekw. The Pequots often used warfare to gain access to territory, drawing power from their control over wampum to gain political and economic preeminence in the region.<sup>10</sup>

Kwinitekw, ideally situated between the wampum coast and the fur-trading regions to the north, quickly became embroiled in competition. The Dutch claimed a settlement site on the river (near the present site of Hartford) through their alliance with the Pequots, obtaining consent from the Narragansetts even as they built trading ties with the local Saukiaug that left Pequot middlemen out of the exchange. Meanwhile, as Pequot-Narragansett competition developed into open warfare, Plymouth colonists belatedly accepted an invitation from the local Paudunk sachems to settle among them as a form of protection against the Pequot. Obtaining the consent of the Narragansetts as well as the local leadership, the English built a fort upriver of the Dutch site (at the present site of Windsor), intercepting the fur trade and directly challenging the

"Dutch-Pequot hegemony." As the European trade entered the mouth of the river, epidemics swept up Kwinitekw's southern stretch, killing hundreds of families, including political and spiritual leaders, and leaving survivors in turmoil. As the "times turned upside down," this swirl of conflict, grief, and upheaval culminated in the violent death of the Pequot's primary surviving sachem, and a struggle ensued over resources and leadership succession that swiftly split the Pequot Nation in two.<sup>11</sup>

The division originated, according to at least one colonial source, when some in the nation "grew so great and proud" that they began to "quarrel" over hunting rights, a conflict that led to warfare within the group and to the strategic strengthening of political ties between the Narragansetts and the estranged ones. The splinter group was led by an ambitious survivor named Uncas, who led his followers to create a separate village in his family territory of Shantok, on the west side of the Pequot River. They referred to themselves as Mohegans, reclaiming an older name that emphasized the nation's original position in the network of relations.<sup>12</sup>

This chaotic explosion of conflict over the wampum trade was a key factor in the infamous "Pequot War." While the English certainly had their own objectives in assaulting the central Pequot village, motivations also arose from within Native space. The Mohegans, in a later petition to the King of England, claimed that they had participated to punish the Pequots "for their greed." As Kevin McBride has observed, "The Pequot War can just as easily be seen as a conflict between Native protagonists as a colonial-Pequot war," which resulted from the Pequots' "aggressive . . . control of the fur and wampum trade." Yet, as illustrated previously, the Pequots accused the Mohegans of the same violation. In truth, each faction censured the other for the crime of hoarding resources, without fully recognizing its own culpability in this destructive business.<sup>13</sup>

Wampum was valued as a conduit for rebalancing, but, as the Abenaki story suggests, its power was not always invoked in peace. When some held more than others, refusing to distribute their resources fairly, they could be subjected to violent redistribution, just as Gluskap made the Great Bull Frog release the contents of his belly through the force of his hand. And just as the Mohawks attacked the Mohegans for dominating the fur trade, the Narragansetts and Mohegans who participated in the Pequot massacre enacted a similar enforcement of the distribution imperative, claiming the power of wampum for themselves.

However, in contrast to the Mohawk-Mohican situation on the Hudson, the English were already deeply embedded in Native networks on the coast and acted as a direct catalyst for war. As McBride has observed, "Many of the tribes who fought against the Pequots perceived the English as a means of ending Pequot domination." Yet, while the Mohegans and Narragansetts watched the English torch the Pequot village and helped them kill the hundreds of inhabitants who ran from the flames, including the women and children whom the Narragansetts had asked the English to spare, Algonquian people were confronted with the overwhelming destructiveness of English power. Although reportedly amazed at its force, the Narragansetts told an English officer at the scene, "Macht, macht; that is, It is naught, it is naught because it is too furious and slays too many men." The European style of warfare, and the "furiousness" with which the Englishmen participated in it, involved much more than a rebalancing of power. As many Native leaders came to realize, colonial warfare arose from emotions and motivations that presented an immediate danger to the survival of the common pot.<sup>14</sup>

In the wake of the Pequot War, the charismatic Narragansett leader Miantonomo arose to unite Algonquians against the threat of English destructiveness while the Mohegan leader Uncas sought to bolster the power and security of his own village by utilizing the English as allies. The English, in turn, flattered the ambitious Uncas and encouraged him to take charge of the distributive role previously held by his Pequot relations while undermining the Narragansetts' standing in the region. However, as tribal historian Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel has pointed out, this relationship went both ways; Uncas was able to successfully draw these allies to him by flattering their own desire for power. Competition over wampum collection and distribution continued to foster tensions in the region, while English misunderstanding and manipulation of the role of wampum complicated the process of rebalancing.<sup>15</sup>

As Salisbury has observed, while the English strove to subordinate Native nations in the region after the Pequot War by "extracting tribute in the form of wampum payments," the Narragansetts continued to perceive such "payments" within the framework of the common pot — as "gifts freely presented to potential allies with the expectation that they would be reciprocated." While both groups perceived wampum exchange as "a symbolic expression of allegiance," English leaders regarded such gifts as deference to their power in a hierarchical system. To

the Narragansetts, on the other hand, English failure to reciprocate implied an unwillingness to participate in exchange, which, as historian Daniel Richter has written, "could easily lead to a presumption of hostility." Even the Narragansetts' long-time friendship with Rhode Island leader Roger Williams began to break down in the face of such pressure.<sup>16</sup>

As colonial governors transformed wampum into a vehicle for enforcing their political power, Narragansett leaders turned their attention to Native networks, utilizing wampum to solidify relationships of reciprocity. Narragansetts regularly traded wampum for fur with the Mohawks to cement ties across linguistic and geographic boundaries and to bolster their security by allying themselves with the nation perceived as the most powerful by the English. By this time, the Mohawks had also begun to forge connections with the nations that gathered at John Pynchon's newly established trading post on Kwinitekw, at Agawam. While cultivating alliances in the north, the Narragansett sachem Miantonomo also carried wampum to his relations on the coast. According to Paul Robinson, "Whereas Miantonomo formerly received presents during his visits, he now gave them to his listeners," emphasizing the value of equal distribution.<sup>17</sup>

In his travels, Miantonomo conveyed a vision with the potential to restore balance to networks torn apart by disease, death, and accumulative desire. His vision is exemplified by a speech he delivered to the Montauks in 1642:

For so are we all Indians as the English are, and say brother to one another; so must we be one as they are, otherwise we shall all be gone shortly, for you know our fathers had plenty of deer and skins, our plains were full of deer, as also our woods, and of turkeys, and our coves full of fish and fowl. But these English having gotten our land, they with scythes cut down the grass, and with axes fell the trees; their cows and horses eat the grass, and their hogs spoil our clam banks, and we shall all be starved. Therefore it is best for you to do as we, for we are all the Sachems from east to west, both Moquakues and Mohauks joining with us, and we are all resolved to fall upon them all, at one appointed day.<sup>18</sup>

Miantonomo invoked the ideal of the common pot to summon the communal memory of abundance, entreating his relations to reclaim it for their own survival. Having witnessed the success of the English divide-and-conquer strategy, the Narragansett sachem urged his relations to recognize colonization as the source of social imbalance and re-

source depletion. Furthermore, he urged his relations to realize that they had the power and the responsibility to reverse the flow of destruction and restore equilibrium. Miantonomo's speech was the first recorded Native articulation of the disparity between the balance of the common pot and the imbalance of the world turned upside down, a trope that, as Salisbury has pointed out, would be echoed in Native writings and speeches for centuries to come.<sup>19</sup>

The call for Indian union to oppose the destructiveness of colonial division emerged from the shores of the Algonquian coast to become one of the resounding themes of the common pot. On the eve of the Pequot War, the Pequot sachems had called for union against the English, saying that these "strangers" had begun "to overspread their country, and would deprive them thereof in time, if they were suffered to grow and increase." However, the Pequots had realized the impacts of colonization too late to save their own village. Miantonomo, more than any other leader, came to understand the significance of the Pequots' last-ditch plea for coalition, realizing its wisdom only after seeing the violence of the alternative. The key to rebalancing, in Miantonomo's vision, was for all Indians, "from east to west," to unite "as one" to counteract the destruction. Lieutenant Lion Gardiner, who recorded the speech, related, "There were divers objections" to the plan because "the English were too strong for them," but Miantonomo responded, "It is true if they did not all join they should be too weak but if all join then they should be strong enough."<sup>20</sup>

According to Gardiner, the greatest obstacle to forming "all the Indians" into "one man" was "howe they might compasse Uncas." The Mohegan sachem had amassed considerable power through his coalition with the English, and through "strategic marriage alliances" and coercion he had incorporated many people into his village dish. Uncas himself married "as many as six or seven wives," including women from key Pequot families, which helped to cement the authority granted to him by the English over Pequot survivors. Most of his wives were "powerful Algonquian women" in their own right, and these alliances bolstered his position within the coastal network while opening multiple routes to Shantok for those who might join him. The Mohegan leader also continued to pursue the raiding tactics employed by the Pequots before the war, gathering followers and goods through the threat of force and taking advantage of the apprehension shared by all coastal communities in the wake of the Pequot War.<sup>21</sup> Uncas constructed a multifaceted, sustainable

stronghold protected by a social palisade of marriages, trade, and dependencies and bolstered by a formidable alliance with the English.

While the Narragansetts presented a continual threat to Uncas's base of power, the Mohegan leader fostered divisiveness between the Narragansetts and their English neighbors, and competition erupted into sporadic warfare between the two groups. At one point, some of the Narragansetts' allies reported to Roger Williams that Uncas's followers were planning to intercept Miantonomo's trade and alliance-building: the Mohegans said they would "lay in way and wait to stop Miantunnumues passage to Qunnihicut, and divers of them threatened to boil him in a kettle." Not long afterward, Miantonomo invited Uncas and his counselors to eat from their dish, to share a meal of venison provided by Narragansett hunters, but Uncas declined, perhaps uncertain whether the offer was an extension of peace or a deadly deception.<sup>22</sup>

Even as tensions between the two leaders mounted to a climax, Miantonomo made one more effort to invite Uncas to share the same dish. The deal, however, was offered only under extreme pressure. Following a battle on the "great plains" at Mohegan, Miantonomo took flight, running for a "great waterfall" on the Yantic River known as "Uncas Leap." A Mohegan "swift runner" known as Tantaquidgeon captured Miantonomo, who was hampered by an unwieldy coat of chain mail given to him by a well-meaning Rhode Island settler. At Shantok, Uncas received a present of wampum from the Narragansetts and apparently engaged in long deliberation with their leader. Although Miantonomo refused to plead for his own life, he did appeal to the Mohegan sachem to consider the fate of the common pot that fed them both. He asked him to contemplate the transformations that had taken place since the English arrival and to seriously consider joining the Indian union. Miantonomo offered to marry one of Uncas's daughters to create an alliance, which might heal the ruptures between them and bind them in mutual obligation to each other and would serve as a formal recognition of the broader network of relations to which they both belonged.<sup>23</sup>

As Mohegan leader Samson Occom later wrote of the Montautks, to join in marriage was to eat from the same dish. Uncas used marriage to draw families into the "dish" of Mohegan while also taking from the "dishes" of other villages to distribute those goods among his followers, offering both security and sustenance to those who joined him. Miantonomo, on the other hand, envisioned a larger dish from which all might eat and the reclamation of this common pot from the English. In proposing

an alliance, Miantonomo offered Uncas a deal that would encompass both visions. The marriage of Uncas's daughter to Miantonomo would reinforce the power of the Mohegan village within the Native network that Miantonomo sought to reconstruct, and Uncas would then be obligated to demonstrate loyalty to the Narragansetts and the Indian union. Miantonomo asked Uncas to reconsider his alliance with the English and to join those with whom he was united by kinship to sustain the pot from which their ancestors had eaten together.<sup>24</sup>

Uncas apparently deliberated carefully before deciding to reject Miantonomo's offer, instead offering the Narragansett leader to his English partners as a captive. The colonial court, now representing the "United Colonies" of Connecticut, New Haven, Massachusetts Bay, and Plymouth, condemned Miantonomo for his "ambitious designs to make himself universal sagamore or governor of all these parts of the country, [and] his treacherous plots by gifts to engage all the Indians at once to cut off the whole body of the English in these parts." They concluded that "Uncas cannot be safe while Myantenemo lives," ruling that although they did not "have sufficient ground" to execute him, Uncas "justly might put such a false and bloodthirsty enemie to death." They sent a message to Uncas asking him to retrieve the captured Narragansett leader and to "put him to death so soon as he came within his own jurisdiction," thereby putting the knife back into Native hands. Uncas retrieved the captive himself and, upon returning to Shantok, had his own brother kill Miantonomo at the place where he had been captured, on a plain above Uncas Leap where Uncas had himself avoided capture by the Narragansetts in an earlier raid. This was the site of the final contest between the two leaders. By bringing him back to the falls, Uncas demonstrated to Miantonomo that all of his skill and agility did not match that of the Mohegans. Where Miantonomo had been captured, Uncas had escaped. Where Uncas had escaped, Miantonomo would be killed. To Uncas, sustaining the village was the best strategy for survival, while forming a coalition against the English was the means to sure death.<sup>25</sup>

Uncas has often been portrayed as "a self-serving collaborator" and a force of destruction in the common pot. But, as historian Eric S. Johnson has noted, while most Algonquian communities were devastated by their participation in movements to resist colonization, the Mohegans "retained their guns, much of their land, their religion, and their political autonomy" by consistently siding with the English. "To the Mohegans," Johnson relates, "Uncas is a hero" for successfully negotiating

colonial politics in order to empower his own community. Indeed, in a 1995 address Mohegan leader Jayne Fawcett remarked: "Every Mohegan here today is a living testimonial to the wisdom of Uncas' strategy of survival through friendship. We are all descendants of that great man."<sup>26</sup> Whether we regard Miantonomo and Uncas as visionaries or collaborators, as prescient leaders or individuals caught in a whirlwind of change, the conflict between them was symptomatic of a broader dilemma. The tension between the desire to protect the village and the need to preserve the larger network of relations, and the question of which would entail the best solution to the problem of colonization, would dominate Native politics for generations to come. Paradoxically, it was the ethics present in Miantonomo's unifying vision that Uncas's descendants called on over a century later to counteract colonial division and protect their village "dish" from English control.

