

**Dispossessed Indigeneity:  
Literary Excavations of Internalized Colonialism**

**by  
Natalie Knight**

M.A., University at Albany, SUNY, 2010

B.A., The Evergreen State College, 2006

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## Approval

**Name:** **Natalie Knight**

**Degree:** **Doctor of Philosophy**

**Title:** **Dispossessed Indigeneity: Literary Excavations of Internalized Colonialism**

**Examining Committee:** **Chair:** Clint Burnham  
Professor

**Deanna Reder**  
Senior Supervisor  
Associate Professor

**Sophie McCall**  
Supervisor  
Associate Professor

**David Chariandy**  
Supervisor  
Associate Professor

**June Scudeler**  
Internal Examiner  
Assistant Professor  
Department of First Nations Studies

**Warren Cariou**  
External Examiner  
Professor  
English, Theatre, Film & Media  
University of Manitoba

**Date Defended/Approved:** August 1, 2018

## Abstract

*Dispossessed Indigeneity: Literary Excavations of Internalized Colonialism* begins with the premise that 21<sup>st</sup> century Indigenous political movements focused on returning to our particular nations, languages, and land bases are often not accessible to urban and dispossessed Indigenous people. Further, I contend that urban and dispossessed Indigenous people embody particular subjectivities that contemporary Indigenous theory has not sufficiently recognized, understood, or theorized. To begin to fill this gap, *Dispossessed Indigeneity* seeks to theorize the subjectivities of Indigenous people who have been dispossessed from our ancestral communities, families, and lands, in order to articulate our political agency and potential contributions to social struggles against colonialism and capitalism. To do so, the following pages present historicized and politicized readings of three Indigenous authors in Canada: Edward Ahenakew (Cree); George Clutesi (Nuu-chah-nulth); and Jeannette Armstrong (Syilx). Through close readings of their texts, I offer Indigenous perspectives on political problems that characterize contemporary working class and urban Indigenous social movements. These problems include interweaving an anti-colonial Indigenous analysis with an anti-capitalist analysis; locating Indigenous politics of recognition and redistribution that do not rely on models of recognition and redistribution controlled by the colonial state; developing a concept of Indigenous historical consciousness as an avenue of politicization; and articulating Indigenous concepts and practices of land and value rooted in noncapitalist ecological knowledges. Woven through the four literary and theoretical chapters are interludes that extend the personal and political reflections of the introduction, showing my own stake in the critical work of the following pages, as well as practicing Indigenous storytelling alongside the authors whose works I consider.

**Keywords:** Indigenous literatures in Canada; decolonization; colonialism; capitalism; recognition; Indigenous feminist ecology

## **Dedication**

To all dispossessed Indigenous peoples — may you find your mirror.

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## **Introduction:**

# **Situating Dispossessed Indigenous People in Canada and the United States**

Indigenous writers in Canada and the United States emphasize the crucial importance of stories for Indigenous wellbeing. Yet “story,” the English word, does little to point to the significance of Indigenous storytelling. The English word can variously mean an entertaining account of events; gossip or rumour; or even a lie. In a Canadian or American context, facts and Western scientific information about material reality are privileged. Indigenous stories that blur the lines between the material and spiritual worlds, between fact and fiction, experience and perception, subjectivity and objectivity create their own meaning-making contexts that explode English-speaking notions of purpose, validity, and truth-telling.

For us Indigenous peoples, stories are inextricably involved in ceremony, epistemology, and ontology. Our worldviews are formed through a complex interrelatedness between understanding the world, understanding oneself always in relation to the world, and *telling* these relations through stories. Profound spiritual, material, and place-based knowledge live through stories for Indigenous peoples; their significance cannot be captured in the English word “story.” This dissertation begins with this basic conviction of the significance of Indigenous storytelling. In the following pages, I seek to weave together the stories told by Indigenous authors from different nations and times. I should say at the outset that this weaving together is politically motivated, and to understand these political motivations, it is necessary to tell my own story.

\*

I write from a position that is characterized by dispossession of my Indigenous beingness. I was adopted out of community at birth and raised by two white parents with two Black siblings. My story is not unique; in fact, it is a common one in Indian Country on both sides of the colonial U.S.-Canadian border. Though the 1978 U.S. Indian Child

Welfare Act (that gives full jurisdiction to tribes in the placement of tribal children in culturally-appropriate foster care and adoptive families) was put into place before my birth, I identify myself as a child who was adopted out of community much like those thousands of children adopted out through the Canadian Sixties Scoop, and through the comparable U.S. program, in which the Bureau of Indian Affairs paid individual states to remove children from tribes and place them in non-Native, usually white, homes. I have learned through participating in talking circles with Indigenous peoples on unceded Coast Salish territories that the particular reasons for my adoption – the reasons why I wasn't protected under the Indian Child Welfare Act – are also not unique. But I did not know this until my early thirties. Until I shared pieces of my story in talking circles, I did not know that the causes for my adoption were ones that other Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, shared.

My birth mother was nineteen when I was born. She is a Diné (Navajo) woman on her mother's side, born to a Cherokee father who was largely an absence in her life. Her father had been adopted out of his Oklahoma Cherokee community and raised by a white family. My grandmother speaks little of her first husband, enough to communicate that he was not a nice man to her. I do not claim Cherokee heritage because my birth mother does not.

My grandmother remarried a white man who was university-educated. Together they had two more children, and so my birth mother lived most of her life raised by her mother and step-father. I have stories told to me that point to tensions, to put it kindly, between my birth mother and her step-father. But she was also very close to her grandmother, and at times in her life found solace in living with her, a woman who carried with her Diné cultural knowledge.

My birth mother is a tremendous woman. I met her three years ago, along with my sister, her daughter. We met on Yurok territory in northern California. In the days we spent together, and as our affinity for each other grew and trust developed, I was able to ask questions and she was able to tell stories that added to what I already knew about the circumstances of my birth. The general arc of the story I knew; when I was eleven or so, I began asking my adoptive parents more questions about where I came from, and they did

the best they could providing me with answers. From the age of eleven, I knew that my birth mother had been raped by a Yurok man. Speaking with my birth mother, she fleshed out the story more. She was raped by two brothers, two people who were familiar to her. This is the kernel of my story that I have carried with me for a long time, that I have wrestled with, denied, anguished over, and am learning to live through in a better way.

It is a story that I admit has caused me significant psychological and spiritual pain. It wasn't until I sat in those talking circles and heard other Indigenous women speak to similar stories that I realized the structural significance of my origins. I am firmly convinced that gender violence is a fundamental technique of colonialism. Colonial gender violence operated and continues to operate in Indigenous communities in complex ways; one of these ways is through the reorganization of gender roles such that Indigenous women and two-spirit people are subordinated to Indigenous men. Indian policies on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border enforce colonial gender roles on Indigenous two-spirit people, women, and men, and this has deep and long-lasting effects on communities.<sup>1</sup> Many Indigenous women, in particular, have done outstanding work that shows how gender violence was and is a technique of colonialism, used to not only disrupt but to wreak Indigenous communities in Canada and the U.S. Because of the

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<sup>1</sup> A partial list of articles and books that expose the ongoing legacies of colonial gender violence within Indian policies in Canada and the U.S. include: Kathleen Jamieson, *Indian Women and the Law in Canada: Citizen Minus*, Ottawa: Canada Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1978; the following chapters from Katie Pickles and Myra Rutherdale's (eds) *Contact Zones: Aboriginal and Settler Women in Canada's Colonial Past*, Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005: Adele Perry, "Metropolitan Knowledge, Colonial Practice, and Indigenous Womanhood: Missions in Nineteenth-Century British Columbia;" Jean Barman, "Aboriginal Women on the Streets in Victoria: Rethinking Transgressive Sexuality during the Colonial Encounter;" Joan Sangster, "Domesticating Girls: The Sexual Regulation of Aboriginal and Working-Class Girls in Twentieth-Century Canada;" Robin Jarvis Brownlie, "Intimate Surveillance: Indian Affairs, Colonization, and the Regulation of Aboriginal Women's Sexuality;" and Sarah Carter, "Creating 'Semi-Widows' and 'Supernumerary Wives': Prohibiting Polygamy in Prairie Canada's Aboriginal Communities to 1900." Also see: Sarah Carter, "'Complicated and Clouded': The Federal Administration of Marriage and Divorce Among the First Nations of Western Canada, 1887-1906" in Sarah Carter et al (eds), *Unsettled Pasts: Reclaiming The West Through Women's History*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005; Joan Sangster, "Native Women, Sexuality, and the Law" in Joan Sangster's book *Regulating Girls and Women: Sexuality, Family, and the Law in Ontario, 1920-1960*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Joanne Barker, "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada," *American Quarterly* 60:2 (2008): 259-266; Qwo-Li Driskill et al (eds), *Queer Indigenous Studies: Critical Interventions in Theory, Politics, Literature* Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 2011; Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces between Us: Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011; Joanne Barker (ed), *Critically Sovereign: Indigenous Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies* Durham: Duke University Press, 2017; L. Cornum, "First Women, Then the Nation: Confronting Colonial Gender Violence," *LIES: a journal of materialist feminism* 2 (2015): 75-93.

important work that Indigenous women have done to draw these connections, I have been given a way to understand my origins that moves me through anguish and towards a politicized subjectivity.

\*

Adoption adds another piece to my story that I have struggled with. Adoption is tied to gender violence in that it attacks the most intimate relations within Indigenous families and communities. It removes future community members and leaders and dispossesses us of our Indigeneity. Adoption produces Indigenous people who are profoundly dispossessed of our own Indigeneity, and this creates a troubling, confusing, situation.

The way that I define Indigeneity, based on conversations with Indigenous people and articulations by Indigenous writers and activists, is an active practicing of a relationship to land. All aspects of one's sense of being for an Indigenous person are rooted in a relationship to land. For Indigenous people who have been adopted, raised in foster care, survived residential and boarding schools, or descended from these survivors, we may experience a near-total colonization. The core of our Indigenous being – our relationship to land that we learn to practice through being exposed to and raised within the cultural norms of our communities – is torn from us. With the severing of our connection to communities and disruption in learning how to practice relationships to land, our colonization of both our self and our understanding of place in a complex interrelatedness with the world may be nearly complete.

This is not a unique experience; there are a large number of Indigenous people who have been deeply dispossessed from our communities and nations.<sup>2</sup> If we are lucky,

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada reports that nearly 52% of people identified as Aboriginal in the 2016 Census live in metropolitan areas. And the U.S. based Urban Indian Health Institute, drawing from United States Census Bureau data, reports that in the 2010 census, 71% of American Indians and Alaska Natives lived in urban areas. While certainly not all urban Indigenous people experience dispossession from their Indigeneity, many of us do. And it is also likely that the statistics reported by both governments under-represent urban Indigenous populations, since a disproportionate number of homeless people are Indigenous in metropolitan areas, and these homeless people are not considered in census data. See “Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Key results from the 2016 Census.” *Statistics Canada*. N.p. 25 Oct 2017. Web. 25 Mar 2018, and “U.S. Census Marks Increase in Urban American Indians and Alaska Natives.” *Urban Indian Health Institute*. N.p. 28 Feb 2013. Web. 25 Mar 2018.

as I am, we may be able to reform relationships with our families, and this is a very hopeful thing. Yet for many of us, we cannot return to our nations. Many of us do not have the opportunity to explore the rebuilding of familial, communal, and national ties. We may also have grown up with our families but experienced such violence that returning is not a safe option; colonialism enacts violence on Indigenous peoples in so many ways, and unfortunately, this violence can be internalized and reproduced in our communities. Regardless of the precise reason, it is a tremendous loss as an Indigenous person to not have connection with family, community, and nation. These relations inform how we build accountable and responsible commitments and learn to locate ourselves in roles that contribute to the social fabric of Indigenous communities, and so being severed from these relations has an impact on the present and future of ourselves and our communities in ways that cannot be overstated. Yet, being removed from Indigenous communities has an additional effect on the ontological-spiritual-psychological aspects of our being. Dispossessed Indigenous peoples cannot practice a relationship to land without being instructed on how to do this by our own communities. For those of us who have and will spend most or all of our lives in varying states of distance from community, we experience a contradiction at the core of our being – being Indigenous and yet not having access to our own Indigeneity through practicing land relationships – that is not easily remedied.<sup>3</sup>

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Dispossessed Indigenous people have complex and varying experiences of this core contradiction. Some of us may find ourselves immersed in Indigenous communities that may not be our birth communities, but may come to satisfy our desires for constructing Indigenous identities. Sometimes these communities are urban Indigenous communities, and in Canada, they often develop in and through Friendship Centres. For urban Indigenous people, with or without an experience of deep dispossession from our Indigeneity, we may still struggle to negotiate the construction of Indigenous identity that straddles urban space and our varying levels of knowledge and intimacy with rural or reserve Indigenous communities.

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the importance of land relationships for Indigenous peoples, see chapter four.

One way that I remind myself of my ancestral connection to land is through asserting my specific Indigenous identity – Diné and Yurok. When I identify myself in these ways, it always reminds me of everything I do not know, of the many connections to community I do not have, and at times identifying with my nations has felt painful. But I am committed to speaking my national affiliations for many reasons, not least that I want to practice a refusal of the colonial forces that desire to assimilate me totally into non-Native space. I also identify as Yurok and Diné because it reminds me of the particular land that my ancestors are tied to.

While acknowledging myself as being Diné *and* Yurok immediately calls to my mind the violent assault on my birth mother’s body, and as such is not an easy identification, I do so because I feel an affinity with Yurok territory that I have not felt anywhere else. When I have visited or passed through Yurok territory, it feels like home in a way that language limits me in describing. In contrast, though I identify with my mother’s lineage through claiming my Diné heritage, and can therein point towards possible community connections, I have not spent any time on Diné territory. I think that many Indigenous people identify themselves with all kinds of known and unknown connections to their nations. And for those of us who are markedly dispossessed from our Indigenous beingness, our identities must be consciously constructed.

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This dissertation is motivated by my affinity with the most dispossessed Indigenous people, those of us who have been torn from our families, communities, nations, and land bases. It is also written through an intense period of three years, during which time I, sometimes quite consciously and sometimes very unconsciously, sought to find ways to articulate my personal experience of dispossession as well as understand it as not only personal. I have sought to tell my story clearly, unashamedly, and find other Indigenous articulations that help to expand my self-understanding into a more complex, more well-rounded, and ultimately politicized positioning. In the following chapters, I read the writings of diverse Indigenous authors as a way of re-educating myself as an Indigenous person. While the importance of living relationships cannot be diminished – indeed they form the foundations of Indigenous communities – I also contend that the importance of stories cannot be diminished either. This dissertation, then, is an

experiment: to what extent can I reform my own conceptions of the world as a dispossessed Indigenous person by accessing, if always only partly, stories told by Indigenous people who are less dispossessed and more woven into the fabric of their communities? To what extent can I rehabilitate myself through exposing myself to stories that communicate Indigenous worldviews?

These are the quite personal questions that form the motivations for my writing. These questions also pose a problem as well. In the way I have formulated my subjectivity, at the core of my being is a fundamental lack – a lack characterized by the particular effects of colonialism as they have expressed themselves in my life. In this way of thinking, I would then become more “whole” if I was able to gain access to my Indigenous communities. However, it remains to be seen to what extent I will be able to rebuild community connections. My birth mother is on her own journey, having only last year visited Diné family that she has been estranged from since she was a child. I may never actually gain access to Diné communities in a way that would bring me into a community membership position. In terms of my Yurok relations, these are relations that I do not expect to ever recover. My birth mother’s rape by two Yurok brothers is not only a site of violence, it is one of the forms of violence that has been and continues to be taboo. There are irreconcilable elements in my story that do not lend themselves easily to catharsis.

I must also defend, or at the very least speak to, the gaps that will become apparent in the following pages; that is, I must speak to my decision to write about the authors whose work I focus on in the following chapters. I do not write about Diné or Yurok authors.<sup>4</sup> Chapter one reads Cree writer and Anglican preacher Edward Ahenakew’s currently unpublished novel *Black Hawk*, circa 1918, to work out an understanding of how capitalism developed on the Prairies, and how Indigenous

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<sup>4</sup> There is a great legacy of Yurok and Diné authors. Yurok knowledge holder Lucy Thompson published *To the American Indian: Reminiscences of a Yurok Woman* in 1916, marking one of the first publications by an Indigenous woman in the United States. Shauna Oteka McCovey is a contemporary Yurok poet whose first book is *The Smokehouse Boys* (2005). A partial list of Diné authors includes poets Luci Tapahonso, Elizabeth Woody, Sherwin Bitsui, Laura Tohe, Esther Belin, Irvin Morris, and Orlando White.



economies were and weren't incorporated into capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Chapter two focuses on Nuu-chah-nulth author, activist, and actor George Clutesi's 1969 text *Potlatch*, contrasting Glen Coulthard's critique of the colonial politics of recognition with a Nuu-chah-nulth politics of recognition. Chapters three and four look at Syilx (Okanagan) author and knowledge holder Jeannette Armstrong's novels *Slash* (1985) and *whispering in shadows* (2002), respectively. Chapter three develops an analysis of Indigenous historical consciousness for the protagonist, Tommy Kelasket, while chapter four considers the politics of globalization in the main character Penny's life, on the one hand, and makes connections with Armstrong's critical articulation of Syilx worldview in her, as yet unpublished, dissertation. Finally, my conclusion takes a step towards theorizing dispossessed Indigenous people's subjectivities, and draws connections to the subjectivities of those most displaced by capitalism, homeless people.

The authors I have chosen to attend to in this dissertation are quite removed from the land bases and cultures of my own nations. The closest connection is between Yurok and Nuu-chah-nulth culture; however, though both nations are located in relative Northwest Coast proximity, the similarities stop there. The Yurok nation has never practiced potlatching, for example. The territory is indeed coastal, but only in part; much of historical and present cultural and economic activity hinges on the major waterway, the Klamath River, that runs through Yurok territory. And only a few miles inland from the coast, the climate changes significantly from the heavy, wet, fog-blanketed California coast that is likely well-known by anyone who has traveled highway 101, to a slightly drier climate that supports oak trees and summers that commonly reach temperatures in the 90s. Trade and exchange for Yurok people was and is significantly influenced by other, including more southern, California tribes, and so though it seems likely that the Nuu-chah-nulth and the Yurok (or affiliated nations close to either of them) may have known of each other before colonialism interrupted trade and cultural exchange, the

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<sup>5</sup> The People and the Text: Indigenous Writing in Northern North America to 1992, a SSHRC funded 5-year project, has supported publishing initiatives of Edward Ahenakew's *Black Hawk*. Building from Brendan Edwards' partial transcription of *Black Hawk* from archived handwritten manuscript originals, I worked with Rachel Taylor (Iñupiaq) to finish a transcription of *Black Hawk* during my time as a Research Assistant with The People and the Text. The *Black Hawk* manuscript has been given to Edward Ahenakew's grandniece Heather Hodgson and extended family to determine how publication should proceed.

Yurok are not within the net of potlatching cultures that partially defines Coast Salish regional affinities. Connections between both Yurok and Diné cultures and Cree and Okanagan cultures are even further afield.

How did I come to Edward Ahenakew, George Clutesi and Jeannette Armstrong then, if, as I've said, this dissertation attempts a reconstruction of Indigeneity in order to perform a highly personal transformation? Why not focus on authors from my own territories and nations, especially considering my political and personal motivations? The answer to these valid questions requires that I position myself in the time and place of the writing that takes place in these pages. When I moved to unceded Coast Salish territories, I was, as I explain more thoroughly below, exposed to much more vibrant, brave, and unapologetic expressions of Indigeneity than I had ever been exposed to in the United States. I quickly immersed myself in Indigenous politics and Indigenous literature, particularly the place-specific politics and literatures developed by Indigenous peoples in Canada. I came to know Ahenakew, Clutesi, and Armstrong's work while familiarizing myself with Indigenous literatures in Canada.

Edward Ahenakew's attentive focus on the capitalist economic practices that were actively displacing Cree economies and ways of living at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century drew me to *Black Hawk*. In *Black Hawk*, I was able to see ways in which an anti-capitalist analysis, informed by Marxism, could be paired with an anti-colonial analysis. This novel affirmed to me the necessity of bridging these two ways of understanding colonial and capitalist power. George Clutesi's *Potlatch* responded to questions I had held for some years while familiarizing myself with Indigenous literatures and histories written in Canada, not least the question of how Indigenous peoples form positive practices of recognition that are not modeled after, or comparable to, the colonial politics of recognition that the Canadian state practices. In addition, I was drawn to *Potlatch* because I found myself living, working, writing, and organizing on unceded Coast Salish territories, a place with rich Indigenous diversity that is also woven together through the practice of potlatching. Reading Clutesi's text was a way of grounding myself in the Indigenous forms of recognition and redistribution that are unique to the place I was living in. Finally, I had the honour and privilege of speaking with Jeannette Armstrong for a companion interview for the text *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle*

*Island*.<sup>6</sup> During the interview we discussed many aspects of Armstrong's storytelling and activist practice, including her understanding and teachings of land relationships – a theme that I explore in great detail in chapter four. A few months after the interview, I was also able to visit Armstrong on Syilx territory at the En'Owkin Centre. It is the combined personal experience with Armstrong as well as the ways in which her novels *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* compelled me that have inspired chapters three and four.

Each author articulated something to me that pushed my thinking, acting, and being further. I found in each author's texts what was, for me, very necessary articulations that I, in the following chapters, place in specific political contexts that are themselves shaped by my particular story, by my political sensibilities, by my life experiences, by my consciousness, and so forth. My decision to write about Ahenakew, Clutesi, and Armstrong also resists a racist localism embedded in settler expectations for Indigenous literary criticism, expectations that imply double-standards about settler abilities to read literature across national and cultural contexts, while holding suspicions of Indigenous critics who practice a parallel, if ethically more rigorous, method.

Again and again, as I write this introduction, I return to the necessity of positioning myself in both personal and political ways; it becomes increasingly apparent to me that the truest way to present the following work is to expose and reveal the contours of my story thus far, necessarily bridging the personal and political.

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It is also necessary to position myself as someone who is living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and living through an incredible period of Indigenous resurgence. In contrast to the previous era of pan-Indian mobilization, we are seeing in both Canada and the United States the resurgence of particular, land-based and nation-based affiliations, articulations, ceremonies, stories, and material revitalization. Efforts to form Indigenous language-learning communities, efforts to reoccupy traditional territories, and efforts to block resource developments on Indigenous lands excite and inspire me very much. Of all the

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<sup>6</sup> Sophie McCall, Deanna Reder, David Gaertner, and Gabrielle L'Hirondelle Hill. *Read, Listen, Tell: Indigenous Stories from Turtle Island*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017.

efforts that Indigenous people are engaged in right now in Canada and the United States, it is these autonomous efforts to move away from a recognition-based politics that seeks acknowledgement by and from the colonial states that compel me the most. And yet, as it should be clear from my words above, these Indigenous resurgence movements that are intimately tied to their lands and languages are not, and cannot be, my politics at this time.

I am left in an awkward position. Where do I fit in Indigenous resurgence? What is my political agency? What do I and all of the most dispossessed Indigenous people of Canada and the United States have to offer our communities if we are divorced from these communities not by our own choosing? To put this in other terms, I am deeply concerned with how to conceptualize the subjectivity of dispossessed Indigenous people. Are we destined to live lives that are characterized by the constant, insistent, and at times debilitating awareness of our lack, a lack that Duran has characterized as a “soul wound” suffered by Indigenous people from the violences of colonialism?<sup>7</sup>

For my own survival, my answer to this last question must be a resounding no. For my own survival, I must locate a sense of political agency for myself, and for all other dispossessed Indigenous people, that does not relegate us to positions of mere victims at best, and at worst, colonialism’s detritus. I must articulate a political agency that honours my story, that does not collapse my political agency with those Indigenous people who lead resurgence efforts based on the particularities of their territories and languages. I view myself and other dispossessed Indigenous people as people who lack both a state and a nation. Our nations, if we even know what nations we come from, are building themselves, strengthening themselves, creating stronger foundations for future generations. Our nations do this whether or not they have access to traditional territories and whether or not they even have reserve land. All of our nations are markedly without statehood, barred as it is by Canada and the United States’ insistence on maintaining colonial control. This is a significant barrier to Indigenous self-determination, but it does not impede self-determination entirely. Indigenous people who participate in and are

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<sup>7</sup> Eduardo Duran, *Healing the Soul Wound: Counseling with American Indians and Other Native Peoples*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2006.

recognized by their communities may be stateless people, but they have their nationhoods. In contrast, dispossessed Indigenous people stand outside of our nations as well. Again, my question returns to me: what is our political agency?

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I must also position myself in relation to my adoptive family. My adoptive mother identifies most strongly with her Irish heritage from her mother. My adoptive grandmother's parents immigrated to Canada from Ireland. Eventually, they moved to the Detroit area. My adoptive grandmother had a job as a typist in Henry Ford's auto factory when she was young. My adoptive father identifies the most with his Italian heritage from his mother. Her family immigrated from Italy to New York City. My father's grandmother never learned to speak English and never learned to swim. She raised nine children in a tenement building, before the family moved to the Bronx which was at the time semi-developed farmland.

We adopted my brother when I was five years old, when we lived in central Florida. I became conscious of race at five years old, and my education in American racism is deeply informed by watching my brother navigate the world as a Black man. My sister came along when I was eleven, and I helped raise her until I left home at seventeen for college.

From my earliest memories, my parents both worked a lot. My dad had a full-time day job when we lived in Florida, working for the water management district. In the evenings a few days a week, he tutored kids at a learning centre. My mom had a part-time job in the evenings at a movie theatre selling tickets. This meant we got occasional free movie tickets, which excited me to no end. It also meant that from a young age, I helped my parents take care of my brother, and later my sister, because most often when I came home from school, there was only one parent home.

My family struggled with money through most of my childhood. I would say that we were always striving for a comfortable middle class life, and would briefly experience this, only to be "set back" again by financial hardships, or my mom having to quit her evening jobs for health reasons. I remember being a young teenager and inviting a friend down the street over for a sleepover. I had slept at her house many times, and this was my

first time inviting her home. At her house, her mom would make us peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with the bread smothered in butter on both slices, and to me this was the best thing I'd ever eaten. She had a walk-in pantry, filled with fruit roll ups, Gushers, and Handisnacks (kid snacks popular in the 90s) that we could raid at any time. When we got to my house for our sleepover, my dad was just pulling a big pot of beans off the stove, complete with a ham hock disintegrating in the soupy brown mix. He announced that we were having bean burritos for dinner, and that we'd have enough beans to eat on for the rest of the week. I was beyond embarrassed. It was experiences like this that quietly pointed me towards an intuitive, unarticulated class consciousness that later informed my interest in Marxism and my commitment to organizing with working class, low income, and homeless communities – experiences that I write about in interludes one and four.

While I was always told that I was Native American, I suppressed this identity until my mid-twenties. Growing up in the U.S. as a white-passing Indigenous person who can point to no cultural knowledge, expressing my Indigeneity felt nearly impossible. I had amassed layers of shame around it, most significantly for being brought into this world through the violent assault of my birth mother's body. For years, I thought I did not deserve to live because no one deserves to be raped. The price paid for my existence was simply too high, in my mind. These are thoughts that return to me from time to time, and it is an ongoing process of healing to shift my conceptions of self. I also felt shame because I felt I had no right to claim my Indigeneity. When I did express myself as Native American, the most common response I got was snide disbelief, which only further shamed me away from building a positive sense of identity.

The most powerful shift occurred when I move to unceded Coast Salish territories. Suddenly, I was surrounded by Indigenous people, so many proud Indigenous people. They were everywhere, in my neighbourhood, in my friend group, in activism, in my university. And the response I received on Coast Salish territories when I self-identified as Indigenous was wholly different than my experience in the U.S. I was welcomed into an urban community of diverse Indigenous people. This is when the real work began for me, as I began to shine a light on the shame and denial of my origins that I had come to practice in the beginning of my life. The generosity of spirit I have experienced from so many Indigenous people has been profound.

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However, all was not suddenly perfect when I moved to unceded Coast Salish territories. From the time I was a young teenager – it is hard to locate a beginning, but I highly suspect it began when I was eleven – I was deeply depressed. I had a core of shame for my being that informed every element of my way of walking through the world. There were periods of joy, but my ability to experience joy and connection to the world around me was dampened. I “succeeded” in aspects of my life, most notably school, because I had developed a way of coping that was founded on escaping my self-anguish through projecting myself into other worlds, other selves, by reading. I have always been an avid reader. I recognize now that this was a way of survival.

When I began to open myself up to my own suppressed identity, it moved the core of my being in profound ways. It called into question the malformed emotional structures I had put in place. This is a very intense, and painful, experience. My depression deepened even as I expanded aspects of myself; it is as if my depression fought for control. After many months of experimenting with self-care routines, herbs, and supplements, I spent six weeks in a hospital in Vancouver. In hindsight, the most important part of this experience was not actually going to the hospital, but instead building a support network of close friends who checked in on me in the coming years. I could no longer pretend I was okay. I was not okay, I was suffering. My support network of close friends has been the most crucial piece of healing.

I still struggle. Last year I was again admitted to a hospital in Vancouver for depression. The experience a second time around was less traumatizing largely because I knew what to expect: an eight hour wait in the emergency room; stripping your clothes in front of a nurse upon admission; earning “passes” for good behavior that allowed you to access the neighbourhood surrounding the hospital for a few hours a day, if you were lucky; being given a cocktail of drugs that dulled the depression and anxiety but left you hazy, unfocused, sometimes docile. I made intense, short friendships in the hospital and we would express ourselves and resist the demoralization of the situation in small ways. We would sneak extra gowns from the hallway – fluorescent yellow gowns that had been mistakenly delivered to our floor – and dress up in ridiculous costumes on our group walks outside led by social workers and nurses. We learned quickly what each of our

favourite hospital food was, and had informal systems of sharing food at our mealtimes. We talked with each other and didn't feel crazy. We mocked the burnt-out or rude nurses and made the best jokes I've ever heard. When a friend came to visit one day, a fellow patient was standing nearby. My friend asked her how she was doing; the fellow patient responded in song: "Crazy, I'm crazy for feeling so lonely..." I should hope Patsy Cline would be proud.

This dissertation is written out of an intense period of coming to terms with myself. The work of the dissertation is inextricably interwoven with my undoing of structures of shame I had come to live through. As such, this dissertation has been a liberatory act, and in a small highly personal way, speaks to the resilience that each of us possesses even in extraordinarily difficult circumstances. It is clear to me that articulating ourselves as full human beings is of the utmost importance to survival. For me, this means articulating my subjectivity as a dispossessed Indigenous person.

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The following chapters lay out explorations of diverse Indigenous literatures in an effort to help attend to what I don't know and to what I may become. It is a way of re-educating myself. While this is highly personal, I know that there are many Indigenous people who are dispossessed from their nations as well. It is my hope that the work I have engaged in here can help inform other dispossessed Indigenous people's understandings of themselves. I also hope that this work can be an example of how it *is* possible to reclaim one's Indigeneity even in the face of so many layers of displacement from Indigenous communities.

These chapters also take on a series of questions that form the theoretical motivations of this dissertation as a whole – theoretical motivations that I then link back to my personal story and the questions I have raised here, particularly the question of political agency, in the conclusion. These chapters address the following concerns:

How can we Indigenous organizers, writers, and theorists wed anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics? How can Indigenous practices and concepts of land relationships, themselves thoroughly noncapitalist, be articulated *as* anti-capitalist Indigenous politics?



How do Indigenous noncapitalist economic and social practices produce a positive sense of recognition that differs substantively from the colonial politics of recognition that severely limits Indigenous self-determination?

How do Indigenous texts help us Indigenous peoples to develop our own historical consciousness?

How can we trace Indigenous ecological knowledges within literary texts, glimpsing, perhaps, alternative modes of being and conceiving the world that offer alternatives to capitalism? Or, to put it in a more theoretical way, how do the following literary texts understand “value” (as Marxists call it) as, contra-Marx, *extra-economic* and *extra-human*, arguably exposing and pushing forward, from new directions, critiques of Marxist humanism that have been made by ecological theorists?<sup>8</sup>

Consecutively, these questions reflect the major interrogations of chapters one through four. Chapter one, through a close reading of Edward Ahenakew’s novel *Black Hawk*, weds an Indigenous anti-colonial analysis with an anti-capitalist analysis. This chapter pulls this dual analysis out of the insights within *Black Hawk*, and shows how necessary a dual analysis of colonialism and capitalism is to understand the historical and contemporary positions of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the United States, and North America more broadly. Chapter two turns towards George Clutesi’s text *Potlatch* to reveal a Nuu-chah-nulth articulation of recognition that does not adhere to the model of recognition proposed and enforced by the Canadian state. This chapter also points towards corresponding Nuu-chah-nulth economic redistribution practices that produce the nation’s unique politics of recognition, an example of noncapitalist economic and social relations that live on into the present. Chapter three reads Jeannette Armstrong’s novel *Slash* with an eye on how Tommy Kelasket, the main character, develops his Indigenous historical consciousness during the course of his youth and early adulthood. This chapter also details the rise of Red Power in Canada and the United States. Finally, chapter four examines Jeannette Armstrong’s second novel, *whispering in shadows*, for its inclusion

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<sup>8</sup> For an example of a critique of Marxist humanism for being anthropocentric, see Jason Moore, “The End of Cheap Nature: Or How I Learned to Stop Worrying about ‘The’ Environment and Love the Crisis of Capitalism.” *Structures of the World Political Economy and the Future of Global Conflict and Cooperation*. Ed. C. Suter and C. Chase-Dunn. Berlin: LIT, 2014. 285-314.

and demonstration of an Indigenous feminist ecology. In addition, this chapter highlights Syilx (Okanagan) land relationships, providing insight into Indigenous practices of land relationships in Canada and the United States overall.

Each chapter is prefaced by an “interlude.” These four interludes frame the critical work of this dissertation in my own development of historical consciousness as an Indigenous woman, strenuous and joyful personal and political work I engaged in while completing this writing. Each interlude extends my story, which I begin to tell in the introduction. The conclusion builds from insights developed in all four chapters and interludes to suggest a theorization of dispossessed Indigenous subjectivity, and begins to outline ways that dispossessed and urban Indigenous people can practice our Indigeneity through land relationships *on* the land where we most commonly find ourselves: the city.

I hope that the reader will find productive interrogations and considerations in the following pages, and I hope that, by supporting the critical and careful reading of work by Edward Ahenakew, George Clutesi, and Jeannette Armstrong, Indigenous literatures may be shown in all their endurance, generosity, and insight.

## **interlude: little brother**

By the time I was twenty-two or so, I had become well-versed in what we call in the United States “ethnic studies” – what Canadians are likely to term multiculturalism – and what I learned later on to more precisely identify as critical race studies. Not to imply that these three terms mean the same thing; they certainly don’t. I was a precocious youth in terms of my voracity for learning and reading. It meant I did well in school, except for math, a subject that I asked too many questions about and never wanted to accept that there were “rules” that existed just because a teacher said they did. Of course, I later learned – through reading popular histories of physics, quantum mechanics, and string theory – that math is absolutely grounded in the material world, and ultimately all rules pertain to information humans perceive about our environment. Grade school teachers don’t usually explain long division or geometry in this way, however, and so I was lucky to get by with Cs as I resisted learning something that didn’t appear to have any reason or justification behind it. I excelled in other subjects, especially English, and later on in history, because I was lucky to have two outstanding history teachers who made what appeared irrelevant for the present (to a very young and naïve person) come alive in total relevance and vivid implication.

Going to school in public schools in the U.S., and in western Washington state from the time I was nine until I finished high school, I was not exposed to very much cultural production – knowledge, art, etc. – that reflected or related to my family’s experiences. We were always the odd ones out; none of us really looked alike, so people always expressed surprised when the five of us sat down at a table together. I suppose we might have looked like five random people. Other odd things happened once I matured and my younger sister was born. For a couple years, it became common for strangers to assume my little sister was my kid, my brother was my boyfriend, and our mother her grandmother. At any rate, we apparently were a mismatched bunch, and this was primarily because of race.

Growing up with two Black siblings affected my consciousness in ways I cannot overstate. I recall clearly when my brother came home from school and asked us to

explain why kids were calling him certain names, and what those names meant, for example. I helped my mom explain racism to my then five-year-old little brother. As he got older, I would gift him music, books, anything I could find that I thought would reflect something back to him that wasn't a white-washed reminder of everything he wasn't. Looking back on the ways that I tried to nurture my brother's consciousness as a Black youth, I think that I was unaware of how I was actually nurturing him when those parallel aspects of myself were not able to be addressed. Finding Black culture was not very hard for me to do, and so helping my brother make connections and identifications that I thought might, ultimately, increase his self-esteem, was something I took on with enthusiasm. However, I also, as an Indigenous youth, needed the same kind of exposure to positive examples and models of Indigenous identity. Not only was there no one in my life to fulfill this role, there was no one in my life who took it upon themselves to show me Indigenous cultures, the way I took it upon myself to try to expose my brother to Black culture that he was significantly removed from in a very white rural town in western Washington.

Though I certainly didn't develop this kind of vocabulary for many years, when I look back on this phase of my relationship with my little brother I recognize that I was trying to support him in the development of his own Black historical consciousness. It is as if I subconsciously, or intuitively, projected my own deep need for this – as an Indigenous youth growing up with no Indigenous family or community – onto my brother, and attempted to satisfy my own need by trying to meet his. For a short period of time, this process of supporting my brother gave the illusion of supporting myself.

My interest and determination to help my brother develop a positive self-image meant that I was, without knowing it, exposing myself to Black culture and Black articulations of racism, discrimination, and violence, but also liberation, power, and strength. I became very comfortable with Black articulations of these experiences, and I also became knowledgeable about Black history. So much so that, as I consider this period in my life, I think that I was substituting the development of my own Indigenous consciousness for my brother's development of his consciousness as a Black man, and that I was – without ever articulating it to myself or anyone else – identifying with

aspects of Black experience in America that felt more similar to my own experience than dominant white narratives.

One of the significant experiences that began what I now recognize as the beginning of my development of an Indigenous historical consciousness was taking a couple Ethnic Studies classes with a Seminole, Creek, Choctaw teacher, Melinda Micco. The classes were introductory classes: one an overview of Ethnic Studies in the U.S., with a focus on the Civil Rights era; the other a historical overview of Native Americans and Native issues in the U.S. I felt immediately at home in these courses, and I excelled in them. I still wasn't identifying as Indigenous, but I had my first exposure to an Indigenous person in real life, and my first exposure to Indigenous histories.

While I had begun a journey towards developing myself as an Indigenous woman, there were twists and turns too; it was not a straightforward path. Along the way, and before I started identifying as Diné and Yurok, I became deeply interested in Marxism. I had already developed a fairly sophisticated understanding and analysis of race, informed as much from my lived experiences as from my education. But suddenly, I had found an additional way to explain structures that limit self-determination and oppress communities. I gravitated towards Marxism for the same reasons that it ultimately became theoretically dissatisfying to me; I was fascinated by Marx's attempt to explain the world in a dialectical totality, and it was this same yearning for totality that eventually caused me to seek ways to bridge a Marxist analysis with an anti-colonial analysis. This bridging is the motivation for chapter one.

But there was a temporal gap between my dissatisfaction with the limits of a Marxist analysis, on the one hand, and my determination to make connections between Marxism and an anti-colonial framework, on the other. This temporal gap of a few years' time was a space of profound flux, during which I began to identify as Yurok and Diné. While I was immersing myself in Marxism, I had a growing feeling that some part of who I am wasn't reflected, was perhaps actually excluded, in the Marxist theory I was able to find. I eventually sought out and found Marxist theory that had strong, viable feminist analyses, and this was quite helpful. But still, I felt as though there was something really missing. I *felt* this gap years before I was actually able to articulate what

the gap was; in other words, that there is indeed a wide gulf between the vast majority of Marxist theory and anti-colonial and Indigenous theory.

It's hard to say exactly why I began to identify when I did. I may never fully understand the conditions that produced that transformation. But I do know that one contributing factor was finally being able to articulate to myself that Marxism, even with its feigning to present itself as a totalizing theory, and even with my own personal desire for this to be true, wasn't totalizing, that it was leaving a big part of the world's story out. Eventually, I realized that the part of the historical story Marxism ignored was precisely those aspects of my own story that form the ember of Indigenous rage and love that propels me forward.

