

“THEY ARE THE LIFE OF THE NATION”: WOMEN AND WAR IN TRADITIONAL NADOUEK SOCIETY

Kathryn Magee
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio
USA, 43210
magee.48@osu.edu

Abstract / Résumé

The importance of women to Iroquoian or Nadouek society has received much attention, yet little has been said about their significant role in regards to Nadouek warfare. Accordingly, this article contributes to the scholarship by drawing attention to the various ways that Nadouek women influenced traditional warfare. Through an examination of the production of wartime materials, the process of initiating and confirming a community's involvement in war, pre-battle rituals, as well as the fate of prisoners of war, the critical contributions of Nadouek women as active agents in times of conflict are revealed.

L'importance des femmes dans la société iroquoienne ou « nadouek » a mérité beaucoup d'attention, mais on n'a pas suffisamment examiné leur rôle important dans la conduite de la guerre. Le présent article contribue à la recherche dans le domaine en attirant l'attention sur les divers moyens adoptés par les femmes pour influencer sur la conduite traditionnelle de la guerre. Par le biais d'un examen de la production de matériel en temps de guerre, du processus d'amorce et de confirmation de la participation de la collectivité à la guerre, des rituels pratiqués avant les batailles et du sort réservé aux prisonniers de guerre, l'article souligne l'apport essentiel des activités des femmes nadouek en temps de conflit.

Introduction

In a 1788 speech, Onieda Chief, Good Peter, presented the following as the women's message to his council:

Brother, our ancestors considered it a great offence to reject the counsels of their women, particularly of the female governesses. They were esteemed the mistresses of the soil. *Who*, said our forefathers, bring us into being? *Who* cultivate our lands, kindle our fires and boil our pots, but the women?... They entreat that the veneration of their ancestors, in favor of women, be not disregarded, and that they may not be despised; the Great Spirit is their Maker. The female governesses beg leave to speak with the freedom allowed to women, and agreeably to the spirit of our ancestors. They entreat the Great Chief to put forth his strength and preserve them in peace, for they are the life of the nation.¹

The importance of women to Iroquoian, or Nadouek culture is thus revealed.² Their roles within the spheres of politics, economy and society have a long-standing tradition built upon matriarchal structures and power. These characteristics have not gone unnoticed, with a wide range of scholarship on the dynamic position of Nadouek women in their community.³ Despite this recognition of the influential role of Nadouek women by scholars, there has yet to be a study of women's influence in Nadouek warfare. This is not to say that women have been completely omitted by investigations into warfare. To be sure, women are often woven into warfare studies.⁴ In these cases, however, the emphasis is not on the *influence* of women, but their roles as innocent bystanders within a volatile and chaotic atmosphere. The overall impression of such investigations then presents particular issue concerning the nature of women's involvement in war. Essentially the concerns are two-fold: one, the authors indicate that women were not active participants in warfare; and two, that if they were involved, it was as helpless victims subject to the demands of powerful warriors and headmen.

The following analysis calls into question these interpretations by drawing specific attention to Nadouek warfare. In particular, this study highlights the various ways that Nadouek women influenced traditional warfare. Consequently, the assertions that women were passive bystanders and that "[warfare] was in the hands of men" become misnomers, revealing women's critical contributions as active agents in times of conflict.⁵ Accordingly, this study delivers its analysis through a chronological examination of Nadouek warfare, beginning with the production of war time material, followed by the process of initiating and confirming a

community's involvement in war, while also touching on unique pre-battle rituals. The investigation will conclude with a look at the fate of prisoners of war in the aftermath of battle.

Who Were the Nadoueks?

The Nadoueks were comprised of several groups of people that all speak a dialect of the Iroquoian language.⁶ There are three main sub-groups when categorizing Nadoueks. The first group is considered those Nadoueks residing in present day Ontario, namely the Wendat, Attiwandaronks, Tionontates, and Erie. The second group is comprised of those living in the United States, namely the Hodenosaunee, the St-Lawrence Nadoueks of New York State, the Tuscaroras, the Cherokees and the Susquehannocks. The third group includes the St. Lawrence or Quebec Nadoueks.⁷ Despite the differences between these various groups, there were indeed cultural similarities in addition to language. The Nadoueks were horticulturalists and depended on subsistence agriculture as their main source of nutrition. Nadoueks were also a sedentary people, living in large long houses surrounded by palisades. Moreover, all Nadouek groups were organized politically along the same lines. Each clan segment had its own leaders for civil and military matters, each with their own set of responsibilities. The civil headmen, of instance, were charged with maintaining the internal affairs of his segment, as well as international relations with other groups. Similarly, the "War Chiefs" were responsible for leading his fellow warriors.⁸ Religious beliefs and practices were also consistent amongst the Nadouek sub-groups. Their myths and deities were similar as well as their games, feasts and celebrations.⁹ Finally, the most relevant characteristic shared amongst traditional Nadoueks in light of this paper was that of warfare.¹⁰ The Nadoueks approached war in a similar fashion, with similar rules and objectives. In short, the Nadoueks, although divided into various collective nations, shared similar cultural characteristics, thus allowing for a general study on warfare of the group at large.

