

Nta'tugwaqanminen

OUR STORY

**The Evolution of the
Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq**

Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmawei Mawiomi

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Foreword

Satsan (Herb George)

Bringing our history to life is the responsibility of all of our people. Our history is a critical part of what defines us, along with our languages, our homelands and our spirituality. Without these critical components, we lose our identity as distinct peoples. As Indigenous people, we must constantly be reminded of this.

Since the time of colonization and Confederation in what we now call Canada, our history has been denied. It was not acknowledged or respected by the colonial powers in this country. Our own people had to practise our traditions and cultures underground because of the colonial laws and policies and the systemic racism that tried to wipe us out. These laws and policies are still with us, regulating us from cradle to grave under the *Indian Act*. Yet we are still here. We are proud of who we are. We are reclaiming our history and our rightful place as owners and caretakers of our territories. *Nta'tugwaqanminen* is a testimony to this. And the fact that the title of this history of the Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq is in the Mi'gmaq language is a testimony to the strength of our languages, our cultures and traditions, our history.

I am Wet'suwet'en, from the Flying Frog Clan. I am one of the Hereditary Chiefs of my Nation and acted as Speaker for the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en Nations during our court action. My identity comes from my language, my sacred homeland, my spirituality, my culture, my history. I worked for many years on the Delgamuukw-GisdayWa case. Since then, I have been helping First Nations reorganize and implement their inherent right to self-government. In this respect, I'm very proud of my work with Mi'gmaq Mawiomi.

When we went before the Supreme Court with the Delgamuukw-GisdayWe case, our Chiefs and Elders felt very strongly that we had to use our own language and history to explain to the courts that we are an oral people, with a strong history and we still have title and rights to our territories. The Supreme Court of Canada agreed with us and ruled that oral histories and evidence must be accommodated and accepted in a Canadian court of law. This led to other successes in the courts, including the Tsilhqot'in decision, in which the Supreme Court acknowledged that the Tsilhqot'in Nation has established Aboriginal title over a claim area of nearly 2000 km in north central BC. The strength of that claim was again based on the strength of oral testimony, oral stories.

This has given hope to many First Nations. As we realize that the *Indian Act*

is not the predominant and certainly not the only way to see our land, our rights and our responsibilities, we are now standing up for our sovereignty. We know we have the power and the responsibility to create a better future for our children and future generations.

We are now in a new era in terms of our relationship with Canada. We are a third order of government. We have the inherent right to self-government and we have pre-existing sovereignty and the right and will to rebuild our communities and our nations. We are now putting back in place our own governments that meet the vision and needs of our people because it's the people who are the rights holders. I've worked in many communities coast to coast to coast and found that the memory, in terms of our own jurisdiction, is very strong in some places but just a dim memory in other places. One of our Chiefs said, regardless, if we look into our language, our history and our songs; this is where we can find what we are looking for in terms of our own jurisdiction and government structures and we need to build from that.

Now is the time to start to create a new memory in the minds of our children. It is our responsibility to share our ways so they will be carried on by future generations. One of our Chiefs said to me that it is critical that we carry on our oral traditions. We used to sit our children down and tell them stories. Stories about who they are as a people, who they are in terms of their relationship with the land and animals, who they are in terms of their obligations and responsibilities to each other and to our territories. We told them stories about our laws and protocols, principles of recognition and respect. We taught them everything about our history, of what makes us who we are as a people. This is what the Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq are doing by writing down and sharing this history book.

Our histories are now more important than ever. We must remember these stories. We must change the negative, pervasive stories we have told ourselves in recent history. We have now had more than seven generations of stories of pain, anger and suffering. The multi-generational impacts of colonization, the *Indian Act*, residential schools, the 60s Scoop and many other devastating colonial practices and policies have wounded us and are still with us. Successive governments removed us from our land, outlawed our governments and cultural practices, exploited our languages and tried to destroy our people and history. But they did not destroy us and we have prevailed. We must now start to tell different stories again. Stories of love, power, healing. We can no longer just talk about our history, we must live it.

And so here is *Nta'tugwaqanminen*, another important history that will no longer be lost. For all those who read this book, understand and see how the land, the territory in what is now called Quebec and New Brunswick has been exclusively occupied and continually used by Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq for thousands of years. They have neither sold nor ceded their territory to the Crown. They have always

been here, and they have a rich and strong history that must be recognized and respected. This history is a witness for all the world to see.