I remember, once I began identifying as Diné and Yurok, that I still acknowledged my affinity for and with Marxism. I was still quite compelled by it; I didn't simply reject it because of my awareness of its limitations. Instead, I straddled two awarenesses that seemed, and truly felt, to directly contradict each other. This produced a very uncomfortable and psychologically stressful situation. As a person, I am inclined to try to understand things abstractly; I have a natural tendency, for better or worse, to try to understand things in "global" versus "local" contexts. This helps to explain my attraction to Marxism. But two systems of understanding the world cannot sit easily within one mind, at least not without a tremendous amount of cognitive dissonance. In hindsight, I recognize this awkward – psychologically and otherwise – phase of development to be an incredibly intellectually and emotionally taxing one, since I was really trying to not create a hierarchy within myself, and trying not to excommunicate one set of beliefs for a swift and radical adoption of another set of beliefs.

As I developed intellectually during this period, and as my personal confidence in my identity grew, I began to find connections between anti-colonial and Indigenous thought and movements and Marxism. I began to learn about Red Power and the Marxist tendencies of some Indigenous activists, especially during the late 60s and 70s. I sought out everything I could find by Indigenous authors, thinkers, and activists in both Canada and the United States, looking for clues as to how to possibly reconcile an Indigenous

sensibility I was developing with a Marxist analysis of class, an analysis I also thought was highly relevant to our contemporary world.

To be honest, I found few satisfying writers or articles that dealt with these issues, and I think that is because there are very few that currently exist in a Canadian or U.S. context. There are two immediate challenges to this search for a Canadian and/or U.S. articulation of anti-colonial, anti-capitalist politics. One is the U.S. context, where the development of a radical class analysis may be one of the most pressing political needs of our time, and also one of the most challenging, since the U.S. is an unabashedly imperialist country rife with complex race and class antagonisms. I fear that U.S. global dominance (even as it may be waning) blinds many potential theorists of anti-colonial and anti-capitalist politics who may live inside the country, precisely because of the deep legacy of imperialism that is so embedded in the structures of U.S. governance as well as the general national imaginary. It should not be surprising at all then, that the internal corollary of imperialism – colonialism – would be so widely denied, so deeply denied in the U.S. that it doesn't even require denial, it is simply almost completely unspoken. This near-total silence around the history and present of colonialism in the U.S. is the major reason why my move to unceded Coast Salish territories was so impacting. I had never heard a territorial acknowledgement in my life; I had never witnessed Indigenous activists leading protests, singing and drumming; I had never seen in person Indigenous people proudly asserting their difference by publicly wearing regalia. These public cultural displays still seem improbable in the U.S., even after events like Standing Rock, which has pushed conversations about Indigenous sovereignty into more mainstream media.

In the Canadian context, things are quite different. Canada's official policy of multiculturalism gives certain prescribed space for the recognition of Indigenous culture, as part of the imagined Canadian mosaic of cultural texture. But this space, as radical as it initially felt to me coming from the U.S., is exactly prescribed rather than self-determined, exactly about recognition rather than redistribution, and exactly focused on culture rather than political sovereignty. While I still hold that there are quite meaningful ways in which the public presence of Indigenous peoples and cultures is important to us as Indigenous peoples who must construct positive images of Nativeness and positive

identities, multiculturalism as it is applied to Indigenous peoples in Canada is severely limiting.

In British Columbia, where the entirety of this dissertation was written, the vast majority of land is unceded; aside from the fourteen Douglas Treaties on Vancouver Island, and Treaty 8 territory that extends into the northeast corner of B.C., land was never negotiated (in “fair” or unfair terms) in sale to settlers. The exception is the Nisga’a Treaty, and the handful of treaties that have been signed under B.C.’s relatively new treaty process established in 1993, which allocates land to Indigenous nations, but requires their extinguishment of Aboriginal title, therein hindering any future claims to Indigenous land stewardship and rendering Indigenous land bound under fee simple property relations.<sup>9</sup> In sum, the treaty process negates Indigenous political and economic difference by forcing Indigenous nations into capitalist private property relations. Other critiques of the treaty process exist as well, including the incredible expense of legal fees required of nations who engage in the process that extends years, sometimes decades, from the initial entry through its six stages.<sup>10</sup> Many Indigenous sovereigntists recognize the B.C. treaty process as an outright attack on Indigenous sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

These two forces within Canadian politics – multiculturalism and the resolution of unceded Indigenous lands through the conversion to fee simple property relations – threaten to erase Indigenous difference entirely, subsuming the core of Indigenous

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<sup>9</sup> Fee simple is the highest form of ownership of land and the basis for all property ownership. Fee simple is based on recognition from the Crown and the Crown’s underlying tenureship of the land. Only the Crown can grant fee simple property to an owner.

<sup>10</sup> For criticism of the B.C. treaty process, as well as information on its costs, see Larry Lintz, “Costly B.C. treaty process undergoing ‘exciting’ reform: feds.” *Vancouver Sun*. 5 Jul 2016. Web. 28 Mar 2018; Sandor Gyarmati, “Treaty process criticized.” *Delta Optimist*. 24 Aug 2012. Web. 28 Mar 2018; Dirk Meissner, “B.C. treaty process too slow say governments, native leaders.” *CBC News*. 12 Apr 2015. Web. 28 Mar 2018; Tamsyn Burgmann, “First Nations alliance launches challenge of B.C. treaty process,” *Globe and Mail*. 11 Aug 2014. Web. 28 Mar 2018; Jeffrey Simpson, “Two decades of treaty flop,” *Globe and Mail*. 16 Nov 2013. Web. 28 Mar 2018.

<sup>11</sup> For a critique of contemporary approaches to First Nations treaty rights, see Russ Diabo, “Federal Justice Minister is Selling Decades Old Termination Plan as New ‘Reconciliation’ Framework for First Nations.” *The Volcano*. 22 Jul 2016. Web. 28 Mar 2018. Also see: Carole Blackburn, “Searching for Guarantees in the Midst of Uncertainty: Negotiating Aboriginal Rights and Title in British Columbia.” *American Anthropologist* 107.4 (2005): 586-96 ; and Michael Asch, ed. *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality, and Respect for Difference*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997.



noncapitalist difference within the Canadian nation as a multicultural element of some larger whole made up of smaller “equal” parts. So what felt to me initially as a place that made space for Indigenous difference, I’ve learned to see instead as a country that tolerates Indigenous cultural presence and production, and actively attacks the roots of Indigenous difference that this cultural production represents. While I am grateful to have stumbled my way into a place where I was able to find my voice, and while I do hold that the U.S. has more regressive national and cultural *attitudes* towards Indigenous peoples within its borders, I do not think that Canada differs substantially from the U.S. in its political and economic treatment of Indigenous peoples.

In sum, the U.S.’s imperialist haughtiness and Canada’s multicultural veneer greatly determine the range of political articulations for Indigenous peoples who find ourselves within the borders of either state. I don’t think it is so surprising, given these contexts, that finding what I’ve searched for – an articulation of anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics together – would be so elusive. The production of race in North America, particularly in the United States and Canada, is so fundamentally intertwined with the establishment of class hierarchy that the two cannot be spoken about individually. American imperialism asserts a self-fulfilling, tautological and highly violent conviction that the American system of democracy – itself informed from the very beginning by the institution of race categories that determine who is recognized as a full human being and therefore who counts within liberal democracy – is the superior form of social organization for the entire world. This deeply held belief in American superiority can penetrate all aspects of internal resistance to American inequality, including resistance by progressives or radicals. One way that I see American imperialism infecting the broad and various political left within the country is the ongoing oversight by the vast majority of anti-capitalists of the embedded history and ongoing present of American colonialism. I do believe that without recognizing the full weight of colonialism in the U.S., it is impossible to understand the full weight of American interventions abroad. The founding and continuation of the wealthiest country in the world has required the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands “at home,” along with the unpaid labour extracted from African American slaves. American wealth has also required the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their

lands abroad, as well as a concerted imperialist agenda that attacks other countries' resources, political forms of organization, and establishment of norms that differ from American liberal democracy. Without making this connection between internal and external domination by the U.S., critical analyses of American power, and ultimately its downfall, don't tell a very full story. In a Canadian context, the deeply engrained belief in and political project of multiculturalism hinders a development of progressive or radical understandings of real difference, in that multiculturalism intends to place all cultural variations within a singular Canadian national tapestry that is knitted together by commonly held values. But this national tapestry is predicated on the extinguishment of Aboriginal title and the violent negation of noncapitalist Indigenous difference that produces the Indigenous cultural forms amenable for inclusion in Canadian multiculturalism. For Indigenous peoples living in an avowedly multicultural society, it can be frustrating to feel "recognition" with very few redistributive policies to back it up.<sup>12</sup> For well-intended allies who support Indigenous sovereignty, multiculturalism infects their abilities to fully respect Indigenous difference; Canadian settler progressives commonly default into a way of acting and understanding that refers back to the only model of inclusion they have ever known. This severely limits the transformation of left political communities in Canada into spaces that can hold Indigenous difference in its various forms, without asserting a self-fulfilling expectation for Indigenous peoples to "play along" with white-settler social norms, political models and ideas, and capitalist conceptions of land, property, and value.

The following chapter, and certainly all of the work in this dissertation, builds from the perspectives and experiences I have written about in this interlude. It may seem like an unlikely beginning, to reflect on my relationship with my brother and my self-education in Black politics in the U.S. in the preface to a chapter about anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics. Yet, it is important to me to reveal the assumptions that are built into my analysis and that frame what I am able to see and articulate, as well as what remains unseen and unsaid in the following pages. In my way of understanding, it makes a great deal of sense to frame the following chapter with this reflection because it exposes

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<sup>12</sup> For more on the dynamics of recognition, see "interlude: mirror" and chapter two.

the first critical methods I developed for understanding the world. It exposes my tendency to seek “global” explanations for “local” problems; it exposes my bent towards critical race studies as a foundation for my own development as a youth and my ongoing way of understanding being alive in Canada and the U.S. in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following chapter delves into some of the tensions present in holding Indigenous anti-colonial politics alongside a Marxist analysis. Through my reading of Edward Ahenakew’s novel *Black Hawk*, I begin to develop an analysis that weds these perspectives, specifically rooted in early 20<sup>th</sup> century capitalist development on the Canadian prairies, where the story takes place.

## Chapter 1.

### Capitalism on the Indigenous Prairies: Edward Ahenakew's *Black Hawk*

*“There is one thing I'd like to talk to you about,” he continued. “You may as well know it now as later. I said I belonged to my race and that was a solemn truth. I am theirs. I am not my own. All that is mine must ever be ready for service in the Cause of my people. Do you care to hear about it?” – Black Hawk<sup>13</sup>*

#### Introduction

In “The Fetish of ‘the West’ in postcolonial theory,” a chapter collected in the volume *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* (2002), Neil Lazarus intervenes in what was at the time, and still is, a general dismissal of Marxism’s relevance to postcolonial theory. He writes that, rather than attend to the role of capitalism in modernity, postcolonial studies instead substitutes “the West” for the particular and historical development of capitalist modes of production. Lazarus argues that what we mean when we say “the West” is actually the characteristics the term *modern* tends to denote; further, these characteristics are those that developed in Europe, particularly England, through the rise of capitalism. Quoting Jamaican cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall, Lazarus points out that “the West”

‘is a *historical*, not a geographical construct. By ‘western’ we mean...a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist, secular, and modern.... Nowadays, any society which shares these characteristics, wherever it exists on a geographical map, can be said to belong to ‘the West.’ The meaning of this term is therefore virtually identical to that of the word ‘modern’.’ (45)

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<sup>13</sup> Edward Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 95. Page numbers refer to my copy of the typed double-spaced manuscript. Ahenakew’s narrative begins on page 4, following transcribing guidelines. *Black Hawk* is currently in the process of being published; its imminent publication is being led by Heather Hodgson, Ahenakew’s great niece, and Cree historian Winona Wheeler. The People and the Text: Indigenous Writing in Northern North America to 1992, a SSHRC funded 5-year project, has supported publishing initiatives of Edward Ahenakew’s *Black Hawk*. Building from Brendan Edwards’ partial transcription of *Black Hawk* from archived handwritten manuscript originals, I worked with Rachel Taylor (Inūpiaq) to finish a transcription of *Black Hawk* during my time as a Research Assistant with The People and the Text.

As Stuart Hall notes in his 1996 essay “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” quoted by Lazarus above, a critique of capitalism has been elided in a turn towards identifying exploitation and oppression in geographical, and by extension, cultural terms. Lazarus, while holding the salience of Edward Said’s work in hand, points to Said’s 1978 text *Orientalism* as ushering in the theoretical and academic displacement of a critique of capital as the driving force behind contemporary imperialism for a concept of “the West” and its liberal values, Eurocentrism, Christian appeal, and European understandings of education and morality.<sup>14</sup> Lazarus further dates the rise of postcolonial theory to the 1960s and 70s, and the production of both theory, and the explicit construction of identity *as* theory, by Third World revolutionaries, writers, and academics.

What is at stake here is our theoretical abilities to grasp what shapes our contemporary world, one whose forms of domination, exploitation, and oppression, I contend, can be largely dated to the rise of European imperialism that drove the North Atlantic slave trade, the colonization of the Americas, as well as the imperial control of once colonized nations in East and South Asia, on the continent of Africa, and in the South Pacific. Contemporary imperialism, often masked in the appearance and rhetoric of globalization, as my chapter on Jeannette Armstrong’s *whispering in shadows* in part suggests, is the product of the rise of capitalism. Imperialism is very basically defined as a country’s forceful imposition of its military, economic, social, and political power onto other sovereign nations. Contemporary and recent historical imperialism, often in the form of colonialism,<sup>15</sup> is “necessary” in order to harness either labour power, as in the

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<sup>14</sup> Also see Aijaz Ahmad’s chapter “Marx on India: A Clarification” in *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*. New York: Verso. 1992. 221-242 for a pointed critique of Said’s reading of Marx. Ahmad offers a clarifying analysis of Said’s over-reading of orientalism in Marx, focusing on the two articles by Marx that are most commonly cited in critiques of Marx’s positions on colonialism, “The British Rule in India” and “The Future Results of the British Rule in India,” both published in *The New York Tribune* in 1853.

<sup>15</sup> In footnote 28 to the introduction to *Red Skin White Masks*, Glen Coulthard draws on work by Patrick Wolfe, Lorenzo Veracini, Robert Young, and James Tully to make distinctions between, while also acknowledging the interrelatedness of, settler colonialism, colonialism, and imperialism. Coulthard writes that: “settler-colonial and colonial relationships are conceptualized as more *direct* forms or practices of maintaining an imperial system of dominance. Settler-colonialism, in particular, refers to contexts where the territorial infrastructure of the colonizing society is built on and overwhelms the formerly self-governing but now dispossessed Indigenous nations; indeed, settler-colonial politics are predicated on maintaining this dispossession. Imperialism is a much broader concept, which may include colonial and settler-colonial formations, but could also be carried out indirectly through noncolonial means.” I think of the United States’ imperial involvement in many areas, particularly the Middle East, as an example of imperialism “through

case of India, for example, or land and its natural resources *and* labour, as in the case of the Americas.<sup>16</sup> As Lazarus convincingly argues, substituting “the West” for the particular motivations of imperialism in modernity – at once economic, social, and political – elides these very forces, rendering them both hard to critique in substantive ways, and also seemingly inevitable.

Alongside the occlusion of critiques of capitalism within postcolonial theory, the particular positions of Indigenous peoples within the rise of global capitalism has also been undertheorized, if not out-right avoided and dismissed, by Marxist theorists. While Karl Marx and Frederick Engels increasingly turned their attention to the role of Indigenous peasants in Russia, and elsewhere, arguing *against* a teleological assumption of progressive stages of development that necessitated the colonization of Indigenous peoples, many Marxist scholars since have overlooked the complexities of Indigenous politics within capitalism. In the introduction to Leon Trotsky’s *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects* (2010), the editors write that:

Poor and working people are in revolt whether it’s women in Iceland banging pans to demand economic aid for people, not banks; or indigenous [sic] Bolivians erecting roadblocks to prevent the privatization of water; or immigrants in the U.S. marching en masse on May Day; or a general strike paralyzing the French Caribbean island of Guadeloupe.... Women, indigenous people, queers, immigrants, oppressed races and nationalities—these are the sparkplugs of workingclass [sic] revolt in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>17</sup>

While it is refreshing to see such a clear foregrounding of groups of people historically marginalized within some critiques of capitalism that centre the industrial white proletariat man as the kernel of revolutionary power, it is also too easy of a move to

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noncolonial means.” See Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota. 2014. 184.

<sup>16</sup> While colonialism in Canada and the United States is primarily a force that has continuously dispossessed Indigenous peoples from ancestral lands, in South America, Indigenous peoples were also used as a labour force once they were disconnected from traditional, noncapitalist relations with their lands. This contrasted with the enforced labour of African slaves and European indentured servants in the United States, in particular, who, were “imported” in order to build labour markets. For more on these distinctions between colonialism in North and South America, as well as in South Asia, see Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race.” *The American Historical Review* 106:3 (2001): 866-905. For more on the dual nature of colonization in South America, see Victor Figueroa Sepulveda, *Industrial Colonialism in Latin America: The Third Stage*. Boston: Brill. 2013.

<sup>17</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution & Results and Prospects*. Seattle: Red Letter Press. 2010.

group Indigenous peoples with others fighting for access to the means of production. Indigenous peoples hold a dual relationship, structured through both capitalism and colonialism, to the labour market *and* to land. While working class groups may fight for incremental demands like higher wages and job stability, these gains may come at the cost of Indigenous peoples' claims to Aboriginal title. An example close to home is Indigenous opposition to resource extraction projects in British Columbia, and elsewhere in Canada, the U.S., and Central and South America. These projects often entail some amount of job creation, and sometimes employ unionized workers in the construction of dams, pipelines, or logging projects. As the history of forestry battles in Canada and the U.S. shows, the interests of Indigenous nations are pitted against the working class just as often, if not more so, than they might be held in solidarity.<sup>18</sup> There is a tension, then, between Indigenous anti-colonial politics and working class anti-capitalist politics. It is largely because of this tension, along with a heavy dose of racism, that Marxist writers, theorists, and academics have nearly entirely ignored the complex interrelationships between capitalism and colonialism that emerge when Indigenous peoples' dual relationship to land and labour is recognized.<sup>19</sup>

While Marxist critiques have often overlooked the position of Indigenous peoples in capitalism, I also argue that some perspectives from *within* Indigenous and settler colonial studies have overlooked the crucial relationships between Indigenous peoples

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<sup>18</sup> For a very partial list of recent Indigenous-led protests of forestry initiatives in Canada, see: "Protestors camp out near Benny, Ont. in opposition to logging on aboriginal lands." *Globe and Mail*. Mar 4 2016. Web. 25 Mar 2018; "Grassy Narrows First Nations hold logging protest in Kenora." *CBC News*. 16 Mar 2015. Web. 25 Mar 2018; Kim Nursall, "Mass arrests during War in the Woods 20 years ago prompting lasting change." *The Canadian Press*. 11 Aug 2013. Web. 25 Mar 2018; Lynn Moore, "Aboriginal group suing forestry firms gets its day in court." *CanWest News*. 22 Feb 2006. Web. 25 Mar 2018.

<sup>19</sup> A remarkable exception to this is the concept of settler capitalism which has been almost entirely developed by Australian political economists, and notably introduced by Donald Denoon. As Peter Beilharz and Lloyd Cox write in the case of Australia (and I would extend their claim to Canada and the United States as well), "...settler capitalism – with its central preoccupation with the nexus between capitalism and colonialism on the one side, and the state and international system on the other – still has something of worth to offer those trying to understand Australia's past, present and future.... the idea of settler capitalism necessarily refers us to imperialism and colonialism, and always implies an historical and comparative approach" (114). See Peter Beilharz and Lloyd Cox, "Settler Capitalism Revisited." *Thesis Eleven* 88:1 (2007): 112-124; Donald Denoon, "Understanding Settler Societies." *Historical Studies* 18:73 (1979): 511-527; Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere*. Wotton-under-Edge: Clarendon Press, 1983; Philip McMichael, *Settlers and the Agrarian Question: Foundations of Capitalism in Colonial Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

and capitalism. As Cole Harris writes in the article “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire” (2004),

Whereas Frantz Fanon (1963) emphasized violence—the power of the gun—and Marx, to the extent that he wrote on colonialism, the aggressive reach of capital, postcolonial research and writing situates the momentum of colonialism in the culture of imperialists and colonists. . . . This work has focused much scholarly energy and has yielded important theoretical and practical results, but it is less clear that it has revealed the principal momentum and power relations inherent in colonialism.<sup>20</sup>

Here, Harris is speaking specifically to postcolonial theory, revealing a gap in that field’s abilities to pinpoint underlying forces that structure individual and communities’ experiences of oppression. But this critique of postcolonial theory can also be extended to Indigenous studies and settler colonial studies as well. For example, in Lorenzo Veracini’s book *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (2010), the second and third sentence of the introduction reads:

A theoretical analysis of what is here defined as the settler colonial situation could perhaps start with Karl Marx and Friederich Engels’ remark that the ‘need of a constantly expanding market for its product chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe’, and that it ‘must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connections everywhere’. “Nestle’, ‘settle’, ‘establish connections’: Marx and Engels were effectively articulating in 1848 what had become a transnational system of diversified colonial intervention.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, this is the *only* reference to Marx. The lack of a critique of capitalism is so thorough in Veracini’s text that “capitalism” lacks an entry in the index to the book. Though Veracini frames his introduction, to what has quickly become a foundational text in settler colonial studies, with the foremost critics of capitalist economic relations, the relationship between settler colonialism, Indigenous subjects, and capitalism is avoided throughout *Settler Colonialism*. Veracini claims that “[a] focus on the global expansion of capitalist relations has produced an historical literature that overlooks a long-lasting determination to produce social bodies where capitalism is at the service of settlement and not vice versa.”<sup>22</sup> He briefly refers to examples of settlement in which the

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<sup>20</sup> Cole Harris. “How Did Colonialism Dispossess? Comments from an Edge of Empire.” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94:1 (2004): 165-182.

<sup>21</sup> Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2010. 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 61.



development of capitalism struggled to take root in order to support his claim that in settler colonialism, capitalism is “at the service of settlement and not vice versa.”

However, Harry Magdoff writes in the early 1970s article “Primitive Accumulation and Imperialism” that:

[o]ne way then to understand the spread of capital throughout the world is to recognize that capitalism begins as a world system and must live as a world system. A second principle is that capitalism must continuously reinvest the surplus or most of the surplus. This is the sine qua non of the system. That expansion is at the heart of capitalism does not mean that capitalism may not suffer terrible crises in certain periods. But the fundamental drive of the capitalist economy, which is different from other economies, is the imperative to accumulate capital.<sup>23</sup>

As Magdoff notes, the theory of global capitalist development does not imply that capitalism has an easy time establishing itself in new colonies and territories. Rather, capitalism is an economic system characterized by systemic crises that occur both during moments of accumulation by dispossession, as well as in stages that include the reinvestment of surplus, management of labour revolts, or attempts to contend with regulatory interventions in the market. While recognizing the significance of Veracini’s insights and theoretical framing of settler colonialism as a dynamic worthy of attention in its own right, this chapter departs from Veracini’s analysis on the question of capitalism’s relationship to settler colonialism. In sum, considering the lack of postcolonial theory’s ability to uncover structural causes of oppression, gaps in Marxist traditions of considering the position of Indigenous peoples, as well as the absence in Indigenous and settler colonial critical frameworks of capitalism’s role in colonization, a more concentrated effort at understanding the position of Indigenous peoples within the global capitalist system occupies the underlying motivation behind this chapter.

It is also worth mentioning that the absence of critiques that wed anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics, especially from an Indigenous perspective,<sup>24</sup> occurs at the same time that Indigenous sovereigntists re-establish and assert cultural practices of Indigenous difference, like language revitalization and ceremony. Alongside these cultural practices,

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<sup>23</sup> Harry Magdoff, “Primitive Accumulation and Imperialism.” *Monthly Review* 65:5 (2013): 24.

<sup>24</sup> A notable exception is articulations made during the Red Power era of the 1960s and 70s. See chapter three for more on Red Power.

Indigenous sovereigntists also revive noncapitalist Indigenous economic forms, like sustainable hunting, harvesting, and gardening. Yet, troublingly, the reassertion of Indigenous noncapitalist economics has not resulted in an articulated anti-capitalist politics by Indigenous sovereigntists. And while cultural revitalization should in every way continue to be pursued, the privileging of specific nation-based cultures in contrast to the previous era's pan-Indian mobilization, most significantly expressed in the Red Power and American Indian Movements, does not address Canadian and American state investment in both capitalism and global imperialism. As the third chapter in part argues, the turn towards highlighting Indigenous cultural difference in the late 1970s and early 80s – a turn that has gained powerful momentum in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – parallels the rise of neoliberalism in North America and across the globe. Neoliberalism asserts that capitalism is not only the *only* way forward, it must be allowed to develop without state interventionist policies that characterized post World War II social democratic inspired governments in Canada and the U.S., governments that intervened in the “natural” workings of the market by instituting social security and old age pensions, social insurance and unemployment insurance, massive investment in social and public housing, and, in Canada, universal healthcare. The shift towards neoliberal interpretations of capitalism means that not only have these social programs come under attack, the cultural and political ideology that permeates our colonial nations, states or provinces, and local communities, shifts drastically as well. No longer does an assertion of helping out one's neighbour in times of hardship, as the government did through its programs after World War II, align with colonial-capitalist state values. Instead, neoliberalism has prioritized a belief in individual agency and responsibility to participate and perform in the market, a belief in limiting the government's interference in capitalism, and a focus on leveling difference within society by equating all members of society as “equal” participants in the supposedly fair capitalist market. This has meant that opportunities for asserting Indigenous noncapitalist difference *as* anti-capitalist politics have become much more sparse; instead, neoliberalism fosters a focus on cultural differences because these cultural differences do not stand in the way of market participation, and they also feed into capitalist value creation since Indigenous cultural production is highly marketable. So, as Red Power shifted towards cultural specificity,

the broader national politics of Canada and the U.S. were also shifting towards a doubling down on individual responsibility, and a divestment from government interventions in the free market. This has meant that Indigenous cultural production in both Canada and the U.S. has found a welcome market; it has also been absorbed easily into Canada's official policy of multiculturalism.<sup>25</sup> Multiculturalism dovetails with neoliberalism, recognizing cultural difference while entirely ignoring economic and political difference. Overall, the overarching avoidance of a critique of capitalism from Indigenous activists, writers, and theorists from the late 1970s until today fits seamlessly within the dominant economic and social policies of neoliberalism and multiculturalism, as Indigenous articulations of political difference currently tend to highlight *cultural* difference, not economic difference.

In light of all the political dynamics mentioned above, this chapter speaks to a gap in contemporary Indigenous politics and theorizing by wedding anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics. The following pages explore the dual and intertwined developments of capitalism and settler colonialism on the Prairies in the late 1800s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century through a close reading of the first known novel written by an Indigenous author in Canada, Edward Ahenakew's *Black Hawk*. Through the perspective of Cree author, organizer, missionary, receiver of an honorary doctorate, and Anglican preacher Edward Ahenakew, this chapter interrogates the structural position of early 20<sup>th</sup> century colonized Indigenous communities within a growing global capitalism. The first two sections of the chapter introduce Edward Ahenakew and provide historical context for the novel *Black Hawk*. The third section close reads Ahenakew's novel *Black Hawk*, producing two major contentions. The first is that, through a grounded and historically contextualized reading of *Black Hawk*, it becomes clear that attempting to understand the position of Indigenous communities within Canada – whether in the late 1800s or in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – is not fully possible without attending to the ongoing development of capitalism, as well as the ways that Indigenous communities are restricted from participating in capitalism by the Canadian state. Secondly, I show that it is also insufficient to attempt to understand

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<sup>25</sup> Though critiques of Canadian multiculturalism abound, see an enduring early intervention by Kogila Moodley, "Canadian multiculturalism as ideology." *Ethnic & Racial Studies*. 6:3 (1983): 320-331.

Canada's entry into industrial capitalism purely as a national affair; that is, as a settler colonial nation, Canada has always been and continues to be deeply interwoven in a global market and dependent on natural resource exports for economic prosperity. Overall, this chapter weds an anti-colonial and anti-capitalist analysis by pulling together the critical frameworks of settler colonialism and capitalism. Such a critique, in Patrick Wolfe's words, "enables us to move beyond the category 'Europe,' used in a vaguely geographical sense, to a specific social formation, capitalism, with discernible historical moments and phases."<sup>26</sup>

## **Edward Ahenakew on Treaty Six territory**

Edward Ahenakew (1885-1961) was a prolific writer, though his work was largely unknown during his lifetime. A rather astonishing lack of literary criticism, contemporary or historical, surrounds Ahenakew's writing, likely due to his work languishing unpublished in his personal papers in the archives. Like the following chapter on George Clutesi, this chapter hopes to attend to a neglected Indigenous writer in Canada, a significant Cree voice and influential community leader, and a perceptive teller of settler-Indigenous relations through often fictionalized accounts. One enduring critical account of Ahenakew's literary contributions is David Miller's chapter "Edward Ahenakew's Tutelage by Paul Wallace: Reluctant Scholarship, Inadvertent Preservation" collected in the 2010 text *Gathering Places: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, edited by Carolyn Podruchny and Laura Peers. Miller writes that,

[w]hen Ahenakew became seriously ill as a child, his parents vowed that they would give him to the church if he survived. He survived, was sent to residential school, and later became an Anglican missionary priest. Throughout his life, Ahenakew was poor and unmarried, and he suffered from periodic illness. Many contemporary Plains Crees consider Ahenakew to be one of their foremost spokespersons and writers because he was among the first to write about Cree culture and history and to be published both during his lifetime and posthumously. A fluent speaker of the Cree language, Ahenakew served as a consultant to Richard Faries for the revision of E.A. Watkins' *Dictionary of the Cree Language* (1865 [1938]),

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race." *The American Historical Review* 106:3 (2001): 870.

because he was literate in Cree syllabics as well as in English. Ahenakew's major publications include an article, titled "Cree Trickster Tales," which was published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1929 [...]. Ahenakew's only publication in the Cree language, written in syllabics, was a mimeographed newsletter titled the *Cree Monthly Guide*, of which only scattered issues have survived.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from earlier publications in periodicals dating from the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ahenakew's writing is mainly collected in Ruth Buck's 1973 compilation *Voices of the Plains Cree*. As Miller writes,

Ruth Matheson Buck, a popular Saskatchewan writer, edited the first edition. She was a long-time friend of the Ahenakew family and daughter of the Anglican priest under whom Edward Ahenakew served following his ordination. Shortly after Ahenakew's death in 1961, his family gave Buck the meagre collection of his papers. Ahab Spence, an employee of the Department of Indian Affairs and fellow clergy, facilitated a modest grant for the preparation of an edition of Ahenakew's writings. A decade after Ahenakew's death, Buck began gathering the material, and she was given free rein to structure, order, shape, and edit the stories.<sup>28</sup>

*Voices* is a highly edited, and even adulterated, repurposing of Ahenakew's stories and perspectives. Even so, this text has been influential in the field of Indigenous literatures in Canada in no small part because, in the first half of the text, it retells stories by Chief Thunderchild, one of the signers of Treaty Six in 1876. These stories introduce one of the first printed versions of Indigenous stories in Canada, and as such, Ruth Buck's 1973 first edition rightly holds an important place within the growing field of Indigenous literatures in Canada. The second half of *Voices* includes Ahenakew's own narratives, as told to the reader by Old Keyam, a fictional Elder who provides often humorous and thoroughly insightful portrayals of Indian life, and Canadian assumptions of Indian life, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ahenakew wrote the Old Keyam stories in 1923, again marking one of the earliest known written literature by Indigenous authors in Canada. As Miller notes, "Ahenakew created Keyam, in part, to get around the church's censure of his political activities and its attempt to strangle his political voice."<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Miller, "Edward Ahenakew's Tutelage by Paul Wallace: Reluctant Scholarship, Inadvertent Preservation," in *Gathering Place: Aboriginal and Fur Trade Histories*, edited by Carolyn Prodruchny and Laura Peers. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010. 249.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Miller, 254.

Born at Ahtahkakoop Cree Nation<sup>30</sup> on Sandy Lake Reserve, Saskatchewan in 1885, residential school survivor, fluent speaker and writer of Cree and English, devout Anglican and Reverend, political theorist and strong dissenter against the colonial state and the cultural, spiritual, and linguistic effects of genocide, Ahenakew's person and writing moves across many contradictory experiences and convictions. Ahenakew's granduncle was Chief Ah-tah-ka-koop (Star Blanket), who signed Treaty Six in 1876, and for whom Ahenakew's nation is named for.<sup>31</sup> After serving for some years as an Anglican clergyman and missionary among rural Cree communities in Saskatchewan, Ahenakew became "emotionally devastated by his inability to help parishioners and fellow Crees who were among the victims of the influenza pandemic of 1917-18" and "decided to learn about physical healing."<sup>32</sup> Miller writes that "[i]n the fall of 1918, and at age thirty-three, Ahenakew secured a leave from the Diocese of Saskatchewan and set off to the University of Alberta with the intention of becoming a doctor."<sup>33</sup> But only four years later, Ahenakew experienced what he called a nervous breakdown,<sup>34</sup> and left his medical studies, never to return:

Ahenakew developed stomach ulcers and was forced to abandon his studies. He went to stay with a priest's widow on the Thunderchild Reserve and began his long convalescence. When he had partially regained his strength, he took up an almost daily routine of visiting old Chief Thunderchild, and each evening he recorded on paper their conversations from memory. When he recovered fully, Ahenakew accepted a new assignment as general

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<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that Ahenakew descended from communities that were displaced from the James Bay region by settler colonialism. As historian Helen Buckley writes: "A meeting with [Crees] on the Winnipeg River is recorded in the early seventeenth century, but their main movement out of the James Bay region followed the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company in 1670. The Crees joined the fur trade. In their great canoes they took the waterways to the West, where they exchanged trade goods for furs with the western nations, sometimes doing a little trapping for themselves. But mainly they were traders, middlemen in the system, connecting the trappers in the West with European civilization on Hudson Bay. The Crees secured this position by making alliances, first with the Assiniboine, who became attached to the fur trade as suppliers of pemmican and buffalo robes, and later with the Blackfoot. They also controlled the inland river systems and, thus, access to the inland posts, once they were built." Helen Buckley, *From Wooden Ploughs to Welfare: Why Indian Policy Failed in the Prairie Provinces*. Montreal: Montreal-Queen's University Press, 1992. 28.

<sup>31</sup> Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Miller, 252.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 254.

missionary in the diocese, a job that involved travel to a variety of parishes.<sup>35</sup>

To what extent Ahenakew suffered depression, anxiety, or serious physical illness during his medical studies is as yet unclear. Piecing together Ahenakew's life requires a heavy reliance on his friendship, and extensive correspondence, with Paul Wallace, who Ahenakew met in a literary club while attending University of Alberta. It is striking that Ahenakew was able, albeit not without probable tension and stress, to move through so many sites of learning and knowledge in his lifetime. Given this mobility, it requires saying that he lived the entirety of his life in poverty, at times in such severe poverty that he barely had enough food to sustain himself.<sup>36</sup> And Ahenakew, a "man of letters" in both English and Cree syllabics, was also very well-regarded by Cree traditionalists:

A group of Indian traditionalists elected [Ahenakew] to lead the newly formed Saskatchewan chapter of the League of Indians of Canada in 1921. His bishop ordered him to choose between the church and his new political position. He chose the former, but not without some regret. In the fall of 1924, Ahenakew humbly told his friend Paul Wallace that Indian traditionalists had chosen him as a leader and had prayed over him and that he was impressed by this honour. The League of Indians did not blame Ahenakew for withdrawing; rather, many viewed the leaders of the Anglican Church as hypocrites for placing Ahenakew in such a bind. They likened the clergy to paternalist Indian Affairs Department officials, who were unrelenting in their campaign to assimilate Native peoples.<sup>37</sup>

While it is ultimately speculation, given the lack of published historical and biographical context for Ahenakew's life, I tend to consider his commitment to the Anglican Church

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> See Stan Cuthand's introduction to the 1995 edition of *Voices of the Plains Cree*, in which Cuthand quotes an article from the March 30, 1950 edition of the *Western Producer*, written by W. Bleasdell Cameron, who tells of Ahenakew's experience in medical school: "'I had very little money,' he said, 'and was obliged to practice the most rigid economy. I had a small room in an apartment block over the river and I used to buy a good size piece of beef ready roasted: this I placed on the sill outside my window where it froze solid. I lived on this frozen meat and little else. When one piece was finished, I bought another. Well after a time I began to feel not too well and it wasn't a great while after I was down and out. One of the doctors examined me. 'Young man,' he said, 'you're trying to kill yourself. What do you think you are, a polar bear trying to live on frozen meat!' He said my stomach was almost paralyzed so I left the university and did not go back. It was ill for a year though I never stopped working.'" Ahenakew's experience underlines how Indigenous peoples were excluded from professional and educational opportunities – not necessarily only through specific policies, but also because the conditions of pursuing these opportunities were so difficult as to be impossible. Edward Ahenakew, *Voices of the Plains Cree*. Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995. xii-xiii.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 251.

to be extra-religious, in the sense that he was deeply committed to his people, and had perhaps found a way to serve Cree communities in the closest version of social work that his era offered. Regardless, Ahenakew's esteemed position among Cree traditionalists is telling of his trusting relationships with multiple Cree communities, and his ability to gain further insight into Cree ways of being, as well as colonial-Indigenous relations, in addition to his own lived experience.

Ahenakew's birth year is also significant in my understanding of his work. 1885 is the year that the Canadian Pacific Railway was completed, extending from Montreal to the west coast. The importance of the CPR for westward development, including reaching and passing through the Prairies, cannot be overstated.<sup>38</sup> As K.H. Norrie notes in the essay "The National Policy and the Rate of Prairie Settlement: A Review," by the time "the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) had reached the Prairies by 1882, or 1883, the Homestead Act had assumed virtually its final form by 1882, and considerable efforts were being made to advertise the region to potential migrants."<sup>39</sup> Ahenakew was born just as Canada was beginning to phase out of its pioneer era and take on the characteristics of industrial capitalism. In the essay "Economic Factors in Canadian History," W.A. Macintosh writes that,

[a]lthough the construction of the railway was a part of a contract with British Columbia, the justification of the railway, and ultimately its salvation, was the north central plain of the Prairies. That portion of the railway which links Winnipeg with Lake Superior was and is the most essential part of Canada's transportation system. It gave the St. Lawrence valley access to a country capable of rapid expansion. Other parts of the railway system were important and essential, but none has had the significance of that section which overcomes the Laurentian barrier between the Great Lakes and the Prairies. With the building of the Canadian Pacific and its coming to effectiveness in the nineties, just when forces external to Canada were bringing grain prices to higher levels, the western barrier was substantially overcome, and a period of phenomenal expansion set in. Once more a Canadian region by reason of higher prices for grain

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<sup>38</sup> Below, I also situate Ahenakew's birth year in terms of the 1885 Resistance led by Louis Riel. It is important to note that the railway, and the telegraph, two new forms of transportation and communication, both opened up the Prairies to settlement, and also likely facilitated swift disruption, and ultimately suppression, of the Resistances led by Métis, Cree, and non-Indigenous allies.

<sup>39</sup> K.H. Norrie, "The National Policy and the Rate of Prairie Settlement: A Review." *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. Edited by Mel Watkins and H.M.K Grant. Montreal: Montreal-Queen's University Press, 2000. 169.



and improved transportation facilities overcame its physical barriers and entered a one-crop stage of agriculture, the stage of the world staple and of prosperity.<sup>40</sup>

In the Prairies, the main grain crop harvested was wheat. The railway opened up the Prairies to an enormous expansion of a cash crop economy based on wheat, linking once remote areas to the metropolitan centres of the East, as well as opening up the Prairies for further settlement by Canadian farmers. The combined advancements of the CPR, the Homestead Act, and the wheat market meant that the Prairies became not only an economically viable region, but an influential region on the rest of Canadian politics, a legacy that lives on today.

Ahenakew's birth year is also the year of the second Riel Rebellion (also called the North-West Resistance), when Métis, Cree, and allied non-Natives, following the leadership of Louis Riel, revolted against the Canadian government and the impinging effects of industrial capitalism.<sup>41</sup> In many of Ahenakew's writings, a clear opposition to settler colonialism is undeniable. Take, for instance, his unpublished, and mysteriously titled, reflection "First Grey Hair." Ahenakew speaks to the rage, and even righteousness, of the massacring of two priests and eight white settlers at Frog Lake in 1885. He writes,

[t]o understand the forces that were at work and to get a right idea as to how and why the massacre took place, we must in the first place mention the taking over of the Land by the Canadian Govt a few years previous to the Rebellion and also the psychological effect on the minds of many of the Indians, long used to unfettered freedom, bred into them for centuries perhaps of lordship over all the land that they could possibly reach in their travels [.]