The Nature of Nadouek Warfare

Before one can discuss the degree of women's involvement in warfare, one must understand the nature of Nadouek warfare itself. In general, Amerindians and Nadoueks saw war as an intrinsic and important part of their daily life. According to Huron scholar Georges Sioui, war was regarded as a "normal and inevitable social phenomenon...."¹¹ Motives for war were neither religious, nor were they territorial.¹² The most common reason to go to war was to avenge someone's death. This particular type of war was often the result of one group's refusal to give

appropriate gifts in compensation for killing a member of another group. This denial was understood as an act of aggression and relatives of the deceased felt it necessary to wage war.¹³ This type of warfare is described by scholars as a “mourning war,” and was seen as a way of restoring lost population, ensuring social continuity, and dealing with death.¹⁴

Nadouek battles took place between spring and summer, allowing the warriors better coverage behind the fully covered trees.¹⁵ It involved surprise attacks and included hundreds to thousands of warriors.¹⁶ It has been observed that warfare was so intense amongst the Nadoueks at times that women had to be accompanied by a man when venturing out to the fields to till the soil.¹⁷ Overall, William A. Starna and Ralph Watkins have summarized warfare among [Nadoueks] as an activity “aimed at subduing an enemy, taking prisoners, and returning them for adoption. The underlying motivations included the acquisition of personal prestige by young warriors, [and] revenge....”¹⁸

As noted by Starna and Watkins, war was also a means for young Nadouek men to gain status among their people.¹⁹ Through their involvement in battles, men stood the chance of becoming recognized for personal skill and bravery. It was through this acknowledgment that young men could be called upon for important roles within the community, such as the position of civil leader. Accordingly, young men were generally supportive of war.²⁰

An enemy was generally identified as an appropriate rival if they were affiliated with a foreign tribe that did not have a recognized bond through trade and reciprocity.²¹ In addition, Nadoueks were known to fight amongst themselves. Perhaps one of the most enduring conflicts was the traditional and seemingly continuous battle between the Wendat and the Haudenosaunee. In his detailed accounts concerning the Nadoueks, Samuel de Champlain described a bloody encounter between the Wendat and one hundred Haudenosaunee. This battle, known as “the Battle of the Richelieu River” took place on June 19th, 1610. Champlain’s involvement in the affair arose when a messenger came to ask for the Frenchman’s help. The circumstances as described by Champlain were as follows

Both sides began firing swarms of arrows, one of which pierced [Champlain’s] ear and entered [his] neck.... The French covered the Indians with musket fire.... Then,...the French stormed the fort, swords in hand, and killed all but fifteen of its occupants. The rest were taken prisoner.... The only booty found inside the camp were some beaver skin robes and the bloodstained fur clothing worn by the dead.

The Indians did not bother to plunder the latter and derided the French who did so.... The Indians scalped the dead or cut off their heads as trophies, and returned to St. Ignace Island, taking their prisoners with them.²²

This example reiterates several key points concerning the nature of Nadouek warfare, including the fact that combatants could number in the hundreds, and arrows were the main choice of weaponry. In addition, it would seem that battles were fought around fortified camps, and the attainment of booty was not an objective of warfare. Once the battle had come to a close victors often scalped the dead, and in some instances prisoners were kept alive and returned home with their captors.

Nadouek Women

From the beginning Nadouek women have held an important place within their society's cosmology. While the Nadouek creation myth varies depending on which particular group you are referencing, they perpetuate a similar narrative based on the story of Aataentsic. This myth, describes how a woman (Aataentsic) fell from the sky-world to land on a turtles back and give birth to humankind.²³ According to the Wendat, Aataentsic was pregnant when she fell from the sky and gave birth to a girl. This girl was soon courted by numerous male spirits and became pregnant herself. Aataentsic's daughter then gave birth to two sons, "the Man of Flint" and the "Man of Fire," but in the process of delivering the latter, the woman died.²⁴ The two brothers engage in a competition in which the "Man of Flint" was killed. Subsequently, the "Man of Fire" went west to live with his grandmother Aataentsic where the two create adversity for humankind.²⁵ Although Aataentsic has often been associated with death and destruction, she was nonetheless highly regarded by the Nadoueks. This is explained through the Wendat perception that "an immoral world would be one without death, pain, or adversity, for these three are sources of compassion, the fountain of all social virtues, or in other words society itself."²⁶ Aataentsic is seen as the grandmother to all and a protector against the "absolute good."²⁷ Thus, the important role that "the woman who fell from the sky" played within the Nadouek origin myth instilled a special place for women within their society from the beginning.