For the Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq who read this history, know that you can be proud of your Nation and everything that has been accomplished. Live your history, reclaim it, and see how you can use this history to rebuild your nation so that you too, can create a new memory in the minds of your children.

Satsan (Herb George) is a Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chief of the Frog Clan and has been a long-time Speaker for the Wet'suwet'en Nation, which is located in BC. He previously served as Speaker for both the Gitksan and the Wet'suwet'en Nations.

EXCERPT

Introduction

How We Came to Write Nta'tugwaqanminen

My words fall,
Arousing inquisitiveness,
Hoping to stir
Different opinions.

If Indians today
Are not fictitious,
Then know them.

I am not
What they portray me.
I am civilized.
I am trying
To fit in this century.

Pray, Meet me halfway —
I am today's Indian.

— *Rita Joe*, Poems of Rita Joe

This book is written by us, the Mi'gmaq of Gespe'gewa'gi. It speaks of our vision, our history, our relation to our land, our past and present occupation of the territory, our place names and their locations, the treaties we agreed upon with the British Crown, the respect of these treaties from our part and the non-respect of them from the various levels of government, the dispossession we had to endure while the European settlers illegally occupied and developed the Gaspé Peninsula to their own advantage, and the rights and title we nevertheless still have on our land.

Our book is the result of a fifteen-year research alliance between the Mi'gmawei Mawioimi Secretariat (MMS), our people and a number of research associates. In 2000, the three Mi'gmaq¹ communities of Northern Gespe'gewa'gi (Gaspé Peninsula) — Gesgapegiag, Gespe'g and Listuguj — agreed to associate and work

together in order to re-affirm our rights and title. This is how the MMS came into existence. At that time, both the federal and provincial governments denied our occupation of the Gespe'gewa'gi at the moment of what is conceptualized by non-Aboriginal people as the "British Sovereignty." The term refers to the year 1763, when the French Crown ceded all its colonies of Canada (New France) and Acadia to the British Crown by the Treaty of Paris. Article IV of the Treaty of Paris states:

His Most Christian Majesty renounces all pretensions which he has heretofore formed or might have formed to Nova Scotia or Acadia in all its parts, and guaranties the whole of it, and with all its dependencies, to the King of Great Britain: Moreover, his Most Christian Majesty cedes and guaranties to his said Britannick Majesty, in full right, Canada, with all its dependencies, as well as the island of Cape Breton, and all the other islands and coasts in the gulph and river of St. Lawrence, and in general, every thing that depends on the said countries, lands, islands, and coasts, *with the sovereignty, property, possession, and all rights acquired by treaty, or otherwise*, which the Most Christian King and the Crown of France have had till now over the said countries, lands, islands, places, coasts, and their inhabitants, so that the Most Christian King cedes and makes over the whole to the said King, and to the Crown of Great Britain, and that in the most ample manner and form, without restriction, and without any liberty to depart from the said cession and guaranty under any pretence, or to disturb Great Britain in the possessions above mentioned. [italics added]²

In fact, the territories in question were ours. France had never acquired any property rights of the said territories by treaty with our ancestors or otherwise. They were ours because we were here first, and we had neither sold them nor ceded them to the French Crown. We had never been at war against France, and thus we had not lost our territories in that way either. So the territories were definitely ours at that time, and they still are, as we demonstrate in this book. Yet, in the minds of both Crowns, the 1763 cession included both our territories and the French infrastructures built on them by virtue of a friendly relationship we had developed with the French before the cession. Therefore, the sovereignty alleged by the French Crown was a false sovereignty.

Since then we have neither sold nor ceded our territories in Nova Scotia and Acadie to the British Crown either. The same can be said about Gespe'gewa'gi, where France had not built official infrastructure at the time of the cession. The only Europeans using our land at that time were French and Basque fishers, and they rarely spent the winter on this side of the Atlantic. We were then the sole inhabitants of the land and had been there since time immemorial. However, due

to ignorance or misinterpretation of historical data, civil servants advising the governments seem to be under the impression that, until the British Sovereignty, we were only “occasional” visitors in the peninsula, as if we all lived on the south side of the Bay of Chaleur, in present-day New Brunswick, and came to the north side only occasionally. In the light of demographic principles and ecology, this is quite a weird belief. How could a population turn its back on a territory so abundant in game, fish, wood, berries, and so on? As our readers will see through reading our book, there is much irrefutable evidence of our presence in Gespe'gewa'gi since the receding of the ice sheet at the end of the last Ice Age. Yet, the provincial government still takes the position that we moved into the Gaspé Peninsula only after the end of the Seven Years' War — the struggle between the British and the French that led to the cession and British Sovereignty. Of course we know that this posture is utterly wrong. We know that we have been in Gespe'gewa'gi since time immemorial. But how to prove it?