The government made treaty with the Indians in 1876, and while the majority carried the day, it is needless to say that it was not carried unanimously, altho [sic] there was no active opposition. A lingering regret naturally lurked in many an Indian breast, and this grew as the government

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<sup>40</sup> W.A. Macintosh, "Economic Factors in Canadian History." *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. Edited by Mel Watkins and H.M.K Grant. Montreal: Montreal-Queen's University Press, 2000, 12-13.

<sup>41</sup> Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View*. Markham: Fifth House Publishers, 1975. Adams casts the years of resistance in the Red River Valley in light of both Métis and First Nations calls for sovereignty and autonomy, as well as solidarities between Indigenous peoples and non-Natives who were resistant to the transition to industrial capitalism led in large part by the Canadian Pacific Railway. While Louis Riel is canonized as a "father of Confederation" because the first Riel Resistance led to the negotiation of the Manitoba Act, I prefer to understand Riel in his relations and political commitments to Indigenous communities, rather than as a figure in official Canadian colonial history.

began to draw the reins of government closer and the Indian began to realize that in signing over the land, his own manner of living must bow to, and, be limited, if not by actual physical force, at least by the moral force of a superior civilization. It began to dawn on his mind that a new order of things, and new ideas were steadily superseding his own, and the day was slowly but surely coming when he must take a back seat, where he had to sit silent in the land where he had always been accustomed to follow the dictates of his own desires pretty much.

What people, unless devoid absolutely of spirit would not feel a certain amount of regret and chagrin if placed in a similar situation? What people, unless slavish by instinct for centuries before, would not feel a certain amount of blame for a people who were instrumental for all this, even supposing as it was the case here, the agreement was made out in due form + order?<sup>42</sup>

In the beginning paragraphs of Ahenakew's reflections on the Frog Lake massacre, he situates the actions of his Indigenous brothers in the context of dispossession of land, and the imposition of European and Christian social norms that necessarily meant the violent suppression of Indigenous ways of being. He writes as much towards the colonizer as he writes from the position of the colonized; that is, in this unabashedly anti-colonial reflection, Ahenakew lays bare the consequences that Indigenous communities faced after the signing of treaties. As historian Helen Buckley notes, the signing of the first seven numbered treaties occurred in a very short span of time – just six short years, and were a quick response to the strong assertion of Indigenous sovereignty and resistance during the Red River Rebellion, which ended only a year before Treaty One was signed. Buckley also contextualizes the numbered treaties in terms of the westward settlement of the United States to the south, and the fear, at the time, of American expansion into Canadian territory. It is significant, as well, that Ahenakew grew up in, and *Black Hawk* is indeed set in, Treaty Six territory. The history of the signing of Treaty Six helps to provide context for Ahenakew's sometimes stunningly harsh critiques of colonialism and his fearless appraisals of an economic and political system wreaking havoc on his people. Ahenakew may very well have inherited some of this rage at injustice from the previous generation of treaty signers in his territory, who Buckley writes of below:

The greatest difficulty was encountered at Treaty Six in North Saskatchewan, where the Crees, living in close proximity to the Métis who had fled Red River after the rebellion, had picked up some of their

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<sup>42</sup> Ahenakew, "First Grey Hair," 1.

disaffection, reinforcing their own doubts and fears. They had stopped the geological survey the year before, and the second Riel rebellion was only nine years away. Chief Poundmaker, adopted son of Chief Crowfoot and widely respected in his own right, expressed his concern that the amount of land offered was not enough, noting that he himself did not know how to cultivate the ground or build a house. Some chiefs sided with him, while others were more accommodating. “Surely,” urged Chief Starblanket (Ahtukakoop), “we Indians can learn the ways of living that made the white man strong,” and Chiefs Mis-Ta-Wa-Sis and Big Child took this side. Treaty Six was rejected three times, but signed in the end with some improvement in terms, notably a fourfold increase in the size of the land grant (from 160 acres per family of five to 640 acres), and the “medicine chest” at the house of each agent, which in modern times was used to lever more money for health care.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the tensions over the signing of Treaty Six among Indigenous leaders, it should not be surprising that the concluding sentences of “First Grey Hair,” which began this paragraph’s description of Ahenakew’s political and literary insights on the massacre at Frog Lake, should read thus:

Nearly 30 years have elapsed since + many of us younger men born since have been + those of us in whom the Indian spirit is not altogether dead, or has been partially [...] by education cannot but feel, as I do, a sorrow that such a thing should even have taken place, but once again I say, you may kick around a child and he’ll fawn around + love you the more, but think twice before you kick an Indian the third time or even the second time.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Buckley, 34. In addition, historian Sarah Carter distinguishes the differences between Treaty Four and Treaty Six provisions in the following terms: “The terms providing for the encouragement of agriculture differed in some important respects from those negotiated by the Plains Cree at Treaty Six two years later. Treaty Six families received more hoes and spades, and every three families rather than every ten shared a plough and harrows. Treaty Six chiefs received more livestock, as well as horse harnesses and wagons. A handmill was to be given to each Treaty Six band that raised sufficient grain on to warrant its use. Perhaps the most significant difference bearing on the encouragement of agriculture was the promise in Treaty Six that for the first three years after reserves were surveyed, bands actually cultivating would be granted provisions to allow them to begin farming. ... The Indians of Treaty Six were also promised that in the event of pestilence or general famine, they would receive assistance, a clause not included in Treaty Four. [...] Certainly there was a marked contrast between the progress of the Treaty Six Indians and that of Treaty Four Indians, who had concluded their treaty two years earlier and should have been in the advance. In Treaty Six many bands had by 1878 made what officials lauded as ‘commendable efforts.’ The bands of Red Pheasant, Ahtakakoop [Ahenakew’s own band], and Mistawasis, all formerly Plains hunters, had from 20 to 40 acres under cultivation, and some, such as John Smith’s band with 120 acres under crop, were remarkably successful.” Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 1993, 57-71.

<sup>44</sup> *Black Hawk*, 5.

These are brash words for an Anglican preacher, who attended Emmanuel College, a school that was “founded for the training of Indian catechists and teachers.”<sup>45</sup> “First Grey Hair” is striking in its open defense of the Cree men who reached their limit in tolerating harassment by Indian Agents and white society at large, and in a fateful fit of rage, retaliated with violence.

Finally, before turning to a close reading of *Black Hawk*, it is worth noting that Ahenakew’s writing is characterized by a curious detail: throughout his personal papers, he uses American spellings. On the Prairies, it was common at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to use American spellings; indeed, in Canada, American spellings were generally more common in the previous century than they are now.<sup>46</sup> In *Black Hawk*, Ahenakew even goes as far as calling residential school “boarding school,” the terminology still in use in the States, a curious turn of phrase that indicates that Ahenakew may have been gearing his writings to an American audience. And, in *Black Hawk*, when a group of Cree men approach the clergyman in their community, asking him to pen a letter for them to Ottawa, detailing grievances the community has experienced at the hands of the Indian Agent, the clergyman refuses, and it is an American who suddenly appears on the scene who agrees to write the letter for them.<sup>47</sup> It is to this scene with the clergyman, among others, that the following sections turn towards to help reveal Ahenakew’s awareness of the shifting economic terrain in Cree communities at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Introducing *Black Hawk***

The beginning of *Black Hawk*, written circa 1918, narrates the main character’s childhood and is set in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century before World War I.<sup>48</sup> Allan Hawk, usually referred to as Black Hawk (which is also the name of Allan’s uncle), and his brother John

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<sup>45</sup> Buckley, 46.

<sup>46</sup> Many thanks to Margery Fee for pointing this out.

<sup>47</sup> *Black Hawk*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> During Black Hawk’s sermon, later in the novel, he says to his transfixed audience, “[f]ive decades have rolled by and all is change” (63). Black Hawk gives his sermon in the early 1920s, and as the character rightly expresses, a mere 50 years after the first wave of settlers displaced Plains Cree communities from what is now known as Saskatchewan.

live with their parents on the fictional Saskatchewan reserve named Starlight.<sup>49</sup> In the first pages of the novel, the narrator (and it is quite tempting to assume Ahenakew is revealing himself in his authorship) addresses his readers, making clear that the following story is written and told with a purpose:

I have known instance after instance where a number of Indians of us would be sitting around, chatting easily and laughing among ourselves, everything free and comradely, a knock would come on the door and a whiteman would come in. Like a snap every visage would as it were close up and assume a mask-like aspect. What was a moment before warm would freeze up like ice. If any one [sic] spoke it would be in the oratorical formal tone. The whiteman at length goes away and forms his opinion of the Indian. This is why it is so hard for any one without Indian blood in his veins to understand the Indian character and much more to know the deeper reasons for many things in the actions of Indians which may seem strange.<sup>50</sup>

The narrator goes on to confess:

...the present writer, he being an Indian of the Indians, (apologies to St. Paul) has consented to attempt to a portrayal of his race, by means of a humble narrative which he thinks may serve to shed some light on things not understood and bring about some sympathy at least on actions of his fellow Indians, on which there was nothing but blame and disgust before.<sup>51</sup>

Like many of Ahenakew's writings, his work carries with it a political motivation to dispel racist assumptions held about Cree people and Indigenous people in Canada more broadly. But this is not to collapse Ahenakew's writing into simply a talking-back-to-the colonizer address; rather, in Ahenakew's wide-ranging writing, he takes on the work of telling Cree stories, telling humorous and lighthearted tales, and also writing historical accounts of events that had come to shape Canadian perceptions of Indigenous people during his lifetime. *Black Hawk*, then, should be read as a novel that emerges out of these various and complex motivations.

*Black Hawk* also succeeds at spanning a range of emotional tenors. Ahenakew is able to write, most often through the perspective of different characters rather than relying on an omniscient narrator, multiple subjective experiences of being Indigenous in the early 1900s on the Prairies. At points angry at the injustices faced by their Cree

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<sup>49</sup> Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 50.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

communities, characters are also written with a great sense of tongue-in-cheek humour. For example, in a conversation between Black Hawk's parents during the first pages of the novel, his father quips, "John can go to the Reserve School and learn to speak the English language, do figuring and that will be enough for the little sinner. He will be our support in age, should he be spared. Black Hawk is given up to God's service."<sup>52</sup> John, Black Hawk's younger brother, is portrayed as an industrious, cunning youth who already has it in mind to take up farming on his own as soon as he is physically able. In contrast, Black Hawk is a studious, quiet child who will, through the will of his parents, but also reflecting his own desires, be sent to residential school followed by education in the Anglican church. When Eagle Shield, Black Hawk's father, calls John "the little sinner," it is hard not to feel Ahenakew's own sense of humour rising through the pages. Eagle Shield is not vindictive or harsh with his two sons, nor is he particularly inclined to crack jokes. Instead, I read this funny characterization of John as an indication of Ahenakew's own self-reflexive position within the Anglican Church, and as a muted, tongue in cheek form of undermining the moral authority of the Church. Further, later in the novel, in a brief narrator's description of the adult Black Hawk, Ahenakew writes,

He had been brought up in an English mission as a youth but he had never been particularly serious about the Christian religion. He believed in God and did so fervently, but the external ceremonial and rules of churchmanship had never seemed of much consequence to him.<sup>53</sup>

Again, passages like these seem to say as much about Ahenakew's own relationship to the Christian religion as they do about his fictional main character's religious piety. Many of the Cree characters in *Black Hawk* are devout Anglicans; in an opening scene, for example, Black Hawk's family sits together while his father, Eagle Shield, reads the Cree Bible written in syllabics.<sup>54</sup> Like his characters, Ahenakew was unquestionably devout in

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 61.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 17. Dominant critical knowledge about the Cree syllabic Bible attributes its creation to James Evans. Yet, Deanna Reder writes in a 2017 paper "Recuperating Indigenous Narratives: making legible the documenting of injustices:" "... I caution you not to assume that this knowledge of Cree syllabics is solely the result of contact. Winona Stevenson, now Wheeler, in her 2000 article 'Calling Badger and the Symbols of the Spirit Language: The Cree Origins of the Syllabic System' argues that the origin of the Cree syllabary has been miscredited. While Wesleyan Methodist Reverend James Evans has been credited with its creation, she disputes it. Stevenson writes: This great Canadian myth has endured for over 160 years virtually unchallenged. Few question colonialist/conqueror renditions of the past and even fewer bothered asking Cree

his faith; yet, his unpublished journal writings also point towards a deep awareness of the negative consequences of Christianity on his communities as well. While Ahenakew devoted his life to his missionary work as an Anglican reverend, traveling through rural Saskatchewan communities, it is also important to recognize that during Ahenakew's lifetime, there simply were very few options, for employment, social status, or survival, available to Indigenous people in Canada. As the following section will show, farming on the Prairies was anything but an easy or prosperous affair, for Indigenous or non-Indigenous farmers alike; and for Indigenous farmers, the extensive regulations and restrictions put into place by the government drastically limited their abilities to cultivate the land reserved for them through the numbered treaties.

Ahenakew also attended residential school, a period of his life that is markedly without reflection in his personal papers. Likewise, *Black Hawk* contains an unfinished chapter titled "Hawk Goes to Boarding School" that simply reads, "The summer was now past and the fall of the year had come. The work of putting away the grain had [...]."<sup>55</sup> While this chapter may have been lost, my suspicions suggest otherwise. Having reviewed photocopies of the original handwritten manuscript of *Black Hawk*, Ahenakew left blank pages in his notebook following this brief opening to the chapter, implying that his intention was to return at a later point to complete it. Later in the novel, in a conversation with his love interest, Helen, Black Hawk shares the following sparing words: "I came to school in Prince Albert in my tenth year. Before that I was not able to speak a word of English. I knew no English, my parents talk only Cree, yet my childhood was the happiest part of my life."<sup>56</sup> Black Hawk's schooling in Prince Albert<sup>57</sup> is never given space or description in the novel. I suspect that the experience of residential school

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people directly about the origins of their writing system. A handful of anthropologists are aware that an Indigenous version exists in Cree oral histories but most, like David Mendelbaum, choose to disregard it in favour of the James Evans story" (11). Deanna Reder, "Recuperating Indigenous Narratives: making legible the documenting of injustices." Keynote address. "Mikinaakominis/TransCanadas Literature, Justice, Relation." University of Toronto. 24-27 Mar 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 38.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>57</sup> Black Hawk attended what must have been a fictional residential school, since the Prince Albert Residential School was built in 1947 as a replacement for the All Saints School in Lac La Ronge 200 kilometers north of Prince Albert. See Anglican Church of Canada: <https://www.anglican.ca/tr/histories/prince-albert/>. Web. 22 Mar 2018.

may have been insurmountable for Ahenakew's own personal and fictional reflections, and I suggest that this may be why his extensive personal papers, as well as the text of *Black Hawk*, do not include deep reflections on this portion of his life or residential schools more generally.<sup>58</sup>

But *Black Hawk* does provide insight into the cultural and social norms that were, primarily through education, being instilled in Indigenous communities, and particularly youth, by Canadian teachers and missionaries. For example, early in the text, Black Hawk's younger brother John works on a homework assignment while Black Hawk reads a book. John shows his essay to Black Hawk, who commends, "That's not bad [...]. You are getting on with your English. It sounds like a farmer talking and you are to be a farmer anyhow'."<sup>59</sup> The content of John's essay is worth reproducing here in full, in light of the insight it provides into the social norms that were being indoctrinated into Indigenous youth at the time:

I liked to live were the leaves is grow his that made happy when we work are The songs of the flowers that makes the world happy and autumn an winter are [or I] have no duties we unhappily perform.

One of the lazy man happy when I had no duties. no that is no good to be lazy in the whole world. God sent not lazy man in the world every one has to work in the earth. God sent not lazy horses and he don't not want lazy man. Some woman is lazy.

Nobody is happy went he sick and nobody is not thinging about is father and mother when he had sickness and the sick man always think he shall die and never see to the father. when somebody is sick she will be die soon go and get a doctor.

Because we do not joying the world and we don't do anything for our father + something some people said "I dont not go to world today I have enough things to eat and I have enough coats and something to wear."

The Hygiene is very good for the people the Hygiene his telling about the health and body and to keep clean every day and to work too. Because when we grow to be a man if we is not a women we have to work to get lived for our self and to grow strong and to beginning to grow stronger every year

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the silence that has historically surrounded Indigenous experiences of residential schools, see Sam McKegney's *Magic Weapon: Aboriginal Writers Remaking Community After Residential School*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2007; and Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin (eds), *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 17.



and to work for our mother and fathers when they old and girls work too.  
This is New life Call.<sup>60</sup>

John's second paragraph recalls Christian morals around idleness, laziness, and the virtues of hard work. His statement that "some woman is lazy" is as grammatically amusing as it is revealing; already, at John's young age, he is not only able to recite (and internalize) the European norms being instilled in him through school, he is also performing a classical capitalist understanding of what constitutes work. John is expressing the dominant idea that "women's work," primarily done in the home, is not real labour; real labour is instead, in this view, performed outside of the home, either directly for wages or in the production of goods that can be sold for money. Reproductive labour traditionally performed by women in what Marx called the "hidden abode" of the family and home is already, to John, an invisible form of labour, and even a sign of women's laziness.<sup>61</sup> Further, John's regurgitation of his schoolmaster's insistence on hygiene, of course itself a particular form of self-care defined by European standards of cleanliness and "good" appearance, also reveals how strongly Indigenous youth were being brought into European cultural standards overall. The emphasis on hygiene also refers back to Ahenakew's own life experience during the Spanish influenza – a deathly illness that affected great numbers of Cree people – which caused him to attend medical school. In the introduction to *Voices of the Plains Cree*, Stan Cuthand writes that:

After World War I, there was an outbreak of influenza which had been brought home by the soldiers from Europe. The people to whom Edward Ahenakew ministered suffered terribly and many died as a result. Sid Keighley...described it 'All the deaths had taken place within a two week period, and the church was piled high with bodies. The epidemic was striking everywhere. On the reserves so many people were dying that mass funerals and burials were being held.'... In fact, the population of Indians in Canada was at its lowest point during the 1920s. According to the Indian Department's Annual Report, March 31, 1923, there were 'about 105,000 for the whole Dominion.'<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 18-19.

<sup>61</sup> For Marx's use of the phrase "hidden abode," see chapter six, "The Buying and Selling of Labour-Power," in *Capital Volume One*. For a critical use of the term, see Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode." *New Left Review*. 86 (2014): 55-72.

<sup>62</sup> Ahenakew, *Voices*, xii.

In this context, John's statements about hygiene also reflect the devastating experience of Cree communities after soldiers returned from World War I. Indeed, the influenza changed the course of Ahenakew's life, propelling him to medical school, a turn of events that also occurs for Black Hawk in the novel, which is discussed further below.

John's school assignment shows how invested Canadian settlers were in maintaining European cultural and social norms, and the relatively great, and surely expensive, lengths they would go to enforce these norms on Indigenous communities who did not practice them. Describing pioneer settlers as "survivors," the eminent Canadian political economist H.A. Innis remarks that:

[t]he survivors live by borrowing cultural traits of peoples who have already worked out a civilization suitable to the new environment as in the case of the Indians of North America, by adapting their own cultural traits to the new environment, and by heavy material borrowing from the peoples of the old land. The process of adaptation is extremely painful in any case but the maintenance of cultural traits to which they have been accustomed is of primary importance. A sudden change of cultural traits can be made only with great difficulty and with the disappearance of many of the peoples concerned. Depreciation of the social heritage is serious.<sup>63</sup>

In *Black Hawk*, John doesn't attend residential school, and instead he and his older brother attend, at the beginning of the story, the reserve school at Sandy Lake. In sum, John's essay assignment shows how the project of Canadian settlement produced cultural and social effects, not just in terms of Indigenous youths' learning of the English language, but also their internalization of European social norms. These social norms are reflective of and embedded within capitalist social relations as well, a topic I turn to below.

## **Land dispossession and Indigenous labour in *Black Hawk***

*To the pioneer heading into the wilderness intent on working and improving the land, the Indian was regarded as a nuisance and a barrier to progress. As the family farm was to be the unit of settlement, the Indians*

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<sup>63</sup> H.A. Innis, "The Importance of Staple Products." *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. Edited by Mel Watkins and H.M.K Grant. Montreal: Montreal-Queen's University Press, 2000. 15.

*were not required as a labour force. The sole economic benefit to be derived from the Indians was through the transfer of their land.*<sup>64</sup>

This section provides a close reading of the first third of *Black Hawk*, focusing on the section of the novel that provides the greatest account of capitalist economic and social relations. The Indigenous Prairies in the late 1800s and early 20<sup>th</sup> century were a site of what Leon Trotsky termed “uneven development,” a concept which points towards the ways in which a country and a global system of capitalism often adheres to and struggles to adapt to capitalism at varying rates, leaving parts of a country, or whole countries, less developed than other areas that they are linked to via the global network of capitalist relations.<sup>65</sup> Most often uneven development is applied to the production of variations in development within a country, or between countries; much less often is the concept applied in the context of settler colonialism, for which the starkly uneven rate of development between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state makes the concept particularly useful. The analysis presented here assumes as a basis that uneven development characterized and continues to characterize the economic and social welfare differences between Indigenous nations and Canada. I seek to understand why this uneven development existed on the Prairies at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the following subsections work to reveal major contributing factors to this dynamic. As it will become clear below, the institution of farming for Indigenous communities on the Prairies was not motivated by a benevolent interest in the welfare of these communities. Instead, farming was a method of weeding out noncapitalist relations to the land, instituting a morally and socially motivated method of indoctrinating Indigenous peoples into European social norms, and ultimately further dispossessing Indigenous communities of their lands. While the numbered treaties initiated the official dispossession of land, the railway and Canada’s introduction into the global wheat market required ongoing dispossession in order to help jumpstart the nation’s entry into industrial capitalism.

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<sup>64</sup> Sarah Carter, *Lost Harvests: Prairie Indian Reserve Farmers and Government Policy*. Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 1990. 24.

<sup>65</sup> Leon Trotsky, *The Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, first published in Moscow in 1919 and first published in English in London in 1962. Neil Smith has to some extent popularized the term uneven development in his book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1984.

Underlying the analysis presented below is a concerted commitment to the position that, overall, the specific methods used to contain, control, and dispossess Indigenous peoples on the Prairies were primarily in service of Canada's *combined* efforts to settle this land *and* to develop as an industrial capitalist nation able to compete in the global market. Rather than choosing to prioritize one or the other of these motivations, I instead seek to wed these analytical perspectives below.

### **Making Money the Capitalist Way**

The first third of *Black Hawk* is replete with references to the changing economic structures within Cree communities on the Prairies during the early 20th century. Chapters three through six, titled "Hay Grounds," "Visit to the Indian Agency," "The Council Meeting," and "Regarding Cattle," provide a sort of scene setting as well as an historical, albeit fictional, account of the economic policies that hindered Indigenous peoples' survival on the Prairies. In "Hay Grounds," the character Isaac, described as a "councilor" who was "a youngish Indian, full of fun and one who delighted in talking to children" instructs Black Hawk's younger brother John on how to make money, or amass profit, within capitalism.<sup>66</sup> Isaac's advice follows:

'Let all your dealings be in cash or muskrat skins. Rat skins is money. Look at your uncle James, he was a trader doing well, he started giving credit and he broke down. Give no credit—not even to your father or mother—not even to yourself.'

The boy was surely impressed. The advice seemed to be in line with his natural propensities.

'Be sure and pay your debts on the pins fast in order to be square. It will be two dollars. That's eight shillings. Perhaps you may be able to sell the pins to some for fifteen cents apiece and then you can have some money to spare. You understand me?'

The boy nodded his head, biting his lip. 'Send off the money as soon as you get it. When you get the watch, sell it and then send for some things from the big buying book and sell those. Your money will grow. Are you thankful for the advice?'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 19.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21.

John, as the passage purports and as previous descriptions allude to, has a “natural propensit[y]” for business dealings – in other words, he has an ability to grasp the basic concepts of capitalist accumulation. And John is successful at his small-scale, first-time self-employment operation, consisting of purchasing “twenty pins of cut glass” from Isaac and reselling them at a small profit:<sup>68</sup>

From day to day he worked, now driving a team when his father was stacking and at other times he was running the rakes. He sold all his pins and had seventy-five cents clear. With ten cents of this he bought a young rooster off Isaac. The sixty-five cents remaining he asked his father to keep for him.<sup>69</sup>

Not only does John show great fortitude at his money-making endeavours, he also manages to bank his profits with his father, resisting any youthful temptations to spend his profits. While this early section of *Black Hawk* helps to distinguish the characters of the two Hawk brothers, the elder of which John describes as a boy who ““can’t do anything but read a book”” and ““wants to be a Praying-Man”” who ““will wear a long white—not a shirt—and say ‘Dearly beloved brethren,’”” this section also reveals the capitalist economic practices that Cree communities were being heavily instructed in at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup>

### **The Farm Instruction Program and the National Policy of 1879**

In the chapter “Visit to the Indian Agency,” Eagle Shield, Black Hawk’s father, travels twenty-five miles to visit the Indian Agent to ask for permission and a permit to “sell a three year old steer he had in order to keep himself in food.”<sup>71</sup> Black Hawk’s family, though the keepers of twenty-eight head of cattle, did not have enough food for the end of summer and “the Indian Agent had given instructions to the store keepers not to give any credit to any Indian.”<sup>72</sup> The Indian Agent “would not hear of it” and tells Black Hawk that ““the Commissioner’s instructions are that no steers are to be sold till

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 20.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

[sic] the Fall when they will be in good shape.”<sup>73</sup> Eagle Shield, who stands in the Agent’s office with Sooneyas, another Cree from Sandy Lake who has also made the trip requesting permission to kill a steer, responds:

‘I have to make my hay and do my best while good weather lasts,’ said Eagle Shield. ‘There is very little grass this year and a day’s work doesn’t give much result. I have no time to go and hunt for food.’

[...]

The Indians stood as if waiting for something and when the realization came that they were not getting anything they went out to their wagon and drove back the twenty-five miles.<sup>74</sup>

The Indian Agent could appear as though his hands were tied, bound by the rules and regulations set by his immediate superior, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs. Yet, it becomes impossible to grant the Agent such a generous evaluation, when, after Eagle Shield and Sooneyas leave, the Indian Agent turns to a visitor from Saskatoon sitting in his office and remarks:

‘Well, I got rid of that bunch easy enough,’ he said. ‘They complain about lack of food. They have to be dealt with in a determined way—they can always find something to eat. There are a few rabbits around still, they eat wild rhubarb—oh, they’ll be alright. Well to return to what we were saying when we were interrupted, the widow was a nice looking girl and you beggar you, I believe she had her eye on you, ha ha ha -- -- --’<sup>75</sup>

The carelessness with which the Indian Agent regards his duty to respond to the concerns of the Cree people who he is charged with supporting is clear in this passage. But this excerpt from *Black Hawk* contains more important historical information as well. In 1878, the farm instruction program was instituted in the Prairies. Though this plan did not apply to territories covered by Treaty One, Two, Three and Five, and was also abandoned in Manitoba, it did affect a great number of Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan. Sarah Carter describes the farm instruction program below:

The government’s new program, which was to apply to both the North-West territories and Manitoba, was first given official voice in the 1878 annual report by the deputy superintendent general of Indian affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet. The exact details of the policy were vague at this point. The Indians were to be furnished with instruction in farming or raising cattle,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 24.

with the object of making them self-supporting. The priorities Vankoughnet outlined were to induce the Indians to abandon nomadic ways by building houses and barns, to subdivide the reserves into lots assigned to each head of family, and to establish schools on reserves where there were sufficient residents to warrant one. At this time Vankoughnet had the idea that the schoolteachers would also instruct in farming and raising cattle. Inspecting officers would visit the reserves, mark the progress of the Indians, purchase cattle, seed, and implements for them, see that the instructors were attending to their duties, and organize annuity payments.<sup>76</sup>

The farm instruction program was the foremost way in which the Canadian government enforced new economic practices on Indigenous communities on the Prairies at the end of the 1800s. This was part of a much larger governmental project that aimed at jumpstarting Canada's industrial capitalism and leaving behind its pioneer beginnings. In 1879, the newly elected Conservative government, under the leadership of John A. Macdonald, instituted the National Policy, which levied tariffs on imported goods to protect manufacturing in Canada from U.S. competition. These tariffs were in place until World War II. K.H. Norrie extends an historical analysis of the tariffs of the National Policy to the unofficial but just as influential national policies of railway development, land settlement, and immigration. He writes:

The clear intent, as V.C. Fowke has argued, was to reproduce something akin to the commercial and industrial prosperity enjoyed during the agricultural development of Ontario in the first half of the century, or to the American boom that was so readily attributed to the continuous expansion of western settlement in that country. The Canadian West was to be the new agricultural frontier. Grain would be the export staple, requiring a host of linked commercial activities to gather it and market it in Europe.<sup>77</sup>

In the 1800s, Indigenous communities on the Prairies were in the process of being forcefully transitioned from an ostensibly nomadic way of life, rooted in the relationship to the buffalo, to a government-enforced agricultural economic basis. But for many areas in Saskatchewan, not only was agriculture and raising cattle foreign to Cree culture and economic practices, it was also not ideal for the ecology of the Prairies. In addition, largescale hunting by settlers of the buffalo, to the point of endangerment, directly impacted Cree communities' abilities to sustain themselves, especially when the forced

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<sup>76</sup> Carter, 81.

<sup>77</sup> Norrie, 167.

farming methods proved inadequate to sustain them. As Carter notes, “[c]learly it was the food crisis in the North-West that generated the farm instruction program in 1879; it was not inspired by a benevolent concern that the Indians be aided in their transition to an agricultural way of life.”<sup>78</sup> Carter writes:

Some observers, however, sensed that a prevailing spirit of unease and discontent among the Indians of the North-West was caused, not by the liquor traffic, but by an anxiety about a future supply of food. By the early 1870s Ottawa officials had been repeatedly warned by missionaries, explorers, and government officials in the field that the buffalo was an endangered species and were being urged to adopt protective measures quickly. Recommendations were made to limit the hunt to Indians only, to prohibit the export of buffalo hides and pemmican, to prevent the slaughter of buffalo by pounds, and to regulate the hunt so that each hunter procured annually only what he required for himself and family.<sup>79</sup>

Prior to 1879, some Indigenous communities on the Prairies, already economically effected by colonialism, planted wheat over larger tracts of land, and used machinery for its harvesting. As Mel Watkins and H.M.K. Grant note in the introduction to *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches* (2000), wheat, alongside cod, fur, and timber, was a primary staple of the Canadian economy and was exported alongside these other staples to France, England, and the United States.<sup>80</sup> On the foundational importance of staples to colonial countries, Canadian political economist W.A. Macintosh, beginning with a quote G.S. Callender, writes:

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<sup>78</sup> Carter, 82.

<sup>79</sup> Carter, 52.

<sup>80</sup> Mel Watkins and H.M.K Grant, *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 2000. xi. Many thanks to Glen Coulthard for pointing me towards the staple thesis for part of this chapter’s analysis. Watkins and Grant insightfully distinguish the differences between how the fur trade effected Indigenous communities in the East compared to the farming of wheat on the Prairies: “The prosecution of the fur trade depended, at least initially in each region into which the trade expanded, on aboriginal fur gatherers. As such aboriginal peoples were commodity producers, not wage-earners, and the fur trade was literally a trade, or a commercial activity, not an industrial activity. Aboriginal producers became dependent to the extent that they became vulnerable to the exigencies of the trade, but they did not have to make two critical and traumatic adjustments that result from imposed industrialization. First, they did not have to become wage-earners, and second, which is really the opposite side of the coin, they did not have to yield ownership of the land. To put the matter differently, neither their labour-time nor their land became marketable commodities.... The Hudson’s Bay Company, as a furtrading company, did not need to own the land; indeed, it was in its interest to allow aboriginal ownership of land to continue, the better to trap on it, and to discourage white settlement. Only when settlement overrode the fur trade, or promised imminently to do so, as it did in the West, did the Bay see fit to transform itself into a real-estate company and to pretend, successfully as it turned out, that it owned aboriginal land and was entitled to compensation rather than the aboriginal peoples” (55-56).



‘Progress does not take place unless the colony possesses markets, where it can dispose of its staple products. The history of modern colonization does not show a single case where a settled country has enjoyed any considerable economic prosperity, or made notable social progress without a flourishing commerce with other communities.’ The prime requisite of colonial prosperity is the colonial staple. Other factors connected with the staple industry may turn it to advantage or disadvantage, but the staple in itself is the basis of prosperity.... Nothing is more typical of colonial development than the restless, unceasing search for staples which would permit the pioneer community to come into close contact with the commercial world and leave behind the disabilities of a pioneer existence. Contemporary records abound with the tales of the projects of the faddist and propagandist of new staples, and much money and energy were spent on experiments.<sup>81</sup>

Within Canadian political economy, the staples thesis, a Canadian-derived theory, has received considerable attention and debate since Harold Innis first developed the thesis in the 1920s. In its most basic form, staples theory argues that Canada’s historical development is rooted in the economic reliance on staple commodities that were exported to more developed nations.<sup>82</sup> These staple commodities, all forms of natural resources, then come to shape the cultural and political aspects of the nation as well. In his now famous essay, “A Staples Theory of Economic Growth,” Mel Watkins writes that

[t]he limited—at first possibly nonexistent—domestic market, and the factor proportions—an abundance of land relative to labour and capital—create a comparative advantage in resource-intensive exports, or staples. Economic development will be a process of diversification around an export base. The central concept of a staple theory, therefore, is the spread effects of the export sector, that is, the impact of export activity on domestic economy and society.... The staple theory then becomes a theory of capital formation ...<sup>83</sup>

Watkins and Grant note that at the heart of “this literature is the vulnerability of an economy heavily reliant upon foreign capital and natural resource exploitation.”<sup>84</sup> For a

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<sup>81</sup> Macintosh, 5.

<sup>82</sup> Strong critiques of staples theory from Marxist political economists exist. See David McNally’s “Staples Theory as Commodity Fetishism: Marx, Innis and Canadian Political Economy.” *Studies in Political Economy* 6:1 (1981): 35-63. Also see Deborah Simmons’ unpublished dissertation “Against Capital: The Political Economy of Aboriginal Resistance in Canada.” York University, 1995.

<sup>83</sup> Mel Watkins, “A Staples Theory of Economic Growth.” *Canadian Economic History: Classic and Contemporary Approaches*. Edited by Mel Watkins and H.M.K Grant. Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 2000. 21-22.

<sup>84</sup> Watkins and Grant, xiii.

colonial nation-state such as Canada, that has always been and continues to be “heavily reliant on foreign capital and natural resource exploitation,” staples theory is a valuable tool that helps illuminate aspects of the economy that also shape the political and social lives of Canadian and Indigenous peoples alike.

## **The Permit System**

Towards the end of the 1800s, as settlers began to arrive in larger numbers to the Prairies, the largescale farming of wheat on large tracts of land became an increasingly central staple for the Canadian economy. Macintosh writes:

For more than half a century western Canada had striven to reach the goal of colonial existence, the production of a staple export commodity. With this period the country passed from the stage of primitive diversified agriculture to the one-crop stage, the period (in the phrase of the late C.C. James) ‘when wheat was king.’ Although not without its variations that period lasted until the end of the Civil War and the repudiation of the Reciprocity Treaty. The various phases of that period of abounding prosperity, with its railway politics, bank expansion, and incidental protection, are sufficiently well known. Economically, Canada was passing out of the colonial stage.... A staple was exported to world markets; and, as southern cotton started the wheels of American industry and commerce in the nineteenth century, western wheat has permitted the initial step of the Canadian advance in the twentieth. It was only one commodity, and there were many; but it was the basis of that period of prosperity. The world staple primed the pump of Canadian industry.<sup>85</sup>

Prior to the farm instruction program of 1879, Indigenous communities on the Prairies who were most effected by colonialism had begun to take up the farming of wheat on large tracts of semi-arid prairie land. Compared to small land plots and emphasis on cattle that the farm instruction program brought in, this was a more economically sustainable approach to the land that Prairie Indians were living on. Yet, the government instituted the farm instruction program to, in Helen Buckley’s words,

[...] creat[e] a kind of peasant agriculture, making the reserves quite separate from the commercial farming which surrounded them. Introduced by Hayter Reed, superintendent in the Department, it began with a survey which divided the reserves into lots of forty acres which were allotted to individual band members. Reed’s vision was that ‘a single acre of wheat,

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<sup>85</sup> Macintosh, 11-13.

part of another in root crops and vegetables, a cow or two could provide for the farmer and his family.’ The forty-acre farm contrasts with the basic quarter-section (160 acres) which launched most settlers, who then went on to acquire more land as fast as profits from farming permitted.<sup>86</sup>

While, as I noted above, Treaty Six Indians were successful in arguing for quarter-section plots of land, in contrast to Treaty Four communities, and therein had a better chance of developing their land for sustenance, the infrastructure provided to Indigenous communities for farming under Hayter Reed’s program was far from adequate. Both Carter and Buckley detail the inferior equipment that Treaty Six and Treaty Four Indians were supplied with; the inferior training that the farm instructors themselves had, making it that much harder for them to support communities in their development of agriculture; and the restrictions placed on Prairie Indians that severely limited their abilities to support themselves.

One of these restrictions was the permit system, which is spoken to at length by characters in *Black Hawk*. After Sooneyas and Eagle Shield visit with the Indian Agent and make the return twenty-five mile trip by wagon with nothing to show for their journey, a council meeting is called by the Chief of their band. The “Chief had casually asked Sooneyas about his visit to the Agent and what that man had told him,” and the Chief is deeply troubled by Sooneyas’ interactions with the Agent.<sup>87</sup> What follows is internal reflections by the Chief, who ruminates on the situation his community is in. The narrator tells us: “[s]trong man that he was, brave man he had ever been, his heart weakened because he knew not what to do. He felt the injustice of it all.”<sup>88</sup> The Chief reflects to himself:

My father passed his word that we would be loyal and peaceful. That binds us forever. Even if it did not, I’d willingly die for my people—at best I could only kill one or two policemen and I’d be branded a murderer and a rebel. The whole country would blame the Indian race and say that we still needed watching. Oh God, who gave us this land, are we to be exiles in our own land forever?

[...]

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<sup>86</sup> Buckley, 52.

<sup>87</sup> *Black Hawk*, 24.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 25.

There was one man whose child was sick, dying. He asked for help—he was abused; he asked to be allowed to kill his own steer, he was refused. He loved his little child and he could not go to work to get food. He got reckless and killed his steer; policemen came to arrest him and to take him from his dying child. He fled. Hounded like a coyote by hundreds of men who bravely volunteered to protect the Country against him, he killed many and at last they saved their country by killing him.<sup>89</sup>

Under the permit system, Indigenous people on the Prairies were required to get permission from their designated Indian Agent in order to kill one of their own animals for food. Importantly, the permit system was never actually made into law. It was a system routinely practiced by Indian Agents even without legal ratification, and so for decades, Indian Agents were illegally enforcing a system that severely limited the survival of Indigenous communities.

The Chief's internal reflections that recount, in the last paragraph, the harassment that ended in the murder of one Cree man who was simply trying to provide for his child is illuminating. Placing these excerpts from *Black Hawk* alongside the historical accounts of Carter and Buckley, it becomes more clear that Indian policy in the Prairies from the late 1870s onwards was not meant to sustain Indigenous communities; instead, Indian policy was foremost concerned with how to limit Indigenous claims to land – primarily dealt with through the quick implementation of the numbered treaties – as well as how to keep Indigenous-generated production from reaching the marketplace, effecting the profits that settler farmers were able to secure. This limiting of Indigenous farming production is further revealed in the quotes from *Black Hawk* below. Because of the Chief's brief talk with Sooneyas about his visit to the Indian Agent, he calls together a council meeting for the following morning, and a group gathers in Eagle Shield's tent. They begin with pleasant, intimate jokes, setting a tone of friendship that quickly turns into somber recognition of their experience of injustice. The Chief speaks at length, detailing the many ways in which the government, through the Indian Agent, limits the self-determination of his community and limits their ability to survive within the economic system that has been forced upon them. The Chief says:

‘We cannot get an advance in the stores because the store keepers had been told not to give us credit. I say some of you do not always pay your debts,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 26.

but is that any reason why the rest should suffer? White farmers have to sell an animal at times, they are allowed to run accounts.... When we are through with our summer's work and can give our attention to procuring food by hunting when we don't need much, then we can sell our steers. This may be alright in the reports they send but it is hard on us.