### Dismemberment and Re-memberment: Framing the Mohegan Land Case

Miantonomo's call was renewed decades later by a Wampanoag leader known most prominently for the colonial conflict called King Philip's War. Although named for the sachem Metacom, alias Philip, the war is more accurately described as the formation of a multifaceted coalition against English expansion.<sup>27</sup> At the start of the war, when his village of Montaup and his sister-in-law Weetamoo's village of Pocasset were attacked by the English, Metacom traveled north to Nipmuc country, where he broke up and distributed his coat of wampum, demonstrating his willingness to distribute power and share in the leadership of the resistance.<sup>28</sup>

Yet, at the end of the war, many of these same leaders faced a different kind of "breaking up": the dismemberment of nations and families as leaders were assassinated and their families sold into slavery, while survivors were forced to disperse and seek shelter with nations to the north. They also faced the literal dismemberment of bodies. Metacom's corpse was quartered and his head was displayed in Plymouth, while Weetamoo's severed head was displayed in Taunton before her grieving kin as a sign of triumph and a warning to those who remained.<sup>29</sup>

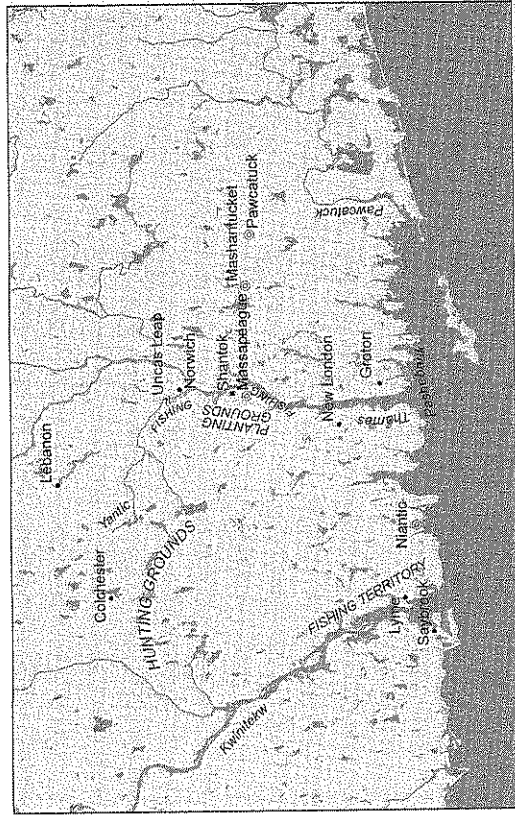
Just as they had served as allies to the English in the Pequot War, the Mohegans served as colonial scouts in this conflict, which they later referred to as "the warres with the Generall Nations of Indians." Four years after the death of Metacom, colonial officials met with Uncas

to determine and settle the bounds of their "reserved" territories. This entailed another kind of dismemberment — that of Native lands. While Mohegans continued to conceive of their village territory as a whole, on paper it was divided up into three major parcels: the planting and fishing grounds on the west side of the Thames River, the hunting grounds in the uplands to the north and west, and the fishing grounds at the mouth of Kwittek (see Map 7). These lands were meant to "re-mayn to them and their heirs for ever." While Connecticut officials recorded these meetings as the formalization of colonial policy, Mohegans remembered them as part of the "League of Alliance and Friendship" between Uncas and the English colonists who had settled, by agreement, in their midst. As his descendants later related, however, the majority of colonists did not honor this agreement. Rather, the Mohegans saw their subsistence territory gradually dismembered by colonization, with only a small portion of their village — the planting grounds on the Thames River — allowed to them by the colony.<sup>30</sup>

Time and again, Mohegans reminded the English of their service and sacrifice during the Pequot War and the many wars that followed in resistance to English expansion. As Mohegan councilor Papaquanait put it in 1703, "In the Pequot war . . . they gave their heads to the English; in the Narragansett and Parentuck [Pocumtuck] war, they gave their heads to the English; and they have lately done the same to the eastward in the war with the Indians and French there; and there is no strange thing with us; if there be any strange it is among themselves."<sup>31</sup> Despite their consistent loyalty, the Mohegans faced a constant struggle against colonial encroachment, which they fought primarily with paper and pen. The Mohegan land case, initiated in 1700 by Uncas's sons Owaneco and Ben, spanned nearly a century and divided the community, even as it embedded the Mohegan presence in Native space. Through the writing of petitions and the recording of communal memory, the Mohegans demanded recognition of their "Native rights" to their entire village territory, utilizing both indigenous tradition and English law to solidify their claim.

The petition quoted at the beginning of this chapter, bemoaning the loss of the village dish, reflects the processes of dismemberment and re-memberment in which the community was embroiled during the land case and beyond. The African writer Ngūgĩ wa Thiong'o has spoken eloquently about the practices and methods of "dismemberment" wrought by the colonial project (in Africa and elsewhere) and those of "re-memberment" acquired in the "quest for wholeness" that is decolonization.<sup>32</sup> His





Map 7. The Mohegan dish, showing the "reserved" territory claimed by the Mohegans during the land case, including the location of their planting, hunting, and fishing grounds, as well as the locations of neighboring Native villages, colonial towns, and other places mentioned in the text.

analysis provides an ideal framework for reading the texts of the Mohegan land case.

Just as there are multiple kinds of dismemberment, Ngūgī tells us, there are multiple ways to think about re-memberment. There is the idea of "memory," which can take place in the individual or communal body and is stored in the cavity of the mind. In the Abenaki language, the words for memory, *mikwaldamwōgan* and *mikwaldīgan*, suggest that, like writing, it can be both an activity and a powerful instrument for finding something stored in one's mind. The processes through which indigenous people retrieve, recall, and reclaim memory represent a collective re-memberment, a process of "bringing pieces together" that have been carefully kept, dispersed, or even buried. Correspondingly, as Ngūgī relates, one of the most important vehicles for re-memberment is literature, which is carried on the spoken voice and in the written word. The land case reflects the utilization of both.<sup>33</sup>

The "texts" of the case to be explored begin with Uncas's League of Alliance, followed by Owaneco and Ben Uncas's petition to Queen Anne in 1700, both of which affirmed the Mohegans' "Native rights" to their "reserved lands." Facing increasing encroachment, Uncas's great

grandson, Mahomet II, traveled to England in 1736 to present another petition to King George II, reminding him of the "ancient alliance" of their nations and requesting the restoration of the Mohegans' "Native lands." Following the death of Mahomet in England, Mohegan leaders presented several "declarations" written in a communal voice, recalling the history of dispossession, countering colonial misrepresentation, and reasserting their common land rights. All of these petitions were penned with the assistance of English neighbors. However, in the generation that followed, a group of literate Mohegans banded together, using writing to reconstruct their body politic, re-member their collective history, and reclaim their "Native rights." This group included Samson Occom, the famous Mohegan minister, and the authors of the "dish" petition, Henry Quaquauid and Robert Ashpo. Each generation grounded its claims in the arguments made by their predecessors, passed down through oral tradition and recorded in the written word.<sup>34</sup>

As Ngūgī conceptualizes it, the process of re-memberment entails a careful reconstruction of the communal body, a "quest for wholeness" that is essential to the healing of the fragmented political, social, and cultural "base." Through a reconstruction of collective history, based on the voices and writings of the Mohegans themselves, this chapter explores the dismemberment of the Mohegan lands and social body, the adoption and adaptation of writing as a tool of communal remembrance, and the Mohegan "quest for wholeness," the routes through which the Mohegans sought to re-member the village dish.

## Dividing the Dish

### *The Dismemberment of Mohegan Lands and a Developing Narration of Native Rights (Mohegan, 1680–1743)*

Having provided a framework for interpreting the texts of the land case, I would also like to provide a historical framework for defining the "Native rights" that these texts repeatedly invoke. William Cronon's landmark *Changes in the Land* offers lucid analysis of the critical differences between the English and Algonquian land tenure systems that were operating in colonial New England, which I attempt to summarize here. The English system rested on a conceptualization of land, especially within the realm of property transactions, as "an abstract area" with "fixed" boundaries, irrespective of usage. The "owner" acquired property through an economic and legal transaction and owned it as an individual against

however, for Uncas the agreement laid out the terms for sharing the space of the watershed, and writing, like wampum, solidified the "binds" between the two groups and enabled their mutual inhabitation.<sup>39</sup>

Having solidified the "League of Alliance & Friendship with the English," as Uncas's great grandson Mahomet (II) explained several generations later, "from time to time" Uncas, representing the Mohegans, made "gifts and grants for small consideration" of "tracts of their land," always ensuring that the bulk of the village territory was "reserved" to themselves. However, sometime after Uncas's death, "a generation arose in the Colony of Connecticut who knew not Unchas & his successors, but did contrary to the faith of their fathers' leagues, their public records, & the terms of the Royal Charter, encroach upon the remainder of the Mohegan Lands which your petitioners' ancestors had reserved to themselves and their people for their hunting and planting grounds."<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, Mahomet asserted, "the Mohegans were threatened to be slain if they came upon those lands." This account reflected communal memory, corresponding to speeches made by Mohegan councilors and recorded during the initial land case proceedings. The complaints addressed two primary assaults on Mohegan territory: the establishment of a new settlement, called Colchester, in the reserved hunting grounds and the expansion of the older settlement of New London into the planting grounds along the Thames.<sup>41</sup> In a speech recorded in 1703, Mahomet II's father, Mahomet I, related that "four of his men [were] taken at Colchester the last winter, and carried to New London, and there threatened to be hanged, when they had done nothing worse than that they went into a cellar and warmed themselves by the fire." He said these actions "seemed strange to him, and he was ashamed."<sup>42</sup> Another Mohegan leader, Ashenunt, protested that "the English had turned them out of their houses in the time of snow" from their planting grounds at Massapeage, "which occasioned their women and children to cry."<sup>43</sup>

Like Mahomet I, Ashenunt expressed bewilderment at the colonists' conduct. The Mohegans had held to their commitment to share space with the English, but the English appeared to be acting more like enemies than allies. Ashenunt further related that since this incident, the Mohegans had been called on as "scouts" for the English, remarking that "as they and the English have been friends and brethren, so they are our brethren still."<sup>44</sup> The English, Ashenunt asserted, demonstrated inconsistent behavior in asking the Mohegans to act as allies in war while fail-

ing to respect the rights and responsibilities of "friends and brethren" in shared space.