Soon after its foundation in 2000, the Mi'gma'wei Mawiomí Secretariat contacted researchers interested and knowledgeable in Mi'gmaq studies. They came from various backgrounds: anthropology, archaeology, demography, ethnography, genealogy, geography, history, law, linguistics, etc. Their mandate was manifold:

1. to find, collect and bring back to us all the knowledge collected by their predecessors and themselves;
2. to revisit the prehistory of the Gaspé Peninsula and collect evidence of our time immemorial occupation of it;
3. to investigate all the available archives to provide us with an understanding of what had happen to those of us who were not confined to reserves after these were created;
4. to revisit all the treaties concluded between us Mi'gmaq and the British Crown, before and after the cession; and
5. to revisit the history of the economic development of the Gaspé Peninsula since the arrival of the Europeans, and to assess and describe the cost of that development in our own terms.

The researchers did their work, and from 2003 to 2009, report after report arrived at our office in Listuguj. The results were overwhelming, not only by their abundance and the insights they provided, but also by the shining evidence of our prehistorical presence here, the continuous and exclusive character of our relation with our territory, the numerous treaties of peace and friendship we entered into with the British Crown and, last but not least, the number of peaceful protests and actions that we undertook since 1760 to defend our territory against invasions, overexploitation and misuse.

At the same time, our own Mi'gmaq researchers from the MMS conducted a series of interviews with our elders from the three communities to create our Traditional Use Study (TUS). The elders were shown detailed maps of the territories and asked to share the knowledge that was passed on to them by their own elders. The topics were fishing, hunting and trapping; gathering of fruits, nuts, berries and medicinal plants; harvesting of wood, bark, roots, stones and minerals; and location of sacred grounds and burial grounds, inland paths and portages. These interviews resulted in a vast amount of data showing that our knowledge and use of our territory is still abundant and accurate. These interviews also brought plenty of evidence that our Mi'gmaq principles of governance regarding land use and occupation are still very much alive.

Along the way, two of our researchers revisited the repertoire of Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq place names collected by Father Pacifique de Valigny in the first quarter of the twentieth century. One of us then worked at finding their exact location on official maps. This confirmed not only our presence on the entire territory since pre-historical times but also the nature and the extent of our relation with our territory.

The reports, TUS interviews and maps were shared extensively with our elders during a workshop held in Listuguj. At the closing of the workshop, our elders strongly recommended that we disclose the details and the sum of this evidence as a way of giving back. In consequence, we are now fully able to share our story with all our Mi'gmaq and non-Mi'gmaq fellow citizens.

The research reports, maps and TUS interviews amount to thousands of pages — not a format that can easily be shared. This is why we decided to condense our research results in the format of a book. Our aim, first and before all, is to share our knowledge with our Gespe'gewa'gi Mi'gmaq fellow citizens. After having repatriated all the data on our history back to our main office, making them available and readable to all the Mi'gmaq of Gespe'gewa'gi and Mi'gma'gi is another step into the process of what is called today “knowledge re-appropriation.” We are all entitled to have access to our own history, geography, ecology, politics and so on. The purpose of this book is also to invite our non-Mi'gmaq neighbours into our world. We think that knowing leads to understanding. We hope that we can, from there, develop a shared understanding of the history and place we live in and that we can in turn work together at a fair sharing of lands and resources.

The materials leading to the writing of this book were assembled collectively. The writing of the book was also a collective enterprise. At the outset, four main writers — Danielle E. Cyr, Donald Jeannotte, Richard Jeannotte and Troy Jerome — worked on separate chapters. Danielle E. Cyr assembled the first draft of Chapter 1 and researched and wrote Chapter 2. Danielle E. Cyr and Donald Jeannotte were responsible for writing the first draft of what became Chapter 3. Assembling other research associates' reports, Cyr also put together Chapters 4 and 6. Richard Jeannotte wrote Chapter 5 and, in partnership with Cyr, wrote Chapter 7. Troy

Jerome wrote Chapter 8. All translations to English were done by our writing team unless we specify otherwise.