Then there's the permit system. We have to get a permit every time we want to sell a load of our hay to provide ourselves with food.'<sup>90</sup>

The Chief speaks directing to the permit system in this passage, which Buckley defines below:

The 1890s saw further restrictions on farming, and new powers for agents and resident instructors on the reserves. Chief among the restrictions was the permit system: the piece of paper which the Indian farmer had to have in order to sell his grain or other produce, or to buy stock or implements. This requirement was to last for more than forty years. An account of Poundmaker Reserve in the 1920s describes the permit system as a device for control; if an agent did not like an individual or was displeased for some reason, he could refuse or delay his permit indefinitely. Cash transactions also had to go. Indian farmers were to be paid in "chits" which could be exchanged at the store, and this chit system did not entirely disappear until the 1950s. Even the business of purchasing a horse was affected. The Indians of Saskatchewan passed a resolution requesting permission to inspect the horses which the government was buying for them, and this was in the 1930s.<sup>91</sup>

The permit system was a direct way to limit the economic development of Indigenous communities on the Prairies. It also controlled the influx of Indigenous-produced commodities (hay, cattle) into the market, protecting settler Canadians from receiving lower returns for their own hay and cattle, since Indigenous commodities could have driven prices down due to an increase in supply. During the council meeting in Eagle Shield's tent, Brass Buffalo, a fellow Cree characterized as a "fiery man" says:

'Did they tell us that we were to be like herded swine tied down hand and foot with our reserves as pastures? Did they say then that we would have to shed our manhood and be forever treated like little children and be at the mercy of any stray fancy that happens to come into the minds of some one man who bears the name of commissioner and who, under the idea of policy, issues decrees that must be applied on all fours to all reserves and all Indians in them without taking into considerations the differences of conditions?'<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 29.

<sup>91</sup> Buckley, 53-54.

<sup>92</sup> Ahenakew, *Black Hawk*, 30-31.

Reminiscent of Ahenakew's explicit tone of rage in "First Grey Hair," Brass Buffalo's words reflect the passionate anger and outrage that Indigenous communities across Canada (not just the Prairies) must have felt during this time of increasing pressure and increasing governmental surveillance and control.

In the chapter "Regarding Cattle," Ahenakew narrates a severe winter that hits both Indigenous and Canadian settler farmers hard:

It had been hinted once or twice that the grass was short even in this Northern part of the country where vegetation was as a rule luxuriant. It may here be mentioned that it was proving to be a very grave matter to all western Canada. There had been very little rain out on the southern side of the Saskatchewan river. Ranchers were scouring the north for places wherein to make hay. The farmers had not even straw to depend on for the drought had caused a crop failure in most places. There was a panic and it is said that it provoked feeling to such an extent in places that the police had to be at hand to keep the peace.

[...]

That winter will never be forgotten. The loss to western Canada was tremendous. Many a wealthy man was crushed. Many a farmer spent nights, heartbroken, listening to the pleading and moaning cry of the cattle. Some in mercy went out and shot their herds down. Some even committed suicide. The Indians were not the only ones that suffered.<sup>93</sup>

During this harsh winter, Black Hawk and other Cree communities plead with their respective Indian Agents for permission, via the permit system, to sell their cattle in order to survive. On the Starlight Reserve, the community requests the presence of the Indian Agent at a time of great emergency. But, without surprise, the Agent fails to keep the appointment:

The Agent came and before seeing the Indians went into the farm instructor's where he stayed for some time. What was said there is not known but the Agent drove home from there without seeing the Indians. The Indians sent for the Agent once again but could get no satisfaction this time.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 33-35.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 34.

## “Many Years Later:” Assimilation and routes of resistance

After the briefest allusion to a chapter that was never written on Black Hawk’s attendance of residential school, the novel skips forward in time, marked by the next chapter that is titled “Many Years Later.” At this point, Black Hawk is working as a hired farmhand on a settler farm in Saskatchewan while he is on break from attending medical school in Toronto. On the Cameron family farm he meets Helen with whom he develops a romantic relationship and a correspondence. The second half of *Black Hawk* is fascinating for its portrayal of whiteness and the white gaze. Ahenakew’s characterization of Helen is remarkable in its intimate knowing of settler perceptions of Indigenous people at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, even as Ahenakew also falls into stereotypical notions of gender in his writing of a romance between Cree Black Hawk and white Helen. We meet Helen in the family home and soon there is a discussion of Black Hawk, who has quickly left the family without saying goodbye, and without collecting his wages, as he heads to the train to return to school. Helen says to her sister and brother-in-law, “I think he acted like an Indian, that’s all, but what else could we expect. Why could he not be like ordinary human beings instead of making a dramatic departure without even saying a word about—well, his wages for instance. I never want to see an Indian again!”<sup>95</sup> It becomes clear in the following pages that Helen’s outburst at Black Hawk’s quick departure belies her feelings for him; she slowly begins to confide in her sister Alice, but not without an attempt at feigning disinterest, and even contempt, for Black Hawk. Alice says, “Isn’t it a pity he is only an Indian?... I was imagining what he would look like if he were dressed in a civilized way. I do not think I’d like him,” to which Helen responds, “Ugh... I do not like Indian things. Long hair, I cannot see why they need to dress in such a manner.”<sup>96</sup>

Helen next sees Black Hawk in Saskatoon, where he gives two sermons at St. John’s Church. Black Hawk draws a large crowd of settlers, and the audience is enraptured by both the content and the poise of Black Hawk’s speech and person. His first sermon touches on many themes, but lingers for some paragraphs on the economic

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 42.

ascension of Indigenous people in Canada. In a predictable articulation of the dominant Canadian social and political perceptions of Indigenous people at the time, Black Hawk portrays his people as in need of civilizing, and as appropriate receivers of Euro-Canadian culture. He addresses the crowd:

‘Think you tis easy for a nation to be taken from the first century civilization and landed bodily into the twentieth? Julius Caesar saw a noble nation in Britain 55 B.C. who were advanced beyond the stage at which the Indians were when the white man reached this land. Two thousand years have passed and given the final product of today, the English gentleman. A noble people took two thousand years to reach this stage. Why blame the Indian if he stands bewildered at the sudden revolution of our environment.’<sup>97</sup>

Black Hawk’s strong assimilative rhetoric in this part of his sermon is, in a way, hard to reconcile with Ahenakew’s own articulations presented earlier in this chapter from his personal papers. On the one hand, Ahenakew wrote fervently against the colonial domination of his people, and yet here in *Black Hawk*, his main character succumbs to the notions of civilizing and progress that dominated settler ideas of Indigenous peoples a century ago. Yet, expecting Ahenakew to present consistent sovereigntist and anti-colonial perspectives is out of step with the actual historical conditions of his life. In many ways, Ahenakew was alive during a very difficult period of history for Indigenous people in Canada; on the Prairies, specifically, not only did the railway facilitate the rapid settlement of Indigenous land and therein lend to the violent conversion of Cree communities to farming and participation in the capitalist market, but the role of the Church in establishing and enforcing strong expectations for Indigenous communities’ conversion and imitation of European social norms must be recognized as a highly forceful influence. The complicated ideologies woven through *Black Hawk* reflect the actual lived experience of Ahenakew, a man who, as we have seen, wrote unashamedly strong critiques of colonialism in unpublished reflections, and yet also presented, through his fiction, the forces of assimilation that so strongly affected the communities he served as a preacher.

Towards the end of Black Hawk’s sermon, he gives an account of progress that can be read in terms of capitalist development. He says to the gathered parishioners:

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 63-64.



‘Out of the present chaos will come a shaping into concrete form of the forces which will make of my people a better and self supporting people. The day is coming when the progress which today but halts will be steadier and speedier. That day is coming, it must come, it must come. I have unbounded faith in the future, I will work and struggle and will never rest in the nation’s Cause. In the meantime I can see away [sic] ahead. I view a nation that has passed the mire and bog of life’s road, for them the Dawn has come. They begin to distinguish the objects which in the darkness looked alarming, a new light comes into their eye, a definiteness in their movements, a purpose in their aspect. They arise up to their feet, a challenge is in their lips and they go on and on ever increasing from strength to strength till [sic] *they reach that stage where they take their rightful place in the Country’s economy*, as citizens of this great country in which despite this thing or that, God does lies as a foundation and guide to all its legislation.’<sup>98</sup>

Aside from the heavy rhetoric of assimilation and progress in this passage, the italicized phrase stands out as a clear reference to the “necessity” of Cree communities, and Indigenous people at large in Canada, adapting to and participating in the capitalist market. The clarity of capitalist ideology, wrapped within notions of progress and civilization, is undeniable. These are the terms that Ahenakew’s life and fiction grapple with, and from our vantage point in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is perhaps hard to imagine just how difficult mounting a resistance to Euro-Canadian culture and economic practices must have been a century ago. Yet, in an unexpected way, Ahenakew does write in a form of resistance that his character Black Hawk takes towards the end of the novel. This resistance is not an explicit rejection of capitalism or Canadian settler colonialism; such provocative political declarations and commitments were all but impossible, I would suggest, at this period of time, especially considering the harsh suppression of the First and Second Riel Resistances. Instead, Ahenakew locates Black Hawk’s choice to resist full assimilation within his romantic relationship with Helen, and his decision to pursue a life committed to working with and supporting Cree communities, rather than marrying Helen and building a life that would have necessarily meant the severing, to a large extent, of Black Hawk’s relations with Cree communities – relations he actualizes by successfully pursuing a career as a doctor.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 66. Italics mine.

<sup>99</sup> It is notable here that Ahenakew’s creation of a Cree character who can successfully become a doctor indicates perhaps a wistfulness that his own pursuit of medicine might have turned out differently, since

After Black Hawk's sermon, Helen and her sister Alice reunite with Black Hawk, who they haven't seen since he worked on their family's farm outside of Saskatoon. They greet each other pleasantly. Black Hawk's subtle forwardness in addressing Helen is striking, revealing Ahenakew's penchant for romance. Black Hawk says, "'I've often thought the scenery around your home would be beautiful in summer time. I never go into ecstasies over beautiful things but somehow I always manage to – gravitate towards them.' His dark eyes rested on her face and Helen felt herself blush."<sup>100</sup> The two take a walk together through the city and catch up on their time apart. As they take their leave of each other's company, Black Hawk asks Helen, "'Will you let me write to you? We will not go beyond a certain point."<sup>101</sup> Helen consents, demurely suggesting he "'can write once in a while."<sup>102</sup> Black Hawk's parting words to Helen follow:

'Let it end then as it has begun—there is now the full moon—some day I will arrive to see you. When another moon is full, when another night is soft and warm, when the summer sounds can be heard. Goodbye, Helen. Sixty years ago my grandfather on a fleet footed horse rode madly by a Blackfoot camp, snatched at a beautiful maiden and fled for hundreds of miles with her. The maiden was my grandmother. Things have changed since then. Goodbye.'<sup>103</sup>

After this meeting, Black Hawk and Helen strike up a correspondence, writing letters to each other while Black Hawk is finishing his fourth year of medical school. It is some time later that Helen, arriving in Winnipeg to attend nursing school with the blessing of her parents, meets Black Hawk in the concluding scene of the novel. The two meet happenstance on a bridge over the Assiniboine River in the moonlight, a fittingly romantic setting. Black Hawk is in Winnipeg for a week, on his way to Toronto. The two agree to spend time together while they can, and Helen proclaims, "...we must make it useful and not thinking of love-making. Lets [sic] make it so that it will be something

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Ahenakew had to drop out of medical school due to illness and poverty. In addition, Black Hawk's ability to pursue medicine, with relative ease, is – considering the hardships that Ahenakew himself faced attending medical school – more or less a fantasy. It may also point to Ahenakew's desire to present to settler readers an image of Indigenous people as capable of succeeding according to Canadian norms and within Canadian society, an experience of success that Indigenous people were all but completely barred from during Ahenakew's own life.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

worth looking back to.”<sup>104</sup> It is in this setting that Black Hawk utters the words that are included in the epigraph to this chapter, before he begins to tell Helen of the social and political conditions that his people are thrust into. Helen’s questions to Black Hawk reveal her ignorance – which stands in for the ignorance of settlers more generally – at the conditions of Indigenous peoples in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The novel ends with a scene in which Helen asks Black Hawk about “his country” to which he replies – and the novel concludes on these lines:

‘...Oh it’s beautiful. You should see the moon rise across the lake over the church and see its silver glimmer on the calm water. We sit around a camp fire at night, my father and mother, and the rest. I am again an Indian boy, as I used to be, carefree and home loving and I love it.’<sup>105</sup>

While Ahenakew leaves the future of Helen and Black Hawk’s relationship vague at the end of *Black Hawk*, it is implicit, in this final scene during which Black Hawk takes an almost didactic tone, educating naïve Helen about the situation that he and all Indigenous people in Canada face, that Black Hawk has chosen to serve his people, forgoing the love affair and its future possibilities. As Black Hawk says, “You may as well know it now as later. I said I belonged to my race and that was a solemn truth. I am theirs. I am not my own. All that is mine must ever be ready for the service in the Cause of my people.”<sup>106</sup> Black Hawk’s route of resistance to assimilation is expressed in the novel as a foregoing of romantic love, a situation that may point towards Ahenakew’s own life experiences, since he never married. The unrequited romance between Helen and Black Hawk also contains within it implicit themes about the prejudices surrounding miscegenation and the social ostracism and hardships the couple would have faced if they had united. Black Hawk chooses to “unite” with his people in a role of service over a unity with Helen, a decision that carries with it expression of an Indigenous sovereigntist politics that is contextualized within the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 95.

## Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to present to the reader the compelling insights of Cree author Edward Ahenakew through a close reading of his novel *Black Hawk*. Specifically, this chapter has focused on capitalist social and economic relations as they are portrayed in *Black Hawk*, and has attempted to place the author, the novel, and these economic relations within a historical context that provides a framework for understanding why and how characters speak the way that they do and events unfold the way that they do in *Black Hawk*. It is my hope that the work in this chapter provides an example of how we as Indigenous critics and theorists can use our Indigenous knowledges in articulating an anti-colonial anti-capitalist politics. It is also my hope that the framework provided in the previous pages may shed light on contemporary politics within Indigenous communities and nations. For it is, I hold, not enough to simply understand Indigenous bodies as located within settler colonialism; we are also cast into capitalism, most commonly as workers. We have not gone easily however, and we resist. As Mel Watkins writes,

no theme is so compelling as the process by which land-bound people – typically agrarian but sometimes nomadic – are turned, against their will, into industrial workers. In general, it has not been a voluntary process, the mere offering of another option as the applicants like to phrase it. Rather, the tendency has been for people to be pushed off the land or to have others sell it from beneath their feet. To turn land-bound people into landless wage-earners has typically involved coercion.<sup>107</sup>

Indeed, we have not gone easily into capitalism and we continue to resist both the forces of capitalist relations and the forces of settler colonialism. In our contemporary context, the ongoing destruction of Indigenous lands for natural resource projects harkens back to the dispossession and development of Indigenous lands for wheat farming in the 1800s. And, it should be noted, the rhetoric employed to justify the dispossession of us from our lands has not changed very much. According to Watkins:

The most persistent argument used by developers, private and public, is that large-scale resource projects serve the ‘public interest.’ If the residents of the region where the project is to take place object, in the final analysis they

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<sup>107</sup> Mel Watkins, “The Dene Nations: From Underdevelopment to Development” (1977). *Staples and Beyond: Selected Writings of Mel Watkins*, Montreal: Montreal-Queen’s University Press, 2006. 56.

are put down by appeal to the public interest. This is justified by saying that the ‘national interest’ must override the ‘regional interest,’ with the reality for contemporary large-scale energy resource projects being that the relevant regional interest is the ‘aboriginal [sic] interest.’ The aboriginal interest – which is real – is then disposed of either by saying, in effect, that it must, regrettably, be overridden, or by asserting that in some long-run sense the two interests are really identical. Yet, virtually without exception, the massive energy projects underway or planned for Northern Canada serve outside needs – and by that I mean needs external to Canada. So the choice is not, in fact, simply between the national interest and the regional aboriginal interest. Typically, in this century, there is the overriding American, or continental, interest, and it cannot be simply assumed that what serves the American interest automatically serves the national interest.<sup>108</sup>

As Watkins points towards, economic relations with the United States, Europe, and increasingly East Asia are consistently prioritized over economic relations between Canada and Indigenous nations. This is not surprising, of course, given the foundation of the Canadian state in a bedrock of settler colonialism. But for all the too-common and racist claims that Indigenous nations mismanage government funds or are not capable of participating in the market in “responsible” (read: profitable) ways, some nations – likely to their long-term detriment – find entries into capitalism and form profitable business ventures. Other nations hold pockets of Indigenous sovereigntists and traditionalists who are committed to revitalizing Indigenous cultural and economic practices that are thoroughly outside of capitalism. It is to these noncapitalist cultural and economic practices that the following chapter turns towards.

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid, 67-68.

## **interlude: mirror**

Once I started identifying as Diné and Yurok, I began what I didn't fully realize was a very deep reorganization and reconceptualization of self. In some ways, I felt like I was completely ungrounded, thrown into a blustery wind. The reality was I was re-grounding, reorienting my points of reference and ways of understanding the world and my own position within it. This was a confusing, straining, joyful, painful, incredible process. Though I will never be able to say I've "gotten it" in the sense that I've mastered or otherwise found stable ground in my sense of identity, I have learned how to position myself in ways that feel truthful, accurate, responsible, and accountable. The introduction, interludes, and conclusion to this dissertation have been places where I can articulate the culmination of this process up until this point. Of course, as I've already said, it will never be over; however, a certain leveling has occurred and for that I am grateful, relieved, and also heartened. Living through this process, and quite literally living to tell about it, indicates to me that for all others who may identify with aspects of my story and who may be on their own journeys of self and community discovery, there is indeed hope for doing this hard work in a good way.

One of the intellectual pieces I wrestled with during this time of re-grounding was figuring out for myself what Indigenous knowledges really are. There was a period during my transition, during the time that I was gaining confidence in my identity as an Indigenous woman, when I was confused about the boundaries between Indigenous knowledges and colonial influence. I don't think I ever fully articulated the problem to myself or anyone else, and yet, since then, I have had conversations with settlers who trusted me enough to expose their own thoughts along these lines, and to ask vulnerable questions that I could myself relate to, as I had asked these questions, differently, as well. What I am referring to can be seen from one perspective as a problem of voice and audience. While I was immersing myself in Indigenous histories written in Canada and the U.S., I began to realize that some of these histories were written to, and seemingly for, settler audiences. Some of these histories were about debunking myths and stereotypes, setting the colonial record straight, revising colonial histories of pioneer discoveries of the West, making clear the land stewardship that Indigenous peoples have

practiced in North America since time immemorial. These are very important and valuable histories to tell; it is necessary work. However, writing towards the colonizer twists the meaning and cultural origins of knowledge and perspectives. Writing towards the colonizer affects the weight, precision, tone, and voice that we use to tell stories. This kind of writing cannot stand in for writing towards ourselves and our own communities.

While I initially found many of these histories to be groundbreaking and crucial work, I also had a sneaking unease building within me. Like other aspects of my re-grounding that I've referred to in these pages, it was a relatively long time before I could articulate what I felt to be at odds. I felt troubled by the ways that some Indigenous authors, not in any way of their own choosing, seemed to be forced to assume a settler audience and seemed obliged to speak to dominant narratives in order to show their falsities. The problem with this is that, to an extent, speaking to a certain narrative, even to say that it is wrong, lends validity to it by simply acknowledging its existence, by giving it power over us, by saying that we must prove this false because if we don't, it will hold sway. There is a way that directing our energies towards the myths of settler colonialism – whether they are cultural myths or national histories of origin – validates the very things we are trying to negate. Those who deny the presence of colonialism in the U.S., for instance, know this dynamic well; the near-total silence around colonialism in the States makes it that much harder to actually speak about. Not acknowledging the presence of Indigenous peoples in the United States affords an ease with which U.S. settlers and U.S. history can continue to occlude Indigenous histories. They don't have to argue with us, if they don't even acknowledge our existence. It's a very useful tactic, silence.

So this problem of who we are speaking to, what we are speaking about, and how we are saying it began to trouble me very much. I devoured histories by Indigenous authors and by strong allies regardless of this dynamic because I needed help in whatever way I could find it to undo my internal colonization of self. Initially, these kinds of texts supported me in this work. But I fairly quickly became unsatisfied, and began to sense the question that I have heard from humble settlers who are willing to express themselves vulnerably to me; the question goes, in sum, how much of Indigenous articulations, and particularly Indigenous writing in English, is just a talking-back-to-the colonizer rather

than an assertion of something wholly different, something truly Indigenous? Now, when I hear this question or any of its variations, I treat it respectfully and with care, because I recognize my own stumbling on this point during my re-grounding.

Of course, Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States who have been raised with access to their cultures will not find this an issue to stumble over at all. Perhaps they would even chuckle at the confusion that such a pondering caused me. It is precisely because I didn't have access to my cultures that this question was one that became, for a while, central to my intellectual concentration. If I had access to my cultures, I would know intimately the knowledges that *are* present within our communities, that aren't reliant on the presence of the colonizer to make meaning. It would likely be laughable to less dispossessed Indigenous people to think it possible that our knowledges were bound and defined by settler presence – logically I could see this couldn't be the case, but my internally colonized self offered up a number of reasons why it *could* be the case. I thought, if Indigenous authors are writing in English, and especially if we don't speak our own languages, isn't our perspective tainted by the colonizer's language? If colonialism has wrecked our communities so extensively, how could we assert that our Indigenous knowledges still have any coherence, any semblance to the way these knowledges were before the violent interruption of colonialism? If our political and cultural practices were banned for so many years and if we were the subjects of genocide, how could our articulations be anything but a broken reflection of a past that is barely remembered?

These questions daunted me, and haunted me. They were able to take hold because I was so focused on reading histories, and so many of these were authored under certain pressures to rewrite colonial Canadian and American histories, to intervene in these histories. But I wanted Indigenous histories, I desperately wanted histories that reflected the positive aspects of my Indigeneity, the complex aspects, the human aspects.

This is when the importance of Indigenous stories began to dawn on me. I finally made the connection between story and history; I connected the fact that Indigenous peoples in Canada and the U.S. told cultural, political, social histories through stories, and that these stories could absolutely live on even under the brutal conditions of



colonialism. All it took was retelling them from one generation to the next. At this point, I turned towards Indigenous literatures written in English as my next source of knowledge and understanding.

What I was seeking has epistemological and ontological significance. Though, as I've written, I always knew I was Native American, it did not feel possible to identify myself as Diné and Yurok for the first two and a half decades of my life. I think that if I had grown up in Canada, this would have been different and I would have started identifying publicly at a much younger age. Identity is a tricky thing, so important to an estimable sense of self, and yet so bound by the reflections we receive from others in their recognition of us. Growing up in the U.S., with no role model of positive Indigeneity and no exposure to Indigenous peoples, I had no reflection of this part of myself and no way to construct a unique, internal variation of Indigeneity built on community and cultural knowledge and practices. When I did attempt to assert myself as Native American (this was most often as far as I got, not even able to speak the names of my nations, before a settler would interrupt with an oppressive racist comment), I was rebuffed by whoever I was speaking to. The most common responses I received were: Indians don't exist; you mean you're Hispanic; and no way, you're white. While I think that this kind of blunt racism absolutely exists in Canada, especially outside of urban centres and perhaps more commonly in the Prairies or in the east, it didn't matter where I lived in the U.S. – these were always the statements I heard. We moved to western Washington state when I was nine, and I lived there until I completed high school, and then attended an alternative liberal arts in-state college for my undergraduate degree. Western Washington is known as being a “progressive” region, and people refer to it as being one of, perhaps the most, racially conscious areas in the United States. My experience, and my siblings' experiences, is instead that racism takes a quieter form, but it is still just as prevalent as other regions in the U.S. And even though I went to a liberal arts college that had a Native American studies program as well as a longhouse on campus, I still didn't begin to identify when I attended this school. Even though it was an alternative college where one of the most popular and longest running programs was called “Alternatives and Resistance to Global Capitalism,” and it was the school that Rachel Corrie attended during the time she traveled to Palestine and was murdered by the

Israeli occupation, and it boasted a strong, vibrant activist community that bled off-campus and created an exciting, challenging, and meaningful town to live in, I still received the denial of my Indigeneity here too, when I tried to assert it. Politics on that campus have changed, I can tell from afar, with the hiring of more Indigenous faculty and the presence of excellent programs centred on Indigenous women's writing, decolonization, Indigenous histories of North America, and Indigenous food sovereignty practices. I think that in the last decade, a major shift has been occurring in both the U.S. and Canada in institutions of higher education. Though this shift is uneven and full of pitfalls, it is happening, and rather quickly. This is good news.

But I attended that college about fifteen years too early; had I gone later I feel confident I would have been exposed to positive images of Nativeness and critical perspectives that would have affirmed me and helped to dispel my shame. Instead, I am part of the generation that is, because of the significant and difficult work of our previous generation of Indigenous academics and intellectuals, breaking into the academy and insisting on our voices being heard. As such, my generation of Indigenous intellectuals remembers the time when the word decolonization was never, ever spoken in a Canadian or American context, and we are the generation who is inserting that word into more mainstream fields, like the academy.

So, to return to the importance of stories, I realize in hindsight that what I came to seek – Indigenous reflections and tellings of *our own knowledge* – was crucially important, to both my construction of self and also to my ability to shift the way I perceived and acted in the world. Without Indigenous stories, I do not think I would have been able to fill the void left within me, as I began to disidentify with dominant narratives of whiteness, as I began to seriously reject these narratives not just on an intellectual level, but a profoundly personal one as well. Once the excavation work began – excavating the damage that settler colonialism had wreaked on my psychological and spiritual self – I desperately needed something to take its place. It was hard enough to confront my shame and look it in the eye. It was hard enough to begin to pull it apart, loosen its grasp on my consciousness, allow myself to stretch and breathe. Once this work gained a momentum of its own, it was crucial that I be able to turn towards Indigenous identifications and forms of social recognition that weren't constructed in any

way by, through, or against settler colonialism. I found these articulations first through Indigenous literatures written in English, and this dissertation is the outcome of my engagement both with this literature and also with this process of excavation of self.

I want to linger on this point of needing Indigenous identifications and forms of social recognition. I had been taught in my graduate studies to be very suspicious of recognition as a political and social form of value creation. I had been taught that recognition is always, in the end, a site of violent misrecognition. But this assertion never sat well with me. I knew the necessity of recognition from others in order to construct a healthy and irrepressible sense of self. I knew this because I had experience, my whole life, of a lack of recognition and its painful effects. I also knew, through Frantz Fanon's work, that recognition from the colonizer is not the only way to find it. In my studies of Indigenous literatures, I was looking for a mirror, a reflection, someone to talk back to me and affirm aspects of myself that no one previously in my life had ever acknowledged the presence of. I knew that I must find recognition, and that it was actually a psychological and spiritual necessity for my healing.

In graduate school, I read the now rather famous (in some circles) article by Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada."<sup>109</sup> Then a couple years later, once it was published, I read his now definitely famous (in some circles) book *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*.<sup>110</sup> Coulthard's work has been significant to my own intellectual development, as is also spoken to in chapter two through my reference to *Red Skins White Masks* in framing the basis for my argument. I have no disagreement with the thesis of Coulthard's work; I find it very compelling and an articulation of something I had sensed but hadn't been able to put words to. These kind of texts, that say what we feel but haven't put into words, are often some of the most valuable because they help to reflect and express a sort of collective consciousness that is beginning to brim over into collective knowing and understanding. Raymond Williams, the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist

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<sup>109</sup> Glen Coulthard, "Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada." *Contemporary Political Theory*. 6:4 (2007): 437-460.

<sup>110</sup> Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2014.

cultural theorist, who I also write about and rely on in chapter two, might call this “structures of feeling,” and might refer to that kind of unspoken collective consciousness ready to brim over as an “emergent” form or knowing.

Yet, Coulthard’s work also left me in search for something else. I accepted his articulation of the problems with the colonial politics of recognition. What I wanted, in turn, was an Indigenous articulation of Indigenous forms of recognition that are not bound to commit the same ontological problems inherent in Hegel’s dialectic. I wanted something to fill the void.

This something I found in George Clutesi’s text *Potlatch*. In *Potlatch* I found a very subtle, yet consistent, gesturing to a Nuu-chah-nulth politics of recognition that affirmed community membership and did not, in that affirmation, suppress the individual’s ability to express their difference within community. In a sense, I found something to fill my void; I found an example of Indigenous ways of knowing and being that are not dependent on the structures of settler colonialism for their meaning, and also a form of recognition that honours difference through a principle of inclusion that does not require oppression. It is to this discussion of Nuu-chah-nulth recognition that chapter two turns towards.

## Chapter 2.

### Tloo-qwah-nah “structures of feeling:” Reading George Clutesi’s *Potlatch* for Nuu-cha-nulth politics of recognition and redistribution

*This narrative is not meant to be documentary. In fact it is meant to evade documents. It is meant for the reader to feel and to say I was there and indeed I saw. – epigraph, Potlatch*<sup>111</sup>

#### Introduction

In *Red Skin White Masks* (2014), Dene theorist Glen Coulthard analyzes the politics of recognition that characterize a deeply uneven relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. Coulthard details the ways in which colonial state policy has shifted from a politics of assimilation to a politics of recognition. In Coulthard’s perspective, cultural recognition has the potential to minimize, and even eliminate, Indigenous difference tied to relationships to the land through the consumption of Indigenous cultural production in the place of returning territory to Indigenous nations. Coulthard dates the “consolidat[ion]” of a liberal politics of recognition to the years following the “demise of the White Paper,” a period of time that the following chapter considers more closely.<sup>112</sup> Coulthard’s analysis provides crucial insight into understanding contemporary Indigenous politics. Yet, this paper argues for an additional understanding of the term “recognition” that is not produced out of the uneven relationships between Indigenous nations and the colonial state, one that is more in line with the “self-affirmative” praxis that *Red Skin White Masks* calls for.<sup>113</sup> The following pages argue for a politics of recognition derived from specific Indigenous cultural ways and practices of redistribution that has potentially transformative implications. To do this,

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<sup>111</sup> George Clutesi, *Potlatch*. Sidney: Superior Pub Co, 1969. N.p.

<sup>112</sup> Coulthard, *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014. 23.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

I provide a political reading of George Clutesi's 1969 text *Potlatch*. *Potlatch* is a fictionalized telling of Tloo-qwah-nah, or potlatch ceremony, one of the foundational structures of Nuu-chah-nulth social organization and redistribution of wealth, honour, responsibility, and provisions of social welfare. I suggest that a text like *Potlatch* is significant to culturally and geographically diverse readers for its traces of Nuu-chah-nulth noncapitalist social organization. *Potlatch* shows other methods of redistribution and recognition than those that are currently dominant in North America, and not based in the exploitations of capitalism – that is, practices that see nonhuman beings as intrinsic members of economic and social community. This chapter also contextualizes *Potlatch* as a text that was published just years before the first major legal and political events ushered in the politics of recognition. I date the establishment of a politics of recognition to the Constitution Express, led by the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, and the subsequent inclusion of Aboriginal Rights in Canada's "Charter of Rights" document in 1980, events I discuss in more detail in chapter three.<sup>114</sup> Given the era of the text's publication, *Potlatch*'s Nuu-chah-nulth mode of recognition holds additional insight for contemporary readers, since it provides a contrast to the dominant politics that guide relationships between Indigenous nations and the Canadian and U.S. states. Finally, drawing from concepts introduced by Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams, I argue that *Potlatch* stages Nuu-chah-nulth modes of recognition and redistribution in an "emergent" context that produces Nuu-chah-nulth "structures of feeling," providing glimpses of cultural practices that refuse consumption by the uninitiated, allowing the text to retain its integrity more than forty years after it was published.

My understanding of Nuu-chah-nulth worldviews draws from Clutesi's writing and E. Richard Atleo's two books, *Tsawalk* (2004) and *Principles of Tsawalk* (2011), as well as Chief Earl Maquinna George's autobiography *Living on the Edge: Nuu-Chah-*

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<sup>114</sup> Glen Coulthard dates the emergence of a politics of recognition to a span of time including the following three pivotal events: organizing against the White Paper by Red Power activists; the 1973 *Calder* decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, which, in ruling against a Nisga'a land claim, ultimately recognized Aboriginal title; and the rapid development of oil, mineral, and natural gas resources following the 1970s oil crisis (*Red Skin White Masks* 4-6). I am persuaded by Coulthard's contextualization of the emergence of a politics of recognition; yet, for my purposes, I see the Constitution Express and the subsequent recognition of Aboriginal Rights in the "Charter of Rights" as legally solidifying the recognition politics that these previous events pointed towards.

*Nulth History from an Ahousaht Chief's Perspective* (2003). For an outsider to Nuu-chah-nulth culture like myself, I enter Clutesi's work with the ears and eyes of an Indigenous person – as a Yurok and Diné person – schooled in Western theories and practices of reading, so it is with care that I hold Earl George and Atleo's perspectives alongside *Potlatch*. These texts provide pathways to some of the storytelling shared in *Potlatch*, and locate their own perspectives in living community relationships; that is, *Living on the Edge*, *Tsawalk*, and *Principles* do not claim to be definitive interpretations or experiences of Nuu-chah-nulth life, much in the way that *Potlatch* never gestures to standing as definitive record of Tloo-qwah-nah practices. Instead, these authors share the conviction of the wholeness of life, and of the importance of the interrelationships between all parts of the world, whether sensually perceived by humans or not. Atleo explains in *Tsawalk* that the theory of Tsawalk, or *heshook-ish Tsawalk*, meaning everything is one, is “the basis for the development of an indigenous [sic] theory.”<sup>115</sup> This theory develops from Nuu-chah-nulth origin stories that Atleo shares versions of, citing the particular telling of the stories from the family houses where he heard them. For instance, most of the stories shared in *Tsawalk* come from Atleo's grandmother, Margaret Atleo's House, from the year 1972.<sup>116</sup> Tracing the life of a story is as important as the story itself, since different families hold different story variations. In the theory of Tsawalk, these differences are held within a vision of the wholeness of life, neither reifying nor diminishing the variations of storytellings.

Even though Clutesi was raised in an earlier generation than E. Richard Atleo, he heard versions of these same stories. Born in 1905 and passed in 1988, Clutesi was a Tseshaht First Nation community member, part of fourteen Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations along the west coast of Vancouver Island, Canada and the northwest tip of Washington state. Clutesi contributed multiple kinds of creative production during his lifetime, including his texts, *Potlatch*, *Son of Raven*, *Son of Deer*, and *Stand Tall, My Son*. He was most well known as a visual artist, and, later in life, as a minor actor in Hollywood films. Clutesi gained some mainstream visibility from the late 1960s to the 1980s, when he

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<sup>115</sup> E. Richard Atleo, *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004. xi.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

painted the Indian Pavilion for Expo 67 in Montreal, for example, with brushes that Emily Carr had gifted to Clutesi before her passing.<sup>117</sup> He was also a returning guest on CBC radio programs from 1947 onward, “sharing traditional Nuu-chah-nulth stories,” as Shayne Morrow notes in a 2012 article for the publication *Ha-Shilth-Sa*.<sup>118</sup> Just two years after beginning to appear on CBC radio, Clutesi gave testimony to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences, during which he successfully argued for the right to teach Tseshaht cultural practices and dances in his position as janitor and unofficial teacher at Alberni Indian Residential School. Clutesi was devoted to education, and did not come out fully against residential schools, petitioning instead for “more day schools,” according to Morrow, and access to better and more advanced English language classes. So it is fitting that his first book *Son of Raven, Son of Deer: Fables of the Tse-shaht People*, publishing in 1967, was subsequently incorporated into British Columbia’s public school curriculum.<sup>119</sup> Jo-Ann Archibald writes in *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit* that Clutesi was one of “the first Aboriginal people in British Columbia to publish stories from culture,”<sup>120</sup> while Alan Velie and Robert Lee’s *The Native American Renaissance: Literary Imagination and Achievement* considers *Son of Raven, Son of Deer* as the first book by an Indigenous person in Canada or the United States that is a book of their own cultural stories.<sup>121</sup> Velie and Lee note that there are precedents like George Copway and E. Pauline Johnson, but credit Clutesi as having greater authorial control over his text. Clutesi even obtained an honorary doctorate in Law from the University of Victoria in 1971, and was anointed to the Order of Canada in 1973, both honours received for his lifelong contributions to cultural revitalization. However, he didn’t receive the economic benefits that we might assume accompany these forms of mainstream reception; for example, at the time that he

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<sup>117</sup> “Carr brushes go east,” Vancouver Province, January 4, 1967. N.p.

<sup>118</sup> Shayne Morrow, “George Clutesi Royal Commission Testimony Rediscovered.” *Ha-Shilth-Sa Newspaper*. 15 Mar 2012. Web. 14 Feb 2016.

<sup>119</sup> See Gail Edwards and Judith Saltman, *Picturing Canada: A History of Canadian Children's Illustrated Books and Publishing*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010.

<sup>120</sup> Jo-Ann Archibald, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body and Spirit*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2008. 20.

<sup>121</sup> Alan Velie and Robert Lee. *The Native American Renaissance: Literary Imagination and Achievement*. Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013.



painted the mural for Expo 67, he was still working as a janitor at the Port Alberni Residential School, which he also attended as a child.<sup>122</sup> And, although his role in the development of Indigenous cultural resurgence is beginning to gain attention in arts communities,<sup>123</sup> his three literary texts, including *Stand Tall, My Son*, published posthumously in 1990, have not been taken up in scholarly ways since his passing, an absence of critical attention that the following consideration of his literary work might begin to remedy.<sup>124</sup>

Clutesi wrote *Potlatch* from his childhood memories of attending a potlatch during the 1920s.<sup>125</sup> Although the potlatch was banned, under the Indian Act, from 1884 to 1951, communities still practiced the ceremonies underground, and, in doing so, faced the risk of persecution and arrest.<sup>126</sup> The introduction to *Potlatch*, written in the third person, reads, “Indeed his own kin was arrested for having staged such a Tloo-qwah-nah. It is then with trepidations that this ‘eye-witness’ account is given and it is because of this lingering fear that actual names have been omitted.”<sup>127</sup> Clutesi hedges his telling of potlatch ceremonies with this statement since the potlatch ban was still in effect at the time he attended the ceremony and communities faced severe harassment and legal

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<sup>122</sup> From United Church website: “Dates of operation: 1892–1899 (Alberni Girls’ Home); 1900–1966 (Alberni IRS); 1967–1973 (Alberni Indian Student Residence); Managed by the Women’s Foreign Mission Society of the Presbyterian Church and, from 1925 to 1969, by the United Church of Canada. It was then taken over and run by the Department of Indian Affairs.; Location: On the west bank of the Somass River, Vancouver Island, British Columbia, just south of the Tseshah reserve Tsahaheh 1 and about 4 kilometres north of Port Alberni.” “The Children Remembered: Residential School Archive Project.” *The United Church of Canada*. Web. 14 Feb 2016.

<sup>123</sup> See Marcia Crosby, “Making Indian Art ‘Modern’.” *Ruins in Progress: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery and Grunt Gallery. Web. 14 Feb 2016; Sarah De Leeuw, “Artful Places: Creativity and Colonialism in British Columbia’s Indian Residential Schools.” PhD Dissertation. Queen’s University, 2007; Ronald W. Hawker, *Tales of Ghosts: First Nations Arts in British Columbia, 1922-1961*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.

<sup>124</sup> The following article and book by Hartmut Lutz are two notable exceptions, though they do not focus specific on Clutesi and instead present the author and his work in the context of wider Indigenous cultural and literary production. See Hartmut Lutz, “Canadian Native Literature and the Sixties: A Historical and Bibliographical Survey.” *Canadian Literature* 152/153 (1997):167-191, and *Contemporary Achievements: Contextualizing Canadian Aboriginal Literatures*. Augsburg, Germany: Wißner-Verlag, 2015.

<sup>125</sup> E. Richard Atleo dates the potlatch George Clutesi attended to the 1920s in *Tsawalk: A Nuu-chah-nulth Worldview*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004. 79.