The Mohegans also accused the English of using their status as "friends" to deceive their leaders and unlawfully claim lands. For example, in 1698 Fitz-John Winthrop, the governor of the Connecticut Colony, and Gordon Saltonstall, the minister of New London, sought a grant for the town of Colchester from the General Court without acquiring those lands from the Mohegans. In order to legitimate the grant under British law, they coerced Uncas's son and successor, Owaneco, to release the hunting grounds to them on paper while he was "intoxicated."<sup>45</sup>

The Mohegans' experience of dispossession was thus complicated by Owaneco's acknowledged weakness for alcohol, enabling colonists to acquire deeds without the community's consent. However, Owaneco took several steps as sachem to protect the Mohegan lands from colonization, as well as from his own fallibility. In 1684, shortly after Uncas's death, Owaneco formally recorded collective Native rights into English law, granting "my right" to the planting grounds "unto the Mohegan Indians for their use to plant" and ensuring that "neither I, nor my son, nor any under him, shall at any time make sale of any part thereof; and that tract of land shall be and remain forever for the use of the Mohegan Indians." As Mahomet II later related from communal memory, "Those lands which your petitioner's ancestors had reserved to themselves & their tribe for their hunting and planting grounds was afterward confirmed by the General Court to Sachem Owaneco the oldest son & heir [of Uncas] and to his son Mahomet your petitioner and their heirs."<sup>46</sup> The rights that had always been confirmed with wampum in council were thus formalized through the writing that confirmed agreements in colonial courts. At the same time, Owaneco entered into a formal trust relationship with the neighboring Mason family in Norwich, who had maintained a firm alliance with Uncas and his descendants since the Pequot War. This relationship was solidified in written law, ensuring that the sachem "might not pass [the Mohegan lands] away to any without the Consent of Captain Samuel Mason."<sup>47</sup> Mason had to be present whenever words were written down, to translate to Owaneco and to ensure that words were recorded accurately. Thus, the Colchester grant was unlawful because it was transacted without Mason's participation, and the expansion of New London into Massapeage was null and void because Owaneco had recorded the Mohegans' perpetual rights to their planting grounds into law.

other individuals in the larger territory. Native rights, on the other hand, referred to the "sovereign rights that defined a village's political and ecological territory." These rights included resource usage, the right to manage the distribution of resources within the community and within the larger trade network, the right to regulate spaces of shared usage, and the responsibility to ensure that resources would continue to sustain the village. The village was generally defined by the watershed it inhabited, and its "collective sovereignty" was based on long-standing inhabitation and continuing use, which was recognized by contiguous communities.<sup>35</sup>

While European land tenure, in both conceptualization and practice, involved delineating boundaries between subjects and between subjects and objects, Native understandings of land "rights" were always relational. Native land tenure was rooted in the interdependent relationship between a community and its territory. Families had particular relationships to hunting and planting grounds within the village territory, which facilitated even distribution of space and resources and tempered competition. As Cronon points out, in situations in which resources were plentiful, such as spring fishing and fall hunting, families would come together to fish the spawning falls or to engage in deer drives. However, when conditions were more challenging, such as during winter hunting or small-game trapping, families split up along the watershed. Although such rights were often based on long-standing use by particular families, the community as a whole still retained sovereignty over the territory, and the sachem was responsible for overseeing this distributive system. For instance, when a family planting ground needed to recover, the land would revert back to the general community, and the sachem would assign a new plot to the family that had used it. The successful operation of the land tenure system was therefore dependent on the relationship between a sachem and his village. Cronon has explained that the sachem was invested with a kind of "symbolic possession" that represented "the entire group's collective right." His (or her) authority was dependent on the consent of the whole and his success in maintaining balance within the group. He (or she) also acted as the voice of the whole in negotiating with other communities. The maintenance of these relationships among people, and between people and space, within a village was crucial to its survival.<sup>36</sup>

These relationships also extended outside the village territory. As Cronon has pointed out, "kin networks" could hold land usage rights "both *within* and *across* villages." As on Kwitckw, multiple nations had

relationships to places such as trading and fishing sites, and the marriages and alliances between nations were crucial to maintaining harmony at these places of convergence. Regularly held councils kept relationships intact and ensured that usage rights were clearly defined. These land conferences were more akin to "diplomatic" events than "economic" transactions. Sachems might meet to make agreements over specific rights in a particular area of shared space, or one sachem might grant usage rights within his community's territory to another group in order to create or support a relationship of alliance. Thus, considerable confusion erupted when English deed making began to enter the space of Algonquian councils and the practices of Algonquian sachems began to enter the space of colonial land transactions.<sup>37</sup>

The "League of Alliance and Amity" between Uncas and the English, enacted in 1681, is a clear example of the interaction of these divergent cultural systems. In the most relevant part of the agreement, Uncas stated:

I do resign up to the Colony of Connecticut all my Lands and Territories, hereby, for myself, my Heirs and Successors, binding myself and them that I will make no other Dispose of them to any person or people whatsoever, without their Grant and Allowance first had and obtained; and that they shall be disposed in Plantations, Villages, or Farms, according as the General Court of Connecticut shall order or determine the same, I always to receive such reasonable Satisfaction for my property in them according as we shall agree.<sup>38</sup>

Although the document's recorders used the language of English law and land alienation, important distinctions reveal the Algonquian context. Apparently, for Uncas the agreement was an activity and instrument that involved "binding myself and them," and a close reading reveals that all references to land grants used the future tense, suggesting that Uncas conceded only the rights of shared inhabitation and preemption. The English were already occupying much of the former Pequot lands at the south end and on the eastern bank of the Thames River. Uncas agreed that if and when he did make grants of his land on the western side, it would be to the English and no other nation. In terms of land tenure, this was an important agreement for the sachem to make. The resources within a given area were limited, so it was important for a sachem to be clear on which nations had the right to use them. For the English, the right of preemption meant that they would have a first crack at Uncas's lands;

As the Mohegans' attorney William Bollan later argued, with their land protected by writing, "The Mohegan Indians flattered themselves that their Boundaries and Properties were now sufficiently ascertained and secured, and expected that they should not have been interrupted by the English in the quiet Possession of their entailed or sequestered Lands, and that the same should have remained to them in Perpetuity unalienable."<sup>48</sup> However, as Mahomet II later argued, Governor Fitz-John Winthrop and his compatriots, "contrary to the faith of their fathers' leagues, their publick records, & the terms of the Royal Charter," continued to expand their settlements into the Mohegans' reserved lands, dismembering the Mohegans from the land on which they were dependent for subsistence. Thus, in 1700, the Mohegans appealed to the highest authority over the colonists, using writing to communicate directly to the British Crown.<sup>49</sup>

From their seat at Mohegan, the sachem Owaneco and his brother Ben addressed a formal "complaint and prayer" to Queen Anne, with the assistance of Samuel Mason and New London advocate Nicholas Hallam. Their petition specifically addressed the recent settlement of Colchester in their hunting territory, asserting that "the whole grant of the township is their proper right & therefore ought not to be taken from them." The establishment of this town, they said, "denied their Native rights which hath been of ancient standing." Here, Owaneco and Ben invoked their indigeneity to demonstrate that their "Native rights" held greater weight than the claims of colonial settlers. Like their contemporaries Ashenunt and Mahomet I, Owaneco and Ben emphasized "their assistance afforded to the English in their warres with the Generall Nations of Indians," demonstrating that they had placed higher priority on their friendship with the English than on their relations with neighboring nations. "Yet," they protested, the Mohegans "are injured in their just rights and possessions." Encroachment defied the respect due them by other nations in their territory. The petition did not request land in exchange for "assistance," but rather called the English to task as allies for failing to respect the Mohegans' seemingly obvious right to inhabit their Native land.<sup>50</sup>

The petition persuaded Queen Anne to appoint a commission to review the case in 1705. The commissioners, under the influence of a sovereign who sought more control over her colonies and cognizant of Britain's need to retain their allies in ongoing war with the French and Abenaki, concluded that the Mohegans had "been very unjustly dispossessed" and ordered the colony to restore the lands in question to the

Native inhabitants. The commission confirmed the Mohegans as "constant friends and allies," observing that "in this time of war, [we] are in great danger of deserting their ancient friendship." They affirmed that the Colony had wrongly "granted away considerable tracts of the planting grounds" and that in particular, the Mohegans "have been very unjustly dispossessed and turned out of a tract of planting ground, called Massapeage." They also upheld the Mohegans' rights to their hunting lands, including the town of Colchester. Furthermore, the commission concluded that "the said Mohegan Indians are a considerable tribe of people, consisting of 150 fighting men . . . and cannot subsist without their lands, of which they have been deprived and dispossessed."<sup>51</sup> However, as Mahomet later related in his 1736 petition, the colonists in Connecticut did not "restore" to the Mohegans "any part of their lands of which they had so unjustly deprived them." Contrary to their Queen's decision, they "proceeded further to deprive the Mohegans of the small remainder of their lands."<sup>52</sup>

The colony, rather than fulfilling the commission's directive, developed a solution to the "controversy" that entailed the dismemberment of the Mohegan "sequestered lands" (the planting grounds and central village on the Thames River). In 1717, Governor Gordon Saltonstall and his council passed an act designed to convert the Mohegans from their "pagan manner of living" by creating a "parish at Mohegan Hill" where they might settle "after the English manner." This included the division of their common lands into family lots that would pass through the father's line, the lease of a sizable proportion to settlers, and the appropriation of five hundred acres for the settlement of a minister. Although a committee was formed to "take account" of the Mohegan families and the "quality and quantity of said lands," the program failed to take hold among the Mohegans. In fact, Mohegan leaders continued to make complaints about settler encroachment on all of their lands. Significantly, when one settler in the "sequestered lands" offered money to Owaneco's son César and Ben Uncas "to be quiet and not complain against him," they responded that "the lands were not theirs to dispose of, but it was to descend to their Children." As Amy Den Ouden has observed, even as the colony sought to dismember their territory, the Mohegans continued to assert their "collective rights to their existing land base."<sup>53</sup>

In 1721, Connecticut governors further resolved the "controversy respecting the lands" by confirming their own titles and allowing that the Mohegans could keep a portion of their planting grounds for their

own maintenance until "the whole Nation or Stock should be extinct." Ironically, it was dispossession that had the potential to produce that result and make the lands "now settled upon the Indians" the property of "the town of New London."<sup>54</sup>

By the time Mahomet II presented his petition in 1736, the impacts of dispossession were dire. He related that the "Colony of Connecticut" had "proceeded to further deprive the Mohegans of the Small Remnant of their Lands, & your petitioner, his tribe are now reduced to less than 2 miles square, out of their large territories for their hunting and planting, and that land so rocky that they are not able to subsist upon it." Yet, rather than surrender to the inevitable "extinction" presumed by colonial leaders, Mahomet followed a course previously pursued by his grandfather Owaneco, traveling with Captain John Mason, along with his kinsman Augh Quant Johnson, across the sea to bring his protest directly to the son of Anne's successor, King George II.<sup>55</sup>

In his petition Mahomet invoked the Mohegans' sovereignty within the land and their dependence on the land in arguing for their Native rights, asserting that the English had a reciprocal obligation, and a legal duty, to respect them. Exactly one hundred years after the Pequot War, Mahomet stood before King George II, recalling the long-standing friendship between them. Mahomet reminded the King that "upon the first arrival of the English in his ancestors' territories . . . His grandfather Unchas . . . had received and entertained them with the highest forms of hospitality & friendship, freely affording them large tracts of land for their new settlements." He recalled that the Mohegans and the English had engaged in mutual defense against the Pequots' "greed," then against "the neighboring Indian tribes" who "combined together" to challenge them after the Pequot War, and most recently "against the French and Indians" to the north. Under the "League of Alliance and Friendship," the Mohegans had "reserved" their "Native lands" for themselves even as they gave "gifts and grants . . . of their land" to their allies. Mahomet requested only that the English honor "the ancient friendship & alliance between them" and comply with that commitment by ensuring that "he & his people may be restored to and protected in the part of their ancestors' lands which they had reserved to themselves & their tribe for their hunting and planting."<sup>56</sup>

Attention to Mahomet's language illuminates the kind of sovereignty invoked in the Mohegan narration of Native rights. He did not

allow the British any rights over the Mohegan lands that were not granted directly by his ancestors. He did not refer to the lands the Mohegans "reserved" as tracts *within* the colony, but rather described lands that encompassed a village territory, including the "hunting and planting grounds" on which the community was dependent for subsistence and over which they maintained the right and responsibility of maintenance. While the colony sought to dismember the land into parcels of property that could be sold and settled, the Mohegans strove to maintain their village space as a political and ecological whole.