As time went by and through several work sessions under the direction of Troy Jerome and Terri Lynn Morrison, and with the guidance of our elders — John Isaac, Bernard Jerome and Ike Metallic — the work sessions soon turned into a process of rewriting together and, even more, rewriting through one another. Each of us was, at times, the voice and the scribe. This is why, in the end, we all agreed that the authorship should be that of the Mi'gmawei Mawiomi. Our book could not have been written without this alliance and long-standing relationship.

What Is in the Book

Summarizing and condensing the incredible wealth of data that forms the basis for our book has been a long and difficult process. As the saying goes, it felt like trying to pour the ocean into a goblet. This is why we opted to complement the information with many bibliographic and Internet references in endnotes. Those who wish to read and learn more are thus given the opportunity to go beyond the contents of this volume. And those who prefer to get our story without all the scientific details may opt to skip the notes.

The first chapter presents a summary of the archaeological research conducted to date on the northern part of Gespe'gewa'gi. It explains how research revealed the successive layers of prehistoric occupation of the peninsula. Where data are lacking we provide explanations as to why this is the case. In this chapter we tell you about the prehistory of our territory, from time immemorial to the eve of European invasions in the early sixteenth century. We also show how the archaeological evidence available in the scientific literature mirrors our own oral history and how the physical archaeological excavations mirror the linguistic traces evidenced in our language.

Chapter 2 tells about the extent of our territory and the stories carried on by our place names through innumerable generations of Mi'gmaq who lived here. It explains in detail the evidence we have of our exclusive and continuous use and occupation of the territory, based on our place names and the connection between our language and archaeological findings, as well as the knowledge we acquired of our territory through millennia of occupation. This chapter drafts a portrait of the knowledge available about Mi'gmaq geographical names in Gespe'gewa'gi. Through it, we gain a better understanding of the importance of these place names in relation with our territory and our identity and how they confirm our ancient and constant presence on our land. In other words, we guide readers in hearing what our landscape has to say through the words of its language.

Chapter 3 is an introduction to our foundation texts, in other words our creation story, and our main myths and legends. They come as explanations and illustrations

of how we govern ourselves in the world we live in even to this day. They encapsulate the way we think, how we orient ourselves physically and philosophically, and how we relate to one another within our family, our clans and our Mi'gmaq society at large.

Chapter 4 reveals the demography of our population from the British Sovereignty until the dawn of the twentieth century. Many people believe that we Mi'gmaq have always lived on reserves or that, by the time reserves were created, we had almost disappeared, or that the few survivors were already living where reserves were established, like Gesgapegiag and Listuguj. However, a careful study of archival documentation brings evidence that many more of us continued living all over our territory long after the so-called British Sovereignty and even long after the creation of the reserve system.

Chapter 5 explains the definition and meaning of the word “treaty,” and describes how, between 1725 and 1779, we Mi'gmaq concluded a series of treaties with the British Crown. We proceed to examine in detail these treaties in order to help our readers in understanding that the treaties we entered into with the British Crown created legal and juridical obligations on both parties.

Chapter 6 brings more details on our social and political organization — the way we shared our resources and conducted our political relations with other nations before the arrival of European settlers. This chapter also tells of what happened to us and to our relation to our land after the Europeans' arrival, specifically after the British Sovereignty. This will help our readers to assess the magnitude of what we gave and what we lost. The chapter explains how, step-by-step, and despite all the treaties signed between us and the British Crown, our ancestors were gradually dispossessed of their control over our lands and access to our territory and its resources.

Chapter 7 is a summary of the legislation imposed upon us from 1763 to the 1960s. It also recalls the evolution of Canadian political discourse and legislation from 1969 to present day, including Trudeau's White Paper and our reply through the Red Paper, the constitutional recognition of our rights in the 1982 Constitution and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007.

Chapter 8 presents a portrait of our three communities today. It gives our readers an idea of how we live now and what limitations we have to face because we are still considered “pupils of the State” under the Indian Act. It also speaks to our goals and challenges in getting beyond this second-class citizen status. We also talk about the negotiations and reconciliation strategies that are geared towards re-establishing our rights to self-governance and self-determination in the context of our Aboriginal rights and title.

We wish you good reading and we encourage you, especially our youth, to explore more on your own by visiting the numerous websites and references available in footnotes and through the text.