<sup>126</sup> See Christopher Bracken, *The Potlatch Papers: A Colonial Case History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

<sup>127</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 9.

penalty. *Potlatch* also relies formatively on conversations with his older sister Anne Hayes, to whom he dedicates the book and “without whose help and information this book would not have been.”<sup>128</sup> Thus, although *Potlatch* is a story told by Clutesi, it draws from stories shared by his sister and by her knowledge of Tseshaht cultural practices as a woman, and as an older sibling. In the oral knowledges that it translates to the written page, *Potlatch* produces the “structures of feeling,” defined further below, of Nuuchahnulth social organization and ceremonial practices that extend before the arrival of fur trappers, traders, and British colonists.

### **Locating *Potlatch* and Tloo-qwah-nah “structures of feeling”**

Nuuchahnulth culture includes fourteen First Nations along the west coast of what is now known as Vancouver Island, British Columbia. The language and cultural group also extends to the Makah Nation on the northern tip of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington state. George Clutesi was from Tseshaht, a southern Nuuchahnulth community. Altogether, Nuuchahnulth territory currently includes 300 kilometers of Vancouver Island’s coast, and 9,500 enrolled members as well as approximately 6,300 Nuuchahnulth people living off reserve.<sup>129</sup> Hereditary chief E. Richard Atleo explains that Nuuchahnulth means “people who dwell along the mountains” but came to be known as the Nootka from the British explorer Captain James Cook who landed at the village of Yaquot in the spring of 1778.<sup>130</sup> Atleo offers the following explanation:

According to oral history, the Mowachaht [one of the Nuuchahnulth Nations], who have lived in Nootka Sound for millennia, found Captain Cook apparently lost in a fog just outside of Friendly Cove. Since English was not yet a locally required language, they provided him the directions to safe harbor in the Nuuchahnulth language. The Nuuchahnulth phrase employed for the occasion, *nutkh-she-ee*, which sounds a little like ‘nootka’ when shouted from a distance over the sea, means ‘to turn around.’ As the phrase gives no indication of direction, one can imagine that it was

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, n.p.

<sup>129</sup> Information about Nuuchahnulth territory comes from the Tribal Council website: <http://www.nuuchahnulth.org/tribal-council/welcome.html> accessed 10 Feb 2016.

<sup>130</sup> Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 1.

accompanied by a chorus of arms waving in large circles to indicate the route.<sup>131</sup>

The oral history that Atleo shares is as amusing as it sounds accurate. The word “potlatch” also likely derives from Nuu-chah-nulth language, and indeed, potlatch ceremonies have played a significant role in West Coast colonization narratives.<sup>132</sup> The economic system is practiced throughout Coast Salish cultures around the west coast of British Columbia and northwest Washington, as far north as southern Alaska, and by some inland communities.<sup>133</sup> On the origin of the word “potlatch,” Clutesi writes in the introduction to his text:

Tloo-qwah-nah later came to be known as Potlatch by the early Europeans perhaps because the Nootka [Nuu-chah-nulth] verb Pa-chitle, to give, was often heard during these festivities so naturally the early settlers mistook that verb for the name of the feast. Pa-chitle is the verb. Pa-chuck is the noun and means articles to be given. Both words were used only when the articles were given in public such as at a feast.

Almost any person, including women, could give as many feasts as they wished but were not expected to stage more than one Tloo-qwah-nah.<sup>134</sup>

In this brief description of potlatch ceremonies, Clutesi undoes some of the ways that Europeans have misrecognized the potlatch, both in the origins of the name, and in commonly held assumptions that only men were able to stage these potlatch feasts.<sup>135</sup> Further, both Clutesi and Nuu-chah-nulth hereditary chief E. Richard Atleo share the importance of distinguishing between Tloo-qwah-nah and other feast ceremonies. Atleo observes that the English word potlatch “has become a general classification that refers to every ceremonial form of feasting” from “a memorial, a rite of passage, a celebration of life, a marriage, an adoption, or a transfer of a chieftainship seat”.<sup>136</sup> In his introduction, Clutesi also classifies feasts into four categories, based on who is invited: “He-nim-tsu...guests consisted of club members”; “Tlee-dtsoo...included members of the home

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Douglas Cole and Ira Chaikin, *An Iron Hand Upon the People: The Law Against the Potlatch on the Northwest Coast*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1990.

<sup>133</sup> James Skitt Matthews, *Conversations with Khahtsahlano, 1932-1954*. Vancouver: publisher not identified, 1955.

<sup>134</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 9-10.

<sup>135</sup> See Bracken’s *The Potlatch Papers*.

<sup>136</sup> Atleo, *Tsawalk*, 3.

tribe”; Hutch-yahk...the host journeyed to another tribe to give a feast”; “Tloo-qwah-nah...guests were invited from any number of tribes.”<sup>137</sup> A Tloo-qwah-nah feast, then, is a gathering of community members from multiple tribes or nations across a regional area. So while British explorers observed the “constant” feasting of Nuu-chah-nulth nations, and more widely, Coast Salish communities, the purposes of these feasts were deeply misunderstood and as a result amalgamated within the generalizing and inaccurate term “potlatch.”<sup>138</sup>

However, I also want to locate Nuu-chah-nulth people in ways that are not bound to colonial origin stories of arrival and misinterpretation. So much of *Potlatch* revolves around the telling of stories in various forms. This includes the actual writing of the text and Clutesi’s shift to verse for ceremonial songs, which themselves are often stories that relate cultural knowledge. In addition to *Potlatch*’s form, the content of the text is made up of numerous stories. The first few days of Tloo-qwah-nah are spent by hosts and guests alike introducing themselves by speaking to the strengths, humility, and generosity of each house leader. House leaders cannot introduce themselves, and so a house speaker has the duty and honour of detailing the many contributions that a house leader has made to their community. After these initial days of welcome, filled with long speeches that seem to exhaust the attention of both children and adults alike, hosts and guests participate in a series of plays, lifelike dramas, and fantastical storytellings that invite spiritual beings while also teaching youth about the expectations and bounds of their community. Overall, the story within *Potlatch* seems to rest on the origin stories that spell the epistemology of Nuu-chah-nulth worldview, that depend as much on what is told as how it is told. In the first pages of *Potlatch*, as Clutesi gives the only direct (and very brief) description of Tloo-qwah-nah, he prepares the reader for listening, as family gathers inside a bighouse, where,

...young girls watched and poked at the fires to marvel at the myriad of live sparkling stars that floated upwards on invisible surges of air currents to effuse through the smoke-hole at the ridge of the easy sloping plank roof. Sometimes a weak spark would falter in its upward flight, waver as if

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>138</sup> For a colonial account of these “constant” potlatch feasts, see John Rogers Jewitt, *White Slaves of the Nootka: The Adventures and Sufferings of John R Jewitt While a Captive of the Nootka Indians 1803-05*. New York: Heritage House, 1997.

undetermined where to go, only to find itself sucked onto the black roof planks to emit for a moment a surge of brilliance and become a part of the blackness.

‘Oh-mee, my mother, why do the beautiful stars not all escape?’ a small girl would ask.<sup>139</sup>

Clutesi’s text narrates through a poetic voice that emerges in sections like this one above. Through its poetics, the text avoids what Rey Chow terms “ethnographic entrapment,” by skirting readers’ desire for fact and confession and instead offering entry into a much more experiential than anthropological text.<sup>140</sup> Whereas a straightforward narrative detailing the exact events of Tloo-qwah-nah ceremonies might reveal more to the reader, Clutesi’s narrative instead resists consumption, performing what Audra Simpson calls “ethnographic refusal.”<sup>141</sup> Written for a diverse audience that may include Nuu-chah-nulth readers as well as non-Indigenous readers, *Potlatch* skirts both the “common sense” and the assimilative desires of mainstream Canada, refusing to confide itself to readers, and refusing to play the role of ethnographic informant for ceremonies that captured colonial fascination. In a sense, *Potlatch* achieves a feeling of cultural, social, and material Nuu-chah-nulth membership – or, in Audra Simpson’s terms again – a “feeling citizenship,” a term she arrives at in *Mohawk Interruptus* from reflections on conversations with Kahnawà:ke community members and their own negotiations of belongingness with many complicated relationships to both the colonial state and their nation in the present day. Simpson writes that “‘feeling citizenship’ or ‘primary citizenship’ [is] the affective sense of being a Mohawk of Kahnawà:ke, in spite of the lack of recognition that some might unjustly experience.”<sup>142</sup> Feeling citizenship is based on a form of recognition that counters the current liberal politics of recognition, one that texts like *Red Skins White Masks* also calls for politically in “an intellectual, social, political, and artistic movement geared toward [...] self-reflexive revitalization.”<sup>143</sup> This

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<sup>139</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 9-10.

<sup>140</sup> Rey Chow, *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002.

<sup>141</sup> See Audra Simpson’s article “Settlement’s Secret.” *Cultural Anthropology* 26:2 (2011): 205-217 as well as Simpson’s full-length book *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Border of Settler States*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.

<sup>142</sup> Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*, 173.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

is a praxis, and a feeling citizenship, that *Potlatch* anticipates, published as it is decades before Simpson and Coulthard's writing.

Indeed, given the context of the White Paper – presented by the first Trudeau government in 1969 – and the response of Red Power organizing at the time of *Potlatch*'s publication, Clutesi's text is situated between the calls for termination by the Trudeau government, on the one hand, and the militant uprising of Red Power activists, on the other. *Potlatch* was published just as Indian Policy was poised to take a considerable turn from an assimilationist agenda to the more seemingly benevolent, though deeply uneven, politics of recognition. Further, the politics of recognition that followed the defeat of the White Paper developed as a way to *contain* the vital force of Red Power activism. It was also a shift in assimilationist state policy that characterized Canadian Indian policy in the early and mid-twentieth century. *Potlatch*, however, lacks overt political content, arguably presenting a cultural practice such as Tloo-qwah-nah *as* politics, prefiguring the cultural turn that Red Power activism and organizing would take in the latter half of the 1970s and into the 1980s, a cultural turn that chapter three considers directly.

Another way of putting it is to consider *Potlatch*, and Clutesi's own historical position, as “emergent,” in Marxist cultural theorist Raymond Williams' terms. An emergent text, cultural practice, belief, and even mode of production differs fundamentally from the acceptable ways of doing things. Emergent practices challenge “common sense” and status quo methods of perceiving and ways of producing; they are, therefore, not just unique versions or variations of the socially acceptable but the precursor to wholly new forms. Emergent practices are also fleeting, not fully formed, feeble and vulnerable to outside threat or exhaustion. In Williams' terms, emergent practices are opposed to “dominant” and “residual” practices, beliefs, texts or other kinds of cultural production. The category of the dominant encompasses those beliefs, practices, or kinds of cultural production that are, in a specific place and time, acceptable, unquestioned, and perhaps even unnoticed as they are so thoroughly lived as “the way things are.” The category of the residual includes ways of being of a past era that continue to reside in partial form in the present. In the context of *Potlatch*'s writing, the dominant, or “common sense” of the time, was a brutal settler colonialism – evidenced, for example, by the publication of the White Paper the same year as the publication of

Clutesi's book. And within Indigenous politics in Canada in the 1940s and 1950s, there were strong elements of assimilationist desire among established Aboriginal organizations, who saw routes forward for Indigenous people through the shedding of language, culture, and noncapitalist economic and social practices and the adoption of mainstream ways of living.<sup>144</sup> From our contemporary perspective, in which the Canadian government has turned towards supporting Indigenous cultural production, while Indigenous peoples themselves have developed strong cultural resurgence politics, it is hard to remember that among common Indigenous politics at that time were strategies of cultural assimilation. Many of Clutesi's contemporaries were not supportive of his own artistic and cultural revitalization practices, considering them to be too overtly political, on the one hand, or overly divulging of traditional stories, on the other.<sup>145</sup> Clutesi embodies some of the contradictions and tensions between western British Columbia settler colonial society and an early politics of Indigenous resurgence or "survivance," as Gerald Vizenor calls it.<sup>146</sup>

Clutesi himself was a unique figure in his position between multiple sites of social value, considering that he received an amount of mainstream recognition, and yet, did not receive the economic wealth that often accompanies public recognition. Keeping in mind Raymond Williams' analytical categories of dominant and emergent, Clutesi's artistic career was also poised at an "emergent" moment in terms of Indian policy. As Canada moved towards a politics of recognition, ending some of the most aggressive assimilationist and genocidal policies,<sup>147</sup> the state funneled money towards arts, culture,

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<sup>144</sup> For a history of Indigenous organizing specific to British Columbia during this time period, see chapters seven through eleven of Paul Tennant's *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990.

<sup>145</sup> Marcia Crosby, "Making Indian Art 'Modern'." *Ruins in Progress: Vancouver Art in the Sixties*. Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery and Grunt Gallery. Web. 14 Feb 2016.

<sup>146</sup> See Gerald Vizenor two books *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990 and *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

<sup>147</sup> The most recent of these shifts away from assimilationist policy is the long-overdue closure of residential schools in 1996. In January 2016, this was echoed by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society vs Canada decision by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal decision, which acknowledges the conscious use of the foster care system as an extension of residential schools and the targeting of Indigenous youth who were otherwise safely housed for assimilationist purposes.

and education. Clutesi's commission as the Indian Pavilion muralist might symbolically mark the first steps of the Canadian government realizing the powerful benefits of supporting arts and cultural initiatives, inasmuch as they can diffuse political organizing, creating livable jobs and organizational structures for Indigenous people where previously there were none. Indeed, Clutesi himself was a strong proponent of cultural revitalization. Like Tommy Kelasket's conviction in *Slash*, shared in the following chapter, of the inherently transformative possibilities of cultural resurgence movements, Clutesi couldn't foresee the ways that cultural revitalization movements could be partially coopted by a Canadian state eager to assimilate Indigenous peoples into apolitical roles in middle class white culture. In this sense, Clutesi's public advocacy for Indigenous peoples was *both* a powerful force in moving cultural revitalization movements forward, as well as simultaneously being a catalyst for the politics of recognition that Canada would take up full force at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century. Clutesi was, in my reading, an emergent character in the historical shift of Indian policy, a complicated figure whose politics were fully of their time and place.

Yet, this is not to suggest an exceptional status to Clutesi as a person. While it has been tempting to look for clues in Clutesi's life for signs of exceptional circumstances, it is a mistake to individualize Clutesi's life. Rather than attempt to explain his uneven experiences, from working as a janitor to earning an honorary doctorate, for instance, as personal experiences and achievements, I argue that it is more historically accurate to consider Clutesi's life experience as an indication of Canada's shifting interest in Indigenous cultural production. Further, this chapter considers the aesthetic innovations of *Potlatch* – its particularly conscious negotiations of settler colonial gaze, its abstractness and refusal to confide ceremonial protocol at the same time that it holds a commitment to viscerally reaching the reader and communicating an intensely intimate experience of Nuu-chah-nulth culture – as presaging aspects of Indigenous cultural resurgence that followed in the 1970s. That is, I read *Potlatch* as an aesthetic anticipation of Red Power political organization. In its refusal to build an easy bridge between Nuu-chah-nulth and settler groups, while simultaneously written out of a desire to revitalize Nuu-chah-nulth culture for its Indigenous members and to express the complexity of



lifeways to ignorant mainstream society, *Potlatch* celebrates traditionalism and defends Tloo-qwah-nah society against racist settler common sense.

Considering Clutesi's artistic production as emergent in its historical place and time allows me to argue that *Potlatch* is unique in its production of "structures of feeling," a related concept developed by Williams that offers insight into both the formal aspects of the text, and its – at times elusive – content. In the 1954 volume *Preface to Film*, Williams coined the term "structures of feeling," a phrase later elaborated in many of his texts, including the dictionary-like *Marxism and Literature* (1977). Structures of feeling refer to how a particular society thinks, acts, and feels in ways that exceed and slip through popular and accepted forms of thought, ways of acting, and methods of perceiving. Structures of feeling are suggestive "feelings," experiences, or inclinations that make up the matter of as-yet-undeveloped or underdeveloped ideologies, material and cultural practices, and social beliefs. These underdeveloped ways of knowing and doing have not been institutionalized in formal structures or "common sense." Structures of feeling are "emergent" traces of cultural beliefs and tendencies, rather than dominant or residual categories of sense and action.<sup>148</sup> In Williams' sense of the term, not every piece of art or form of cultural production has corresponding structures of feeling; rather, only those artworks or literary texts that are *emergent* may carry such structures, since they oppose and exceed the dominant discourses and "common sense." It is useful to consider *Potlatch* as a text that produces structures of feeling because of its position in-between so many descriptive categories, formal aesthetics, cultural locations, and temporalities. In addition, by putting *Potlatch* in conversation with Williams' terms of cultural analysis, I am suggesting that *Potlatch* is a text that produces the kind of cultural knowledge that connects times and places; that is, while *Potlatch* was written in the 1960s, it refers to a cultural temporality that extends to millennia past, while also, I argue,

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<sup>148</sup> Williams' categories are particularly useful because they highlight the ways that every time and place overlaps with many other times and places. No era is made up of purely dominant views and there are always elements of all three terms at any given moment. Social and material change does not happen at right angles or in one forward direction, though our theories of change and history tend to make events appear sharp, contained, and unidirectional. Williams' sense of historical change attempts to capture the ebbs and flows of history and the cacophony of temporal and spatial differences and variations at any given moment. For descriptions of emergent, dominant, and residual categories, see *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.

gesturing to social forms of organization that have much to say about the 1960s present of its publication and the early twenty-first century present of its current readers.

*Potlatch*'s structures of feeling become clear when we consider the poetics of the text, evidenced in passages like the one above, in which a young girl "marvel[s] at the myriad of live sparkling stars."<sup>149</sup> Keeping in mind that this imaginative passage directly follows the only succinct description of Tloo-qwah-nah ceremonies in Clutesi's *Potlatch*, the use of poetic language and imagery gains greater meaning. Rather than expose Tloo-qwah-nah to readers as a consumable event traced in textual form, Clutesi resists consumption by readers, maintaining the text's emergent character as much through what is *not* said as what is said. This refusal to divulge or reveal enables the text to hold its own structures of feeling without collapse. As the epigraph that opens *Potlatch* states, Clutesi's narrative is "meant to evade documents," documents that have historically worked to contain and control Indigenous lifeways. Clutesi resists ethnographic consumption by refusing a purely narrative tone, enacting a poetics from which it is possible to "feel and say I was there and indeed I saw;" that is, to glimpse the modes of *recognition* operative in Nuu-chah-nulth Tloo-wah-nah ceremonies.

### ***Potlatch*'s poetics of recognition**

Situated within the textual world of *Potlatch*, the following section traces the poetics of Clutesi's text for Nuu-chah-nulth recognition. Recognition is a term commonly used in political science conversations as a frame for understanding social struggles and organization. It includes what feminist cultural theorist Nancy Fraser calls "status inequalities" that have direct effects on an individual's position, access, and sites of inclusion and exclusion in a given society.<sup>150</sup> This category of social struggle draws from Fanon's analysis of the workings of raced recognition in *Black Skin White Masks*, which

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<sup>149</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 11.

<sup>150</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Mapping the Feminist Imagination: From Redistribution to Recognition to Representation." *Constellations* 12:5 (2005): 303. Also see: Nancy Fraser, "Reframing Justice in a Globalizing World." *New Left Review* 36 (2005): 69-88; Kate Nash and Vikki Bell, "The Politics of Framing: An Interview with Nancy Fraser," *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Science in a Globalizing World*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

itself is an intervention in Hegel's sense of recognition. When misrecognition occurs, it is the experience of being excluded from full membership in society. The experiences of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, and all other demeaning forms of prejudices are examples of exclusion from full social membership. Indeed, Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks* parallels Fanon's text of similar name in identifying the specific dynamics of Indigenous communities subjected to recognition by the colonial state, a relationship that results in misrecognition of Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood. In contrast to the dynamics of recognition that Coulthard details in *Red Skin White Masks*, *Potlatch* stages a mode of recognition *between* Indigenous communities that does not result in subjection or misrecognition.

This different form of recognition is found within the first pages of *Potlatch*, as Clutesi describes the setting for this great Tloo-qwah-nah. *Potlatch* begins in the Cutting Carving Moon, or September, two months before the preparations will be realized in a large Tloo-qwah-nah, held during Moon of Little Sister, December.<sup>151</sup> All guests from "the ten united tribes" are housed and fed for 28 days, and "[i]f there was any problem at all it was to curtail generosity towards the arriving guests. The results at these times were that all were wont to be overfed."<sup>152</sup> Tloo-qwah-nah was:

[...] the time when all ties of kinship were encouraged to grow, expand and extend beyond the mere security of relationship. This was the time when co-existence exemplified itself beyond the mere desire to be tolerant, to live and let live. This was the time to share your good fortune, wealth and affluence with your fellow-man be it your worldly belongings, your food or your goodwill. This was the time when tribes of different dynasties were drawn together in one common bond—fellowship.<sup>153</sup>

This particular Tloo-qwah-nah is an important one, and with highly revered guests; in the opening pages, an impressive ceremony is performed where a large canoe filled with the "king," as Clutesi often refers to chiefs, of one of the Nuu-chah-nulth Nations is literally lifted out of the water by twenty-four Tseshaht warriors, and slowly carried onto the beach with all of the travelers sitting inside the cedar vessel. The ceremonies proceed

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<sup>151</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 18.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 20-21.

with four days of greetings and welcoming, with speeches by the speakers representing each of the Houses present. Though the following pages argue for a sense of recognition in *Potlatch* that is reciprocal and consensual, the previous example from the text of an honouring protocol shows the complex social hierarchies and protocols of respect that Nuu-chah-nulth recognition can also hold. Rather than idealize Nuu-chah-nulth recognition, my analysis focuses on aspects of its reciprocal and consensual functions that help to structure Nuu-chah-nulth society.

The following image locates the kernel that began the development of this chapter's argument. *Potlatch* includes ten ink drawings by the author interspersed throughout the text, including this canoe drawing:



**Gift – Recognition<sup>154</sup>**

Whereas I have become accustomed to reading recognition as a dubious relationship to the colonial state, and as a mode of interruption of Indigenous sovereignty in its political and embodied forms, this image of the canoe as a “gift – recognition” gave me considerable pause. Further, the majority of *Potlatch* offers poetic accounts of gifting and feasting that draw together the “common bond [of] fellowship,” made manifest through the gifting of items and social titles, the gifting of new songs, as well as the gifting of

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<sup>154</sup> *Potlatch*, 151. Image and caption by George Clutesi. Reproduced with permission.

performances and plays that share family stories and bits of Nuu-chah-nulth lore. It was, indeed, these acts of gifting that prompted me to seek out written perspectives from community members on the role of gifting in Nuu-chah-nulth social organization. The image of the canoe and its accompanying caption is also striking for the use of the word “recognition,” especially in the context shared earlier, of the impressive arrival of the *hawiih* (chief) to the ceremonies, who is welcomed by being physically lifted out of the water by hosts and carried ashore, canoe and all. E. Richard Atleo offers insight to these connections between gifting and recognition in his book *Principles of Tsawalk: An Indigenous Approach to Global Crisis*:

Why is it that gift giving is the core of Nuu-chah-nulth feasts to which visitors from other communities have been invited? And why does the speaker for the host of such feasts, when he calls out the name of one of these visitors, present a gift with words that can be translated into English as: ‘you have been recognized?’ At ceremonial feasts, why is it important to recognize those who have been invited? One answer is that the act of recognition has been found to be an effective way of negotiating a reality that seems to range from utter destructiveness at one end to sublime harmony at the other. The notion that reality is inherently polarized is one that ancient Nuu-chah-nulth accepted as *qua* (that which is). At this level of discussion the focus is not upon the feasting itself but upon the principle of recognition. Feasting is simply one venue within which to enact recognition. Over time it was learned that gift giving and recognition promoted balance and harmony between beings, that it obeyed what might be called the laws of the positive side of polarity.<sup>155</sup>

Unlike the form of recognition that Coulthard critiques in *Red Skin White Masks*, which is rooted in an uneven relationship of domination between an occupying colonial state and the “subjects” of recognition,<sup>156</sup> Indigenous nations, Atleo’s sense of recognition relates an Indigenous understanding of living together with difference. Recognition in this sense of the term is a corollary to the inevitability of what Atleo calls “polarity.” To put it another way, recognizing another in their fullness of being, and in their difference, performs an act of acceptance that is distinct from a Hegelian understanding of recognition, in which being a subject is always a state of being subjected.

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<sup>155</sup> Atleo, *Principles*, 80.

<sup>156</sup> See Coulthard’s article “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada.” *Contemporary Political Theory*. 6:4 (2007): 437-460 which is elaborated on extensively in *Red Skin White Masks*.

The Tloo-qwah-nah ceremonies in *Potlatch* also revolve around acts of gifting that perform Nuu-chah-nulth recognition between humans and the nonhuman world. The following example shows how recognition is not bound within human relations, but is instead a mode of relating that extends the Indigenous principle of *heshook-ish Tsawalk*, or “everything is one,” as Atleo calls it, to the natural world. The text opens with an uncle who has been given a song, and is on his way to visit a master canoe builder who is preparing a canoe for an upcoming ceremony.<sup>157</sup> As the uncle paddles his canoe to check on the progress of the master canoe builder, “from the wind to the north, a new song was born.”<sup>158</sup> The uncle is gifted a song not by a person but by Yoo-ah-ti, the North Wind. The uncle is a “songmaker” who speaks and sings at Tloo-qwah-nah and other ceremonies, and as is customary according to *Potlatch*, he is in charge of the preparations for a play in the upcoming Tloo-qwah-nah, hosted by his nephew.

What I find revealing about the opening section of *Potlatch* and the uncle’s newfound song is that the North Wind, a nonhuman form, is the gifter rather than a person. If the act of gifting, just like the act of feasting, is as much about recognizing members of a community as it is about exchanging items and sharing meals together, as Atleo has it, then Clutesi’s poetic account of the uncle receiving a new song from the North Wind indicates that the Wind, itself, is participating in an act of recognition with the uncle. The natural world, represented by the North Wind, is given form and sentience, and enters into a reciprocal relationship with humankind. Seen from this perspective, a relationship of kinship exists between the natural world and humankind in *Potlatch*, since to recognize another is to acknowledge them as full participatory members of a community. This animation of the natural world through reciprocal relations implies a distinctly different understanding of the relationship between human society and our environment, especially compared to the exploitative epistemology of capitalism that views the natural world as merely a resource for human development.

Nuu-chah-nulth modes of recognition also serve to create membership between humans, and to establish expectations for new initiates in Nuu-chah-nulth society. During

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<sup>157</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 13.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

the very first day of ceremonies, Clutesi tells of a frightening play: a haunting abduction of ten children, Us-mas, or young girls, from the community. These children are taken by the Wolf People or the Qwah-yha-tseek, and ten warriors are sent to find them.<sup>159</sup> In Clutesi's telling of the strange and frightening events, it seems as if the abduction has actually happened; he describes sounds of the wolves howling around the bighouse, silencing the crowd inside, some who apprehensively step onto the beach only to sight ten wolves across the river slinking in and out of the brush, and to hear the sound of Us-mas in the distance calling to their mothers. Four days pass before the ten abducted children and warriors sent to find them re-enter the bighouse, the Us-mas hand in hand with their mothers. Clutesi describes the warriors and Us-mas dressed head to toe in soft green spruce needles, a plant that was believed in for protection and to ward off evil. As the community is put back together again, these children become "initiated" into Tloo-qwah-nah Society when the Moon of Little Sister enters phase two on the eleventh day of celebrations.<sup>160</sup> In this example from *Potlatch*, the children all accept the initiation into Tloo-qwah-nah Society without any argument; through the vulnerability of being removed from one's community, they and all those in attendance are shown the community's dedication to their safety and membership, and their valued role in the integrity of the Tloo-qwah-nah Society.

The previous two examples show how Nuu-chah-nulth recognition works to encourage membership and cohesiveness within a sense of community that spans the human and natural worlds. Yet, I also want to consider how the form of recognition alluded to in *Potlatch* might handle difference and disagreement between people. What happens when a recognized community member contests the community, and challenges

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<sup>159</sup> In a 1969 review of *Potlatch*, Audrey Hawthorn writes, "The Nootka Dancing Society has one main theme — that of Dlukwana, the wolf. In the winter months, the wolf spirits were supposed to abduct the children of the tribe and teach them the songs and dances which belong to their families by inheritance. The children were sponsored by relatives, who gave feasts and gifts in their honour. It is the drama of these days which George Clutesi sets out from his childhood memory of them" (68). Given my own position as an outsider to Nuu-chah-nulth culture, coupled with a relative lack of accountable sources from Nuu-chah-nulth community members, I have chosen to not attempt to speculate about the meaning or value of obviously significant imagery, roles, and characters in *Potlatch*. This is the kind of reading that can be performed with great care and insight by Nuu-chah-nulth community members themselves. For Hawthorn's review, see: Audrey Hawthorn, "Potlatch." *BC Studies* 3 (1969): 67-68.

<sup>160</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 71.

their belonging within it? Considering the difficulties in present societies of dealing with difference, how might the principle of recognition in *Potlatch* reconcile difference and alterity? The following scenes from the text provides an answer to these questions by posing a form of recognition that responds to disagreement and difference with acceptance and consent.

After the community shows their devotion to the new initiates, a special ceremony proceeds in the bighouse in which each individual has a turn to profess allegiance to the whole. Each of the 400 people in attendance receives black paint on their face applied by the ceremonial master. This solemn protocol is a requirement of all who attend before ceremonies can continue. But not everyone accepts the black paint: a young man appears out of the hundreds gathered without any face paint. He defies the presence of the ceremonial master who commands the sequences of events. The boy dances aggressively around the bighouse and throws himself against the walls and ceiling, as if he has the dexterity of a wolf. Ten grown men try to corner the boy in the bighouse, but his speed and slinkiness out-maneuvers them in the tense and silent room as everyone watches. The climax of the scene hits as the boy leaps to the roof beams, “like a mountain lion,” and nearly escapes out of the smokehole.<sup>161</sup> But instead of escaping the bighouse, he suddenly slips down to stand quietly before the ceremonial master. The old man gently applies black paint to the boy’s face and then addresses the room. It becomes clear to the reader only as the old man embraces the boy before addressing the audience that the wolf-like or mountain lion-like young man is actually his grandson, and this was yet another play staged for this Tloo-qwah-nah:

As the old man with the black cane had put the black paint on the cheeks of the defiant one he whispered under his breath.

‘Well done Kah-oots, my grandchild. You are a brave.’

For the young man was indeed his grandson.

‘You could easily have made your escape through the smoke-hole but you chose to honor your old Nah-neek-so, grandparent, instead by receiving the color from his own hand. I am proud of you.’

The young man made no reply. There was no need to. His surrender to the grand old master of ceremonies was ample proof of his respect for the

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 80.



aged and indeed ancient laws. He carried the color with pride as he was led back to his own seat by his grandfather.

The old man was his jolly self again as he made his way back to the far end of the lodge where the dignitaries sat, and upon reaching the area he turned to face the throng.

‘The beginning of this important affair was marred by the insolence of one of our own members who rebelled against carrying the mark. That was not good. You saw his speed and extreme agility. We marveled at his adroitness, his dexterity and his skill to evade capture. He had indeed escaped for he could have slipped out of the smoke-hole at the top but he did not. He chose to surrender and comply with the law. Let it be said that we are fortunate to have a man of his abilities in our midst. All went well, let us say.’<sup>162</sup>

What is striking about these events in *Potlatch* is that, although the ceremonial master and his grandson seem to be waging a battle of wills, he does not force the youth to accept Tloo-qwah-nah membership or conform to the social norms and identity of the majority. There is a defined way for the boy to leave, symbolically represented by nearly leaping through the smokehole. Further, the community does not reprimand or look down on the young man for rebelling against tradition; instead his impressive feat of out-maneuvering the ten grown men as they attempt to corner him, and his “difference” that Clutesi characterizes in this scene with both wolf-like and cougar-like characteristics, are recognized as skills that are valuable to his community.

The staging of this play communicates to Tloo-qwa-nah members that membership is active and consensual, not enforced. By allowing the boy the opportunity to leave the community, and to demonstrate his ability to out-manuever others in a physical show of skill – symbolically, to be different – *Potlatch* implies an active responsibility to the kind of kinship that underlies recognition in Tloo-qwah-nah society. And rather than *misrecognize* a community member who objects to how they are received and perceived, Tloo-qwah-nah society seems to have within it mechanisms for dealing with instances of misrecognition. Difference is reconciled through the possibility of community members voicing their disagreement with protocols, and the ability to *choose* to enter into recognition with the community, by accepting the black paint of Tloo-qwah-nah ceremony.

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 80-81.

## Tloo-qwah-nah and Nuu-chah-nulth politics of redistribution

The previous section shows how Nuu-chah-nulth recognition conceives of a world in which membership can be consensual, a form of recognition that also imagines membership to span human and nonhuman worlds. This kind of recognition is generous and reciprocal in a way that the following section argues is an economic principle as much as it is a principle of social organization. In *Principles of Tsawalk*, E. Richard Atleo confirms this reading of *Potlatch*. He writes that,

[c]ontextualized within these teachings is the value of generosity. The Western dictum that ‘it is better to give than receive’ is potentially misleading from a Nuu-chah-nulth perspective because an emphasis upon giving may lead one to consider receiving irrelevant or unimportant. In the traditional Nuu-chah-nulth view, both are of equal importance. Giving is completely dependent upon receiving, and receiving is completely dependent upon giving. There is balance and harmony here. Neither is generosity simply a romantic notion disconnected from the ‘bottom line’ of harsh reality. Giving as a general community practice over millennia has proven pragmatic. It is an economically feasible principle.<sup>163</sup>

In this context, the seemingly lavish displays of wealth and abundance that settler witnesses of potlatches have described, for example,<sup>164</sup> carry a deeper meaning that is less about consumption than it is about exchange – or the process and act of giving and receiving. Further, the political and economic interpretation of what it means to exchange is what distinguishes capitalist societies from noncapitalist ones. To put it another way, exchange is the act of distributing goods among members of a society. If distribution refers to the economic distribution of material goods and wealth in a given society, *redistribution* is the mechanism of reorganizing the distribution of these goods. In capitalist societies, for example, proponents of the market strive for deregulation and argue that the market can regulate itself and can “naturally” distribute wealth fairly if it were just left alone. Conversely, in social democratic societies, the government plays a conscious role in redistributing wealth from the rich to the poor (while stopping short of fully intervening in capitalism): guaranteed incomes; livable wages; high taxes on wealth,

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<sup>163</sup> Atleo, *Principles*, 39.

<sup>164</sup> John Rogers Jewitt, *White Slaves of the Nootka: The Adventures and Sufferings of John R Jewitt While a Captive of the Nootka Indians 1803-05*. New York: Heritage House, 1997.

inheritance, and corporations; free social services, healthcare and socially owned (rather than privately owned) housing, utilities, and natural resources are some of the policies put in place.

It is notable, then, that *Potlatch* is almost entirely absent of descriptions of Tloowah-nah's redistributive functions. In places where Clutesi could have enumerated the gifts given between hosts and guests, the author chooses to run along with the children playing in the sand, or stare up at the stars as they appear in the evening dusk. I suspect that Clutesi's avoidance of actually disclosing much of anything *material* about a ceremony that has caught settler attention precisely for its function as a redistributive economic form is quite conscious. *Potlatch*'s surprising lack of accounting suggests that Clutesi was at least concerned with, if not thoroughly attentive to, the possibilities of uninitiated readers consuming his text and appropriating his sharing of knowledge and culture.

Given the absence of details of redistribution in *Potlatch*, I turn to two secondary sources that contribute to understanding the significance of gifting to Nuu-chah-nulth economics. The following 1880 letter to the editor by Chief Maquinna, excerpted below, details the importance of the potlatch ceremony to Nuu-chah-nulth society:

*Victoria Daily Colonist, 15 May 1880:* To the Editor — My name is Maquinna! I am the chief of the Nootkas and other tribes. My great-grandfather was also called Maquinna. He was the first chief in the country who saw white men. That is more than one hundred years ago. He was kind to the white men and gave them land to build and live on. By and by more white men came and ill treated our people and kidnapped them and carried them away on their vessels, and then the Nootkas became bad and retaliated and killed some white people. But that is a long time ago. I have always been kind to the white men. . . . And now I hear that the white chiefs want to persecute us and put us in jail and we do not know why.

They say it is because we give feasts which the Chinook people call 'Potlatch.' That is not bad! That which we give away is our own! Dr. Powell, the Indian agent, one day also made a potlatch to all the Indian chiefs, and gave them a coat, and tobacco, and other things, and thereby we all knew that he was a chief; and so when I give a potlatch, they all learn that I am a chief. To put in prison people who steal and sell whiskey and cards to our young men; that is right. But do not put us in jail as long as we have not stolen the things which we give away to our Indian friends. Once I was in Victoria, and I saw a very large house; they told me it was a bank and that the white men place their money there to take care of, and that by-

and-by they got it back, with interest. We are Indians, and we have no such bank; but when we have plenty of money or blankets, we give them away to other chiefs and people, and by-and-by they return them, with interest, and our hearts feel good. Our potlatch is our bank. . .<sup>165</sup>

Not only was the potlatch the “bank” for Nuu-chah-nulth communities, it was a source of identity and a social structure that maintained cohesion through acts of recognition that worked to form community and kinship ties. Maquinna’s letter to the editor is written at a time when Nuu-chah-nulth economic organization was in confrontation with the development of capitalism along the west coast of British Columbia. Further, the implementation of wage labour, the continued dispossession of Indigenous lands, and the eradication of Indigenous ecological practices were the economic motivations behind the potlatch ban under the Indian Act. Seen in this way, the attack on Nuu-chah-nulth modes of redistribution was done at the dual levels of policy and economics, and these forces had tremendous effects on the living realities of Nuu-chah-nulth communities, as Chief Maquinna’s tone of urgency points towards.

Interrupting Nuu-chah-nulth redistribution practices actually changed the physical living environments of community members, and therein affected the possibilities of sustaining Nuu-chah-nulth recognition.<sup>166</sup> In the essay “Transformations of Nuu-chah-nulth Houses,” Yvonne Marshall relates changes in uses of the bighouse to community members’ entry into capitalist wage economy, and the challenge of maintaining large extended family networks that the bighouse facilitated.<sup>167</sup> Marshall writes that Nuu-chah-nulth workers became increasingly employed for wages as “producers of dogfish oil, hop

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<sup>165</sup> Penny Petrone, ed. *First People, First Voices*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983. 69-70.

<sup>166</sup> This interruption by no means *eliminated* Nuu-chah-nulth modes of recognition, or traces of Nuu-chah-nulth redistributive practices, just as Canadian colonization has not eliminated Indigenous ways of life more broadly. The resurgence of Indigenous nationhood is testament to the ongoing presence and living practice of Indigeneity, such as the practices of Nuu-chah-nulth recognition and redistribution.

<sup>167</sup> Parts of Marshall’s analysis and perspective is overly concerned with what she calls “chiefly control,” and portrays Nuu-chah-nulth entry into the wage economy as primarily an entrance into a better life, especially during the “period between 1850 and 1920 [which] was a time of exceptional economic affluence.” She even writes that “[the] Nuu-chah-nulth people’s remarkable talent for taking advantage of any new economic opportunity that arose led Blenkinsop [a deeply racist Hudson’s Bay Employee and eventual Indian Agent] to remark in 1874 that ‘without question, these people are the richest in every respect in British Columbia’” (88). However, aspects of her work are useful still, and her focus on the material production of culture is indispensable to my own analysis in this chapter. Yvonne Marshall, “Transformations of Nuu-chah-nulth Houses.” *Beyond Kinship: Social and Material Reproduction in House Societies*. Eds Rosemary A. Joyce and Susan D. Gillespie. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. 73-102.

pickers, and cannery workers” and in this transition to wage remuneration, “cash and purchased products replaced locally produced resources as both basic food stuffs and wealth items.”<sup>168</sup> She notes two major changes in the “corporate house structure” of Nuu-chah-nulth communities:<sup>169</sup> “First, a house chief’s *ha-hoolthe*, which consisted of major territorial rights, no longer represented the economic base of a house;” and second, “people were increasingly at liberty to earn and dispose of cash income independently of the chiefs.”<sup>170</sup> Marshall’s analysis clarifies that bighouses, once deconstructed seasonally and moved to different locations according to a family’s land rights, eventually became sedentary halls where community members gathered *only* for large ceremonies. The shift meant a tendency towards nuclear families rather than large extended families housed under the same roof. Considering the relationship Chief Maquinna draws between the potlatch and a bank, the overall wealth of Nuu-chah-nulth community became fixed in more sedentary locations, just as work became more commonly relegated to the productive sites of canneries or hops fields.