Furthermore, Mahomet strategically reminded the English of their own position in Native space. The Mohegans had recently served as scouts, traveling far up Kwinitekw to help protect the English from Greylock's raids, and Mahomet delivered his petition only eight months after the Deerfield Conference of 1735. He asked whether, "having proved themselves for the Space of 100 years faithfull friends & Allies to your Colony of Connecticut & true to your Majestie, & your Royal Predecessors, against all your Enemies, they may not now be forced to fly to some Indian Tribe for Subsistence, who are friends to the French, & Enemies to the English in time of War." Mahomet warned that the Mohegans, deprived of their subsistence grounds, would have to seek shelter with Abenakis or other nations to the north if they could not rely on their English "friends." In future wars, the English might find themselves facing their former allies on the opposing side. Still, Mahomet related, his "sincere prayer" was that the Mohegans would "obtain a redress of their grievances" from the "royal justice" of the King.<sup>57</sup>

Although Mahomet fell ill and died during his diplomatic trip to England, the British King did follow through on his petition, appointing a commission to review the case two years later. This particular commission, after a brief and dubious hearing, supported the position of the Colony, ruling that only the "Mohegan Fields," or the planting grounds along the Thames River, constituted the "reserved lands." The Masons and Mohegans appealed the decision immediately, and a fuller hearing of the case took place before a new commission in 1743.<sup>58</sup>

For this new hearing at the Norwich court, the Masons hired the dynamic attorney William Bollan to represent the Mohegans. Bollan grounded his legal argument in Mohegan communal memory, as recorded in Uncas's league and the petitions that followed. Extending the legal argument for collective sovereignty, he translated the "Native rights" of

Owaneco and Ben's petition into "property rights" under English law. Bollan insisted that "the Mohegan Indians are, and were, when the English began to settle in that Part of America since called the Colony of Connecticut," a "free" and "independent" people who were "immemorably possessed of and intitled to a large Tract of Country." Building directly on Mahomet's petition, Bollan maintained that the Mohegans "received" the English "in a friendly Manner, and permitted them to plant and settle among them." He asserted that it was well known in the colony "that all the Land within the original Boundaries of the Moheagan Country, which had not been granted away by them or their Sachems to the English, still belonged to and was the Property of the Moheagans" as "the original Natives." Bollan thus tied indigeneity directly to English property rights, asserting that Native land tenure was equivalent to the sovereignty of any European nation.<sup>59</sup>

In employing the language of property, Bollan contested the longstanding argument that Native people held only usage rights and that land had to be "improved" in the European manner to be owned. This was the legal foundation the opposition were using to argue that the Mohegans had only the right to inhabit their planting grounds.<sup>60</sup> When the case commenced in 1700, Owaneco and Ben Uncas expressed special concern for the two-hundred-acre "Mohegan hunting land," which was crucial to both subsistence and social balance. Colonial settlement within family hunting territories would foster tensions within the village, while destruction of the forests would lead to hunger, or even starvation, for animals and humans alike. However, the legal status of hunting grounds in the colonial system was a subject of much debate. The majority supported a position articulated early on by John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony and father of the Connecticut governor with whom the Mohegans were contending. He had argued that "the Natives in New England" did not legally possess the land they inhabited because "they inclose noe Land, neither have any settled habytation, nor any tame Cattle to improve Land by, and soe have noe other but a Naturall Right to those Countries." On the other hand, Roger Williams, who had cultivated a greater intimacy with Native people, advocated for the legitimacy of Indian land grants over those acquired from the Crown. Although Williams certainly had his own political motivations for making this argument, the Rhode Island leader seems to have had a deeper understanding of "Native rights" than most of his contemporaries. For example, in

*A Key into the Language of America*, he related, "They say themselves, that they have sprung and growne up in that very place, like the very trees of the wilderness," and he argued to his contemporaries that this indigenious status allowed the Natives land rights that the king of England did not have the legal authority to grant away. Furthermore, Williams advocated that Native hunting grounds constituted improved land because of the burning practices the Algonquians performed "twice a year" to facilitate travel through the forest and create a better environment for game.<sup>61</sup>

Pushing Williams's line of reasoning even further, William Bollan argued that "Native rights" held the same legal standing as "property," if not greater, regardless of the question of improvement. Bollan referred to the Mohegans as "the original Owners and Possessors of the Country," and insisted that the entirety of "the Mohegan Country" was the community's "possession" unless they, as the owners, granted it to someone else. The dispossession of the Mohegans, Bollan insisted, was completely illegal and should be reversed, even if English settlers had made improvements on those lands. Thus Bollan argued for the legitimacy of "Native rights," not only in Native space but in the realm of international law.<sup>62</sup>

In the writings that emerged during the land case, the Mohegans and their advocates attempted to articulate a relational system of land tenure. They communicated that the Mohegans had an "ancient" relationship to the land, on which they continued to rely for subsistence. They emphasized that they had a long-standing relationship of alliance with the English *within* their "ancestors' territories." The Mohegans had given the English specific rights and privileges in "friendship," but they had "reserved" their "Native lands" for themselves. The land was shared space to which the Mohegans had the prior claim, and the English were bound by the relationship of reciprocity between allies to respect their "Native rights." In a 1703 council speech, Appagese, a contemporary of Owaneco, succinctly expressed the relationship between his community, their land, and their English "friends," as well as their bewilderment at their allies' behavior: "He saith, from a boy their ground and he grew up together, and they have always been friends to the English, and why our ground and we should be parted now, we know not."<sup>63</sup>

Appagese used a metaphor of being planted in and growing with the land in order to convey his relationship to Mohegan. "Native rights" involved a cultural and corporeal intimacy with an environment in which humans were literally intertwined with the ground that sustained

them. As the Mohegans resisted dismemberment by challenging abstract property rights and physical encroachment, a new narration of Native rights grew from the contested ground of Mohegan, a narration on which a new generation of leaders would draw to re-member the village "dish."

*Dismemberment of the Communal Body, Writing as Re-memberment (Mohegan, 1723-1743)*

The dismemberment of the land caused by colonial settlement created both ecological and social changes in the village space. While the clearing of forests altered the physical environment, the politics of the land case caused a rift in the social structure that eventually split the village into two districts, "Ben's Town" and "John's Town," divided by loyalties to competing leaders and divergent courses in regard to their "Native rights." During the land case, the Mohegans faced a different kind of colonial warfare, fought largely with paper, that functioned as an assault on the political body of the dish.

In order to undermine the power of Mohegan petitions and protests, the Connecticut government supported the installment of a sachem who would act as their ally. After Owaneco died, his oldest surviving son, Cesar, succeeded him as sachem. When Cesar died amid the rumblings of war in 1723,<sup>64</sup> Mahomet II, as the heir of Owaneco's eldest son (Mahomet I, who had died before his father), would have assumed the role if deemed a suitable successor by the community. However, Major Ben Uncas, the youngest son of Uncas, apparently "threatened to kill" Mahomet II if the young successor opposed his claim to the sachemship. Ben "obtained" an "order" from Governor Saltonstall supporting his ambitions and thereby "usurped" the role of sachem as well as the right of the Mohegan community to select their primary leader. Ironically, this was the same Ben who had initially protested against colonial encroachment in the petition to Queen Anne.<sup>65</sup> Upon Ben's death shortly thereafter, his son, Ben Uncas II, "by the Contrivance and Assistance of the Colony of Connecticut, seized on the Sachemship against the Will and Inclination of Mahomet and the greater Part of the Mohegan Tribe." The General Assembly had previously acknowledged the young Mahomet as the rightful heir, but in supporting Ben Uncas II, they acquired "a Creature of their own," who "was prevailed upon shamefully to betray to the colony the Rights of the Tribe."<sup>66</sup>

Despite this opposition, the young Mahomet prevailed in his renewal of the land case. But as King George II's commission commenced in the spring of 1738, colonial officials sought to counteract the power of Mahomet's "public instrument" with one of their own. Taking advantage of Mohegan illiteracy, they tricked the majority of the tribe into signing a statement recognizing Ben as the rightful sachem. Then they persuaded Ben to sign a statement that "release[d] and forever quit claim[ed], all the right [and] title" to lands claimed by the colony and confirmed all of the deeds "granted and patented" by the "general court." However, the very next day, a large group of Mohegans signed a "declaration" that not only contradicted these statements but exposed the context under which they were produced. The "Mohegan Indians" asserted that, "through the impportunity of some English persons," they

signed] an instrument...by which they now hear, they did acknowledge Ben Uncas as their Sachem, which then they knew nothing of, but being in a time when we thought ourselves in danger of losing our lives by means of the eastward Indians coming upon us, and his honour the governor writing a letter to us, we thought nothing more thereby only to give his honour an account of the number of our soldiers, and of those that would stand together and fight in time of war.<sup>67</sup>

The Mohegans then counteracted the colony's statements, declaring "that at a general meeting of the Mohegan, Pequot, and Niantick Indians, the whole body of them did renounce Ben Uncas as Sachem, in and by an instrument bearing date some time in September 1736." They insisted that they stood by that decision and "disown[ed] and protest[ed]" the false "recognition." Indeed, after Mahomet's death, they had chosen John Uncas, a "grandson of Uncas," as Mahomet's successor, to whom the majority remained loyal.<sup>68</sup> "And by virtue of these presents," they concluded, "we do disapprove of and make void whatever Ben Uncas has acted or may act in the capacity of Sachem or King over us in the conveyance of any lands, rights, and privileges whatsoever belonging to us."<sup>69</sup> The Mohegans' acknowledgement that they were joined by Pequots and Nianticks in their "general meeting" demonstrates the rebuilding of relations that was taking place in the region. As Amy Den Ouden has discerned, "Mahomet's death had not left Mohegan resisters entirely on their own, for they had gained the support of members of neighboring reservation communities — Pequots and Nianticks." Their participation in

the general meeting represents an "act of cooperative resistance" that suggests that they "acknowledged their common struggle against dis-possession and perhaps recognized that Mahomet's complaint to the Crown had created an opportunity for all of them to be heard."<sup>70</sup>

The Mohegans' declaration is also important for what it reveals about the process of communal remembrance. In using the names of the Pequots and Niantics, the Mohegans asserted the continuance of these communities and revealed multiple witnesses to communal memory. Interestingly, while Governor Joseph Talcott struggled to find the paper trail for the land case, the Mohegans consistently related a clear memory of collective history, from the establishment of Uncas's league to the "black dance" at the "general meeting" by which they had formally deposed Ben. Furthermore, they had learned to use writing, like wampum, to present their decisions and their remembrance in material form.

Among the signers of this declaration were John Ashpo, his brother Samuel, and a young Mohegan from Ben's town named Samson Occom. The marks of Occom and others from Ben's town demonstrated that even Ben's supporters objected to the colony's tactics, as well as Ben's complicity in their deceit. They also showed that the Mohegans were able to unite on matters that concerned the whole community. Samuel Ashpo was the only Mohegan who signed in script, indicating that he had begun to acquire literacy, although his signature on the "recognition of Ben Uncas" suggests that his reading skills were not yet well developed. Still, the appearance of a single signature marked the community's consciousness of the potential power of this force in their lives. Although Ben had failed as a sachem to speak the voice of the community, the Mohegans took it upon themselves to speak as "a whole body" through the vehicle of writing, even as the colony sought to use that tool against them.

However, these instruments were not enough to force a full hearing in the colonial court. In 1738, King George II's commission decided that Connecticut officials had produced sufficient evidence to support Ben Uncas's claim, although, ironically, they refused to hear testimony from the people he was supposed to represent. The commission consisted of political representatives from neighboring colonies who were deeply prejudiced in favor of maintaining colonial order in New England. Having fulfilled their obligation to hear the "voice" of the Mohegans through Ben Uncas II, who disavowed the land claim, the commission dismissed the case in favor of the colony. Colonial officials thus manipulated the Algonquian institution of the sachemship in order to bolster their own

legal position.<sup>71</sup> In affirming that Ben II was the rightful sachem, they asserted that his word held the authority of the whole.

Samuel Mason traveled to London almost immediately to appeal the decision. The colony responded with another "address" by Ben Uncas II, which essentially presented their entire legal argument in the voice of the purported sachem. Ben's statement conceded that Mohegan existed "in the Colony of Connecticut" and that the "Mohegan Indians" were "subject[s]" of the King. Rather than appealing to alliance, Ben used the language of colonial benevolence to describe their affiliation, saying, "Your majesty's English subjects have always treated the Mohegans with great kindness." Furthermore, he added, "I have in my hand" a gift given "to my grandfather Uncas" by King Charles II. This statement supported Ben's claim to the sachemship but also served to contradict Mahomet's portrayal of the relationship between the Mohegans and the English. Rather than showing Uncas granting land to colonists, Ben depicted the king as the giver of gifts and therefore the holder of sovereignty. Finally, Ben counteracted Mahomet's account of the effects of encroachment by insisting, "We are in the quiet possession of our land which is far more than we can improve and [are] joined to us by the Laws of the Colony." This statement negated the case's central arguments. If the Mohegans did not require more land for subsistence than that which the colony allowed them, they could not claim usage rights to the whole of their original territory. Furthermore, if that land was theirs by "the Laws of the Colony," they had no claim to "Native rights." Finally, in emphasizing the language of improvement, the statement confirmed that the Mohegans had need of and rights to only their planting grounds on the Thames River, not the hunting territory claimed by Mahomet.<sup>72</sup>

A new hearing began in 1743 with another round of dueling petitions. With a more diverse commission in place, the attorney William Bollan was allowed to present the Mohegans' full case, and the Mohegans were called upon to address the sachemship directly. In addition to testifying in court, a majority of the community members signed two powerful statements that disavowed Ben Uncas and presented their communal remembrance of recent history. They asserted, "The said Ben," both "before and since the time of the decease of our late rightful Sachem Mahomet, has been endeavouring to convey away our rights of lands to the English subjects of Connecticut, and to defeat us in those legal measures we have been and are still taking to recover our rights and possessions, to our great prejudice and dissatisfaction."<sup>73</sup>



The Mohegans reiterated that at their general meeting in 1736 they had unanimously "vote[d]" to "disown" Ben and "did likewise then declare our satisfaction in the proceedings of the rightful Sachem Mahomet, who was then prosecuting our cause in Great Britain." They argued that Ben had made "pretences to the right Sachemship" before the previous commission "and did assume the power and right of acting in behalf of the tribe as such, and of disposing of their lands as he pleased, to the great dissatisfaction and injury of the said tribe of Indians." They related the circumstances under which they had unwittingly signed their acknowledgment of Ben's sachemship in 1738 and reiterated, "We do therefore hereby utterly disown the said Ben to be or ever to have been our rightful Sachem, notwithstanding the aforesaid constrained acknowledgment of him as such, and do disallow of the said Ben's acting as the head or Sachem of our tribe in any respect whatsoever."<sup>74</sup>