Consequently, or at least appropriately, traditional Nadouek society was both matrilineal and matriarchal. This system of kinship inferred that membership in clan segments and extended families was based on matrilineal principles, principles that frequently governed the inheritance of office as well.²⁸ One theory for this social organization is that matrilineal residence took shape once women took on the role of primary la-

borer in food production:

It argues that the work teams of greatest economic importance in [Wendat] society consisted of a woman and her daughters, whose cooperation in growing crops constituted the basis for forming common households.... This situation, combined with the higher morality rate among young men than women, due to war and accidents, may have encouraged the formation of matrilineal households as the most stable form of extended family.²⁹

Perhaps one of the clearest depictions of the specific differences between men and women in Nadouek society, is Trigger's comparative summary on the topic. He states:

In general, women had a special interest in issues relating to community life, while men were more concerned with relations between communities. [Nadouek] women were the guardians of family and community traditions, while men, who spent more time visiting far off peoples, were more used to, and tolerant of, cultural differences. Yet men and women both had a significant input into most discussions on public policy.... As in many other aspects of their life, [Nadoueks] recognized that men and women had different interests but gave each other the freedom to control what was of interest to them.³⁰

In short, women had specific and significant roles within Nadouek society. It was a woman who was at the core of their belief system in relation to their conceptualization of the world, it was the woman's family lineage that dictated ancestry, residency and at times political office, and it was Nadouek women that had a particular interest and influence in their community's well-being.

Women and War: *Production of Military Supplies*

The preparation and production of military equipment and supplies was the responsibility of Nadouek women. Even before the battles took place women's work included providing the necessary tools for warriors to engage in battle. In addition to their regular duties of "supplying virtually all horticultural labor, as well as for providing firewood to heat the longhouses during the winter...performing domestic work such as child care; [making] household goods, clothing, and pottery; and [preparing] food for storage and consumption," women also made military weapons and food supplies for military campaigns.³¹

Making the weapons that men would use for fighting was an important contribution by women for the war effort. One of the most common

objects produced by women was the arrow. By using a sharp knife or sharp-edged stone they would carve a straight and long arrow. Subsequently, the arrow would be fledged with eagle feathers. Sharp-pointed stones or bones were then attached to the strongest point of the tip of the arrow using fish-glue.³² Although the arrows had a dual purpose in that they were also used for hunting, there were several military implements made specifically for warfare. In Gabriel Sagard's accounts of women's work he makes note of the production of wooden clubs made and used for warfare.³³ Sagard also describes the production of a shield that nearly covered the entire body. The shields were decorated with a round piece of bark with the "armorial bearings of [the warrior's] town or province painted upon it, and fastened to the end of a long stick, like a cavalry pennant."³⁴ Furthermore, women made the *aquientor* that covered the warrior's arms and legs, serving as protection against the onslaught of arrows destined to come in contact with it. These *aquientors*, or cuirasses, were made with white rods, all about the same length, which were sewn together and tightly interlaced with cords.³⁵

Women were also responsible for making the food that warriors took with them when they were called to action far from home. The importance of nutrition during Nadouek war campaigns was paramount. If the warriors did not have proper nutrition they could not fight effectively and would be forced to retreat in search of food supplies. Such was a case described by a member of the Wyndot nation when they were at war with the Senecas. The Wyndot expedition was forced to call off their war party and retreat to the nearest village for four days in order to replenish their weak bodies. The four-day delay cost the Wyndot the battle owing to the fact that they had run out of food.³⁶ The food prepared for Nadouek warriors was very particular. It consisted of bags full of cornmeal that were scorched and roasted in ashes to preserve it. This food supply was effective in that it was easy to transport, it could keep for a very long time and it was easy to prepare. When the warriors wanted to eat, all they had to do was soak the cornmeal in water to soften.³⁷ Overall then, women played a crucial role in the production and preparation of weapons and food. Such significant contributions to Nadouek warfare were vital to the success of military campaigns.

Women and War: A Call for War

The desire for a group to initiate talks to engage in war was instigated by the women. Generally, it was the clan mother who made the first call for a war. This was based on the woman's own volition, usually rooted in the fact that there had been a death in her family and she wished to be compensated for that death through a "mourning war."³⁸

The woman did this by approaching a leader within the community who she deemed to be influential and requested that he call a war council to try to persuade other members of the village to agree to go to war.³⁹ The following is a description of how this process took place:

when, then, this matron judges it time to raise up the tree again, or to lay again on the mat, someone in her family whom death has taken from her, she addresses herself to some one of those who have their *Athonni* [sire] at her home and who she believes is most capable of executing her commission. She speaks to him by wampum belt, explaining her intention of engaging him to form a war party. This is done.⁴⁰