What distinguishes house-based Nuu-chah-nulth social organization is kinship ties, rather than location. Families inherited rights to fishing areas and other “property” which would determine their living locations, usually shifting home sites multiple times a year and deconstructing the bighouse when a family moved to a new site according to the ecology of the land. Thus, a “tribe” as the colonial system would have us think of it, erroneously implies a group of people with presumably single-location homes. This is not necessarily the case for Nuu-chah-nulth social organization, or even for Coast Salish social organization east of the Nuu-chah-nulth.<sup>171</sup>

Clutesi’s *Potlatch* gains additional layers of significance once we understand just a little about Nuu-chah-nulth economic organization. The text produces traces of principles of recognition that correspond to the physical and material social organization

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<sup>168</sup> Marshall, 88.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>171</sup> See historian Keith Thor Carlson’s insightful book *The Power of Place, The Problem of Time: Aboriginal Identity and Historical Consciousness in the Cauldron of Colonialism*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010 for Stó:lō social organization and discussion of Stó:lō potlatch practices.

of noncapitalist Nuu-chah-nulth society – the structures of kinship that were produced through house societies. Not only do the previous examples from *Potlatch* show the Nuu-chah-nulth kinship structures that form principles of recognition, they also gesture to kinship between humans and other life forms. As *Potlatch* draws to a close after twenty-eight days of celebration and feasting, the uncle who opened the text on his way to check in on the master canoe builder stands “alone on a landing below the great lodge” where, in verse, Yoo-ah-ti, the North Wind, is present and presiding over the withdrawal of guests:

The morning dawned clear and crisp  
There was no cloud in the pale blue sky  
The tide filled the river in the early morn  
The sun arose over the arête to the east  
Yoo-ah-ti nudged the rime off the naked trees  
It sparked on the breath of the wind from the north.<sup>172</sup>

Here the North Wind is no longer gifting to the uncle, but watching from the trees as the uncle stands “forlorn and motionless as he watche[s] the last canoe move downstream and fade into the mist . . . This was the end. There was no more.”<sup>173</sup> Now that the year-long preparations for the Tloo-qwah-nah are over, the uncle’s exhaustion overcomes him as the participants, including the North Wind, recede back to the rhythm of daily roles and routines.

## Conclusion

This chapter on recognition and redistribution in George Clutesi’s *Potlatch* stages a dual argument. The first aspect of my argument presents Nuu-chah-nulth recognition as an alternative to dominant understandings of recognition, and extends this analysis to systems of redistribution that are, in turn, always attached to systems of recognition. The second aspect of my argument is a methodological intervention, since I hold political science and historical analyses alongside a literary text. I suggest that the terms redistribution and recognition – generally reserved for political science – are useful terms

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<sup>172</sup> Clutesi, *Potlatch*, 186.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

for literary analysis as well. Redistribution and recognition are two significant aspects of social struggle, and as such can help to pull literary texts into conversations and debates about economic and social organization. For example, the relationship between recognition and redistribution becomes more clear by reading *Potlatch* for ways that gifting in Tloo-qwah-nah ceremonies stages both an act of recognition and a redistributive function of economic necessity. At the same time, the material lives of Nuu-chah-nulth communities, that Maquinna's 1880 letter to the editor and Yvonne Marshall's text details, illuminate the economic and social significance of the poetic and narrative aspects of *Potlatch*. As a part of this methodological intervention, I also bring in Raymond Williams' cultural theory concepts of "emergent" and "structures of feeling," which, when placed alongside the categories of recognition and redistribution, suggest that cultural production and economic and political formations can be considered as related aspects of social formation. As such, analyses of cultural production are enriched by political science and historical perspectives, while the latter perspectives gain depth and insight from associated cultural production. Therefore, bringing Raymond Williams' terms to the fore in this chapter hopes to suggest that cultural studies, the field that once sought so thoroughly to place cultural production in conversation with politics and history –influenced as it was by theorists like Williams, Stuart Hall, E.P. Thompson, and C.L.R. James – is a critical methodology that still exists today, particularly in work by Indigenous scholars. Finally, given that Indigenous knowledge production has been based in storytelling methods long before written records, the varied and rich legacies of Indigenous literary storytelling can also provide much needed insight as we move forward with resurgent practices of Indigenous nationhood.

The following two chapters turn to two novels by the Syilx (Okanagan) writer Jeannette Armstrong. Though Armstrong was born roughly forty years after Clutesi, her work parallels Clutesi's *Potlatch* in interesting and surprising ways. Her texts both pair with and build from the cultural revitalization project of Clutesi's literary texts, while staging more direct political intervention. Drawing from the methodological framework I develop by considering Clutesi's work, I extend the analysis of recognition by showing, through a reading of *Slash*, how a politics of recognition develops at the beginning of the 1980s, while also complicating a sense of the politics of recognition by reading

transnationally, through *whispering in shadows*, which brings the reader to Chiapas, Mexico after the institution of NAFTA.



## **interlude: heartbreak**

As I began reading Indigenous literatures written in Canada and the United States, I began to hear stories that told of familiar experiences to my own. I wasn't necessarily looking for a perfect reflection of my life, and I knew that there were aspects of my story that wouldn't be reflected, given the somewhat unusual makeup of my adoptive family. But I did find stories that resonated with me, that told sometimes hilarious and sometimes heartbreaking tales of surviving through colonialism, and that reflected the particular forms of racism that Indigenous people experience. Indigenous literatures also showed me the incredibly wide range of expression authored by Indigenous voices. There are stories of all kinds, and many of them feature strong women protagonists, a characteristic that struck me and that is significant to me.

What I realize I was developing through exposing myself to Indigenous literatures was my own historical consciousness as an Indigenous woman. I was beginning to understand where I was located in the world, how my experiences fit within a wide tapestry of Indigenous tales, and that it was *okay* to express myself as an Indigenous woman. Developing historical consciousness does not mean learning about history per se. Historical consciousness is more complex, and more rooted in human experiences of the continuum of past, present, and future. It is a way of saying how we understand ourselves in historical context, how we make sense of historical events and how this making sense effects and codetermines how we live in the present, and how we perceive the future. Historical consciousness is one concept that I consciously take from Marxist thought because it points towards a way of understanding that does not see the past, present, and future in isolated terms, and it recognizes the fact that we are complex sums of – to put it in Indigenous terms – our ancestors and our future generations.

It is significant that I found powerful examples of Indigenous women as I immersed myself in this literature. My own story, such as it is, is rooted in gender violence. My birth was the result of another woman, my birth mother, finding the strength within herself to carry me to term, knowing all the while that the conception of this child was the ultimate act of taking away her own power. I have wondered since I

was a young teenager, how could my birth mother have been so strong? How could a nineteen-year-old youth make such a tremendous decision? As I got older, my questioning developed into interrogations of myself: what was I, if not a terrible reminder of a rape? How could I possibly be a “good” person when my conception was so violent? Did I carry within me this violence? And could I, somehow, live up to my birth mother’s strength and make her decision worthwhile in my life?

I put a lot of pressure on myself with these kinds of questions. I ached over them. I never spoke about these anxious reflections to anyone in my life; the truth was, those people I felt comfortable enough sharing my birth story with didn’t seem to understand why I was so bothered by my conception. There was some kind of disjuncture between my emotional experience of my origin story and other people’s ability to empathize. It was likely the case that everyone I ventured to tell had simply never heard such a thing and didn’t know how to respond.

This is why sitting in talking circles was so cathartic and clarifying for me. One afternoon, I recall that no less than three other Indigenous women spoke to stories of their own that confirmed mine. Once again, this was a form of recognition that I had never experienced in my life until my early thirties. Their strength in also speaking to their origins released some of my shame.

In my introduction, I speak about my experiences with depression, and how my depression increased and became an anxious psychosis precisely during the most intense phase of my recalibration, my excavation of internalized colonialism. Like my origin story, this has been another piece of my story for which it has been very hard to find recognition. While stigma against people with mental illness, especially depression, is waning overall, I found that as soon I bared the real truth of my psychological and spiritual experiences – that my depression bled into a real dissociation with the world, what some might even call psychotic episodes – people quieted and began to give me certain kinds of looks. Either there was confusion, like their ability to understand my situation stopped at the mention of perceptions and convictions of things that weren’t happening and didn’t exist, or there was apprehension, as if I had suddenly transformed in their estimation, had become someone who had lost touch with the world and therefore

*all* my perceptions were to be questioned. This was much worse than confusion. I didn't understand what was going on in my mind and soul either, but I also had learned that not only was recognition possible, it was necessary, and my healing depended on it. I had already developed a fairly thick skin in terms of being misrecognized; indeed, I'd lived a life that was dominated by misrecognition. So it was not so much painful to feel the edges of people's empathy recede as it was frustrating. I have struggled in my life to advocate for myself, and one of my constant goals is to always become better at asserting myself in my full humanity, not conforming to what others may perceive me to be. At the point of my most significant mental health and spiritual crisis, I knew that part of my healing relied on the validating reflections that could only come from others.

Not finding what I was looking for in my personal relationships, I turned to reading (a familiar survival strategy that I had practiced since a child). I read everything I could find about depression and psychosis. I read about experiences similar to mine and experiences quite different, and I especially gravitated towards those people who were able to articulate their own experiences, rather than distanced professional accounts of clients' and patients' presentations of mental illness. To be clear, I read those too, because I also wanted to understand the system I had suddenly been plunged into after my six-week stay at a hospital in Vancouver. I already had semi-formed suspicions of Western medicine, particularly Western psychology, but I tried holding these alongside open investigations of psychiatry and psychology texts. It helped me to understand in an abstract, "global" way the system that was now treating my condition. For a while, I entertained the explanation that the very first psychiatrist I'd ever seen in my life gave me: that there was no real reason for my depression and psychosis, that I had a good life, and that it was simply an imbalance in my brain chemistry. I entertained this explanation for a year or two; I tried it out in a sense.

After two years of relative stability, during which time I wrote three quarters of this dissertation, I slipped again. In hindsight, it was a meaningful slip because, though I would never wish these kinds of "learning moments" on another human being, there was, in its aftermath, much to reflect on. This time, I was able to prove beyond a doubt that my psychological and spiritual challenges were not simply a manifestation of a brain chemical imbalance. What happened was a series of events, nothing very abnormal in the

course of a life, and nothing so traumatizing that a slip the way I experienced it would seem warranted. But I was already softened, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, by my experience of psychosis two years earlier. While I had healed quite a bit, aspects of my mental stability, my ability to refuse taking on certain stresses or my ability to adapt quickly to them, simply wasn't functioning the way it once did.

The first thing that happened was experiencing prejudice from other Indigenous people in a very personal and political way. It was not, of course, my first walk around this particular block. But it struck home in a way that other moments of prejudice, dismissal, and ridicule for being a white-passing, white-washed Indian hadn't. I was involved in putting together a gathering of Indigenous land defenders from across British Columbia one spring. The idea was that there would be a convergence in Vancouver and we would hold three days of events, workshops, and meetings to be attended by land defenders and allied supporters. The first challenge was simply articulating myself, and my position as an urban Native, to this group of very well-intentioned land defender supporters who were organizing the convergence. At one point, we had a discussion about the necessity of holding private meetings for the Indigenous land defenders to strategize amongst themselves, while simultaneous workshops were occurring for supporters to address some of the challenges their presence presented on Indigenous territories, challenges that the land defenders had communicated to us. I was left wondering which meeting or workshop I should attend; I was not an Indigenous land defender, but I was also not simply a supporter, especially as that category was explicitly conceptualized as being for settlers. Of course, this was not just about me – there is a large urban Native population in Vancouver, and if any of us showed up, where would we go? It was clear that the organizers putting the convergence together had never considered this problem because urban Natives had never been part of organizing for Indigenous land defense support. We had a series of meetings and conversations leading up to the convergence, and we collectively decided that there would be a “third stream” for urban Natives, for which I would lead a talking circle for us to come together, get to know each other, build connections and trust, and begin to identify the pressing issues that faced us in the city. Overall, this “intervention” into the organizing for the land

defender convergence was received gracefully and humbly by the other organizers, and I felt a strong level of trust for them.

Things became quite different, however, as the convergence neared and two land defenders from a territory north of Vancouver attended a couple of our organizing meetings. During one of these meetings, I asked the land defenders very clearly what they saw as the role for urban Natives in their struggle – where and how could we contribute, given that we are not simply settler supporters, but also that many of us are dispossessed from our own nations and territories? The response I received was a huge political, emotional, psychological, and spiritual blow. They said, “You can go home.” Even at this point looking back on this exchange, I still can’t conceive of what motivated them to say such an unrealistic, hurtful, and asinine thing. To be told that the only way I could contribute to the foremost expression of Indigenous sovereignty – to the retaking of traditional territories and the blocking of natural resource projects – was to do the very thing that colonialism had made impossible for me to do, this was absolutely heartbreaking. The convergence happened; I attended; I led a talking circle for urban Indigenous people; I chatted and laughed outside smoking cigarettes with land defenders; I got to the event space early and stayed late to clean up; I put on a good face. But I was holding myself together by a thin string.

Only weeks after the convergence ended, my short but intense relationship with a Cree man ended very poorly. There are too many personal details necessary to describe how and why this ending of a relationship affected me deeply. Suffice it to say that it was an abusive relationship with complex power dynamics that made it hard for me to see the abuse for what it was. I was heartbroken, even as I knew that the relationship couldn’t continue for my own soundness of being. This was the second event.

The third and final blow to my stability occurred about a month later. I had been teaching for the past three years in a program for Indigenous students, a “bridging” program that provided support, both academic and social, to Indigenous students wishing to go to or return to university but also wanting to brush up on their academic skills in an environment that provided a curriculum specifically geared towards Indigenous students. Teaching in this program was a huge gift. I learned so much from students, and walked

into class every day anticipating another profound, heartfelt, open, and vulnerable discussion that strengthened all of us as Indigenous people learning to express our power and resilience together. It was a space where I found a huge amount of that recognition I spoke of seeking in the interlude to chapter two. Though I was leading the classes, of course, I was being exposed to Indigenous youth and adults from a diverse range of nations across Canada, with various relationships to their nations and languages and cultures, and many different ways of understanding themselves and the world. Students grew strong relationships and bonds with each other. There is really nothing like a learning environment in which colonized people can come together without the presence of the colonizer. We laughed a lot, and sometimes there were tears. It was safe, and powerful.

At the end of the semester, the day after a concluding meeting of the program's instructors, during which we discussed each student's progress and made suggestions for adjusting the program in small ways for the coming year, I received an official email sent out to campus-wide faculty at my university, informing us that the only program at that institution designed for Indigenous students was being cut, effective immediately. I was heartbroken, and enraged. It made no sense to me on any level that I tried to understand the decision; Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission had funneled millions of dollars into the Canadian education system specifically earmarked for supporting Indigenous students. I thought, if this program can be cut now, at the very height of Canada's awareness of its history of abuses through residential schools, what does this imply about the future of education for Indigenous peoples?

In a short time, just a few months, I had been dealt three significant blows to my emotional being. My health declined rapidly, and in the early summer of that year, I was admitted to the same hospital that I had stayed in two years previous. The second stay was shorter, just under a month. My symptoms were not nearly as pronounced, in large part because I, as well as my support network of close friends, had learned to identify my warning signs. In contrast to my first crisis, I was able to read, for instance. Two years previous, my ability to read was significantly dampened by my psychological and spiritual state. I remember, while I was staying at the hospital during that visit, a friend came to walk with me outside during one of my passes. We walked slowly through the

city, and found our way onto the south side of the seawall, where a few sailboats were moored. I remember looking at the name of a boat, written very clearly in bright blue paint. I sounded it out slowly, mispronouncing it, and nothing registered in my head. I didn't know what the word meant, it seemed just like a collection of sounds. My friend casually repeated the boat's name, and I laughed cautiously, embarrassed by my childlike mispronunciation and misunderstanding. When I was able to read again, and when I was no longer convinced that I didn't deserve to live, I left the hospital that first time.

The second time, I was not nearly so far gone; my friends and I intervened much sooner. The doctors made an adjustment to my meds, and I was paired with a different psychiatrist this time, who seemed to have a very different way of understanding my situation. He was empathetic, didn't talk so much about brain chemicals, listened to my story and picked up on what may have appeared like minor details but were actually crucial pieces of emotionally-charged information. During the last week he invited my friends to come in for a conversation so that we could discuss plans for supporting me after discharge. In this conversation, my friends, wise and wonderful humans that they are, advocated strongly for something that is very hard to get: continued support from a psychiatrist at the hospital, someone who would "follow" me, as they say, after my discharge. Perhaps there was a time decades ago when this was commonplace. These days, with the state of underfunding for the healthcare system, particularly for mental healthcare, there are just not enough resources for patients to receive anything but acute support during in-patient hospital stays. There were programs I could enrol in for group, and counsellors I could be paired with for individual talking sessions, but these counsellors were not trained psychiatrists. Though I was not, and still am not, discriminatory about people's ability to empathize and offer support based on their educational experience and background, it was still eye-opening to have that second psychiatrist listen and provide insight, skills he had developed through many years of practice. This psychiatrist recognized that the issues that were present in my story were not things that a medical student in psychiatry would be able to support; this was an easier option for pairing me with after-hospital care, but my psychiatrist knew that it wouldn't be a good fit. And, amazingly, he listened to my friends make a case for why I needed long-term support from someone skilled and well-practiced. A few days before

my discharge, a man came by my room to introduce himself. He was to be my psychiatrist, to follow me out of hospital, for as long as I needed the support. The relationship I've developed with him in the past year has been an amazing one. He is the most gifted listener and most perceptive person in the field of psychology or counselling that I have ever met.

So, in hindsight, I gained a great gift by ending up in the hospital a second time, by meeting this man who I have regular support from. I also learned something very important, which is that an imbalance in brain chemicals is absolutely not an adequate explanation for my experience of mental health. It has become clear to me that it is primarily through an understanding of my personal experience of colonialism and how it has affected my consciousness that I can understand why and how I have struggled mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

All of this is, I must say, intimately related to my development of my own historical consciousness as an Indigenous woman. It is telling that so many radical histories of Western mental health, whether in Europe or Canada or the United States, tell stories of how conditions and diagnoses were invented to contain, control, incarcerate, medicalize, and sometimes kill women, queers, trans and gender nonconforming people, racialized people, and people living with different perceptions of the world that are often seen as mental disabilities. My experience of altered states of perception must be understood as a personal expression of the dynamics of colonialism. As such, it is in a sense a very different, much more painful, expression that correlates to the very work in this dissertation. If this dissertation articulates the positive work that I did in my development of historical consciousness as an Indigenous woman, my mental health challenges are the correlative, personal, and to some extent negative byproduct that accompanied this work. My mental health challenges signify the true costs of reconstituting oneself as an Indigenous person living in a colonized world.

The following chapter also discusses the development of Indigenous historical consciousness through a close reading of Jeannette Armstrong's 1985 novel *Slash*. Though Tommy Kelasket's story is very different from my own, *Slash* gave me a reference point in my own process of self-growth. It is this reflection of self in



Armstrong's work that I hope other dispossessed Indigenous people might find as well, and I hope that my critical analysis of her text helps to reveal how the development of Indigenous historical consciousness is a crucial part of the work that we as Indigenous peoples engage in.

## Chapter 3.

### Indigenous historical consciousness in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*

*I read in one of them bulletins that the Government of Canada was proposing a new policy that would phase out Indian reserves in five to ten years. A lot of Indian people were pretty angry about that because they had been led to believe that consultations with them had been held to actually listen to their recommendations and do some good for Indians. The bulletin referred to this policy as the White Paper. – Slash<sup>174</sup>*

#### Introduction

On May 9, 2016, the newly elected Canadian Liberal government under the leadership of youthful Justin Trudeau confirmed their official endorsement of UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.<sup>175</sup> Many have already begun to celebrate this step in Trudeau's first six months in office, applauding his follow-through of election campaign promises. And yet, two weeks prior to the confirmation of the endorsement, the Natural Resources minister, Jim Carr, told the Commons Aboriginal affairs committee, "I would say the government is in the process of providing a *Canadian definition* of the declaration."<sup>176</sup> As Russ Diabo notes in his article, "Trudeau cloaks continued attack on First Nations sovereignty with charm: A 'Canadian definition' of the UNDRIP aims to extinguish 8th Fire," a specifically-Canadian definition of UNDRIP works to undermine a principled document intended to establish free, prior, and informed consent for all Indigenous peoples, and the unqualified

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<sup>174</sup> Jeannette Armstrong, *Slash*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 1985. 40.

<sup>175</sup> Brian Hill, "Canada endorses United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." *Global News*. 9 May 2016. Web. 21 May 2016. In 2010, Canada "endorsed" the UNDRIP as an "aspirational document," a political move with little significance since Canada did not officially sign on to UNDRIP. For the government's statement in 2010 regarding UNDRIP, see "Canada's Statement of Support on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples." Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. 12 Nov 2010. Web. 25 Jun 2016. For background on Canada's historical positions regarding UNDRIP, see Joanna Smith, "Canada will implement UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Carolyn Bennett says." *The Star*. 12 Nov 2015. Web. 25 Jun 2016.

<sup>176</sup> APTN National News. "Ottawa developing 'Canadian definition' of UNDRIP, says Liberal minister." *APTN*. 21 Apr 2016. Web. 21 May 2016. Emphasis mine.

existence of Aboriginal title.<sup>177</sup> Diabo polemically calls the Trudeau government's move a new "First Nations Termination Plan [...] to extinguish the 8<sup>th</sup> Fire" in which "the 'Canadian definition' of UNDRIP sounds a lot like the Harper government's position except it is couched as 'reconciliation.'" <sup>178</sup> Diabo's opinion piece suggests a historical view of the UNDRIP endorsement, relating the adoption of UNDRIP to the previous Harper government, as well as to the White Paper of the first Trudeau government in 1969. And in the 2015 book *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*, Aileen Moreton-Robinson characterizes Canada's benevolence as part and parcel of an era of reconciliation, where it is still the case that "the possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty is compelled to deny and refuse what it cannot own—the sovereignty of the Indigenous other."<sup>179</sup> Through the invocation of the non-legally binding UNDRIP, Moreton-Robinson argues persuasively for the disingenuous motivations behind Canada's official endorsement, and shows how the thoroughly colonial foundations of Canada continue to inform the country's legal, political, and moral codes.

I open this chapter on Jeannette Armstrong's fiction with the news of the Canadian endorsement of the UNDRIP to suggest a continuity between the former Trudeau government's tabling of the White Paper with the current Trudeau government's endorsement of UNDRIP, suggesting that a legacy of termination may live on, even if veiled, in our era of benevolent reconciliation. As Tommy Kelasket's story tell us, Armstrong's novel *Slash* hinges on the Red Power mobilization and activism that responded to the White Paper. By positing connections between the White Paper and UNDRIP in the opening to this chapter, I endeavour to show historical continuity with the work of the previous chapter that sought to place George Clutesi's text *Potlatch* in contexts including Nuu-chah-nulth worldviews, settler colonial policies of the late 1960s,

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<sup>177</sup> One hundred and forty-four countries signed on to the UNDRIP in 2007. Tellingly, the settler colonial countries of Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand were the four in attendance who initially refused.

<sup>178</sup> Russ Diabo, "Trudeau cloaks continued attack on First Nations sovereignty with charm: A 'Canadian definition' of the UNDRIP aims to extinguish 8th Fire." *Ricochet*. 11 May 2016. Web. 21 May 2016. N.p.

<sup>179</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 179.

and the current politics of recognition.<sup>180</sup> What follows is a reading of Armstrong's *Slash* that connects the politics of the Red Power era with the development of Indigenous historical consciousness over the course of Tommy Kelasket's life.

The following pages draw on the history reflected in Tommy Kelasket's journey in *Slash* to present two arguments: one, that *Slash* holds a particularly Indigenous development of historical consciousness, defined further below; and two, that *Slash* narrates a crucial time in Canadian history that allows us to make contemporary connections between the White Paper and UNDRIP. Since 2007, when UNDRIP was presented to the United Nations General Assembly by Indigenous leadership from many countries, Canada has tellingly resisted a pledge of allegiance to this document. Following Tommy Kelasket's movements through the Okanagan, across Canada, and across the United States as Red Power politics and activism develop, I argue that the final pages of *Slash* show a shift towards the first steps of a politics of recognition that has now come to dominate Canadian relationships with Indigenous nations. In the last pages of *Slash*, the Constitution Express is on its way to Ottawa to protest the exclusion of Aboriginal rights from the "Charter of Rights," formed as part of Canada's patriation of the Constitution in 1980. I argue that the inclusion of Aboriginal Rights in Canada's Constitution marks the first legal action that establishes a politics of recognition.<sup>181</sup> At the same time, however, Tommy develops an Indigenized historical consciousness that leads him back to his Okanagan community and towards an Indigenous sovereigntist practice.

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<sup>180</sup> As of this writing, news of specific policies the Trudeau government may adopt in the name of UNDRIP have not yet been released. Yet, no matter the various ways the government chooses to interpret UNDRIP, its strongest principles cannot be enacted because it would undermine the financially lucrative resource development industries in Canada, as well as the legal rights of municipal, provincial, and federal governments. My anticipation is that Trudeau will announce increased funding to address poverty on reserves; may address needed shifts in family services and welfare; and will continue to fund Aboriginal educational initiatives. These funding initiatives will be in lieu of formal recognition of the need for free, prior, and informed consent, and will likely serve to "buy off" Indigenous leadership so that development projects around the country will continue apace.

<sup>181</sup> Glen Coulthard dates the emergence of a politics of recognition to a span of time including the following three pivotal events: organizing against the White Paper by Red Power activists; the 1973 *Calder* decision by the Supreme Court of Canada, which, in ruling against a Nisga'a land claim, ultimately recognized Aboriginal title; and the rapid development of oil, minerals, and natural gas resources following the 1970s oil crisis (*Red Skin White Masks* 4-6). I am persuaded by Coulthard's contextualization of the emergence of a politics of recognition; yet, for my purposes, I see the Constitution Express and the subsequent recognition of Aboriginal Rights in the "Charter of Rights" as legally solidifying the recognition politics that these previous events pointed towards.

His return to the Okanagan in the final pages is his own shift towards embodying Red Power politics in commitments to the land, commitments that also echo the Syilx environmental ethics that Armstrong writes of in her dissertation, a text I examine closely in chapter four. Overall, this chapter suggest a tension, that is ongoing, between the motivations of Indigenous sovereigntist practices on the land – and cultural reclamation and resurgence that often accompanies it – and a dubious politics of recognition lead by the Canadian state that minimizes Indigenous relationships to land, while amplifying cultural production. I argue that this amplification of Indigenous cultural production, primarily through increased funding for the arts and education, is tied to intensified attacks on Indigenous noncapitalist land relations, signified by the 2012 First Nations Property Ownership Act (FNPOA), a piece of legislation, discussed in more detail below, that is a twenty-first century version of the White Paper.

Below, I trace Tommy's development of an Indigenous historical consciousness through the pages of *Slash*. Historical consciousness is the idea that a given community develops a sense of how the past, present, and future are related to each other, and how the actions of one's life is both determined by, and also shapes the ongoing possibilities of, history. Historical consciousness has been a concept heavily relied on by Marxist theorists in understanding how we come to know history, and how we, in different eras, come to determine routes to take and political directions to pursue. It is a concept that, though traced to Hegel's understanding of history, was developed significantly through Marx's early writings, before he shifted towards developing a theory of political economy in the work of *Capital*.<sup>182</sup> I argue that for Indigenous subjects, historical consciousness plays a central role in realizing our positions within settler colonialism. In these terms, the novel *Slash* can be read as the evolution of Tommy Kelasket's own historical consciousness. Yet, his political maturity develops in ways that may not adhere perfectly to Marxist expectations. For Tommy, his movement into activism, with all its attendant meetings and endless talk that Tommy grows to notice characterizes the scene,<sup>183</sup> is not the final stage of his development as a political being. Tommy's unique

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<sup>182</sup> Marx's concept of historical consciousness is developed in his earlier texts, specifically the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* and *The German Ideology*.

<sup>183</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 38.

historical consciousness is rooted in kinship with land, a relationship that is as spiritual as it is political to enact. Over the course of *Slash*, Tommy comes to understand that his political commitments might be best performed right where he began, on his Okanagan lands. The story of *Slash* is the story of Tommy Kelasket working through the heady era of the 1970s and coming to realize his place within an historical perspective of his world. Tommy's "return" to the land expresses Armstrong's Syilx environmental ethics that she develops in her dissertation, an ethics that is also more explicitly developed in *whispering in shadows*, the novel that grounds chapter four.

## Historical consciousness and Red Power activism in *Slash*

*Slash* is told through a highly personal narrative "I," a tone that critics have too often mistook for a simplicity of authorship. Lynette Hunter writes that "many critics have read [*Slash*] as well-meaning but naïve, or simply as 'failed' or dismissible because it cannot be understood – it's too different," a perspective that, in contrast, Margery Fee argues is far from the case.<sup>184</sup> Fee writes that the use of a personal "I" narrative "may not be a subversive tactic in the classic realist text or in the popular novel, but it is within the literary discourse of Canada. Native readers finally will find what white Canadians take for granted — a first-person voice that does not implicitly exclude them."<sup>185</sup> *Slash* is also written in "Okanagan Rez English," which, as Armstrong writes, "has a structural quality syntactically and semantically closer to the way the Okanagan language is arranged."<sup>186</sup> Armstrong "believe[s] that Rez English from any part of the country, if examined, will display the sound and syntax patterns of indigenous [sic] language of that area" and "will also display [...] semantic differences reflecting the view of reality embedded in the culture."<sup>187</sup> These semantic differences "subvert[] and alter[] the rigid sequential time

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<sup>184</sup> For a detailed account of the reception of *Slash* by critics, see Manina Jones, "Slash Marks the Spot: 'Critical Embarrassment' and Activist Aesthetics in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*." *West Coast Line* 33:3 (2000): n.p. Web. 5 Mar 2016.

<sup>185</sup> Margery, Fee. "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Beatrice Culleton's *April Raintree*." *Canadian Literature* 124 (1990): 171-172.

<sup>186</sup> Armstrong, "Land Speaking," 193.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

sense compelled by the way the English language grammatically isolates verb tense,” a pattern that is more obviously disrupted in *whispering in shadows*.<sup>188</sup> What may first appear in *Slash* as simple sentences that lack grammatical sophistication, to the fluent English reader, are actually subversions of English grammar rules to let Okanagan language, and epistemology, percolate through the colonizer’s language. It is also important to note that *Slash* was written with the express purpose of being developed in the Okanagan Indian Curriculum Project, and it was actually “commissioned for use as part of the grade eleven course of study in contemporary history.”<sup>189</sup> Quoting Armstrong, Manina Jones notes that Armstrong wrote *Slash* to “pre-empt better-known non-Native writers who were ‘dripping at the mouth’ to take part in the documentation of Native history,” and that *Slash* also pre-empted the founding of the En’owkin Centre,<sup>190</sup> a centre on the Penticton reserve that teaches Syilx educational programs.<sup>191</sup> Considering the political motivations behind the first novel published in Canada by an Indigenous author,<sup>192</sup> it is suspect that critics have so often failed to give generative and insightful readings of *Slash*, an indication, indeed, of critics’ colonized expectations for literature.<sup>193</sup> So, of course, Tommy “read[s] in one of *them* bulletins” about the White

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<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Jones, n.p.

<sup>190</sup> For the meaning of the concept “En’owkin,” see chapter four of Jeannette Armstrong’s dissertation, “Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmix<sup>w</sup>centrism,” as well as the online articles: “En’owkin: What it Means to a Sustainable Community.” *Center for Ecoliteracy*. Web. 20 June 2016; “Indigenous Knowledge and Gift Giving: Living in Community.” *Women and the Gift Economy: A Radically Different World is Possible*. Ed. Genevieve Vaughan. Toronto: Inanna Publications and Education, 2007. Web. 21 May 2016.

<sup>191</sup> Jones, n.p.

<sup>192</sup> Hartmut Lutz dates Armstrong’s 1985 *Slash* as the first novel written in Canada by an Indigenous author. See Hartmut Lutz. Ed. “Interview with Jeannette Armstrong.” *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*. Saskatoon: Fifth House, 1991: 13-32.

<sup>193</sup> For many of the better critical treatments of Armstrong’s *Slash*, and well as informative interviews with the author, see Kim Anderson, “Reclaiming Native Space in Literature/Breaking New Ground: An Interview with Jeannette Armstrong.” *West Coast Line* 23:1/2 (1997): 49-65; Jeannette Armstrong, “Deconstructing Race, Deconstructing Racism: A Conversation Between Jeannette Armstrong and Roxana Ng.” *Situating “Race” and Racisms in Time, Space, and Theory: Critical Essays for Activists and Scholars*. Ed. Jo-Anne Lee and John Lutz. Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014; Karin Beeler, “Image, Music, Text: An Interview with Jeannette Armstrong.” *Studies in Canadian Literature* 21:2 (1996): 143-54; Julia Emberley, “History Lies in Fiction’s Making and Unmaking: Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*. *Thresholds of Difference: Feminist Critique, Native Women’s Writings, Post-colonial Theory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993: 129-50; Matthew Green, “A Hard Day’s Knight: A Discursive Analysis of Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*.” *Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 19:1 (1999): 51-67; Kerstin Knopf, “Terra-Terror-Terrorism?: Land, Colonization, and Protest in Canadian Aboriginal Literature.” *The Canadian Journal of*

Paper, not in “a bulletin.” In light of Armstrong’s highly conscious choice of language and the didactic purpose behind the novel *Slash*, the following paragraphs turn towards a careful reading of the novel with excerpts below to help demonstrate the poetics of Okanagan Rez English.

Towards the beginning of the novel, Tommy, aka Slash, who earns his nickname in a barfight at Turkey Tom’s,<sup>194</sup> reads about the White Paper while he sits in jail for attempted assault. Tommy, now Slash, is sentenced to one-and-a-half years in prison at the age of eighteen for a scuffle in a bar that resulted in an outpouring of Tommy’s deep-seated rage.<sup>195</sup> He reads of the White Paper in a bulletin brought in by Mardi, a friend and soon-to-be lover, a young woman “tough with hard eyes and long black hair that hung below her hips” who works at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Vancouver.<sup>196</sup> Mardi participates in the Beothuck Patrol, a self-organized Indigenous street-outreach group that looks out for those on the streets in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside. To Slash, Mardi is “extra deluxe [...]. I could tell she knew her way around. Nobody could take her for a ride.”<sup>197</sup> Mardi visits Slash in prison, writes him letters, sends him bulletins (likely published by the Native Alliance for Red Power, or NARP), and later serves as his connection to Red Power politics in Vancouver and, eventually, in the United States.

Though this relationship sparks Tommy’s politicization, and propels his development of a politicized Indigenous consciousness, his understanding of colonization begins at a much younger age. Tommy Kelasket, Okanagan-born and raised on reserve, articulates an awareness of class, whiteness, and racism early in life. Around the age of

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*Native Studies* 17:2 (2007): 293-329; Nancy Van Styvendale, “The Trans/historicity of Trauma in Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* and Sherman Alexie’s *Indian Killer*.” *Studies in the Novel* 40:1-2 (2008): 203-223; Janice Williamson and Jeannette Armstrong, “What I Intended Was To Connect... and It’s Happened.” *Tessera* 12 (1992): 111-129.

<sup>194</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 39.

<sup>195</sup> The containment and criminalization of Indigenous peoples, whether through prisons, residential schools, foster care, or confinement to reserves, is a common thread in literature by Indigenous authors. For more on these themes, see: Deena Rymhs, *From the Iron House: Imprisonment in First Nations Writing*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2008; Luana Ross, *Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998; Emma LaRoque, *When the Other Is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850-1990*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014; Sherene Razack, *Dying from Improvement: Inquests and Inquiries into Indigenous Deaths in Custody*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015.

<sup>196</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 40.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*



fourteen, Tommy reflects, “we just weren’t good enough to mix with the white kids. I mean with things like using wrong words and laughing at the wrong times and always feeling shabby and poor [...]”<sup>198</sup> His awareness of white benevolence emerges at this age as well, as he notes that “sometimes out of ‘good manners’ they would talk to us. We knew that it wasn’t because they liked us or wanted to be friends with us. We left out why that was worse than not talking to us.”<sup>199</sup> As Margery Fee writes “[t]he incredible pain, anger, confusion and frustration that *Slash* suffers is the result of his inability to accept either of the only choices offered by the dominant discourse: ‘join the rats’ or ‘cop out and be drunks and losers.’”<sup>200</sup> His personality, desire for action, and awareness of structural oppression mix with anger to inspire the many directions of Tommy’s life through *Slash*, including losing interest in school at sixteen, leaving his family and home on the reserve to try living in Vancouver, traveling across Canada and the United States with Red Power activists, hitting bottom with drug and alcohol addictions, before finally returning to the Okanagan with a new partner Maeg and their newborn child. *Slash* spans roughly fifteen years of Tommy Kelasket’s life, and fifteen of the most intense and tumultuous years of Indigenous activism in the history of Canada and the United States.

While *Slash* is in prison, Mardi writes to him with updates on what is going on outside. The following excerpted letter illuminates the powerful urgency that characterized the Red Power era:

[...] There is nothing wrong with our ways. Just because our people hate to be grabby, just because they don’t knock themselves out like robots at nine-to-five jobs, and they don’t get too excited about fancy stuff or what I call luxuries, they are looked down on and treated as outcasts and called lazy. Pretty soon they believe it and they think of themselves that way. That’s when they give up and drown in drink. Or else they get like us. They get angry inside and fight back somehow. Usually they end up dead, in prison or drink. All of these lead to genocide of our people. You see they only give us two choices. Assimilate or get lost. A lot of us are lost. We need to make a third choice. That’s what Red Patrol is about. We work in shifts on skid row. We pick up people from the streets and help them out anyway we can. We keep the pigs and others from harassing them. We help out even when

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Margery Fee, “Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* and Beatrice Culleton’s *April Raintree*.” *Canadian Literature* 124 (1990): 170.

there is violence. And we talk to them and tell them to leave that place. But most of all we set up an example of pride and power in being Indian. [...]<sup>201</sup>

A number of points stand out in this excerpted letter from Mardi. For one, she refers to “our people,” a characterization that defines the Red Power movement, as Joane Nagel argues in *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. Red Power was a pan-tribal movement, distinct from more contemporary nation or tribal-specific politics of cultural resurgence. The organization of NARP, Vancouver’s own Red Power-inspired activist group, as well as the Beothuck Patrol, also called Red Patrol, were activist manifestations of a pan-tribal awareness that Nagel describes as an “ethnic renewal,” that “has flown in the face of precisely the conditions thought to produce cultural decline,” namely “the problems of poverty and despair that confront many reservation communities” like “depression, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, elevated school dropout rates, substance dependency and addiction, and crime and delinquency.”<sup>202</sup> The Beothuck Patrol can be understood as a direct response to the effects of colonization, and an organizing tool that pulled Indigenous people together in their vulnerable positions on Vancouver streets. Mardi’s letter to Slash also shows the widespread and articulated awareness of Indigenous peoples in both Canada and the United States of the choice to either “assimilate or get lost.”<sup>203</sup> This sense of the options available to Native peoples was a part of an historical consciousness formed from hundreds of years of Indigenous activism, actions that Nagel relates the colonial states interpreted as “war,” from the Handsome Lake movement begun in 1799, to the Ghost Dance movements of 1869 and 1889, the latter of which famously resulted in the massacre of more than 150 women, men, and children in Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1890. Indeed, the Ghost Dance movements and their pan-Indian inclusiveness predated Red Power – a term Bradley Shreve dates to 1966 in *Red Power Rising*, when Clyde Warrior and Mel Thom of the National Indian Youth Council first articulated the term,

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<sup>201</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 49.

<sup>202</sup> Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. 6.

<sup>203</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 46.

taking Black Power as inspiration.<sup>204</sup> These pan-tribal movements that preceded Red Power, by nearly a century or more, focused significantly on cultural revitalization, an effort that Red Power would also develop more strongly in the latter half of the 1970s, as Slash's story tells us.<sup>205</sup>

Mardi's letter to Slash is also noteworthy for its didactic tone, and for the role she plays in Slash's life as an advocate, lover, and most of all, a teacher and political leader. Indeed, Slash finds great connections with, and gains the deepest political education from, women in the novel. So while the novel *Slash* is admittedly lacking in feminist themes, I argue that the role that women play in Slash's life complicate a simplistic gendered reading of the story. *Slash* provides strong women role models to the imagined youthful readers that the novel was initially intended for. It is quite telling that the

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<sup>204</sup> Who actually first uttered "Red Power" is disputed. In *American Indian Ethnic Renewal*, Joane Nagel accounts for the term first being used in 1966 by president of the National Council of American Indians and former member of the National Indian Youth Council, Vine Deloria, Jr. However, given Vine Deloria, Jr.'s involvement with the NIYC, it is likely Deloria picked up the phrase from Mel Thom and Clyde Warrior while working with them.