The Mohegans further declared that they had reorganized their government; they had recognized John Uncas as having "according to the ancient custom of our tribe, the best right to the Sachemship of any Indian surviving since the decease of our said late Sachem Mahomet" and had "lately" selected twelve men to serve as counselors. Forty-three men signed the first petition in 1742, including Henry Quaquaquid, who was listed as a counselor, as well as Robert and Samuel Ashpo. Eighty men signed the second petition in 1743, including the Ashpos.<sup>75</sup>

To counteract these damaging statements, Ben Uncas produced an "address and declaration" in 1743, signed by the minority of Mohegans who continued to support him. He claimed that it was "evil-minded white people" who sought "to set up one John Uncas to be chief Sachem of the Moheagan Indians" and insisted that "neither I nor any of my people have any dispute or controversy with the king of Great Britain's people of this colony of Connecticut, touching or concerning any ground claimed by me or my people." He reassured that the Connecticut settlers and government "have at all times behaved in a very friendly manner towards me and my people" and requested that they continue to serve as guardians and protectors. "I have no claims or demands against them or any of them," Ben insisted, "by virtue of the original and Native right of me the said chief Sachem and my Moheagan Natives," and he further declared, "I now hold for myself and people about four thousand acres of good and valuable land, which is more than sufficient for the habitation and improvement of me and my nation, and with which I am fully content." Through this writing, Ben once more denied his own grandfather's claim

to the Mohegans' "Native rights," as well as their claim to land necessary for subsistence. Bollan, speaking for the Mohegans, concluded that Ben "was prevailed upon shamefully to betray to the colony the Rights of the Tribe." The document's eleven signers represented Ben's "counselors," including Henry Quaquaquid and the newly appointed Samson Occom.<sup>76</sup>

### *Samson Occom, the Land Case, and the Power of Literacy*

While the Ashpos lived in the part of the village known as John's Town, Henry Quaquaquid and Samson Occom lived in Ben's Town.<sup>77</sup> Unfortunately, there are no written records that relate Occom and Quaquaquid's motivations for supporting Ben's complicity with the colony. It is possible that their families believed they were righteously upholding Uncas's policy of cooperation with the colonists in the community's best interests. They may have believed, as Ben Uncas claimed, that their best strategy for survival was to accept the "protection" of the government against encroachment by individual settlers. However, Ben's faithfulness to the colony was greased with financial compensation. As the recognized sachem, Ben received money for leasing land through the overseers appointed by the colony, and both he and his counselors were entertained by the colony with gifts and feasts during the land case to ensure their continuing cooperation. Bollan told the court that "the governor and company" admitted to having given Ben "valuable consideration" for his statements. "It is apparent from his conduct" Bollan commented, "that this pretended Sachem Ben has sold himself to the governor and company and is endeavouring to sell the whole tribe, or, which is the same thing, their ancient and rightful inheritance as fast as he can."<sup>78</sup>

Bollan also insisted that Ben was "now only the head of a corrupt party or faction, seduced, deluded, and made by a little money, added to the great artifice of the English, who have cunningly spread corruption and caused divisions amongst this tribe." Of the four men (John and Samuel Ashpo, Henry Quaquaquid, and Samson Occom), only Occom actually appeared in the Norwich court to hear Bollan's accusations. We cannot know what his reaction to these statements was, but it is clear that over the next twenty years, both he and Quaquaquid changed their positions dramatically, joining with the Ashpos to offset the "corruption" and "divisions amongst the tribe" and actively pursuing the reclamation of their Native rights.<sup>79</sup>

Occom may have also been present when Bollan revealed the connection between literacy and dispossession. The attorney stated that “the Mohegans beg leave to observe, that they are a people unskilled in letters” and that the English held the upper hand in “penning” the “treaties” and “transactions” between them, including several dubious documents presented as evidence by the colony. The English, insisted Bollan, “doubtless took care to express favorably for their own interest,” leaving the Mohegans disempowered by the very instruments that were supposed to safeguard their rights.<sup>80</sup>

Clearly, the best route to protecting their lands was for the Mohegans to acquire the power of literacy for themselves. Uncas had relied on John Mason to write letters to the Connecticut authorities, while his sons had received help from Samuel Mason and New London attorney Nicholas Hallam in writing their petition to Queen Anne. Similarly, Mahomet II had obtained John Mason’s assistance to compose his petition to King George II. The Connecticut Colony had taken advantage of the Mohegans’ illiteracy to bolster their own position, and the Mohegans continued to rely on Englishmen for the interpretation and composition of correspondence with colonial officials. However, by 1743 a few of the Mohegans had begun to read and write. Augh Quant Johnson, who had traveled to England with Mahomet in 1736 and served as one of John Uncas’s counselors, acquired these skills early on, as evidenced by correspondence with one of the friends he had made in England. His son Joseph inherited his ability and shared it with his family. Samuel Ashpo had begun to learn writing from a missionary at Mohegan. Only ten years after the land case hearing, he would be passing on his knowledge to Pequot students at Mashantucket while Joseph Johnson wrote letters to his wife from the battlefield on Lake George. Finally, just after his appearance in court, Samson Occom left Mohegan for Eleazar Wheelock’s house in Lebanon, a town within the original Mohegan village territory, to learn how to teach his kin.<sup>81</sup>

In his autobiographical “Short Narrative of My Life,” Occom related that as a child he had run from the grabbing hands of a missionary because the English teacher gave the young Mohegans little motivation to learn. But, as an adult, he was so drawn to reading that he taught himself, and he desired the skills to pass his knowledge on to others. Although inspired in part by his own recent conversion to New Light Christianity and by his “Desire to learn to read the Word of God,” Occom noted, “At

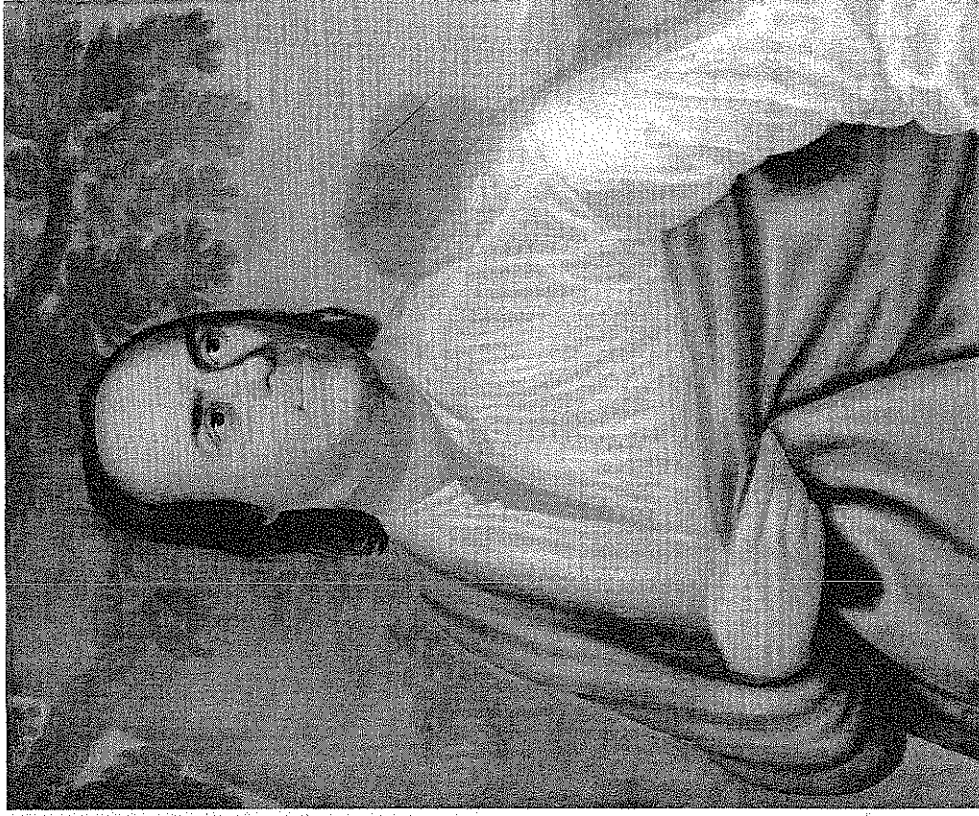


Figure 7. Portrait of Reverend Samson Occom, by Nathaniel Smibert, ca. 1751–56. Bequest of James Bowdoin III, Bowdoin College Museum of Art, Brunswick, Maine.

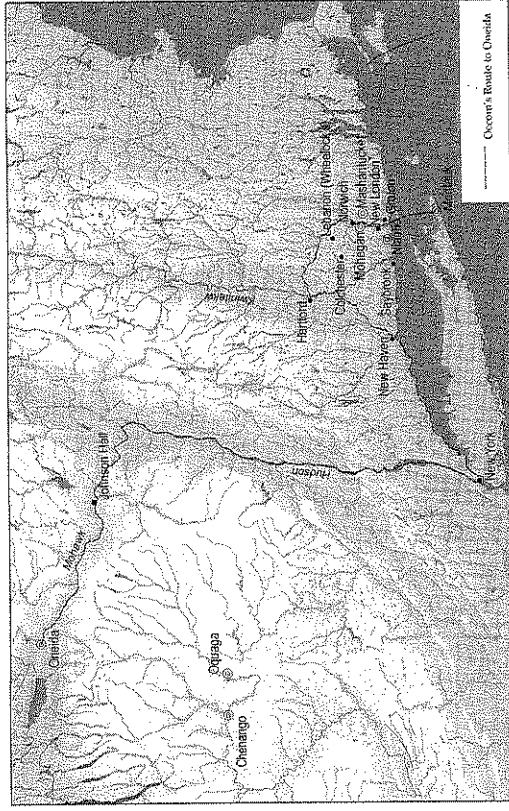
the Same Time [I] had an uncommon Pity and Compassion to my Poor Brethren. According to the Flesh. I used to wish I was capable of Instructing my poor Kindred. I used to think, if I could once Learn to Read I would Instruct the poor Children in Reading.” Certainly a key motivation for Occom’s “great Inclination to go to” Wheelock was his desire to learn about and share a newfound religious philosophy. However, we should not underestimate the effect Bollan’s statement about the consequences of

illiteracy may have had on the young Mohegan scholar. When Occom returned home many years later as a father, teacher, and minister, his literacy would evolve into a tool he could use to reclaim land and reconstruct the "whole" of Mohegan.<sup>82</sup>

### Occom's Journeys: Indian Education in the Network of Relations (Mohegan, Montauk, Iroquoia, 1749–1763)

The journey home was not an easy one for Occom. The Mohegan minister had been born into a tumultuous world at Mohegan. The son of Mohegan counselor Joshua Occom and his wife Sarah was born in 1723, the year the sachem Cesar died and Major Ben "usurped" the sachemship, while the English were calling on their allies to serve as scouts in Greylock's War. As a young scholar, he excelled under Wheelock's tutoring, but experienced difficulties with his health that prevented him from attending college at Yale. However, Occom's life took a positive turn when he joined some of his relatives on a fishing trip, traveling across the sound to visit relations at Montauk. As Occom related in his "Narrative," "The Indians there were very desirous to have me keep a School amongst them, and I consented." Occom remained at Montauk for eleven years, marrying into a leadership family, living within the community, and traveling with them in the subsistence cycle that continued to sustain Algonquian village life. Occom served the community as a teacher, minister, scribe, and healer. As Bernd Peyer has observed, "Rather than having received any employment assistance from his mentors as he may well have expected, Occom found relief by tapping the ancient sociolinguistic network among Coastal Algonquian Indian communities to find a useful application for his newly acquired skills." During these years, Occom kept a journey journal that illustrates the intertwined relationships between his "home" of Mohegan, his wife's home of Montauk, neighboring villages like Niantic and Mashantucket, and his mentor's school at Lebanon. Occom often traveled with his relations, including Robert Ashpo, Joseph Johnson, and his brother-in-law, David Fowler, building and maintaining connections between coastal communities. During these journeys, Occom began to develop a reputation as a stirring preacher, and he emerged as a leader who strengthened relationships in the larger network.<sup>83</sup>

While Occom was traveling and teaching, his mentor was developing his own project to educate young Indians for missionary work.



Map 8. Samuel Occom and Samuel Ashpo's travels, showing Native villages and colonial towns (mentioned in the text), with Occom's route to Oneida indicated.