The matron's choice concerning which "sire" would represent her at the council was an important one. It was this man who would have to bring the clan mother's desire and justification for war to the table for discussion. If he was a poor orator, or if he lacked influence and respect within the community, her message may be lost and her call for war refused.⁴¹

Women and War: *Confirmation of Battle*

Nadouek women were not only instigators of war, they also confirmed the community's final decision to engage in battle. It was "the matron, who has the principle authority..., [she] can force these children to go to war if it seems best to her, or keep them at home if they have undertaken a war displeasing to her."⁴² If the war council agreed to go to war but the reasons for battle proved weak, or the nature of the arguments brought about at the war council were not convincing, the women had the power to veto the decisions of male council members.⁴³ This power, either to confirm or deny participation in warfare, is one of the most significant contributions by women to Nadouek military conflict. Women were able to control the involvement of their community in battle and were acknowledged as the ultimate decision makers. Conclusively, Nadouek women can be deemed ultimately responsible for participation in war within their society.

Women and War: *The "Fort Fight" Ritual*

In addition to women's involvement in the more familiar stages of warfare (ie. producing military supplies, gathering support, confirming battle, and influencing participation), Nadouek women also played a decisive role in a very unique pre-battle ritual.⁴⁴ Marc Lescarbot captured the "Fort Fight" ritual in his observations of the eighteenth century Haudenosaunee. He remarked:

They make a fort, within which all the young men of the army place themselves; then the women come to compass them

about, and to keep them as it were besieged. Seeing themselves so environed they make sallies, to slip away and deliver themselves out of prison. The women on the watch drive them back, arrest them, do their best to capture them; and if they are taken the women rush on them, beat them, strip them, and from such a success draw a favorable presage of the impending war, while if they escape it is an evil sign.⁴⁵

Later writing in support of Lescarbot's observations, Reverend P.F.X. de Charlevoix summarized this somewhat puzzling episode by stating: 'Warriors, before taking the war-path, fought with their wives, and if they got the worst, had no doubt of the success of their expedition; but if, on the contrary, their wives were the weaker, they augured ill.'⁴⁶ The pragmatic application of this ritual can be explained by the fact the warriors had to prove themselves strong enough to face adversity and withstand not only physical abuse, but humiliation as well. The Jesuit Relations describe a good example of the relevant lessons attained through this custom and how these lessons may be put into practice in the context of actual battles. The following is a Jesuit missionary's account of a battle between the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat:

'About two hundred [Haudenosaunee]...encountered some advanced-guards of that [Wendat] troop. The latter straightway took flight after some skirmishing, and were eagerly pursued until within sight of our fort – many having been killed while they were in disorder in the midst of snows. But the more courageous of the [Wendat], having stood firm against those joined combat with them, had some advantage on their side, and constrained the [Haudenosaunee] ...These [Haudenosaunee] were forced into a palisade, and about thirty of them were taken captives.'⁴⁷

The success of the Wendat who stayed and faced the Haudenosaunee and the death of those Wendat who fled demonstrate the importance of standing one's ground in times of battle. In essence this is what the Fort Fight ritual seeks to address. It was an attempt to confirm the strength of the warriors. If they were not strong enough to face their wives and be beaten and humiliated by them, then how could they possibly face their enemies? Therefore, the participation of women in the Fort Fight was ritualized, symbolic adversity which acted as a means to measure the capability of their warriors.

Women and War: *The Fate of Prisoners*

The Nadoueks placed great emphasis on the conduct and treatment of prisoners of war. In most cases prisoners faced three possible

outcomes: one, they could be tortured; two, they could be killed; and three, they could be adopted by the captor society. In light of the fact that most wars were waged in the hopes of renewing populations, and replacing a member that had been killed in a previous battle, prisoners were frequently subject to the last of the three options.⁴⁸ Ultimately, much like the decision to go to war, the women had the final say in matters concerning the fate of captives. In fact, Lafitau compares the woman's role concerning prisoners of war, to an arbitrator of life and death. He proclaims that:

The matrons to whom the captives are given are so entirely mistresses of the latter that the wish of the entire village could not save them if the former are desirous of throwing them into the fire nor could they be put to death if these women wish to grant them life.⁴⁹

The fact that captives were given to women whose fates lay in their hands demonstrates that women were key decision makers throughout the warring process. They made decisions pertaining to their own people, as well as decisions concerning the outcome for their opponents.

Women and War: *Women Prisoners*

In addition to deciding the fate of the prisoners, women were prisoners themselves. In most accounts of women prisoners of war, women are portrayed as passive bystanders who witnessed a bloody and chaotic masculine mess. Missionary Gabriel Sagard describes how women and children were exceptions to the torture that male prisoners received, "seldom putting them to death, but saving them and keeping them for themselves or to make presents of them to others."⁵⁰ Passivist accounts such as this, depicting women as helpless victims, fail to take into account the numerous instances when women were active and successful instigators in evading their captors by taking matters into their own hands.