<sup>205</sup> It is outside of the scope of this chapter to detail the fascinating history of Red Power and its antecedents. For strong histories of Indigenous activism in Canada and the United States that inform this chapter, see: Harold Cardinal, *The Unjust Society*. 1969. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1999; Howard Adams, *Prison of Grass: Canada from the Native point of view*. Toronto: Gen Pub, 1975; Vine Deloria, *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. New York: Macmillan, 1969; Vine Deloria, *The Aggressions of Civilization: Federal Indian Policy Since the 1880s*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984; Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997; Daniel Cobb and Loretta Fowler, *Beyond Red Power: American Indian Politics and Activism since 1900*. Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research, 2007; Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel and Duane Champagne, *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997; Alvin M. Josephy, Joane Nagel and Troy Johnson, *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999; Alvin M. Josephy, Trudy Thomas, and Jeanne Eder, *Wounded Knee: Lest We Forget*. Cody: Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1993; Tadeusz Lewandowski, *Red bird, Red Power: The Life and Legacy of Zitkala-Sa*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016; Rick Monture, *We share Our Matters: Teionkwakhashion tsi niionkwariho:ten: Two Centuries of Writing and Resistance at Six Nations of the Grand River*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2014; Bradley Glenn Shreve, *Red Power Rising: The National Indian Youth Council and the Origins of Native Activism*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011; Nicholas Rosenthal, *Reimagining Indian Country: Native American Migration & Identity in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012; James Treat, *Around the Sacred Fire: A Native Religious Activism in the Red Power era: A Narrative Map of the Indian Ecumenical Conference*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

For a literary history of Red Power and its consequences in Indigenous literary communities, see: Sean Kicummah Teuton, *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008; Robert Warrior, *Tribal Secrets: Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995; Jace Weaver, Craig Womack, and Robert Warrior, eds. *American Indian Literary Nationalism*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006; Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

conversations Slash has with women nearly always present these women as grounded, knowledgeable, anti-violent, strong, and sharp, whereas the examples in the text of lives filled with violence or rage tend to circulate among the men who Slash speaks with. And yet, women are not simplistically portrayed as peaceful and gentle either; Mardi, for example, is a leader within Red Power, and a powerful spokesperson and organizer who directs both men and women. Armstrong's portrayal of intelligent and strong women who productively direct their own rage into activism is an implicit feminist stance in the novel, one that anticipates *whispering in shadows* and Penny's strong lead character.

Another strong woman Slash befriends, though a much less pivotal character than Mardi, is Elise, who he meets on the "Trail of Broken Treaties" caravan. This caravan culminated in the occupation of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) building in Washington, D.C., by the American Indian Movement (AIM) from November 3 to November 9, 1972. Later, while Slash is in Toronto, he reads in the Mohawk newspaper *Akwesasne* that some tribal officials denounced AIM's sit-in at the BIA. Slash reflects, "How in hell could Indians back up the B.I.A. against their own people [...]? Especially when the demands that were being made at the sit-on [sic] were for making things better for all people on the reserve."<sup>206</sup> Slash wants to figure out why the political leadership of tribes were selling out the American Indian Movement, and he draws connections between these tensions in the States and his knowledge of Okanagan politics back home: "I knew that it had a kind of parallel in what was happening back home [...]. I mean about the split between assimilationists and the traditionalists [...]. I knew I had to try to understand what it was about so that I could go home and try to do something about it."<sup>207</sup> For Nagel, these tensions actually characterize a shift in the politics of Red Power, as the American Indian Movement consciously turned towards tribal and reservation-based activism in place of pan-Indian organizing. The last of the major events marking the pan-tribal Red Power era, in Nagel's version of it, is the "Trail of Broken Treaties"

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<sup>206</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 86.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

caravan. This was followed in close proximity by the 1973 Siege at Wounded Knee, an event that had significant impacts on the future of Red Power and AIM organizing.<sup>208</sup>

Following the “Trail of Broken Treaties” and the catastrophic Siege at Wounded Knee,<sup>209</sup> the scale and size of Red Power activism became much smaller, focused on reserve and reservation politics. It was also significantly impacted by the government and mainstream media attacks on AIM, facilitated by the events of Wounded Knee. In *Slash*, we see this shift in political focus in Slash’s own actions, as he makes his way back to British Columbia, and near his home in the Okanagan. There a blockade has been set up to address “dissatisfaction with situations on the reserve” like “poor housing, poor education, high suicide and death rates and low economic opportunities [and...] better housing programs.”<sup>210</sup> In the article, ““Shut the Province Down: First Nations’ Blockades in British Columbia, 1984-1995,”” Nicholas Blomley writes that, in British Columbia, “the summers of 1974 and 1975 saw a number of instances of direct action that included the use of blockades” leading to May and June of 1975 when “at least thirteen blockades were established, their targets including public highways, logging roads, public works yards, the office of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), and a rail line.”<sup>211</sup> From Slash’s perspective, “so many things were going on all at once even the newspapers and television couldn’t seem to keep up. Roadblocks were being thrown up sporadically everywhere in the province over the cut-off land issue.”<sup>212</sup> According to the Ministry of Forestry, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, cut-off lands “means former Indian Reserve lands that, pursuant to Section 2(a) of the McKenna-McBride Agreement of 1912, were removed (i.e. ‘Cut-off’) from Indian Reserve status.”<sup>213</sup> These cut-off lands

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<sup>208</sup> See Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, chapter five.

<sup>209</sup> For the effects of Wounded Knee on Red Power organizing, see Alvin M. Josephy, Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, *Red Power: The American Indians’ Fight for Freedom*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999 and Joane Nagel, *American Indian Ethnic Renewal: Red Power and the Resurgence of Identity and Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

<sup>210</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 120.

<sup>211</sup> Nicholas, Blomley, ““Shut the Province Down: First Nations’ Blockades in British Columbia, 1984-1995.”” *BC Studies*. 111 (1996): 5-35.

<sup>212</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 146.

<sup>213</sup> Ministry of Forestry, Lands and Natural Resource Operations. “Cut-off Lands and Indian Reserve Expansions.” Government of British Columbia. 26 May 2011. Web. 20 Jun 2016. 1.

were one of the ways that the province of British Columbia further encroached on Indigenous territories, a situation that has yet to be fully resolved.<sup>214</sup> Slash “travel[s] around the province” talking to Indigenous communities during a summer of blockades, and tries to educate people about the causes and motivations for political action:<sup>215</sup>

We said things to them like, ‘It’s okay to sing and feel good dancing with the songs of our people. It’s okay to be just what we are. This way some of the hurt that is killing our people and damaging them beyond any help will be overcome.’ It was hard, though, to talk about how that ties us to the land. It’s hard to show just how much our pride, our culture and our lives all have their roots in the land. It’s not easy to explain that to protect and attempt to regain control over it is really the way to protect our own lives as Indian people. It was not easily apparent that it is really the only means we have. I began to see that more and more clearly.<sup>216</sup>

Armstrong’s Syilx environmental ethics begins to show through in the passage above, as Slash begins to “see [...] more clearly” that “our pride, our culture and our lives all have their roots in the land.”<sup>217</sup> Slash’s Indigenous historical consciousness also emerges in section of the novel like this one. While Slash reflects on how hard it is to communicate connections to the land, even among his own people, it may also be that Armstrong is indicating the difficulty of communicating these connections in the English language. In the online article “I Stand With You Against the Disorder,” Armstrong writes that the Nsyilxcen language “refer[s] to the land and our bodies with the same root syllable. [...] We are our land/place. Not to know and to celebrate this is to be without language and without land. It is to be displaced.”<sup>218</sup> This is a displacement that happens, as it becomes clear in *Slash*, as well as in Armstrong’s own reflections like the one above, on the (gendered) body, on the land, and on and in our languages that relate ourselves to each other and our environments.

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<sup>214</sup> For more on cut-off lands, see chapter eight of Paul Tennant’s *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990, as well as Cole Harris, *Making Native Space: Colonialism, Resistance, and Reserves in British Columbia*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2002.

<sup>215</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 116.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid*, 116-117.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>218</sup> Jeannette Armstrong, “I Stand With You Against the Disorder.” *Yes! Magazine*. 8 Nov 2005. Web. 21 May 2016. N.p.

As Slash deepens his understanding of the relationship between Indigenous peoples and land, he also develops a growing sense of spirituality, rooted in his memories of his family and their traditional ways on the reserve. Back in the Okanagan, Slash grows increasingly aware of a disconnect between some of the spoken politics of AIM-influenced activism and the practices that ground his own family and community. He reflects on these tensions in the excerpt below:

I had spent a lot of time convincing myself that we were the same as non-Indians in every way, except that we were oppressed and were angry. Sometimes there were things, though, that would be said, or that would happen, that were not quite explainable. [...] Some of those things had to do with medicine ways, like the winter dances, and other things that were practiced by our people. [...] It seemed to me a big part of what was missing from inside of me, and the reason I couldn't feel anything except bitterness and a compulsion to go with the action was tied up with understanding that. Without finding what was missing, I felt I could easily slip into oblivion like my brother Danny.<sup>219</sup>

This is just one of many passages in which Slash begins to notice something “missing” and recognizes that his “compulsion to go with the action” is motivated, at least in part, by “bitterness.”<sup>220</sup> Slash doesn't find everything he's looking for in activism, though he supports the political demands behind the summer of blockades and the Indigenous sovereigntist actions of the 1970s more generally. His many conversations with strangers and acquaintances recounted throughout the novel are testament to his attempts to have political conversations with Indigenous people about how to make their collective lives better. That summer Slash “even help[s] set up a militant camp on one of the reserves in the Okanagan” with “many people who claimed to be AIM stay[ing] at the camp.”<sup>221</sup> And yet, he still feels he “could easily slip into oblivion like [his] brother Danny,” who was hit by a car after a night of heavy drinking.<sup>222</sup> What Slash finds in the AIM camps and in the groups of people he caravans with across B.C., across Canada, and across the U.S., is “an Indian power through confrontation kind of attitude.”<sup>223</sup> But Slash admits to himself, “I

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<sup>219</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 145.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

was past that. I knew I had to develop further, towards something that would carry me beyond the point of sheer anger and frustration. I couldn't see clearly what it was, so I didn't do anything. I just waited and watched."<sup>224</sup>

With his political fervour waning, but not entirely subsiding, Slash continues attending what he calls "gatherings" in his community and listens to Okanagan people address the issues that are affecting them in their everyday lives.<sup>225</sup> But he avoids "the meetings that were what I called purely politically orientated," where "much of the energy of the leaders was spent jockeying back and forth on interpretations of what Indian Government was."<sup>226</sup> Instead, Slash goes to gatherings where "other people were actually busy defining [government] by practice," and here he meets Maeg, who becomes the person closest to him until the final pages of the novel. Like his relationship with Mardi, and his briefer but significant relationship with Elise on the "Trail of Broken Treaties" caravan, Maeg teaches Slash important lessons on his journey to developing an Indigenous historical consciousness. Maeg speaks in Okanagan, dresses plainly, "not the usual 'radical Indian' or 'office Indian' garb," leading a life on the reserve that melds political activism with traditional Okanagan practices.<sup>227</sup> It is with Maeg that Slash eventually has a child, in the last pages of the novel, having fully committed to returning home and building community from the ground up.<sup>228</sup> Slash's years of wandering, recovery of self, and development of Indigenous historical consciousness lead him back to where he began, home on his Okanagan reserve, where he can enact community relationships and relationships to land that become, for him, a political call to action.

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, 177.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>228</sup> Both *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* conclude with the main characters returning home with their children and partners, a return home and birthing of children that implies certain ways of enacting Indigenous sovereignty that are actually exclusive, not accessible to all Indigenous peoples. And yet, this potential reading of heteronormativity in Armstrong's work is complicated when *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* are considered in the context of Syilx epistemology and social organization. See chapter four for more on this tension.



## **Indigenous cultural resurgence and the emergence of a politics of recognition**

This section reads the final pages of *Slash* to show how a politics of recognition began to emerge during the Red Power era. I argue that this politics of recognition is more fully understood when it is considered in light of the First Nations Property Ownership Act (FNPOA) that Stephen Harper's government introduced in 2012. The politics of recognition has gained its strongest and most visible presence in the second decade of the twenty-first century, now coupled with legislation that alienates noncapitalist Indigenous modes of production and relations to the land.

As *Slash* grows a bit older, and the intense years of AIM-inspired activism draw to a close, many Indigenous sovereigntists turn, as *Slash* does, towards cultural resurgence practices. This turn towards cultural revitalization was both a move away from a politics of activism that tended to focus on resisting the colonial state, and a turn to recognizing that traditional Indigenous lifeways are in themselves resilient anti-colonial practices. It cannot go without saying, however, that the severe criminalization and persecution of AIM activists during the Red Power era must have also contributed to the pressures felt by *Slash*'s real-life contemporaries, as FBI agents infiltrated the AIM movement and pitted organizers against each other.<sup>229</sup> *Slash* was never close enough to the centre of AIM organizing to be involved in the now-infamous events that helped to break up the once-strong American Indian Movement; instead, *Slash* is always on the outskirts of activism, in love affairs with women, like Mardi, who are much more directly tied into political organizing. But *Slash* notes the difference in the air:

Sweats and pipe ceremonies and prayer gatherings were common. A whole different attitude than in the mid-seventies was plainly evident. There were young people who were very aware of what was Indian in approach and what wasn't. They were rebuilding a worldview that had to work in this century, keeping the values of the old Indian ways. To me that was more

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<sup>229</sup> For the infiltration of AIM by FBI agents, see Troy Johnson, Joane Nagel, and Duane Champagne. *American Indian Activism: Alcatraz to the Longest Walk*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997, and Alvin M. Josephy, Joane Nagel, and Troy Johnson, *Red Power: The American Indians' Fight for Freedom*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

important than anything else. I thought that, through this way, there was no bullshit that could get through for very long.<sup>230</sup>

While the resurgence of Indigenous practices that Slash notes in the late 1970s has no doubt helped to spark contemporary cultural resurgence movements, this shift to culture as a site of political transformation occurred at the same time that the Canadian state also shifted its mode of assimilation of Indigenous peoples. As Glen Coulthard writes in *Red Skin White Masks*, and as my previous chapter on George Clutesi's work has shown, the politics of recognition that has emerged, partly as a method of containing the vital force of Red Power, is a relationship of deep unevenness between Canada and the Indigenous nations within its borders. This is a politics that feigns acceptance, built as it is on the bedrock of multiculturalism, while it makes few attempts at changing the material conditions that cause ongoing poverty, suicide, and violence in Native communities. So it is with a sense of irony that I read Slash's conviction that "there was no bullshit that could get through for very long" in a cultural resurgence movement. Though, as my previous chapter argued, there is always a politics of recognition *between* Indigenous peoples that is not coopted by the state's politics of recognition, these liberatory forms of recognition are still operating in a settler colonial context that has not receded because of practices of cultural resurgence.

The "bullshit" that may have gotten through very well could be the First Nations Property Ownership Act (FNPOA) passed into law in 2012, though in process since 2006. In "Divide and Conquer: Privatizing Indigenous Land Ownership as Capital Accumulation," Rebecca Jane Hall "argue[s] that the FNPOA proposal is both an ontological and a structural dispossession, aiming to replace Indigenous relationships to land with liberal capitalist ideology and institutional and economic structures."<sup>231</sup> Countering the dominant narrative that private property is "an ahistorical, universal given," Hall instead insists that "alienable private property is a relational structure between land and people particular to capitalist relations."<sup>232</sup> The FNPOA seeks to enter

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<sup>230</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 191.

<sup>231</sup> Rebecca Jane Hall, "Divide and Conquer: Privatizing Indigenous Land Ownership as Capital Accumulation." *Studies in Political Economy* 96 (2015): 33.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

First Nations into fee-simple land arrangements<sup>233</sup> that would restructure “communal Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies, for the purpose of expanding the scope and deepening the intensity of capital accumulation,” where “restructuring communal land into fee-simple land is a direct assault on Indigenous noncapitalist means of production and reproduction.”<sup>234</sup>

I read the FNPOA as an enormously threatening realization of the colonial state’s shift from a politics of assimilation to a politics of recognition, in that it presents a “way out” for Indigenous nations that nonetheless requires entry into private property relations. This “way out” is not entirely dissimilar from the 1980 Trudeau government’s proposal to terminate Aboriginal rights under the “Charter of Rights” document as part of the patriation of the Constitution of Canada, which proposed to extend the rights of mainstream Canadians to Aboriginal peoples.<sup>235</sup> In the final pages of *Slash*, Tommy disagrees with Maeg about the inclusion of Aboriginal rights in the “Charter of Rights” and Canada’s soon-to-be minted Constitution. Their exchange, the following excerpted from Maeg’s point of view, illuminates the political tensions between Slash and his partner, as well as the tensions that characterized the era:

We must get some special rights guaranteed and maintain our land bases, free of taxation. Your way doesn’t guarantee anything but opposition and resistance, and maybe someday our descendants might be able to get a better deal. Your way guarantees years of bitter struggle. [...] Canada is here to stay. All our leaders are trying to make sure of is that we join Canada in a way that is not too harsh for our people.<sup>236</sup>

Maeg participates in the Constitution Express, a caravan of Indigenous activists that travels to Ottawa. The caravan eventually travels to the United Nations in New York and to Europe, where Indigenous leaders present their case for Aboriginal rights to governments in England, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium. But Slash vehemently opposes the Constitution Express; he sees the inclusion of Aboriginal rights

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<sup>233</sup> The most basic definition of “fee simple” is private property relations; fee simple land is land that can be owned individually rather than held in collective stewardship.

<sup>234</sup> Hall, 32.

<sup>235</sup> For more on the effects of Constitutional patriation on Indigenous Nations in Canada, see: Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, “Indian Nations and the Constitution: A Position Paper.” Vancouver. 1980. Web. 20 Jun 2016.

<sup>236</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 200-201.

within a colonial constitution as a forfeit of Indigenous sovereignty, and a step back from the political momentum that was built in the early 1970s through Red Power. In contrast, Maeg's position, cited above, accuses Slash of nothing but "opposition and resistance," "years of bitter struggle," and concedes that, "Canada is here to stay."<sup>237</sup> This shift in tone from Maeg, who Slash shares many political affinities with – as well as her difference from Mardi, who is still active and struggling south of the Canadian border, sending brief letters to Slash written in haste, and frustration, at the shifting times – signals a much larger change than simply in the character of Maeg. The White Paper was drafted with the purpose of terminating Indigenous nationhood, relations to land, and identity in one piece of legislation. In the 2014 article, "How Capitalism Will Save Colonialism: The Privatization of Reserve Lands in Canada," Shiri Pasternak writes that "the last major initiative to privatize reserve lands prior to the introduction of the FNPOA was in 1969 with the Liberal Party of Canada's infamous federal 'White Paper' on Indian Policy that recommended the transition of reserves into full fee simple ownership," arguing that "the justification for privatization at that time was to promote *equality* [...]."<sup>238</sup> When termination became impossible due to the response by Red Power activists, a different tactic was taken to "include" Indigenous peoples within the Canadian Constitution as a method of assimilation. This has been followed up by reconciliatory attempts, coupled with the termination policies of acts like FNPOA. However, the responses by Indigenous peoples to the White Paper of 1969, the patriation of the Canadian Constitution in 1982, and the 2012 FNPOA are extremely varied. Whereas the White Paper was met with the "Red Paper" and mass organizing, eleven years later the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, an establishment organization in distinction from grassroots Red Power, lead a caravan across the country to rally support for, essentially, a position of working *with* the Canadian government. Though it would have been disastrous for Aboriginal rights to have been terminated under the 1980 Constitutional patriation, the momentum of resistance and refusal of colonial terms of engagement that characterized the Red Power era was no longer at the forefront of Indigenous activism. Paul Tennant writes in

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Shiri Pasternak, "How Capitalism Will Save Colonialism: The Privatization of Reserve Lands in Canada." *Antipode* (2014): 4.

*Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989* that, as early as 1972, the political climate in British Columbia for Indigenous movements “was radically different from what it had ever been in the past.”<sup>239</sup> He notes that “[t]he British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs were now the dominant elements in Indian politics, each having some two hundred full-time employees and an annual budget well in excess of \$2 million.”<sup>240</sup> Slash’s response to this situation, and to the Constitution Express in particular, is, characteristically, dramatic:

I felt the world had come to an end. The worst had happened. I knew for people like me it meant only one thing. We would finally have to take a real stand to resist this or our children would have nothing, nothing but equality in a slave market to the corporations. I feared for our future then. I saw some dark days ahead. I knew, finally, our real defeat could be just around the corner.<sup>241</sup>

Slash knows that inclusion into the Canadian constitution also means inclusion into Canada’s capitalist market, a market that is rooted in private property relations. His disgust at the Constitution Express is motivated, in part, from his developed Indigenous historical consciousness that sees the interrelatedness of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and violence that have produced many of his life experiences, forces that he has struggled through his young adult years to learn to resist. Further, we can read this “defeat [that] could be just around the corner” as the introduction of the First Nations Property Ownership Act, an Act that seeks to solidify capitalist private property relations on reserves, eliminating Indigenous difference at a profound epistemological and ontological level.

## **Conclusion**

It is in this context that we can see more clearly how the politics of recognition, begun through events like the Constitution Express and the inclusion of Aboriginal

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<sup>239</sup> Paul Tennant, *Aboriginal Peoples and Politics: The Indian Land Question in British Columbia, 1849-1989*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 1990. 165.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Armstrong, *Slash*, 205.

peoples in the colonial constitution of Canada, work hand-in-hand with acts like FNPOA to diminish Indigenous difference, “recognizing” culture *as* difference, and quietly working to eliminate the material differences of Indigenous lifeways. In the following chapter, which turns to an analysis of Armstrong’s 2000 novel *whispering in shadows*, these themes of cultural recognition tied to Indigenous dispossession are complicated by a transnational awareness of the explicitly brutal dispossession of Indigenous Mayan subsistence farmers in the Mexican state of Chiapas. Unlike the dominant politics of recognition that currently guides Canadian relationships with Indigenous nations, Mexico enacts policies much less veiled in benevolence, policies facilitated by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), as *whispering in shadows* tells us. Armstrong’s Indigenous feminist ecology becomes much more tangible in *whispering in shadows*, as Penny Jackson’s story criss-crosses the Okanagan, Alaska, the United States, and Mexico, forming relationships as she travels with Indigenous peoples who are all experiencing ongoing dispossession from land and ways of living. *whispering in shadows* extends Tommy Kelasket’s journey to consciousness, and his path to activism, through Penny’s life and her commitments to awareness, action, and, importantly for her, art. *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* are, I argue, best read as companion texts that attempt to present multiple Indigenous perspectives of a globalized world, from the Red Power era of Canada and the United States, to the rural Mayan coffee fields of Chiapas.

## **interlude: alliances**

I began writing the fourth chapter of my dissertation in the fall following my first admission to hospital for depression with psychosis. I had a wonderfully productive spell of a few months, wrote many pages, attended a conference, contributed to a research project that my PhD supervisor was heading up, maintained extracurricular and social commitments. It was a very positive time. I was stunned by my clarity and focus, given that only months previous I hadn't been able to read.

My positioning of myself had shifted as well. I was much more at ease with asserting my identity, felt a kind of confidence about myself and the irreconcilable elements of my story that allowed me to engage in intellectual work with fervor. At this point, I was no longer questioning my place, my ability or capacity to contribute, or the validity of my identity. Though there would be other hard moments in the future, which I speak to in the previous interlude, I had found a certain grounding; my hard work on my self had paid off.

I now took on what were, in some ways, more complex questions of Indigenous beingness. Having dispelled many of the confusions and misperceptions that were the product of how I had internalized colonialism, I was open to receiving stories and information from Indigenous perspectives. I sought Indigenous conceptions of everything; I wanted to fill my world with Indigenous understandings of being and acting. This isn't to say that I, in my own estimation, was appropriating knowledges from Indigenous cultures that weren't my own. I felt an extreme necessity to proceed with utmost caution and care, to humble myself to what I didn't know and to what I would only ever understand partially. This required a huge acceptance of just that, partial knowing. I became "at home" in my particular location as a dispossessed Indigenous person, and I recognized the fact that I would live a life that would straddle many knowledges, epistemologies, genealogies, and ways of being. In this sense, I knew that I could never consciously seek something "whole" again; when I previously sought to adopt a Marxist framework, for instance, I was misguided in believing that, given my subject position, I could accountably and honestly adopt a totalizing perspective of the

world. Instead, I acknowledged that my life would be a continuum of learning, relearning, doing, and undoing, and that there was indeed much joy to be found in this process. I would not, in my intellectual endeavours, seek to contribute an entirely new framework for understanding the world around us. But I would through these endeavours be able to weave together seemingly disparate stories and histories, make revealing connections, and perhaps, if I was lucky at any point in my life, allow consciousness to work through me in expressing those “structures of feeling” that we collectively hold but find difficult to express. These are the kinds of contributions I hope my work will make.

Writing this form of personal narrative, as I have chosen to do in my introduction, interludes, and parts of my conclusion, has been an opportunity to reflect to myself the ways that I have traveled, as a human being, in the past years. It has afforded me space to connect the highly particular and personal aspects of my consciousness with a greater awareness of consciousness that extends beyond and through each of us. What I have chosen to share about my life here are significant realizations, struggles, moments, and relationships that, at this moment of writing, seem to me to be telling of where I’m at now. If I were to write these reflections in a few years or a decade from now, I would no doubt give weight and significance to a different range of challenges and experiences, and I would likely articulate their meaning in a different way.

One piece of my life in Vancouver that has been hugely instructive and constructive (and it would indeed be a misrepresentation to write these reflections without speaking to it) is my ongoing commitment to social justice organizing. Within a few months of arriving in Vancouver to begin my studies, I started familiarizing myself as much as I could with the grassroots political landscape of the city. I felt a real urgency to become involved in this way. I also felt a strong need to ground myself both in the communities I could form accountable relationships to, and also to the place, and land, that I found myself in.

My method of doing this was to become involved in a group that was, at the time, a grassroots group that did educational and non-violent actions to draw attention to the housing crisis in the lower Mainland and across British Columbia. The focus was on the dire lack of low-income housing, and the growing prevalence of homelessness. In this



sense, it was a class-centric group in its initial scope of addressing and speaking about social inequalities. While the analyses held by many people involved in the group were markedly *not* class-centric, and took into account the complex ways that gender and race and ability, for instance, directly produce discrepancies in housing justice, our work at that point tended towards publicly focusing on homelessness and the need for low-income housing, and sometimes this inadvertently meant that other contributing factors to someone's experience of structural oppression were not as central in our public articulations as they could have been. But in the years that followed, many things changed. New people joined, some people left to pursue other life commitments. Our politics changed as well, both in response to the changing membership, and also in response to the development of politics around us. The more we worked together, the more it became obvious that merely focusing our energies on low-income housing needs and homelessness was telling a very partial story. Yes, it is true that these are basic needs that affect every aspect of a person's life, and it is also true that these issues deserve, indeed require, concerted focus and attention from extra-governmental bodies, like social justice groups, because the austerity budgets and politics that are increasingly being put forth, by all levels of Canadian government, are a large part of the problem. Solutions won't come from the government, not without great effort and pressure applied by people outside of the government.

These things I still hold to be true, as I did when I initially became involved in the group. Yet, what has changed is that I and we no longer think it is sufficient to call for partial reforms of a very broken system. It is actually unrealistic to imagine that we could return to a social democratic-inspired state that characterized much of Canada's policies in the 1970s, for instance. If we pay attention to the way that current governmental policies and budgets reflect neoliberalism and austerity, it is more realistic to recognize that things cannot be reversed, back to the way it was when Canada invested millions in the building of low-income social housing, and homelessness was a minor fraction of what it is now. Not only is this fantasy, it also ignores that ways in which social democracy required the imperialist accumulation of wealth globally alongside the colonial extraction of wealth within Canada's borders. It is also unrealistic to imagine that partial reforms can really make significant changes in the long run, for our future

generations. Perhaps some reforms may make the daily lives of some people a bit better in the immediate, but without drastic changes to the underlying economic and governmental structures, our future generations will live in societies that are much worse off than ours currently is.

In short, our group began to consciously seek a long-term perspective. We began to resist falling into the common pitfall of feeling the real life-or-death needs that people in communities presented to us, and allowing these serious needs to determine the horizon of our political vision. We widened our vision. We worked hard to consciously reflect the real-life dynamics that communities experienced, and we also worked hard to intervene in communities' knowledges when this knowledge was oppressively gendered or raced.

The group I began organizing with in 2013 was called the Social Housing Coalition. We changed our name to the Social Housing Alliance soon thereafter, reflecting a slight change in the organization of our membership; previously, our membership had been individuals from affected communities, organizers, and social justice groups or representatives from these groups who were also confronting housing justice or homelessness through their work. When we changed our name to Social Housing Alliance, we were no longer attempting to build a coalition that would come together despite our differences to throw energy behind pressuring the government to build social housing, but instead reaching towards articulating a more visionary politics that was not necessarily bound by working in a coalitional form.

Looking back on this period, we were in a transitional phase. Actually, in some respects we have been in a transitional phase all along, since our politics are constantly developing. But during the few years' time when we were known as the Social Housing Alliance, we were really transitioning to something completely different, though we didn't quite know what that meant. The work was very hard. At certain points our "group," which maintained biweekly organizing meetings since the first days of organizing together, along with additional meetings or community outreach or public panels, was only really five or six committed people. When we started a new organizing effort in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby, it was demoralizing at times when barely a

handful of neighbourhood residents would come out to a meeting, or when we would see exactly the same faces each time. I remember days when showing up to meetings was a practice in pure doggedness. The most dedicated and committed people I have ever met have been those organizers who refused to give up, especially when there were no signs of anything working. I learned so much about perseverance in these years.

But things changed. We built momentum, met new people, inspired people, threw amazing efforts into outreach, persisted, took setbacks with grace, carried on, and worked hard. In the summer of 2016, we supported former residents and allied organizers to squat a three-story walkup apartment building in the Metrotown neighbourhood of Burnaby that was “demovicted”<sup>242</sup> for a high-income condo tower. The squat, which we enjoyed calling the Anti-Imperial squat since the building was located on Imperial Street, lasted for nearly two weeks. It was a breakthrough moment, an incredibly uplifting experience of community power and solidarity. We opened rooms in the building for homeless people living in the area, gave them keys to lock their own suites, sometimes the first place they’d had off the streets in over a decade. We received spontaneous deliveries of a half-dozen boxes of pizza from a pizza shop down the street, and curry and so many warm samosas from a family restaurant nearby. Residents in neighbouring buildings, which were already slated or soon to be slated for demolition, brought their kids and I played soccer with two young boys in the heat of summer on the lawn. We held “paint-ins” on the building and children and their parents decorated it with drawings and slogans. I brought my dog with me every day, and quickly found it easier to just sleep overnight at the squat than return home after sixteen-hour days. Yukon, my husky/shepherd rescue dog, became our mascot.

Though the squat was eventually broken up by about two dozen cops dressed in riot gear, one early morning around 5am, we had already won. The experience of community power by those residents of the neighbourhood was palpable. And for us organizers, a more than two-year stint of tireless organizing up seemingly endless steep

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<sup>242</sup> The term “demovictions” refers to the eviction of tenants for the demolition of their apartment buildings, most often to build higher-income condo towers. See Alliance Against Displacement’s Stop Demovictions Burnaby campaign, the group that coined the term: <http://www.stopdisplacement.ca/stop-demovictions-burnaby/>.

hills had paid off. Today, we continue to organize in the Metrotown neighbourhood of Burnaby. And looking back, I recognize that we used the momentum and success of the squat to propel us forward in developing new campaigns. After the squat, our membership increased significantly. And our name had changed by this time from Social Housing Alliance to Alliance Against Displacement, no longer referencing social housing as the particular cause we were fighting for, but instead gesturing to our desire to fight against the displacement caused by capitalist forces more broadly.

During this time, a major and ongoing conversation that we were having as a group was the relationship between displacement and dispossession. All of the organizers recognized the importance of broadening our analysis and our work to reflect not just capitalist forces of displacement but also colonial forces of dispossession. It is important to say that we had no models to build from, no examples from previously existing social justice groups of how to bridge anti-capitalist and anti-colonial politics. We were feeling around in the dark, in a way, at first cautiously raising these issues, and eventually confronting them head on. Today, we organize an urban Indigenous campaign which is a new initiative of Alliance Against Displacement. As with any new campaign (and as our experience in Burnaby, as well as in many other locations, showed us) the road forward is anything but clear, and starting out is often a rough ride. For our urban Indigenous campaign, we are holding talking circles to begin to form relationships and trust, begin to collectively acknowledge, confront, and dispel the ways we have internalized colonialism, and work towards articulating how we experience colonialism's effects in our everyday lives. The long-term goal is to build urban Indigenous political capacity and agency and provide space for urban Indigenous people to contribute to Indigenous resurgence efforts, even as we are markedly dispossessed of our nations and territories. Importantly, I see our urban Indigenous campaign as a space where those of us who are dispossessed can speak to our particular experiences of dispossession without shame. I believe that if we can build our collective confidence, and consciousness, *as* dispossessed Indigenous peoples, we have an extraordinary amount of insight for anti-capitalist and anti-colonial political movements.

What had begun as a way for me to build grounded relationships in community in a new city I'd recently moved to has developed into something much more complex. As I

have shifted my identity, grappled with all of the things I have shared in the previous interludes, and built up my own confidence as a dispossessed Indigenous person, I have come to see my work with Alliance Against Displacement quite differently. From my subject position, and considering my very limited access to my nations and territories at this point in my life, I have struggled to understand where I fit, politically and socially, within Indigenous communities and within broader society more generally. I have struggled to understand how I could possibly develop ways of practicing Indigenous relations to land if I am so dispossessed from my territories, and so removed from the cultures and languages of my nations. While I still absolutely wrestle with this challenge on a near daily basis, I have come to view my organizing work with Alliance Against Displacement as a way of practicing aspects of Indigenous consciousness. The Alliance has quite literally become family; they have taken care of me when I have been in my worst states of health, and they have provided such consistent, steadfast care through my high and low points that the only way I can think to describe the kind of relationships we have built together is one of family. We have each other's backs, we challenge each other, we love each other. I have both found and helped build a family within this social justice group that has become my most significant site of accountability and responsibility in my life.

I do think that there are ways of understanding this in Indigenous terms, and I do feel that I am practicing aspects of Indigenous consciousness in my work with the Alliance. The word “family” is, to my own ears, negatively bound up with the oppressive gender norms of the European nuclear family, that severely limiting economic site that perpetuates gender violence and also organizes us into productive units under capitalism. But “family” in Indigenous contexts is decisively not that. Cherokee writer and scholar Daniel Heath Justice, among others, writes of the importance of kinship to Indigenous ways of knowing and being.<sup>243</sup> Kinship, versus the nuclear family, does not ultimately discriminate its membership in terms of bloodlines or lineages. Kinship recognizes that

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<sup>243</sup> Daniel Heath Justice's chapter “Go Away Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative” in the book *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, edited by Craig Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher Teuton. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008. Justice's chapter explores Indigenous kinship practices in the context of Indigenous literary nationalisms.

underneath all of the complex variations that characterize our expressions as human beings, there is a common and shared beingness that surpasses any of our categorical, cultural, or political distinctions. In its broadest terms, kinship recognizes all of humanity to share a commonality that is just as important as, and also not repressive towards, our complex differences. The more I reflect on my many layers of family – extending from my biological family who I have only relatively recently been able to form relationships to, to my adoptive family, to my brother’s biological family, who I had the pleasure of meeting two years ago – I can much more easily understand how family has expressed itself in my life through the concept and practice of kinship.

It is also the case that I increasingly believe that my engagement with Alliance Against Displacement is also a form of practicing relationships to land. I am, for better or worse, an urban Native, a dispossessed Indigenous person whose relationships to my nations and territories have been torn by the effects of colonialism in my life. In this context, it is not realistic to expect myself to form parallel relationships to land that Indigenous land defenders, traditionalists, and others less dispossessed of their territories and nations can practice. It is simply not possible. Throughout my journey that I’ve spoken to in these pages, I have deeply struggled with how I could possibly retain my Indigeneity if the most crucial aspect of it – a culturally formed and inflected relationship to land – was something I did not, could not, have.

I think that anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements and politics have the potential within them to hold Indigenous land stewardship principles. I think there is space for us to make our movements not just inclusive of these principles, but actually founded on them. In practice, this means developing ways of understanding our relationship to our lived environment – the city – that does not rely on European models of private property ownership. There is no reason we need to own the land, or the buildings, we live on and within; but there is every reason to care for them and to see them as valuable, living resources for future generations. We all, whether Indigenous or not, have a responsibility to those who have yet to be born, and we have a responsibility to our ancestors, whether we define our ancestors as those people we share bloodlines with, or those people who have fought valiantly in social and political struggles that have improved our own lives today.

The following chapter takes on some of these questions about responsibility and stewardship to and for the land by reading Jeannette Armstrong's second novel *whispering in shadows* for its expressions of Indigenous land relationships in a globalized world. While Armstrong's text, and the characters within it, express these principles in very different ways than I have above, her text has informed my own ability to see my work with Alliance Against Displacement in an Indigenous context. *whispering in shadows* has, like all of the texts I read critically in this dissertation, given me a certain kind of permission to live, and to live as an Indigenous woman.

## Chapter 4.

### Syilx Environmental Ethics Outside of Colonial Time: Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*

*Land bonding is not possible in the kind of economy surrounding us, because land must be seen as real estate [sic] to be 'used' and parted with if necessary. I see the separation is accelerated by the concept that 'wilderness' needs to be tamed by 'development' and that this is used to justify displacement of peoples and unwanted species. I know what it feels like to be an endangered species on my land, to see the land dying with us. It is my body that is being torn, deforested and poisoned by 'development'. Every fish, plant, insect, bird and animal that disappears is part of me dying. I know all their names and I touch them with my spirit. I feel it every day, as my grandmother and my father did. – Jeannette Armstrong<sup>244</sup>*

#### Introduction

In the 1997 essay “Sharing one skin: native Canadian Jeannette Armstrong explains how the global economy robs us of our full humanity,” published in the *New Internationalist* and quoted in this chapter’s epigraph, Armstrong introduces the concept “land bonding,” a way of expressing living relationships that Indigenous peoples hold with the land. This chapter argues that implicit in the concept of land bonding is an Indigenous feminist theory that shows the relationship between gender and the land. Armstrong’s land bonding connects a way of living under capitalism that sees all land as potential real estate with a way of living that perpetuates violence against Indigenous women at rates much higher than experienced by the mainstream Canadian population.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Jeannette Armstrong, “Sharing one skin: native Canadian Jeannette Armstrong explains how the global economy robs us of our full humanity.” *New Internationalist* (Jan/Feb 1997): 16.

<sup>245</sup> An Amnesty International report in Canada found that “in a 2009 government survey of the ten provinces, Aboriginal women were nearly three times more likely than non-Aboriginal women to report being a victim of a violent crime; this was true regardless of whether the violence was perpetrated by a stranger or by a spouse” (2). Further, the report states “that the national homicide rate for Indigenous women is at least seven times higher than for non-Indigenous women” (ibid). See “Violence Against Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada: A Summary of Amnesty International’s Concerns and Call to Action.” Ottawa: Amnesty International Canada, 2014. Web. 25 Jun 2016.



In sum, this chapter argues for connections between capitalist valuing of land as commodity and the Westernization of Indigenous understandings of gender. Jeannette Armstrong's writing expresses an epistemological view of nature and our interconnectedness with it that also poses a different understanding of the passage and flow of time.