Occom's success may have served as the inspiration for Wheelock's "Indian Charity" school, but the motivation for Indian education also came from within. Occom was operating his school at Montauk, and Samuel Ashpo was teaching the Pequots at Mashantucket several years before Wheelock established his school at Lebanon. The majority of Wheelock's first students had close ties to Occom; they included his brothers-in-law, David and Jacob Fowler; his Pequot cousin Samson Woyboy, who had taught at Mashantucket before Samuel Ashpo; his son Aaron; as well as Augh Quant Johnson's grandson and granddaughter, Joseph Jr. and Amy Johnson, the first girl to enroll at Wheelock's school. Even Ben Uncas's son Isaiah attended for a brief period, but he proved a weak student. In addition, Samuel Ashpo eventually went to Wheelock to formally acquire a license to preach and to seek financial support to teach at the intertribal village of Chenango on the Susquehanna River, where he had received an invitation to serve as minister. So, while the school served to foster Wheelock's colonial experiment, it also provided a space of interaction for Native students who could potentially utilize their education for community empowerment.<sup>84</sup>

When Samuel Ashpo sought help from Occom's mentor, he probably knew that Wheelock and the missionary societies that supported

him had targeted eastern Iroquoia as the best venue for Algonquian missionary-teachers. The Mohawks' and Oneidas' alliance with the English made them more likely to accept offers from New England than from northern Algonquians like the Abenaki, while the English perception of their "heathen" status and "wilderness" environment gave the project more weight than the schools that had already been formed among the acculturated southern New England Algonquians. Both Occom and Ashpo traveled to Iroquoia during the early 1760s, forging a diplomatic path for many of the young men who would follow from Wheelock's school.<sup>85</sup>

Occom received a commission to be a teacher and missionary at Oneida after serving many years within his own network of relations, during which time he faced increasing frustration with the lack of support he received from the missionary societies that were supposed to fund him. In comparison, as Peyer has observed, the position at distant Oneida was a "lucrative assignment." However, Occom was not entering into a territory entirely unknown. The Mohegans had a long-standing alliance with the Mohawks and Mohicans, and all three nations had recently provided scouts to the English for their forts around Lake George. As Peyer has noted, Occom's mission held great "political import" because it commenced "at the height of the French and Indian Wars." Ben Uncas himself had sent a message pledging the support of "the Mohegan tribe" to "our brethren of the Mohocks & Stockbridge Tribes" under "the old agreement made by their wise forefathers" to "defend that tree of Shelter planted by Our father the King & our ancestors." With this message, the Mohegans had promised to maintain their alliance with the Mohicans and Mohawks to defend their English brothers against the French and northern Indians, including those Abenakis who were fighting for their own land rights against the Mohegans' allies. The message was delivered only two years before Occom traveled to Iroquoia and only one year after Augh Quant Johnson's son, Captain Joseph Johnson, wrote a letter home to Mohegan, sending news on the men in his all-Mohegan company and relating a firsthand account of the siege at Fort William Henry.<sup>86</sup>

So, although the Oneidas may not have been acquainted with Occom as an individual, they were well acquainted with the Mohegans as a nation, and Occom's entry into Iroquoia was already grounded in alliance. Occom's first stop was Johnson Hall in the Mohawk Valley, where he met up with Sir William Johnson, the superintendent of Indian Affairs. Johnson was, in many ways, a British inhabitant of Haudenosaunee

space; the Irishman's marriage to Molly Brant had solidified his place in the Mohawk kinship network, and he frequently played an intermediary role between the Haudenosaunee and the English. Johnson's ability to translate between English and Mohawk as well as his substantial education in Haudenosaunee diplomacy made him a good candidate for ushering Occom into Iroquoia. Johnson "introduced" Occom "to the Oneidas and Tuscaroras as a person sent for their instruction in the Christian religion, and earnestly desired and recommended it to them to treat him as became one of his sacred function." Thus, Johnson represented Occom's position as something akin to that of a traditional spiritual leader, opening the eastern door to Iroquoia through an act of cultural translation.<sup>87</sup>

Samuel Ashpo subsequently followed in Occom's tracks to preach at the multinational villages of Oquaga and Chenango on the Susquehanna River. Oquaga was known as the "place of hulled corn soup," and these communities represented "kettles" where many traditions mixed. Combining Algonquian and Haudenosaunee families, traditional agriculture and European husbandry, longhouses and log cabins, Confederacy councils and Christian meetings, the communities at Oquaga and Chenango utilized the best of indigenous and European tools to maintain a flourishing existence in the Haudenosaunee homeland. Because Ashpo had been invited into this dish by its inhabitants, the motivation for his mission emerged, in many respects, from within Native space.<sup>88</sup>

The combination of alliance during the French and Indian War and the establishment of the missions created a new space of exchange between coastal Algonquians and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and education flowed both ways. While Occom, Ashpo, and their successors taught reading, writing, and the principles of Christianity, they learned Haudenosaunee language and diplomacy, as well as the limits of their own religious beliefs. Wheelock's school functioned as a site within this network. Occom brought his Montauk brother-in-law, David Fowler, with him to Oneida, and Fowler returned to Wheelock's school with four Mohawk students, including the young Joseph Brant. Brant had recently fought alongside his brother-in-law, William Johnson, in his first military battles and had witnessed the death of his clan chief, Hendrick, all of which had taken place on the same ground from which Captain Joseph Johnson wrote to his wife and on which his own life was sacrificed. At Wheelock's school, Joseph Brant and his Mohawk relations interacted with Johnson's son and daughter, as well as Occom's son Aaron, David Fowler's brother Jacob, and a much older Samuel Ashpo. Joseph Johnson

Jr. would eventually follow in his father's tracks toward Iroquoia, but he, like Occom, would serve as a teacher and missionary rather than as a soldier and scout, while Brant would mature into a powerful war leader and influential diplomat.<sup>89</sup>

Algonquian teachers in Iroquoia also learned a great deal about the circumstances that Indian people shared, including dispossession. When Occom arrived at Oneida, the clan chiefs presented him with a belt of wampum to "bind" them in "friendship," saying, "We are glad from the inside of our Hearts that you are come here to teach the right way of God." However, as a crucial part of their message and relationship, the Oneida speaker also insisted, "We desire to be protected in our lands, that none may molest or encroach upon us." During the same period, Samuel Ashpo told Wheelock of "a great concern among the Indians in those parts esp at Jeningo [Chenango] . . . that they are very unwilling that the English should get footing among them lest by & by they root them out as they have done in New England." The shared experience of dispossession provided common ground for Haudenosaunee and Algonquian people, a space in which to discuss the intricate workings of colonial systems as well as the potential routes of resistance.<sup>90</sup>

### Re-remembering the Dish: "We Shall Look upon One Another as One Family" (Mohegan, 1763-1778)

For several years, Occom and Ashpo traveled between their coastal village and the Haudenosaunee interior, but both men returned home during the winter of 1763-64, leaving Iroquoia due to the increasing threat of violence from Pontiac's War. Occom received a commission to minister at the neighboring village of Niantic and settled back in at Mohegan, where he hoped to raise his ever-growing family. Ashpo was supporting his own sizeable family through hunting, and he suffered from considerable debt. Considering his reliance on hunting and the threats settlement continued to pose to the Mohegan land base, it is no surprise that Ashpo, in line with family tradition, assumed a leadership role in renewing complaints against colonial encroachment. Occom himself had observed brewing problems with the English overseers on a visit just before his return home, especially regarding the leases to white farmers, and he was aware of Ashpo's organizing activities. In a letter to Wheelock written during one of his earlier journeys, Occom related, "I have heard Sam Ashpo and his people together, about their controversies, and I am afraid Sam Ashpo

has took irregular steps, I cannot receive him yet, and I will not do contrary to my Mind; I hope I shall find him better next time I see him." Given the Ashpo family's long-standing allegiance to Mahomet and John Uncas, it is likely that "their controversies" referred to the land case, or at least to the lands that Ben Uncas and the overseers were leasing without the community's consent. The letter suggests that Samuel Ashpo and "his people" had begun taking "steps" to renew their legal case as early as 1762 and that Ashpo was attempting to persuade Occom to assist him in seeking redress. Occom's hesitancy was reflective of his own family's accustomed allegiance to Ben, as well as his unwillingness to directly challenge colonial authorities. However, his experiences upon returning to Mohegan would soon transform his position.<sup>91</sup>

Only a month after Occom's arrival, he joined a group of Mohegan counselors who "met at Benjamin Uncas's" house "to consult about our land affairs." They sought to regain control over the leases and make their sachem, Ben Uncas III, responsible to the whole. Ben III had succeeded his father in 1749, at least as far as colonial officials and the inhabitants of Ben's Town were concerned. Like his father, he violated the responsibilities of the sachemship, acting unilaterally and cooperating with the overseers rather than consulting with the counselors and the community. Even the English schoolteacher, Robert Clelland, had complained to Wheelock that Ben III was consuming "the profits of Mohegan" in drink. When Samson Occom, Henry Quaquaquid, and other leaders from Ben's Town gathered for a meeting on March 24, 1764, they resolved to "go unanimously in all matters," counteracting the divisive dynamic and attempting to pull Ben back into a participatory process. "But," their meeting minutes related, "our over Seers got in With our Sachem alone at Norwich on March 29 & 30: and got him to give a Lease to Mr. Ross of Banks' Farm — Contrary to the agreements between the over Seers and the Indians, and between the Sachem and his Council."<sup>92</sup>

According to their minutes, "The Tribe of Mohegan got together to Consult What our over Seers, and Sachem had done, and found it altogether Disagreeable to our Minds." Occom and Quaquaquid were in attendance, along with the majority of Ben's counselors; however, at this gathering the counselors from John's Town were equally represented, including John Uncas Jr. and Samuel Ashpo. Three weeks later, the same group met at Henry Quaquaquid's home in Ben's Town and "found our Selves of one Mind Still." Counselors from both factions were once again present, including Occom, Quaquaquid, and Ashpo, as well as a number

of women.<sup>93</sup> This reconstructed group then "constituted Trustees to Act in the behalf of Mohegan tribe of Indians" and "concluded to Send the Trustees to Benj Uncas, to talk With him in a Mild Manner, to Bring him to Consideration, that We may agree and make up Matters in an Amicable manner." The trustees "went, on 24 of April in the Morning to his house, and talkd With him, but it only Stird up fire in his Breast and was intraged against us and So We left him."<sup>94</sup>

After this altercation, the group gathered in John's Town to have "a Meeting of the Mohegan Indians amongst themselves" and "found many faults more against Ben Uncas." Together, they confirmed their conclusions in writing:

First he has never regarded his Fathers Will by which he was made Sachem -- 2ly he has leas't out Some Lands Without his Council; and 3ly he has Sold much Tymber Wood and Whoop Poles and Stone, and Contrives a great deal to set the Indians by the Ears in stead of making peace amongst them, and he is not Contented With all the privileges he Injoys and all the help he has from the Indians he reckons as nothing, and Wants more Still, but We believe he Wont have So much in time to Come for these things[.] We think he has forfeited his Sachemship over and over again [.] Neither Can we in Conscience look upon him again as our Lawful sachem in Mohegan.<sup>95</sup>

From this moment on, Ben Uncas found himself with few adherents outside of colonial circles. A few remained loyal to him, but the majority of Mohegans had reconstituted themselves as a communal body, leaving Ben Uncas and his acquiescence to colonial control behind.

The records of the meetings of the Mohegan tribe reveal a movement from within to reclaim the ethic and structure of the common pot. First they endeavored to draw the sachem back into his role of responsibility within the group and to restore a commitment to unanimity. When that failed, the process of rebuilding the pot began with a meeting that united leadership from both towns and rekindled cooperative deliberation. During the course of their meetings, the Mohegan counselors began to think as "one mind" and act as one body, re-membering their social structure and perhaps even drawing on the rhetoric of Haudenosaunee councils in which Ashpo and Occom had participated.<sup>96</sup> The Mohegans alternated meeting locations between the two towns, ensuring that neither would be regarded as the "center" of decision making. This generation

of leaders became highly cognizant that the greatest threat to the village was its division, and through their deliberation they repaired the divides between the two towns and reconstructed the social body of their village.<sup>97</sup> Their next step was to address the re-memberment of their land base.