A prime example of this took place when the Wyndot were at war with the "white men." According to Wyndot oral tradition, the European party had captured several Wyndot's including young women who they enslaved. Subsequently, the women began to congregate amongst themselves and came up with a plan to escape. Once they agreed on a plan, the women called to the young Wyndot men and told them of their strategy. They told the men to tie sticks around their legs. The men were then told that the women would signal the men to fight with a whistle call. And so it came to pass, that the men did as they were told. They tied sticks around their legs and waited for the whistle call. Upon hearing the whistle signal, the men took to battle. Initially the "whites" had large numbers, but in the end, the Wyndot men and *women* ended up killing

or capturing all of the “white” soldiers. The victorious group then followed the women back to their own village.⁵¹

This episode is a demonstration of one way that Nadouek women transgressed the stereotypical role as passive victims, mobilizing themselves into a persuasive and effective force within the volatile atmosphere of combat. What is more, this particular incident not only affected the personal outcome for the Wyndot prisoners, in that they were saved, but was a pivotal military success against the “whites.” Thus, women, even as prisoners, were apt to take on active, influential roles during warfare.

Women and War: A Missing History

In light of the numerous ways that women were involved in Nadouek warfare, it is important to consider why there has been so little mention of their particular contributions. One of the most obvious reasons that observers and scholars have overlooked women may be due to the fact that women had little physical presence during the battles. Imagine five to six hundred Huron men gathering together and setting out for war, to the missionary or explorer women’s involvement would seem marginal in that the warriors were all men.⁵² The fact that it was the women who had caused them to gather; that it was the women who had packed their food supplies, carved their arrows and made their shields, would have been impossible to discern unless one had first-hand knowledge of war preparation.

Moreover, the tangible benefits for men fighting in a war may have led to assumptions that women were less involved in warfare because they stood to gain little in comparison to the warriors. As noted, men could gain personal prestige, political sway and respect within his community if he became an accomplished soldier. To an outsider, it would seem likely that men would maintain the key roles of influence within warfare because on a superficial level they were the ones that stood to gain from successful military campaigns. Women, on the other hand, gained little in these personal areas of accomplishment, therefore making it easy for early observers to assume that women did not contribute significantly to interests and outcomes of warfare.

Another reason that women’s involvement may have been eclipsed by male roles in warfare is the lack of physical presence of women at the war council. According to Sagard, women and young men had no part in the council.⁵³ This, like the other circumstances previously discussed, does not take into consideration the extremely influential presence of women behind the scenes. Just because women were not seated at the council did not mean that they were not involved. Women exercised

their influence, even though they were not physically present during the war council.⁵⁴ Women were not only implicated on a pragmatic and symbolic level by starting the fire that was the heart and centre-piece of the council, but demonstrated their significant authority simply because women chose the headmen who led the council.⁵⁵ In brief, the process of selecting a headman included that “the clan mother (usually the oldest or senior woman of the clan) in consultation with other women of the clan [nominated] a man for the position and other [headmen] either [approved] or [rejected] the choice.”⁵⁶ This said, the women still had the last say because during the feast for the newly appointed headman’s inauguration, “if two women [came] and [pitched] the tone of the feast, “they expected to see only broken heads under the [headman].”⁵⁷ Meaning, that if the women did not accept the new headman, in the end his leadership would be doomed to failure.⁵⁸ Therefore, although women were not physically present during the war councils, their aspirations and political points of view were intended to be expressed by the men that they themselves had appointed. The Jesuits acknowledged the extent of female power within Nadouek war councils through an observation of one highly respected Wendat matron. They observed that: “This woman held a high rank and [was] much respected; ...the Elders would decide no important affair without [the women’s] advice.”⁵⁹ Therefore, “the women have the chief authority amongst all the nations of the [Nadoueks]....”⁶⁰ Taking this into consideration, the lack of physical presence by women at war councils seems insignificant in correlation to their important contributions to warfare. Women were respected and influential throughout the decision making process, despite their absence from the councils.

As a final point, one must also take into account that primary observations of traditional Nadouek warfare were written by European men. The missionaries, and explorers were all men, born and raised with European perceptions of the world. Their cosmology was one based on patriarchal structures, focused on the power and leadership of men. The Nadouek world, rooted in matriarchal conception, would have fallen outside the normal range of cultural variation with which the European man was familiar.⁶¹ Therefore, it is likely that they did not record the participation of women, because their own ideological framework would not have suggested to look beyond the roles of men.

Thus, the exclusion of women from both primary narratives and contemporary scholarly accounts is perhaps understandable to a certain degree. The fact that military history places an emphasis on the warrior—a role dominated by men, could have been one reason for this. In addition, seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century observers may

have assumed that because men served to make personal gains through their involvement in war, there would be more of an investment in war by men rather than women. Moreover, it is true that women were not present at war councils, thus making it easy to conclude that they did not influence the councils. Lastly, the ideological paradigm that blurred the vision of primary observers must also be taken into consideration. Overall, the potential reasons behind the exclusion of women from discourses on Nadouek warfare are understandable, but nonetheless problematic in attempts to portray the historical reality of these conflicts.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of *reference* to women and their roles within Nadouek warfare, this study demonstrates that women were not lacking in *influence* and *participation*. They were not only instrumental in producing food supplies and weaponry, but were also key players in decisions concerning calls for war, as well as the confirmation of a community to partake in battle, and decisions concerning the fate of prisoners. In addition, women were also crucial to the so-called Fort Fight ritual and, subsequently, the training and preparation of the community's warriors to engage the enemy with skill and confidence. Lastly, even though Nadouek women were often depicted as passive victims in times of war, this was not always the case. In fact, women were capable of becoming active agents in deciding their own fate and organizing others to put their plans into effect. In the end, although women participated in warfare in a number of important ways, their most crucial contributions resound in that fact that women were the ultimate authority when it came to making decisions in regards to war.

In an excerpt from Joseph-Francois Lafitau's, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, Lafitau captures the power of Nadouek women. He states:

There is nothing more real than the superiority of the women. It is they who constitute the tribe, keep up the genealogical tree and the order of inheritance, and perpetuate the family. They possess all real authority; own the land and the fields, and their harvests; they are the soul of all the councils, the arbitrators of peace and war; they have the care of the public treasury; slaves are given to them; they arrange marriages; the children belong to them, and to them and their blood is confined the line of descent and the order of inheritance.⁶²

Considering women's central role in all aspects of Nadouek society, it is not surprising that women contributed to key aspects of Nadouek warfare. To be sure, although the wars may have been fought by the men of

Nadouek nations, they were simultaneously shaped by those women that were the “life of the nation.”

Notes

1. Quoted in W.M. Beauchamp, “Iroquois Women” *The Journal of American Folklore* 13, no. 49 (Apr.-June 1900): 87
2. The use of the term “Nadouek” derives from Georges Sioui’s presentation “Nadoueks et Algonquiens: La Première Civilisation du Canada” for the Canadian Institute, University of Ottawa (March 10, 2003). Sioui argues that “Iroquoian” is a Eurocentric term categorizing the Huron-Wendat, Wyandottes, Eries, Neutrals, Petuns, and Haudenosaunee. Alternatively, Sioui encourages the use of “Nadouek” which is an Amerindian term used by the Algonquian to describe the same group of people.
3. Representative examples include several edited texts, books, and articles. For edited texts see Rebecca Kugel and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy, ed., *Native Women’s History in Eastern North America before 1900* (USA: University of Nebraska Press, 2007); W.G. Spittal, ed., *Iroquois Women an Anthology* (Ontario: Irocrafts Ltd., 1990); Nancy Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For books see Karen Anderson, *Chained by Her Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France* (London: Routledge, 1991); Alan Greer, *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Roland Vaiu, *Femmes de personne: sexes, genres et pouvoirs en Iroquoisie ancienne* (Montreal: Boreal, 2000). For essays see Karen Anderson, “Commodity Exchange and Subordination: Montagnais-Naskapi and Huron Women, 1600-1650,” *Signs* 11, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 48-62; W.M. Beauchamp, “Iroquois Women,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 13, no. 49 (Apr.-June 1900): 81-91; Judith K. Brown, “Economic Organization and the Position of Women among the Iroquois,” *Ethnohistory* 17 (Summer-Fall 1970): 151-167; Nancy Shoemaker, “The Rise and Fall of Iroquois Women,” *Journal of Women’s History* 2, no. 3 (1991): 39-57; Helen Hornbeck Tanner, “Coocoochee: Mohawk Medicine Woman,” *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3, no. 3 (1979): 23-41; Natalie Zemon Davis, “Iroquois Women, European Women,” in *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*, ed. Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell (New York: Routledge, 2007), 85-105.