On behalf of this newly united council, Samson Occom drafted a formal letter to William Johnson, utilizing his connections in Iroquoia to renew the case against the colony. He opened with eloquent phrasing that flattered Johnson as a "mediator" for "the Miserable Nations of this Land," demonstrating his literacy in the language of diplomacy. The draft among Occom's papers shows that he struggled with choices in rhetoric and metaphor so that the letter would reflect indigenous oratorical styles, including appeals to political kinship and prayers for pity and empathy. He lauded Johnson for his clarity and compassion, praising his foresight in having seen, from looking far and wide, that the "Natives" were "liable to be imposed upon by all other Nations." Occom wrote, "It moved your Heart in a way of Commiseration," and thus "God hath made you a mediator between the Natives and other nations," to whom the Mohegans, as "children," now "make our cries in your ears."<sup>98</sup>

Having established a space for diplomatic address, Occom related the key problem faced by his nation:

We are imposed upon by our overseers, and what our overseers have done, we take to be done by the [Connecticut] Assembly. By what they have already done, we think they want to render us as cyphers in our own land. They want to root us out of our land, root & branch. They have already proceeded with arbitrary power over us, and we want to know from whence they got that power or whether they can maintain such power justly over us.<sup>99</sup>

This protest marked a renewed narration of Native rights. Like his forebear Appagese, Occom employed a metaphor for indigeneity that "rooted" Mohegans in their native land. He pointed to colonization as the main threat to the continuance of their tree and the growth of their "branch." In contrast to a developing rhetoric of gradual extinction, Occom invoked the image of a living and growing community being actively thwarted by people acting under questionable authority. Demonstrating a complex cognizance of colonial power, he contended that the colony's leaders were attempting to displace his nation both physically and conceptually — to turn the Mohegans into "cyphers in our own land." In using the

word "cypher" he articulated awareness of the colonial processes through which the Mohegans were being transformed into disempowered non-entities, "wanderers" in their own land. Yet for Occom, the tree remained rooted and tangible. It was the "power" claimed by the Connecticut government that was "arbitrary" and intangible. Reinforcing the embeddedness of the village, Occom questioned the legitimacy of a system that colonists (and some Mohegans) took for granted, and he challenged its very existence within Native space.<sup>100</sup>

In his letter to Johnson, Occom demonstrated keen comprehension of the colonial source of the division within his community and revealed his position, with other like-minded leaders, as a mediator between the two towns: "Understand Sir, this Tribe has been in 2 parties, the Government Pretended to befriend the Indians, and Mr. Mason pretended the Same, and each had a Number of Indians, and there is a few of us that Seems to Stand between the two parties — Deacon Henry Quaquauid will relate the whole matter to your Honor." He also revealed the community's cognizance that Ben's sachemship was part of the divisive design, telling Johnson that the Connecticut government had "used Ben Uncas as a tool in their hands." Explaining how the tribe had reasserted their sovereignty over the sachemship, he related, "Ben Uncas was to do nothing without his Council while he was our sachem. And now we have cast him off, as your Honor may see in a Bit of Paper, and the English intend to Continue him as a Sachem over us, but we have a Law and a Custom to make a Sachem without the help of any People or Nation in the world, and when he makes himself unworthy of his Station we put him down — ourselves."<sup>101</sup>

Occom was invested not only in reclaiming a sense of sovereignty, but also in reasserting the Mohegans' political relationship with the Crown. Given the Mohegans' recent contribution to Britain's military success, Occom could speak from a position of alliance. In concluding his letter to Johnson, he appealed to British law, asking "whether the Kings Instructions Concerning the Indian Lands, aren't as much for us as any Tribe." He was referring to the 1763 Royal Proclamation that protected the land rights of Britain's Indian allies and, in particular, to a critical passage in which the king "strictly enjoined and require[d] all persons whatever, who have either willfully or inadvertently seated themselves upon any Lands . . . which, not having been ceded to, or purchased by Us, are still reserved to the said Indians as aforesaid, forthwith to remove themselves from such Settlements."<sup>102</sup>

Occom's question demonstrated his literacy in the documentary record of the land case, as well as British Indian law. In his analysis, the proclamation could be applied to any Indian nation that had not ceded its territory, and by his reading of the land case, Mohegan certainly qualified.<sup>103</sup> Under British law, Connecticut colonists should be enjoined to "remove themselves" from the "reserved" Mohegan lands, which had not been "ceded" or "purchased" lawfully. Occom used his reading skills to interpret the laws that might secure his community's rights, and in writing to Johnson, he sought an audience with the source of those laws. Henry Quaquauid traveled to Iroquoia to deliver the letter, along with the minutes of the tribe's meetings, which had probably been recorded by Occom. Johnson apparently cleared the way for Occom to address the King of England more directly. For, while news spread quickly through the colonies of stirrings at Mohegan, by the end of the year a report reached the governor of Connecticut that Samson Occom "has wrote a Letter agst this Colony with his own hand to the King of G Britain, and amongst many other things, he says they have not a foot of land." John Mason had recently traveled to London in order to reopen the land case, and "Had it not been for Occom," Robert Clelland told Governor Thomas Fitch, "Mason had not gone to England." Ben Uncas confirmed the rumor, and just a few months later, another settler corroborated it: "Samson wrote a letter to the King of England wherein he said these Indians joined the English when few in Number, but when they increased they took their Lands from them after they sett up stakes for their bounds, and now their widows suffered as they had no land to plant, or kept creatures on & that in truth they had not land of their own."<sup>104</sup>

Even this brief summary shows that Occom followed the rhetorical patterns of his forebears: he appealed to Mohegan agency, alluded to the history of alliance and wrongful dispossession, and insisted that the community needed the lands in question for subsistence. According to Clelland, Occom was not only writing on behalf of the community's Native rights, but was "stirring up the Mohegan tribe" to reclaim them. "He has behaved very ungratefully to the worthy & kind overseers who have spent no small time to protect them & manage their affairs," the school-teacher complained. Furthermore, "Repeated complaints he has Sent up to Sir William Johnston & it is said he is gone up to him this Season, It is trew I suppose that he said he would ly down & die if he got not his Will." Colonial officials were especially alarmed that the Mohegans seemed to be coalescing against the colony around the land case. Clelland lamented,

"All the Indians but 3 engages to stand by one another agst this Gov't," and added, "If Samson could be gain'd the rest would come easily over, at present his is all in all with them."<sup>105</sup>

Occom's involvement in Mohegan politics erupted into public controversy. His mentor Wheelock was especially concerned about a "breach" between him and the missionary at Mohegan, David Jewett, who was threatened by Occom's reputation as an orator. Wheelock reported, "A great number from other neighbouring parishes flock to hear Mr. Occom on Lord's Days at Mohegan & the effect of which you may easily guess." Furthermore, Jewett was "like to lose all his land in his parish, if the Indians there should gain their point in their suit against the government." These circumstances led Jewett to privately pursue actions against his rival. According to Wheelock, "Mr. Jewett wrote the Commissioners at Boston, on which they withdrew [Occom's] pension." Wheelock wrote to Jewett in January of 1765 regarding the need for a "publick enquiry" into Occom's activities and asked him to gather "evidence" for the case "against" Occom for the Board of Commissioners, but Jewett was somewhat reluctant to do so, fearing public antipathy. However, when Wheelock's own purse was directly threatened by Occom's "stirrings," he was motivated to take action. He became incensed when his petition to the General Assembly for the continued funding of the Indian school was denied "on acct of the reports & jealousies of his [Occom's] being active in the old Mason Case, as it is called, of late revived."<sup>106</sup>

According to Wheelock, "Clamours spread through the government, and almost every one cried out against Mr. Occom as a very bad, mischievous, and designing man." As a result of all the "controversy," Occom was called before the Commissioners for a formal hearing. Not surprisingly, the evidence included statements from Mohegans who remained loyal to Ben. They relayed testimony about Occom's involvement in the land case and the reconstruction of the Mohegan government. Joseph Johnson's brother Zachary, Ben's closest counselor, reported that the Mohegans "had frequent meetings but never wanted Sachem & he to meet with them[.] he said they car'd not for them for they were for Govvt & English & they wanted all their lands from them." Zachary Johnson further related, "Samson said . . . I was for the Government & overseers & that these very men eat up their lands." A Mohegan woman named Sarah Mohomet testified that Occom had sent "Eliphalet Peggy" to "ask of her whether she would be for Sachem & Government or join to have him turn'd out, [and] if she would join with them they would take care of

her." Peggy, she related, said the group had made an "agreement of one and all of them & that they would stand by one another as the English."<sup>107</sup>

For his participation in the land case, the missionary board reprimanded Occom for his "ill conduct" and forced him to make a "confession" in which he formally apologized and promised not to "act in that affair, unless called thereto and obliged by lawful authority." He wrote,

Although as a Member of the Mohegan Tribe and, for many years, one of their Council, I thought I had not only a natural & civil Right, but that it was my Duty, to acquaint myself with their temporal Affairs; Yet I am, upon serious and close Reflexion, convinced, that as there was no absolute Necessity for it, it was very imprudent in me, and offensive to the Public, that I should so far engage, as, of late, I have done, in the *Mason Controversy*.<sup>108</sup>

However, Occom later told a Mohegan woman that he had "outwitted" the commissioners. Ironically, this information was revealed in a long complaint that Ben Uncas wrote along with Zachary Johnson and Simon Choychoy to demonstrate that Occom and his compatriots were still pursuing the land case. Only two months after Occom's "confession," Ben reported to the governor, "Samson told a squa he had outwitted the ministers, when she told him they were to put him down."<sup>109</sup> This revelation gives weight to the subtext of Occom's confession, which asserts his obligation as a councilor to his community. In an undercutting tone, Occom reminded the commissioners that he was not only a missionary under their pay but a "member" and leader of a "tribe," with a "duty" to enable his people to survive here on earth, not merely to prepare a path for them to heaven. Occom suggested that this duty was also a "right" ensured by the "natural" laws common to all humans and by the colony's own code. He spoke covertly to the missionary society's pretense of benevolence, implying that their own claims of concern for the "poor Indian" may have been rooted in hypocrisy.<sup>110</sup> While providing the "confession" that would enable him to retain his salary, Occom validated his actions by demonstrating his position within Native space and his literacy in common law, exposing the colony's paternalism as a duplicitous pretense with which the "ministers" appeared complicit.

Regardless of the commissioners' chastisement, Occom, along with Ashpo and Quaquaquid, proceeded to push the land case through William Johnson, seeking "authority" from the internal "obligation" to his community and appealing to the "lawful authority" of higher colonial



powers, thus remaining faithful to the letter of his promise. To demonstrate the key role Occom continued to play in Mohegan political affairs, Uncas, Johnson, and Choychoy reported to Governor Fitch:

The melancholy condition of this tribe for 15 months past ever since Samson Occum has moved here, obliges me to lay all open to your Honor for relief. Presently upon Occum's arrival, he differed with our overseers and me for leasing Mr. Ross a piece of land, He first drew of the bulk of the Indians from their allegiance to me that they would not acknowledge me as their sachem; 2ndly He has got the Indians to disregard and despise this kind Government & our good overseers — who protect & defend us against all incroachments. . . . 3rdly He has brock up our School, and persuaded the Indians to keep back their children from School because the Master joins us he says with the overseers against the tribe. . . . 4ly He has join'd with Mason party against this Government and makes the poor Indians believe he will recover for them a vast tract of land 4 miles wide & 8 miles long, he sent Hary Quaquid last summer twice to Sir William Johnston's & it is said hary is going again very soon, I suppose Mason had never gone to London had not Occum got the Indians to sign several papers for said Mason.<sup>111</sup>

Furthermore, the three reported that "our Indians have meetings by themselves on the Mason affair" and that Henry "Quaquid set out this week for Sir William Johnston with a Pacquet." This "Pacquet," which Quaquaquid did indeed carry to Johnson, contained a statement from the "Tribe of Mohegan Indians" signed by leaders from both towns, the combined group of counselors selected during the meetings held the year before. The only surviving copy is fragmented, but the entire letter concerned the land case. The document suggests that it was Johnson who had advised the Mohegans to send their petition to the king, and it contains a report on "our guardian" Mason's journey to England. The council appealed directly to their "alliance" with the English and addressed their concern that the case had been "postponed, which we fear & Dread Inasmuch [as it] hath been so Long delay'd already by the Government." This delay, they wrote, "hath already Impovershed us." Insisting that they were being "kept out of our Lands by the Government," the Mohegans reiterated that their Native rights were being violated and their subsistence was at stake. They asked for Johnson's help in bringing the "Case to A Speedy Determination."<sup>112</sup>

As Ben reported to Governor Fitch that spring, Occom himself traveled to see "Sir William with a fresh packet." Although Occom's travel back to Iroquoia was ostensibly in service of Wheelock's missionary project, his trip was clearly related to the land case as well. Occom spent a good part of the summer traveling between Oneida and Johnson Hall, even attending Joseph Brant's wedding while he was visiting.<sup>113</sup> Once more, Iroquoia served as a space for deliberating dispossession. While Occom was visiting his territory, the Mohawk teacher Isaac Dakayenenere wrote to Eleazar Wheelock, regarding his proposal to send missionaries and settlers to "assist" them "in setting up husbandry":

We would have you understand Brethren that we have no thoughts of selling our Land to any that come to live among us; for if we should sell a little Land to any, by & by they would want to buy a little more & so our Land would go by Inches till we should have none to live upon — yet as those who come to instruct us must live, we have no objections against their improving as much Land as they please; yet the Land shall remain ours.<sup>114</sup>

This statement reflects the exchange of knowledge that took place in the networks of Native space, a shared remembrance of the experience of colonization as a deceptively gradual process of dismemberment and dispossession. However, it also reflects the knowledge that comes from that shared experience, a re-memberment that could ultimately protect the lands, and the Native rights, that remained.