4. Representative examples of studies on Nadouek warfare include Daniel Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 40, no. 4 (October 1983): 528-559; Keith F. Otterbein, "Huron vs. Iroquois: A Case Study in Inter-Tribal Warfare," *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 2 (Spring, 1979): 141-152; Ian Steele, *Warpaths* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1994); Bruce Trigger, *Children of Aetaentsic: A History of The Huron People to 1660* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987); Elizabeth Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians 1615-1649* (USA: Syracuse University Press, 1991); Roger Carpenter, *The Renewed, The Destroyed, the Remade: The Three Thought Worlds of the Iroquois and the Huron, 1609-1650* (USA: Michigan State University Press, 2004); Matthew Dennis, *Cultivating A Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth Century America* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993); George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois: A Study in Intertribal Trade Relations* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1940); Daniel P. Barr, *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America* (USA: Praeger Publishers, 2006).
5. Davis, "Iroquois Women, European Women," 86.
6. This paper's analysis is based on the Nadoueks of the seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century.
7. Georges E. Sioui, *Huron-Wendat: the Heritage of the Circle* (Vancouver: UBC Press, c1999), 217-218, n22.
8. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, 102.
9. Ibid., 103.
10. Ibid.
11. Sioui. *Huron-Wendat: the Heritage of the Circle*, 69.
12. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, 68.
13. Reuben G. Thwaites, ed., *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, 1600-1791*, (Cleveland: Burrows 1896-1901) [JR] 10: 225; 17:11.
14. Daniel Richter's article gives a much more in-depth analysis of the characteristics of the Mourning war, Richter, "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience," 528-559. See also Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, 805-6.
15. Gabriel Sagard-Theodat. *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*. ed., George M. Wrong, trans., H. H. Langton, (Toronto: Champlain Society, 1939),152.
16. Ibid.
17. Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649* (USA: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 31.
18. William A. Starna and Ralph Watkins. "Northern Iroquoian Slavery,"

- Ethnohistory* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1991): 39.
19. Ibid., 68.
 20. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, 69.
 21. Ibid., 68.
 22. Ibid., 256-258.
 23. Marius C. Barbeau, *Huron-Wyandot Tradition Narratives in Translations and Native Texts* (Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 165), 4.
 24. Soui, *Huron-Wendat: the Heritage of the Circle*, 16-18.
 25. Ibid., 17-18.
 26. Ibid., 19.
 27. Ibid.
 28. Trigger, *The Children of Aataentsic*, 101-102.
 29. Trigger, *The Huron: Farmers of the North* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1990), 56.
 30. Bruce Trigger cited in Sioui, *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*, 121.
 31. Anderson, "Commodity Exchange and Subordination: Montagnais-Naskapi and Huron Women, 1600-1650," *Signs* 11, no. 1 (Autumn, 1985): 51.
 32. Sagard-Theodat, *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, 98.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Ibid., 154.
 35. Ibid.
 36. Barbeau, *Huron-Wyandot Tradition Narratives in Translations and Native Texts*, 294-295.
 37. Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649*, 30.
 38. Joseph-Francois Lafitau, *Customs of American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*. ed., and trans., William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore (Toronto: Champlain Society 1977), 99.
 39. Marc Lescarbot, *The History of Newfrance*. trans., W.L. Grant. (Toronto : The Champlain Society, 1914), 3 : 264.
 40. Lafitau, *Customs of American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, 99.
 41. Lescarbot goes into great detail about the war council itself detailing the chronology of events. This account, although seemingly dominated by the male figures of the council, actually supports the importance of women because it was through the woman's initial communication with the "sire" that the council was called. The proceedings of the council, according to Lescarbot, were as follows: "on the arrival of the other leaders the [sires] would make long orations to

- explain the situation and to convince them. At each proposal he asks their consent. At any time the others may also speak and give their opinion." Lescarbot, *The History of Newfrance*, 264.
42. Lafitau, *Customs of American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, 99.
 43. Beauchamp, "Iroquois Women," 86.
 44. Due to the fact that this ritual has yet to be categorized by a specific title (primary observers make reference to an "interesting" and "peculiar" Iroquois ritual), it will be referred to as the "Fort Fight" ritual throughout this paper.
 45. Lescarbot, *The History of Newfrance*, 264.
 46. P.F.X De Charlevoix. *History and General Description of New France*. trans., John. G. Shea, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962), 6: 266.
 47. *JR*, 34:132-133.
 48. William N. Fenton, "Northern Iroquoian Culture Patterns," *Handbook of North American Indians*, (Northeast). ed., Bruce G. Trigger, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978) 15: 316.
 49. Lafitau, *Customs of American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*, 154.
 50. Sagard-Theodat, *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, 159.
 51. Barbeau, *Huron-Wyandot Tradition Narratives in Translations and Native Texts*, 307-312.
 52. Sagard-Theodat, *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*, 152.
 53. *Ibid.*, 149-150.
 54. Tooker, *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649*, 48; n72.
 55. Jean de Brebeuf, *Ecrits en Huronie*, ed., Gilles Therien, (Montreal: Bibliotheque Nationale du Quebec, 1996), 165.
 56. Tooker, "Northern Iroquoian Sociopolitical Organization," *American Anthropologist* 72, no.1 (Feb 1970): 93-95.
 57. *JR*, 17 :161.
 58. Tooker, "Northern Iroquoian Sociopolitical Organization," 93-95.
 59. *JR*, 54: 281.
 60. Beauchamp, "Iroquois Women," 86.
 61. Trigger, *Children of Aataentsic*, 5.
 62. Quoted in Beauchamp, "Iroquois Women," 85.

References
Primary Sources

- Barbeau, Marius C.
1960 *Huron-Wyandot Tradition Narratives in Translations and Native Texts*. Ottawa: National Museum of Canada, Bulletin No. 165.
- de Brebeuf, Jean
1996 *Écrits en Huronie*. ed. Gilles Therien. Montreal: Bibliothèque Nationale du Québec.
- de Charelvoix, Rev. P.F.X.
n/d *History and General Description of New France*. trans. John. G. Shea
1962 6 Volumes. Chicago: Loyola University Press.
- Lafitau, Joseph-Francois
1974 *Customs of American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times*. ed. and trans. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore. 2 volumes. Toronto: Champlain Society.
- Lescarbot, Marc
1914 *The History of Newfrance*. transl. W.L. Grant. Toronto : The Champlain Society.
- Sagard-Theodat, Gabriel
1939 *The Long Journey to the Country of the Hurons*. ed. George M. Wrong. trans. H. H. Langton. Toronto: Champlain Society.
- Thwaites, Reuben G. (ed.)
1896-1901 *The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents, 1600-1791*. 73 volumes. Cleveland: Burrows.

Secondary Sources

- Anderson, Karen
1991 *Chained by Her Foot: The Subjugation of Women in Seventeenth-Century New France*. London: Routledge.
- _____.
"Commodity Exchange and Subordination: Montagnais-Naskapi and Huron Women, 1600-1650." *Signs* 11, no. 1 (Autumn 1985): 48-62.
- Barr, Daniel P.
2006 *Unconquered: The Iroquois League at War in Colonial America*. USA: Praeger Publishers.

- Beauchamp, W.M.
n/d "Iroquois Women." *The Journal of American Folklore* 13, no. 49 (Apr.-June 1900): 81-9.
- Brown, Judith K.
n/d "Economic Organization and the Position of Women among the Iroquois." *Ethnohistory* 17 (Summer-Fall 1970): 151-167.
- Carpenter, Roger
2004 *The Renewed, The Destroyed, the Remade: The Three Thought Worlds of the Iroquois and the Huron, 1609-1650*. USA: Michigan State University Press.
- Davis, Natalie Zemon
2007 "Iroquois Women, European Women," in *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Indian Removal, 1500-1850*, ed. Peter C. Mancall and James H. Merrell. New York: Routledge, 85-105.
- Dennis, Matthew
1993 *Cultivating A Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth Century America*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Fenton, William
1978 "Northern Iroquoian Culture Patterns." In *Handbook of North American Indians* 15 (Northeast). ed. Bruce G. Trigger, 296-321. Washington: Smithsonian Institution.
- Greer, Alan
2005 *Mohawk Saint: Catherine Tekakwitha and the Jesuits*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hornbeck Tanner, Helen
1979 "Coocoochee: Mohawk Medicine Woman," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 3, no. 3: 23-41.
- Hunt, George T.
1940 *The Wars of the Iroquois: A Study in Intertribal Trade Relations*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Kugel, Rebecca and Lucy Eldersveld Murphy (ed.)
2007 *Native Women's History in Eastern North America before 1900*. USA: University of Nebraska Press.
- Otterbein, Keith F.
1979 Huron vs. Iroquois: A Case Study in Inter-Tribal Warfare. *Ethnohistory* 26, no. 2 (Spring): 141-152.
- Richter, Daniel
1983 "War and Culture: The Iroquois Experience." *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd ser., 40, no. 4 (October): 528-559.

- Shoemaker, Nancy (ed.)
 1995 *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*. New York: Routledge.
- Shoemaker, Nancy
 1991 "The Rise and Fall of Iroquois Women." *Journal of Women's History* 2, no. 3: 39-57.
- Sioui, George E.
 1999 *Huron-Wendat: The Heritage of the Circle*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Spittal, W.G. (ed.)
 1990 *Iroquois Women an Anthology*. Ontario: Irocrafts Ltd.
- Starna, William A. and Ralph Watkins
 1991 "Northern Iroquoian Slavery" *Ethnohistory* 38, no. 1 (Winter): 34-56.
- Steele, Ian
 1994 *Warpaths*. NY: Oxford University Press
- Tooker, Elizabeth
 1991 *An Ethnography of the Huron Indians, 1615-1649*. USA: Syracuse University Press.
- _____
 1970 "Northern Iroquoian Sociopolitical Organization" In *American Anthropologist* 72, no.1 (Feb): 90-97.
- Trigger, Bruce G.
 1990 *The Huron: Farmers of the North*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- _____
 1987 *The Children of Aataentsic: A History of the Huron People to 1660*. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Vaiu, Roland
 2000 *Femmes de personne : sexes, genres et pouvoirs en Iroquoisie ancienne* Montréal : Boréal.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to acknowledge the invaluable insight and guidance of Jim Doyle, Diane J. Magee, and Georges E. Sioui throughout the writing of this article.