Although British magistrates ultimately decided the land case in favor of the colony, this outcome did not alter the Mohegans' conviction. Rather, the decision deepened their belief in the hypocrisy of the colonial legal system and pushed them to seek solutions from within. It also gave Occom and other leaders even greater motivation for pursuing education in order to "outwit" colonial deceit. Occom's commentary upon hearing the decision exemplifies this position:

The grand controversy which has subsisted between the Colony of Connecticut and the Mohegan Indians above seventy years is finally decided in favor of the Colony. I am afraid the poor Indians will never stand a good chance with the English in their land controversies, because they are very poor, they have no money. Money is almighty now-a-days, and the Indians have no learning, no wit, no cunning: the English have it all.<sup>115</sup>

Although the Mohegans lost their case in the colonial courts, perhaps the greater accomplishment was their reclamation of an indigenous internal organization. They brought back a sense of unity to the community and a sense of sovereignty to the land. The renewed tradition of deliberation and consensus is especially evident in the minutes of a meeting held on the eve of the Revolutionary War, recorded by Samson Occom:

April 28, 1778: In the evening, the Tribe met together, to Consult about the Disposal of the Rent money, and as it has been agreed unanimously heretofore once and again, that we shall look upon one another as one Family, and will call or look upon no one as a Stranger, but will take one another as pure and true Mohegans; and so at this time, we unanimously agreed that the money does belong to the whole Tribe, and it shall be disposed of accordingly for the Benefit of the Whole.<sup>16</sup>

When the Mohegans confirmed themselves as “one Family,” they were actively engaged in the re-memberment of the common pot. Recognizing the role colonialism played in their division, they reclaimed an Algonquian ethic of familial inclusiveness and a commitment to act in the traditional role of sachems, equally distributing resources “for the benefit of the whole.”

### Conclusion: Reclaiming Native Space “at the Mouth of the River” and at Mohegan Hill

The Mohegans’ reclamation of sovereignty from within enabled the leadership to continue to assert their Native rights even after the land case was over. A petition from the Mohegans and Niantics in 1785 regarding their fishing rights at the mouth of Kwinitewk exemplified this ongoing articulation, even after the establishment of the United States:

To the Most Honorable General Assembly of Connecticut . . . Your steady, close and faithful friends the tribe of Mohegan, and the tribe of Nahantick sendeth greeting. Sincere friends and brethren may talk freely together without offence. Such we concluded, the English of Connecticut and Mohegans, and Nahanticks are — your Excellency may well remember, that we sent a Memorial to the General Assembly, held at New Haven last October, requesting, not a Privilege, which we never had before, but a Protection in our Natural Privileges, which the King of Heaven gave to our Fathers and to their Children forever. When we received an answer or grant

to our petition, we were all amazed and astonished beyond measure. What? Only half a sein allowed to Monooyathegunnewuck, from the best friends to the best friends? We are ready to conclude, that the meaning must be, that in time to come we must not have only one canoe, one bow, one hook and line, among two tribes, and we must have taxes imposed upon us also, &c., &c. Whilst the King of England had authority over here they order no such things upon us. Alas, where are we? If we were slaves under tyrants, we must submit; if we were captives, we must be silent, and if we were strangers, we must be contented; or if we had forfeited our privileges at your hands by any of our agreements we should have nothing to say. Whenever we went to war against your and our enemies, one bow, and one hatchet would not do for two tribes — And what will the various tribes of Indians, of this boundless continent say, when they hear of this restraint of fishing upon us? Will they not all cry out, mmauk, mmauk, these are the good that the Mohegans ever gloried and boasted of — Certainly we cannot hurt the public by fishing, we never had more than two seins in Mohegan and two in Nahantick and many times not one in Mohegan for over 15 years together, and we fish but very little in the season. We conclude your excellencies must have mistaken our request. And therefore we earnestly pray again, that the honorable Assembly would protect us in our Natural Priveledges, that none may forbid, hinder, or restrain us from fishing in any of the places where we used to fish heretofore.<sup>17</sup>

The petition was signed by Samson Occom, Henry Quaquaquid, Robert Ashpo, and three Niantic leaders, Phillip Cuish and Joseph and Isaac Uppauquiyantup. They opened their address by recalling their longstanding friendship with Connecticut. Like their forebears, they expressed “astonishment” and “amazement” that the colonists would dishonor this friendship by disrespecting their “natural privileges” to fish freely in their home territory (see Map 7). They invoked their sovereignty by demonstrating cognizance of their right to self-government and their status as separate nations, exempt from paying taxes to the state. They also suggested that the new state might be trying to erode this status in attempting to regulate their fishing.

The petition is important as well for its representation of the relationship between the Mohegans and the Niantics. They continued to share space at places like fishing sites and maintained a social and political relationship, but they also preserved their separate identities as villages. The petition’s authors balked at the colony’s proposal that they should

share one sein between them, asking sarcastically if the Mohegans, the colony's ancient allies, should be "allowed" only "half a sein." The metaphor of being forced to use "one canoe, one bow, one hook and line, between two tribes" suggests a comparison to the larger village environment. Both groups had regulated their common fishing space by using particular seining sites to ensure equal distribution. By lumping all Indians in the region into one category, the colonial government threatened to break this system of balance between groups, which would inevitably lead to conflict and competition.

Furthermore, the Mohegan and Niantic leaders insisted that they had not "forfeited our privileges . . . by any of our agreements." They asserted fishing rights in the very same territory on Kwintekw that previous sachems had claimed during the land case. Despite decisions made in the courts, Native rights could neither be granted nor taken away by the colonial government, but existed as a reality within Native space unless the indigenous inhabitants relinquished them. The Mohegans and Niantics bolstered this position by locating themselves within a larger network of Native nations across "this boundless continent," suggesting that a message of distrust would spread through an extensive network of communication if the state of Connecticut did not respect their rights. Like Owaneco and Mahomet II, the Mohegan and Niantic leaders insisted on placing their English, now American, allies within Native space, concluding their petition by reiterating the obligation of their "friends" to respect their "natural privileges" in their land.

Although the Mohegans continued to assert their Native rights, the material impact of the land case decision could not be denied. Their subsistence suffered, and colonial encroachment continued. Even the Mohegans' attempt to build a subsistence culture around agriculture was thwarted by continuing infringement on their planting grounds. As during the beaver and wampum wars, colonial acquisition led to scarcity and competition within and over the common pot, despite the political unity the Mohegans had built from within.

Still, the Mohegan leaders were able to learn from their experiences of the wampum wars and the land case, developing several solutions that were rooted in the renewed ethic of reconstruction and unity. Occom's strategy was to strengthen relationships within the larger coastal network and to reconstruct a new dish from among the surviving wampum-making nations, a village that could be moved along the waterways to a place with more abundant resources, away from colonial control. All of

the people involved in this project were committed to the principles of Christianity that Occom had embraced as a young man, as well as to the ideals of the common pot. His partner in the development of this "utopian" vision was the grandson of Cato Johnson, Joseph Johnson Jr., who, after teaching at Oneida and the neighboring Tunxis community, had married Occom's daughter. Utilizing their connections to the Haudenosaunee, Occom and Johnson appealed to the Oneidas, who gave them land and adopted the Algonquians into the Confederacy. As Occom related in his journal, he and his followers named their newly constructed village "Brotherton, in Indian Eeyamquittoqwuconnuck," recalling the relationships between all of the nations from which they came and honoring the Mohegans' commitment to "look upon one another as One Family."<sup>18</sup>

Henry Quaquauid and the Ashpo brothers chose to remain at Mohegan, developing a strategy based on the lessons of the land case and exemplified by their 1789 petition, which was quoted at the beginning of this chapter. The Mohegan leaders' romanticized nostalgia for their ancestors' hunting and fishing life and their emphasis on agriculture as the new foundation of community sustenance reveals a strategic utilization of the language of property law. In asserting, "We have begun to work our land, keep horses and cattle and hogs; and we build houses and fences in lots," Quaquauid and Ashpo appealed directly to the rhetoric of "improvement." Their petition represented a strategic reversal of John Winthrop's original justification of colonial ownership. The Mohegans argued that they clearly owned their lands not only through Native rights but by the definition of property rights as well. Furthermore, by advocating for the division of the dish into individual lots, the Mohegan leaders may have been attempting to protect the pot as a whole, because individually owned property could not be easily contested. Even as they lamented the loss of their "one large dish," Henry Quaquauid and Robert Ashpo may have been ensuring its preservation. The petition, in this reading, represented a mastery of colonial law and rhetoric to ensure the continuance of the village.<sup>19</sup>

Even if this interpretation of Quaquauid and Ashpo's strategy is valid, it was truly the Mohegan women, and especially Occom's sister Lucy Tantaquidgeon, who led the most effective movement to sustain the village dish. Unlike her brother, Lucy remained firmly planted at Mohegan. For generations, the Mohegan people had held their annual Green Corn/Wigwam festival celebrating the women's harvest at the village center, where the Algonquian transformer Moshup, "the greatest" of all

the creatures of the sea, had marked this spot with his footprint. Indeed, it was at this annual gathering that the "great meeting" of the Mohegans, Niantics, and Pequots had been held in 1736, where Mahomet's mission had been confirmed and Ben Uncas had been condemned with a "black dance." Here, the Mohegan women planted the structure that would mark the village as Native space and prevent the eradication of the community and its land base. And it was primarily in community remembrance that this story was sustained.

As Mohegan tribal historian Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel has related in her own written history, "Four generations of Mohegan women," beginning with Lucy Occom Tantaquidgeon, "fought hard for the creation of that structure. Its purpose was to prevent Mohegans from being relocated, for by the 1830s, federal law required any unschooled or non-churchgoing Indians to go West." By the "end of the reservation era," when plans were made by the colonial government to dissolve the Mohegan reserve entirely, the Mohegan church was the "only communally owned tribal property" and "sacred site." By planting a church at the site of Moshup's rock, the Mohegan women created a marker of property and sacred space that would be respected by their American neighbors (see Figure 8). Yet, at the same time, the church also represented a site of communal remembrance and a central space for the maintenance of a unified community. Here, leadership councils continued, community members gathered, and the wigwam festival was renewed. Here, the pounding of corn into *yokeag* with a giant mortar and pestle reminded every generation of the power of the village dish and of the women who sustained it through the tradition of transformation. Here, the Mohegan women reminded all of their relations to "come . . . home."<sup>120</sup>

Ultimately, the male leaders could not envision a solution that did not entail division. Occom's plan became controversial in his home community because it involved the parting of some of its strongest members to build the new village of Brotherton. While his plan entailed the division of the community, Quaquauid and Ashpo's required the division of its lands. But Lucy Tantaquidgeon and the Mohegan women remained committed to the vision of unity. They grounded their common land in a building that marked their territory in a way that outsiders would comprehend, creating a space that served as a gathering place for the whole "family" until they were able to renew the Mohegan narration of Native rights before a colonial court, 150 years later, to reclaim their village as Native space.<sup>121</sup>

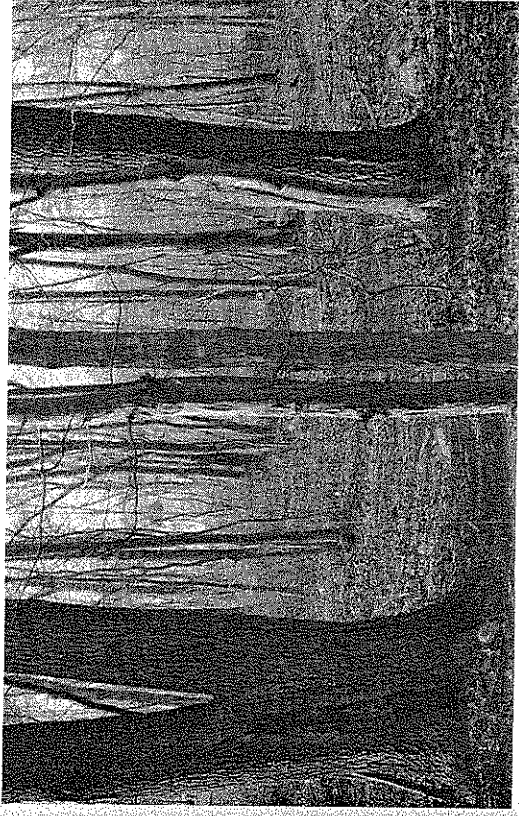


Figure 8. View of the Mohegan church through the trees from Moshup's rock. Photograph by the author, 2007.

According to Melissa Tantaquidgeon Zobel, the Mohegans still gather at the site of Fort Shantok, upriver from the Mohegan church. The "ruins" of this village, marked by red cedar trees and crushed shell, stand as a reminder of the "conflicts" between the Mohegans and the Narragansetts and as a testament to Uncas's ability to reconstruct and defend his village. She relates, "A large stone called Shantok Rock" once marked the site where Uncas gathered his people together after they first split from their Pequot relations. This rock, although removed to make way for railroad tracks in the nineteenth century, would remain, in the memory of Uncas's descendants, as a remembrance of "the political discord that can divide a nation." The church and the wigwam festival, which continue at Mohegan to this day, would also remain as permanent markers and reminders of the power of unity and of the strength of the village that sustains.<sup>122</sup>

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THE  
COMMON POT

The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast



Lisa Brooks

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