The following two sections of this chapter turn to *whispering in shadows*, a novel that expands the frame of Indigenous politics transnationally. The main character, Penny Jackson, travels to Chiapas, Mexico and participates in conversations to establish fair trade and Indigenous-owned coffee production in the wake of the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). I argue that what might strike readers as a novel about globalization and global capital is just as much a novel about Indigenous relations to the land. *Whispering in shadows* picks up Tommy's politicization towards the end of *Slash* and pushes it further; that is, *whispering in shadows* is a novel that produces Indigenous feminist theory<sup>246</sup> and articulates the violences of gendered accumulation by dispossession,<sup>247</sup> making it clear that dispossession happens on the land *as well as* the

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On the conditions of sexual and gender violence against Indigenous women in the United States, Amnesty International states that: "Data gathered by the US Department of Justice indicates that Native American and Alaska Native women are more than 2.5 times more likely to be raped or sexually assaulted than women in the USA in general. A US Department of Justice study on violence against women concluded that 34.1 per cent of American Indian and Alaska Native women – or more than one in three – will be raped during their lifetime; the comparable figure for the USA as a whole is less than one in five" (2). See Amnesty International, "Maze of injustice: The failure to protect Indigenous women from sexual violence." New York: Amnesty International Publications, 2006. Web 25 Jun 2016.

<sup>246</sup> Taking a cue from Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill, I am not labeling *whispering in shadows* as an Indigenous feminist novel, and rather choosing to position it as *producing* Indigenous feminist theory. As these authors note, Indigenous feminist theory does not always come from those who identify with this label, particularly because of the suspicion within Native communities of the "whiteness" of the word "feminism." See "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy." *Feminist Formations* 25:1 (2013): 8-34. For more on feminism's position in relation to Indigenous women, see: Jennifer Nez Denetdale and Mishuana Goeman, "Claiming the 'F' Word: Native Women, Feminisms, and Visions of Sovereignty" *Wicazo Sa Review*. Special Issue. 27.2 (2009).

<sup>247</sup> "Accumulation by dispossession" is a term that draws from Marx's understanding of how capital is accumulated through the dispossession of communities from land. It updates Marx's "so-called primitive accumulation" concept that he developed in *Capital Vol I* by highlighting the *ongoing* nature of accumulation by dispossession, rather than considering it as an initial phase in colonial-capitalist state establishments. The term has been popularized by David Harvey's book *The New Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. However, it was first hinted at in the activist-intellectual project called *Midnight Notes* in "The New Enclosures." *Midnight Notes* 10 (1990): 1-98.

gendered body.<sup>248</sup> Positioning Armstrong as a producer of Indigenous feminist theory in *whispering in shadows* suggests that her fiction, as well as her essays on politics, language, and the land, many of which are referred to below, should be given as much consideration as foundational Indigenous feminist texts like Joyce Green's *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (2007) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson's *Talkin' up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (2000). Finally, I relate the nonlinear form of *whispering in shadows* to Syilx understandings of time, arguing that the text performs a "running out of" colonial time that attempts to decolonize the English language by structuring the plot of *whispering in shadows* in nontraditional ways. Overall, I read *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* as companion texts that develop a Syilx environmental ethics that parallels Armstrong's dissertation work on the same topic; but, rather than overly determine either novel in explicit Syilx references, *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* are both resolutely accessible to broad Indigenous knowledges, and find resonance with major themes of class, racism, gender, the development of consciousness, and political activism.

The following pages draw considerable insight from Armstrong's doctoral dissertation titled "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmix<sup>w</sup>centrism."<sup>249</sup> Armstrong's dissertation presents a unique Syilx environmental ethics irreducible to current Western environmental methods and ethical systems. Syilx environmental ethics is an Indigenous feminist ecology of land rooted in the dialectics between Okanagan land and the Nsyilxcen language born from it. Her dissertation is a text that insists on the centrality of orality and oral traditions in shaping the past, present, and future relationships with the land, and between Syilx people. It refuses any collapse of Syilx environmental knowledge into Western concepts, like deep ecology, that may at first seem similar, by rooting the explanations of Syilx ways of understanding and relating to land in the structures of Nsyilxcen language.

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<sup>248</sup> Sarah Hunt extends the connection between dispossession of land and gender violence in her response to Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks*, "Violence, Law and the Everyday Politics of Recognition," a paper given at Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA), Washington DC, June 6, 2015.

<sup>249</sup> Jeannette Armstrong, "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmix<sup>w</sup>centrism." PhD dissertation. Universität Greifswald, 2009.

Armstrong's fluency in Nsyilxcen, an essential experience informing her dissertation, is an important consideration in developing a reading of *Slash* and *whispering in shadows*, two texts that have been, in my opinion, critically misread by some colonial scholars as either lacking aesthetic value, in the case of *Slash*, or attempting (and potentially failing, as some might read it) a project of innovative writing akin to *l'écriture féminine*,<sup>250</sup> in the case of *whispering in shadows*. These perspectives on Armstrong's work reduce the tensions between Nsyilxcen and English, and disregard Armstrong's many essays and interviews that detail both her intimate relationship to Nsyilxcen, and her struggle to render Syilx epistemology into English. She writes in the influential and oft-quoted essay "Land Speaking" that "my writing in English is a continuous battle against the rigidity in English, and I revel in the discoveries I make in constructing new ways to circumvent such invasive imperialism upon my tongue."<sup>251</sup> She states directly that "it is my conviction that Okanagan, my original language, the language of my people, constitutes the most significant influence on my writing in English."<sup>252</sup> Armstrong reminds us that epistemological understandings are developed within language in its relation to place, as she asserts that Nsyilxcen is "the language spoken by the land, which is interpreted by the Okanagan into words" and that it "carries parts of [...] ongoing reality."<sup>253</sup> It is, as Armstrong's dissertations shows, a relationship to land facilitated by language that roots Indigenous peoples to their territories.

Considering *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* as novels that prefigure a Syilx environmental ethics allows for this chapter to show how violence against women has been intimately tied to the violences of settler colonialism in Canada and the United States (as well as internationally). Though *Slash*, told in Tommy Kelasket's voice, lacks an overtly feminist perspective, I read *whispering in shadows* as a complementary text to

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<sup>250</sup> *L'écriture féminine* is a term introduced by Hélène Cixous in her 1976 essay "The Laugh of the Medusa," and developed by French feminist theorist Julia Kristeva, among others. It brought together psychoanalytic perspectives with second wave feminism, and intervened at the level of grammar, syntax, and the form of language to assert that women's writing is unique and must break out from the patriarchal space of gendered Western languages. See Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*. 1:4 (1976): 875-893.

<sup>251</sup> Armstrong, "Land Speaking," 194.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

*Slash* that develops the politicization of Tommy into Penny's global awareness of the effects of colonization, and her strength as a single Indigenous mother. Seen in this way, the two texts are two parts of a whole, that, when read alongside Armstrong's doctoral dissertation, provide a complex portrayal of Indigenous consciousness, resistance, and resurgence in twentieth and twenty-first century settler colonialism.

## **Indigenous feminist ecology in *whispering in shadows***

*I've been thinking about us, the human, as 'natural environment', too.  
Aren't we? I don't mean as individuals. I mean the body human. How is  
the human organism, as one whole unit, faring in what it has wrought?  
– whispering in shadows*<sup>254</sup>

The first section of this chapter considers Armstrong's novel *whispering in shadows* as a text that produces an Indigenous feminist ecology, embodying, in fictionalized form, Armstrong's Syilx environmental ethics developed in her dissertation. Compared to *Slash*, much less has been written about *whispering in shadows*, a context that I perceive to be the case not only because *Slash* was published fifteen years before *whispering in shadows*, or because *Slash* holds the rightly impressive status as the first book published in Canada by an Indigenous author. For all of the critical dislike of *Slash*'s form and writing, as a previous section of this chapter noted, *whispering in shadows* stages more conscious interventions in classical structures of the novel, resulting in formal innovations that have likely produced critics' dismissal of the novel. Diana Brydon notes that "the novel of ideas has not fared well in Canadian literary criticism" and criticizes the critics by saying that the "reception of Armstrong's novel reveals the limitations of conventional literary criticism in responding to such innovative engagements with globalization and its discontents."<sup>255</sup> *Whispering in shadows* nearly lacks narration, relying primarily on dialogue to establish plot, while also weaving together letters, personal monologues, poems, and fragments from Penny's diary. In addition, the novel spans historical time by shifting unpredictably to Penny's childhood

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<sup>254</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 84.

<sup>255</sup> Diana Brydon, "Global Designs, Postcolonial Critiques: Rethinking Canada in Dialogue with Diaspora." *Ilha do Desterro* 40 (2001): 74.

memories of her great-grandmother Susapeen, referred to lovingly as Tupa; in doing so, *whispering in shadows* presents four generations of knowledge, as it depicts Penny, her mother Juliana, her grandmother, and her great-grandmother. Indeed, Penny, or “Paen-aye” as Tupa pronounces it, is named after Tupa’s mother, touching a fifth generation through the gifting of a name.<sup>256</sup> At times, the novel shifts first person perspectives, with sections written from Lena’s perspective, Penny’s sister, or from Donna’s perspective, a woman Penny meets while working as the Interim Referral worker at the Aboriginal Friendship Centre in Vancouver. All of these breaks with the traditional novel result in a text that introduces prisms or shards of a story, placed together in a way that presents a variegated whole, true in its irregularity of memory. As Jane Haladay writes in “The Grandmother Language: Writing Community Process in Jeannette Armstrong’s *whispering in shadows*,” this form of writing is also an “activist project of literary decolonization”<sup>257</sup> in which “Armstrong asserts a form of Okanagan literary self-determination that privileges indigenous thoughtways [...] mak[ing] it clear that her central concern is to write for and from the perspective of her own Okanagan culture.”<sup>258</sup> In light of Haladay’s insightful view, critics’ distrust of the form of *whispering in shadows* may say more about the colonized state of literary criticism in Canada than it does about the aesthetic value of the text itself.

Yet, I argue, as well, that it is not just the form of *whispering in shadows* that may repel critics from engaging with the novel. *Whispering in shadows* is unabashedly anti-colonial, anti-globalization, and anti-capitalist. The politics spoken in this novel come through quite clearly, and in that clarity, refuse to be easily consumed by liberal readers. These three points of analysis – anti-colonialism, anti-globalization, and anti-capitalism – are useful frames for understanding the position of *whispering in shadows* in the politics of literary production and cultural consumption. But the novel does more still than present a critique of colonialism, globalization, and capitalism. I argue, instead, that *whispering in shadows* offers an Indigenous feminist ecology that fills the void of

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<sup>256</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 18.

<sup>257</sup> Jane Haladay, “The Grandmother Language: Writing Community Process in Jeannette Armstrong’s *whispering in shadows*. *Studies in Canadian Literature* 31:1 (2006): 43.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

mainstream North American societies, built as they are on these three intertwined, and violent, forces. *Whispering in shadows* presents another layer of insight that is likely to repel liberal readers in its defiantly clear message of Indigenous ways of living that centre women, understand the ties between the earth and the work performed by caregivers, and enact a living kinship with the earth itself. In its visionary knowledge, Armstrong's Indigenous feminist ecology proclaims, yes, another world *is* possible, precisely because Indigenous worlds, plural, and in their noncapitalist formations, still exist.

Penny also defies colonized expectations for a struggling First Nations woman to be the central character of an Indigenous author's text. Paula Anca Farca writes, in the 2011 article "Painting the Indigenous Landscape in Gloriously Dark Colors: Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*," that "other Indigenous authors depict spiritually mutilated women who lost their sense of self and place along with their family ties and who have to reinvent these ties in order to heal their broken spirits."<sup>259</sup> Armstrong subverts these potentially stereotypical portrayals by "creat[ing] a character who is among the fortunate ones because she can continue to enrich her experiences of home and its traditions instead."<sup>260</sup> Penny is characterized as a strong and brave person, who is also scrappy enough to physically intervene in the physical attack on a gay couple at a house party by putting an ignorant young jock into an armlock.<sup>261</sup> Further, Penny is constructed as a gifted visionary, who easily understands political science analyses in her university classes and relates her embodied understanding of injustice into her painting, which is the artistic activity that her life is dedicated to. As Louisa Sorflaten writes in the compelling 2006 essay "The Aboriginal Intellectual in Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*: Between Indigenous Localism and Globalization," "constructing Penny as a complex and multifaceted intellectual artist writes against essentialist notions of Aboriginal identity and fosters questions around the idea and role of the Indigenous intellectual."<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Paula Anca Farca, "Painting the Indigenous Landscape in Gloriously Dark Colors: Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*." *Identity in Place: Contemporary Indigenous Fiction by Women Writers in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2011. 81.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 50-54.

<sup>262</sup> Louisa Sorflaten, "The Aboriginal Intellectual in Jeannette Armstrong's *whispering in shadows*: Between Indigenous Localism and Globalization." *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies* 16:2 (2006): 388.

However, Penny experiences alienation because of her racialized and gendered subject position, and also because of her tendencies for the abstract, and the emotional, as an artist. Early on in *whispering in shadows*, Penny's direct experience of racism and sexism is clear. She interviews at an apple packaging factory in the Okanagan, and the manager says, "Well, I do need a female on this here job. You look like you're Indian. Are you?"<sup>263</sup> When Penny answers, "Yes," the manager responds with, "Yeah, well that helps, too. I get a better subsidy for hiring minority [sic] and women. I can kill two birds with one stone. But you get one chance. The first time you come in hungover, or late, your ass is outa here."<sup>264</sup> Not only does the manager cast her as a valuable worker because of the subsidies he will receive for her raced and gendered identity, he stereotypes her as a drunk Indian who is likely to show up late to work. Penny's alienation in mainstream white society is clear throughout the text. Penny experiences a kind of culture shock when she attends university, often unable to relate to her white middle class peers as an Indigenous mother of three children who grew up on reserve in the Okanagan. Armstrong's sense of humour comes through in passages that convey Penny's alienation, like the following, an internal reflection before Penny enters a party of college kids:

Shmuuk! I should've just stayed home. What was I thinking? Oh well. Just go in. It can't be that different than a rez party. A little music and laughs. Some booze. Smoke. Mostly snagging. It's research. You don't know a thing about this society. You gotta get a personal view of social customs. This must be how Margaret Mead felt.<sup>265</sup>

Penny is also "strange," according to her friend Donna from the Aboriginal Friendship Centre.<sup>266</sup> To Donna, Penny is an artist type who appears day dreamy and lost in thought during gathering circles.<sup>267</sup> Penny is "different" from mainstream white society, and though she seems thoroughly accepted throughout the novel by Indigenous communities, she is also perceived as "different" by some of her Native friends as well. She is, of

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<sup>263</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 24.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

course, an artist, and being one means for Penny prioritizing her painting over settling down with a partner or a marketable career. She has multiple lovers over the course of *whispering in shadows*, but prefers to live alone, and eventually finds a strong relationship with David, an activist who travels often and who Penny doesn't live with full time. At one point, Penny reflects, "*I need space to be. To be what? Lonely? To be a bonafide loony? No! An artist! What's that? [...] Why couldn't I just be normal. What's normal? Is full time mating normal?*"<sup>268</sup> Penny's personality as an intellectual artist, an independent and strong woman, a college graduate whose roots are on the reserve, her traditional upbringing in Syilx culture, her strong relationships with maternal role models, and her ability to speak her language are aspects of her character that, when placed together, trouble many colonized expectations of Indigenous women in contemporary society. It is these aspects of Penny's character that bring Armstrong's Indigenous feminist ecology to light; Penny's complexity and her relationship to the land – even as she is thoroughly embedded in colonial and capitalist Canadian society – make her an almost archetypal expression of Indigenous feminism. In a sense, Penny embodies, positively, "the co-constitutive relationship of sovereignty and gender" that Joanne Barker examines in "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada."<sup>269</sup> In addition, the knowledge of the land passed down to her through her relationships with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother show how Indigenous knowledges exist, and even thrive, in a globalized world.<sup>270</sup> Rather than explicitly state an Indigenous feminist ecology, *whispering in shadows* embodies knowledge that, as I argue in the following section, comes from Armstrong's own relationship to Syilx culture and Okanagan land.

In addition to insight Penny gains from her experiences as a raced and gendered person, she articulates the unevenness produced through the class relations that capital

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>269</sup> Joanne Barker, "Gender, Sovereignty, Rights: Native Women's Activism against Social Inequality and Violence in Canada." *American Quarterly* 60:2 (2008): 259-66.

<sup>270</sup> For a wide-reaching account of gender roles and their relationship to land and economy, see: Laura F. Klein and Lillian A. Ackerman. *Women and Power in native North America*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2005.



structures. While attending university, Penny writes a letter to Donna, her friend from the Aboriginal Friendship Centre, that includes, “what I’ve come to understand is this: if you don’t have ‘capital’ to start with or borrowing power or business education or a few generations of merchants in your background, you just can’t start anything.”<sup>271</sup> While Penny is at school, she befriends Julie, an outspoken white working-class woman. In a conversation between Penny and Julie one evening, Julie speaks of the effects of capitalism, expressing outrage at “a rigid class system [... that] keep[s] the rich powerful and the poor powerless. The same class system which got the whole thing going, keeps it going.”<sup>272</sup> Julie declares, “it’s not just a human philosophical issue. It’s effecting [sic] the environment and it’s getting worse. It’s got to effect [sic] people in the end.”<sup>273</sup> The course of the novel spans Penny’s developing abilities to articulate the injustices she sees around her. Years later, now out of university and in a relationship with David, Penny says to him:

‘This global system relies on the violence of poverty itself as a way to insure commerce continues and expands. [...] It’s the monster whose masters sit in shining towers in cities far removed from the suffering. They can’t afford to feel the searing pain of those being crushed. It’s getting stronger and more vicious. And everybody gets snared in its diabolical methods. From the woman in the grocery store buying a banana to the unsuspecting voter who wants a better tax cut. We get tainted with that blood without ever realizing it [...]’<sup>274</sup>

Penny’s experience of class is unique to her position as an Indigenous woman; that is to say her class position is determined as much by dispossession as it is by class relations structured by capital, a unique situation for all Indigenous peoples living within capitalism. And yet, there is solidarity possible between a white working-class person like Julie, and an Indigenous woman like Penny, even if the experience of dispossession characterizes their fundamental difference. This is because within globalized capital, class relations are no longer purely contained within nation-states, making it possible to talk about a global class of dispossessed, unemployed, and exploited, shot through with

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<sup>271</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 58.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

the deeply various contexts of particular locations. Keeping in mind that, from a decolonized perspective, Julie and Penny are indeed from different nations, and undoubtedly have very different relationships to the state, the theme of globalization takes on another level of meaning and significance in Armstrong's text, given the settler colonial setting of *whispering in shadows*. Working class solidarity can be imagined as international precisely because capital has globalized itself, connecting different locations through the migration of bodies, the flows of capital, and, significantly, movements of labour. As Neil Smith writes, "non-American elites around the world benefit from globalization and its wars, while the working class in Harlem or Harlan, South-central or Centralia receive nothing but returning body bags and the tax bill."<sup>275</sup> By "South-central," Smith is referring to Los Angeles, a place that shocks Penny with its poverty:

People move around them trance-like. They jostle and shuffle past. Eyes vacant with misery or crazy with pent up rage. Homeless people, some standing absently begging, others wrapped in a dirty blanket or simply sprawled against the buildings take up every space available on the sides of the street. Two blonde, stringy children walk among the homeless, aimlessly turning over every promising looking piece of litter. The stench of piss and rotting garbage is overwhelming. Cars going past blare their horns angrily in the slow crawl of choked traffic. The sharp smell of exhaust fumes overrides the faint traces of ocean salt in the air.<sup>276</sup>

This description of the city contrasts sharply with many passages in *whispering in shadows* that take place on the land, or recall memories from Penny's childhood as she gathers berries with Tupa, or sits near a pond and watches the dance of colours and light across the water. More than being an idealization of "nature," Armstrong's portrayal of the harshness of the city compared to the natural world works to heighten the politics within the novel, showing the ongoing relationships between destruction of land, destruction of human communities, and the drive for profit and capital accumulation.

Penny's travels to L.A., and her movement more broadly over the course of the novel, gives her perspective on the realities of exploited people in many different locations, whether Indigenous or not. But this is not to suggest that *whispering in shadows* valorizes globalization through Penny's ability to travel and access different

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<sup>275</sup> Smith, 13.

<sup>276</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 197.

places. Further, for Indigenous subjects, globalization has particularly intense consequences that have had serious effects on land claims and the ability to maintain sustenance farming. In *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism: Place, Women and the Environment in Canada and Mexico*, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez writes that “although interactions between the local and the global enable Indigenous peoples’ politics, they also constrain Indigenous peoples’ possibilities.”<sup>277</sup> Recalling the discussion earlier in this chapter of the relationship between dispossession and a politics of recognition, Altamirano-Jiménez argues that “the recognition of cultural difference and the ‘compensatory measure’ of granting collective rights to ‘disadvantaged’ social groups are integral to neoliberalism”<sup>278</sup> and that, in the context of Mexico specifically, “territorial rights are not included as part of the ‘cultural rights’ package granted to Indigenous peoples”.<sup>279</sup>

*Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism* presents acute comparisons between Indigenous peoples in Canada and Mexico, and the differing ways that accumulation by dispossession – or the accumulation of capital through the dislocation of Indigenous communities from land – couples with a politics of recognition that has deleterious effects on the Indigenous Nations of both countries. In the Mexican context, “NAFTA has been the most obvious expression of neoliberalism.”<sup>280</sup> And, according to Altamirano-Jiménez, NAFTA has had specifically violent consequences for Indigenous women who are often doubly oppressed through their status as both landless Indigenous people and women in colonial and patriarchal Mexican society. Indeed, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), the revolutionary armed organization that the Zapatistas organized in response to NAFTA (not unlike the Red Power organizing that took place in response to the White Paper), was borne out of feminist goals and

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<sup>277</sup> Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez, *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014. 6.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.* For more on the relationship between globalization and neoliberalism, see: Teresa Brennan, *Globalization and Its Terrors: Daily Life in the West*. New York: Routledge, 2003, Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution*. Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2015, David Harvey, *The New Imperialism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

philosophies, even as they troubled the assumptions and expectations of Zapatista men.

Altamirano-Jiménez writes that:

The EZLN became the first armed movement in Latin America to advocate and prioritize women's demands within its own political agenda. Subcomandante Marcos (1994), the EZLN's spokesman, has stated that the Zapatistas' first uprising took place not in January 1994, when the world first learned about their existence, but in March 1993: 'The first uprising was led by Zapatista women; there were no casualties and the women won.' He was referring to the internal revolt caused by the introduction of the Women's Revolutionary Law, which Zapatista males did not welcome.<sup>281</sup>

The Women's Revolutionary Law led by Zapatista women is a direct intervention in the gendered ways that colonization has impacted Indigenous communities. Joanne Barker is clear on this relationship between gender and colonialism, and relates many of the current experiences of oppression and violence towards Indigenous women in Canada, by both members of their own communities, and members of mainstream society, as effects of the Indian Act. Reading the Indian Act and its legacy of gendered containment of Indigenous peoples in Canada alongside the Women's Revolutionary Law of the Zapatistas shows both how colonialism has fundamentally relied on gender violence in the dispossession of Indigenous communities, as well as the creative and transformative ways that Indigenous communities resist the intimate effects of gender violence. Barker writes that,

Some of the most troubling consequences of the [Indian] Act were the corrosion and devaluation, however uneven and inconsistent, of Indian women's participation within Indian governance, economics, and cultural life. [...] But the difficult issue to understand is how patriarchal, heterosexist, and homophobic ideologies came to characterize Indian attitudes and practices and how these attitudes and practices came to define the social conditions of oppression within Indian social and interpersonal relations.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 161-162. Like the history of the Red Power era, a more comprehensive analysis of the Zapatistas, and the militant organizing led by women within the movement, is outside the scope of this paper. On the Women's Revolutionary Law, see chapter five of *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism*, in which Altamirano-Jiménez writes: "the Women's Revolutionary Law asserts the right of Indigenous women to participate in the armed struggle in any way they desire and according to their capacities. This law also protects Indigenous women's right to work and receive a just salary whenever applicable, to decide the number of children they have, to participate in the community's decision-making process, to access priority healthcare, to access education, and to freely choose a partner. In addition, this law also asserts that women cannot be physically or mentally abused by their family or strangers and that sexual assault will be severely punished (Rojas 1994, 22)" (162).

<sup>282</sup> Barker, 262. For more on the role of the Indian Act in establishing uniquely colonial raced and gendered identities for Indigenous peoples in Canada, see Bonita Lawrence, "Gender, Race, and the Regulation of Native Identity in Canada and the United States: An Overview." *Hypatia* 18.2 (2003): 3-31.

The Zapatistas, in their own context, respond to these “patriarchal, heterosexist, and homophobic ideologies [that] came to characterize Indian attitudes and practices” by placing women in front as strong leaders, and working from within community to address gender violence from the very beginning. The Zapatistas strive to build resilient communities from the inside out, so that colonial resistance and Indigenous noncapitalist societies have long and strong futures.

The Zapatistas’ response to NAFTA also plays a role in Penny’s developing understanding of globalization and its effects in *whispering in shadows*. One of the pivotal events in Penny’s life is visiting the Mexican state of Chiapas with her boyfriend David, who has connections there through his activism. They go to build relations with Indigenous activists, and end up helping to negotiate fair trade relationships between Mayan coffee farmers and textile producers and small local businesses back home. Penny is shocked by the level of poverty and desperation that greets her on the streets, and the trip takes a mental toll. While visiting a small village and meeting with Mayan farmers, Emilio, the group’s translator, exchanges information between Penny and David and the farmers. Referring to the Zapatista uprising,<sup>283</sup> he tells them,

The situation grows much worse since the uprising. They are experiencing a market shut-out. It has caused severe economic hardships in the last two years. The market boards do not buy their goods or their coffee. It is to squeeze them out of production and force them to sell their lands cheap. They say it is an effect of NAFTA. The constitution no longer protects lands held in common by villages. To force them to see to outside privatization.<sup>284</sup>

Penny learns from Emilio, and others she meets, about the destructive effects of global capital, and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous Mayan farmers from their lands. Recalling the arguments posed previously in this chapter, about the White Paper, the First Nations Property Ownership Act, and their purpose of terminating Aboriginal title, we

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<sup>283</sup> Though accounts of the Zapatistas abound, see chapter five of *Indigenous Encounters with Neoliberalism* for an insightful interpretation of the historical conditions that caused the uprising, as well as contemporary state policies in Mexico that effect Zapatista organizing and Indigenous Mayan self-determination. Altamirano-Jiménez writes that “unlike the state’s neoliberal model of cultural recognition and essentialized indigeneity, the Zapatista project has pushed for an alternative articulation of indigeneity that is inclusive, place-centred, and outside of the state’s power [...]” (161).

<sup>284</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 186.

can also interpret NAFTA, as Altamirano-Jiménez does, as an instrument wielded by the Mexican state to further dispossess Indigenous peoples from their lands.

In Mexico, Penny witnesses the intimately related violences of colonialism, capitalism, and globalization, or “an increasingly pure form of imperialism,” as Neil Smith asserts in the essay “The Endgame of Globalization.”<sup>285</sup> Smith refers to globalization as “a deepening and reorganization of existing patterns of uneven development” in which stateless and landless communities have often endured the worst.<sup>286</sup> Writing about conditions in sub-Saharan Africa, but with clear application to the poverty that Penny witnesses in Mexico, Smith holds that “denied access to more than a trickle of capital on the global markets, yet condemned to resolve the local consequences of an earlier global adventurism by colonial powers, much of this region has experienced the message of modernization and globalization at its most cruelly satanic.”<sup>287</sup> This ongoing pattern of “uneven development”<sup>288</sup> is one that extends much further into history than conversations about globalization usually imply; that is, globalization is really an imperial spread of capital – an extension of capitalism – that links the local to the global in ways that, though bringing implicit possibilities for increased communication and exchange of information, are always replete with imperialist design. In the essay “The Global in the Local,” Arif Dirlik defines globalization as:

global motions of peoples (and therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories), the replication in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation within and across societies, the interpenetration of the global and the local (which shows culturally in a simultaneous cosmopolitanism and localism of which the most cogent expression may be

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<sup>285</sup> Neil Smith, “The Endgame of Globalization.” *Political Geography* 25 (2006): 18.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, 179.

<sup>288</sup> The term “uneven development” was first coined by Leon Trotsky in *Permanent Revolution* (1921) to describe how capitalism has functioned on a global scale since its beginning. Vladimir Lenin further elaborated on the concept of uneven development in his text *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), while the phrase has also been picked up by contemporary theorists, like Neil Smith, in his book *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*. 1984. Rev. ed. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

‘multiculturalism’), and the disorganization of a world conceived in terms of ‘three words’ or nation-states.<sup>289</sup>

The difference, however, between globalized capital and previous forms of imperialism is that it is capital, itself, that dictates displacement and exploitation. The following quote from Smith helps to understand this point:

Globalization, then, is only the latest stage of uneven development, succeeding the three-decade-long postwar era. As such, globalization appears as an increasingly pure form of imperialism. Quite different from the colony-led imperialism that ushered in the twentieth century, the globalization of culture and capital at the end of the century takes place not via the dictates of colonial administrations, colonial trade preferences, or even the imminent threat of military retribution for noncooperation. [...] What was new was the unprecedented extent to which imperial exploitation no longer emanated first and foremost from political and military control but, rather, resulted from the unfettered operation of the global market itself.”<sup>290</sup>

Smith’s quote points to the legacies of colonialism that continue in globalization, legacies that Penny is very adept at seeing as well. The connections between Indigenous people in the Mayan communities of Chiapas with Indigenous struggles back home surprise Penny, and she learns to broaden her understanding of the effects of colonization beyond Canada, and to understand globalization as an ongoing process of colonizing through capital that extends beyond the contemporary timeframe, connecting disparate locations.<sup>291</sup> Penny also recasts her understanding of land struggles back home through the connections she builds with Indigenous Mayans. David remarks to Penny after their trip to Chiapas that,

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<sup>289</sup> Arif Dirlik, “The Global in the Local.” *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. 463-467. New York: Routledge, 1995. 200. The title of Dirlik’s article also references Stuart Hall’s important essay, “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity.” *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation, and Postcolonial Perspectives*. Ed. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shomat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 173-187. Hall writes that the relationship between globalization and capital is one in which “capital [...] realizes it can only rule through other local capitals, rule alongside and in partnership with other economic and political elites. It has to hold a whole framework of globalization in place and simultaneously police that system: it stage-manages independent within it, so to speak” (179).

<sup>290</sup> Smith, 182-183.

<sup>291</sup> For an Indigenous feminist account of the relationships between globalization, gender, and capitalism, see Rauna Kuokkanen’s articles: “Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence: The Case of Indigenous Women.” *International Feminist Journal of Politics*. 10:2 (2008): 216-233; “Indigenous Economies, Theories of Subsistence, and Women: Exploring the Social Economy Model for Indigenous Governance.” *The American Indian Quarterly*. 35.2 (2011): 215-240; “From Indigenous Economies to Market-Based Self-Governance: A Feminist Political Economy Analysis.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*. 44.2 (2011): 275-297.

‘Our people are still going through it. Think about it. Every road block and militant action is about stopping a dam, a clearcut, a pipeline, a mine, and so on. [...] We find out quick enough what happens when we try to protect our environment and our way of life. We get beat up and criminalized. They use the military. Granted it’s not as desperate and as violent. But the results are similar. Just look at the conditions and statistics on any reserve. [...] Indigenous Peoples in this western hemisphere have all been dispossessed. Yet, they are all that protects the untouched lands that are left. They stand in the way.’<sup>292</sup>

This “standing in the way” is part of the responsibility of land stewardship as conceived by Indigenous people.<sup>293</sup> After finishing university, Penny returns home to the Okanagan where she can enact a living relationship to the land, and pass on this knowledge to her children. Penny’s return parallels Tommy Kelasket’s return home to the Okanagan, and both characters share realizations about their responsibilities and positions as Indigenous community members. In a letter to her oldest sister Josalie, Penny writes, “maybe it has something to do with being surrounded by something powerful rather than being absorbed in fighting what surrounds you daily. [...] I’ve spent so much time on resistance, I’ve risked the things that give purpose.”<sup>294</sup> Penny’s return home, just like Slash’s, is a return to “these things that give purpose;” to put it another way, Armstrong presents a way forward for Indigenous peoples that requires responsibility and action, and working from the locations that we are each born within. This is a way forward that embeds an Indigenous feminist ecological awareness of history, land, and community, positions that the following section relates in more detail to Armstrong’s Syilx environmental ethics of her dissertation, and to Syilx epistemological understandings of time.

## **Syilx environmental ethics outside of colonial time**

This section draws connections between *whispering in shadows*’ main character Penny Jackson’s artistic abilities, and her visionary sense of her surroundings, with a

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<sup>292</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 146-147.

<sup>293</sup> For an account of Indigenous land stewardship and actions taken to protect land, see Winona LaDuke, *All our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*. Cambridge: South End Press, 1999.

<sup>294</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 131.



relationship to land that is expressed in Armstrong's Syilx environmental ethics developed in her dissertation, "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmiɣwɔcentrism." It connects a Syilx environmental ethics to notions of time that are woven into the epistemological worldviews of Syilx people. These notions of time are embedded in the Nsyilxcen language, as Armstrong's dissertation shows. The experience of time through Nsyilxcen language presents another way of contextualizing the formal innovation of *whispering in shadows*, and deepens Jane Haladay's insight that the novel is an "activist project of literary decolonization."<sup>295</sup> Armstrong writes,

The importance of the concept of a timeframe being set within the story provides insight into the narrative in that it is the 'changes' that are important to know about rather than the time it took to happen. In captikwɔ [story], things happen as a consequence, in relation to other things happening. Only a loose adherence to earth's timeframes are kept and usually only as incidental to the event. A child being born one day in the story and in the next day be at puberty isn't construed as magical or mystical it just means nothing important happened between.<sup>296</sup>

Considering the way time functions in captikwɔ, or Syilx oral storytelling, the formal aspects of *whispering in shadows* become more clearly an intentional rendering of Syilx epistemology into the English language and the form of the novel. The prioritization of dialogue over narration draws connections between *whispering in shadows* and what Armstrong terms "oraliture," or the oral literature that Syilx knowledge produces and is founded in. The unpredictable jumps in time, from memories of Penny's childhood on the land with Tupa, back to her life in the present, and then forward an unspecified amount of time, are aspects of Syilx oral storytelling that Armstrong has consciously brought into the novel form. In "Land Speaking," she writes,

In Okanagan storytelling, the ability to move the audience back and forth between the present reality and the story reality relies heavily on the fluidity of time sense that the language offers. In particular, stories that are used for teaching must be inclusive of the past, present, and future as well as the current or contemporary moment and the story reality.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>295</sup> Haladay, 43.

<sup>296</sup> Armstrong, "Constructing Indigeneity," 168.

<sup>297</sup> Armstrong, "Land Speaking," 194.

And in an interview with Kim Anderson, Armstrong continues, “I know them to be story [sic] which engages the listener in terms of the past and the present – and projects into the future. So there’s a sliding in and out with the audience in terms of what some of the concerns and underlying messages of the story are about in the present.”<sup>298</sup> *Whispering in shadows* translates aspects of Syilx epistemology and notions of time into a contemporary novel written in English. It performs this “sliding in and out” by shifting perspectives, presenting different forms of documentation of Penny’s life, and moving across time in nonlinear ways to show “the fluidity of time sense that the [Nsyilxcen] language offers.”<sup>299</sup>

The weaving of Syilx story time into *whispering in shadows* is not the only way that the novel reflects Syilx worldviews. For Penny, her artistic visions are, in part, made possible by her different understanding of the world, compared to mainstream Canadian value systems. Her ability to “speak” with the colours, as her great-grandmother Susapeen notices, is not just a poetic embellishment that Armstrong writes into *whispering in shadows*. Instead, it points towards living ways of perceiving and being that are radically different from colonized ways of being. Throughout Penny’s life, she experiences the world through colours, and it is her sensory connections to her environment that draw her to painting. Penny’s great-grandmother is instrumental in encouraging Penny’s artistic inclinations. In addition, all of Penny’s memories of Tupa take place on the land, and many of them incorporate Penny’s abilities to see the natural world differently than others. She constantly notices the patterns of light and shades of colours in her surroundings, and they even speak to her. One day in Penny’s childhood, Tupa says to her, “Paen-aye! [...] You and the colours can talk, I see. They tell you things. Listen to them. They never lie.”<sup>300</sup> Penny possesses a visionary quality related to her painting. Early in *whispering in shadows*, readers become aware of Penny’s unique relationship to her environment through passages like this: “this place is known to her somewhere deep inside. A coming home. She feels each colour. They are inside her. The

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<sup>298</sup> Kim Anderson, “Reclaiming Native Space in Literature/Breaking New Ground: An Interview with Jeannette Armstrong.” *West Coast Line* 23:1/2 (1997): n.p.

<sup>299</sup> Armstrong, “Land Speaking,” 194.

<sup>300</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 46.

colours of warmth, of light. They are a soft voice whispering into the wind. A giving of thanks. Being held close.”<sup>301</sup> Penny’s ability to “feel[] each colour” is also related to her kinship with land, demonstrated in the following extended passage from *whispering in shadows*:

She opens her eyes again. Just then the breeze stirs, just slightly, and the light green wispy lichen hanging from the branches of the tree nearest her swings and sways around her. The ground is suddenly speckled with splotches of sun and shadow which move over the small orange flowers and large bluish mushrooms at the edge of fern spreading out over a rotting log disappearing into the soft cover of moss, leaves and pale green plants. The ferns and salal bushes move, too, and she can hear the great tree move high up above her. She hears it’s [sic] whispering of needles and the barely perceptible creak reverberating down to the ground she sits on.

*Look up! It’s the tree moving!*

[...]

*They’re talking!*

[...]

*It’s the trees! It’s them watching!*

[...]

She can feel the tremble and vibration of the trees [sic] movement under her cheek as she presses her ear closer to the damp bark.

*It sounds like a long sigh. Like a breath drawn in and slowly let out.*

She sits still, face against the tree, the tree’s each sigh matching her own.<sup>302</sup>

Penny feels the life of the tree as she sits against it, literally feeling “the tree’s each sigh matching her own,” as the tree breathes in and out.<sup>303</sup> This is one of the most clearly expressed passages in *whispering in shadows* that alludes to Armstrong’s Syilx environmental ethics. Turning to a close reading of Armstrong’s dissertation helps to contextualize the above section from *whispering in shadows* as much more than a metaphorical passage.

Armstrong’s dissertation centres on two concepts, known in Nsyilxcen language as *tmix<sup>w</sup>* and *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>*. Armstrong defines *tmix<sup>w</sup>* as “the life-force” and *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>* as “the life-forceplace.”<sup>304</sup> *Tmix<sup>w</sup>* has been defined by ethnographers and translators,

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, 97-99.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid, 99.

<sup>304</sup> Armstrong, “Constructing Indigeneity,” 155.

insufficiently Armstrong notes, as “‘all of creation’,” “the ‘spirit animals’,” or as “‘everything in nature’.”<sup>305</sup> Likewise, *tmix<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>* is “usually translated into English as country, land or world,” but is more accurately thought of as “things-spreading-outward-in cycles-as the here/now” because the “Syilx view of land is an ecological or a dynamic systems view rather than a mental picture of the geography with its plants and animals.”<sup>306</sup> Armstrong gives “transliterations” of Nsyilxcen words, based on the root meanings of the phonemes within each word. For *tmix<sup>w</sup>*, it “is perceived as strands fanning continually outward from a source not physically visible and refers to each life form including the human.”<sup>307</sup> Every life form is *tmix<sup>w</sup>*, a strand within the braided whole of Syilx cosmos; each *tmix<sup>w</sup>* is like a category of life, so that humans are *tmix<sup>w</sup>*, dogs, cats, blackberry bushes, evergreen trees, each has its own unique position as a threaded *tmix<sup>w</sup>* within *tmix<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>*. Humans, however, are distinguished from the rest of *tmix<sup>w</sup>*. From the Syilx perspective,

it is not the unique ability of logic and memory that makes [humans] different, although that is the source of their difference. Not being bound by the laws that the rest of the *tmix<sup>w</sup>* have organized over a long, long period is what makes them different. To be able to be a ‘person’ they require ‘knowledge’ to be brought into the ‘order’ in place in the world of the *tmix<sup>w</sup>* because they don’t automatically have that ‘old knowledge.’ They must learn everything in a new way. The *captik<sup>w</sup>l* are there to guide the ‘new people’ and thereby secure the order and survival of all the *tmix<sup>w</sup>* including the human.”<sup>308</sup>

A number of points must be explained in this passage by drawing on Armstrong’s dissertation. The “laws that the rest of the *tmix<sup>w</sup>* have organized over a long, long period” are the laws of reciprocity and structured relationships that allow each lifeforce to survive and regenerate while living alongside each other lifeforce. The “long, long period” refers to a Syilx origin story, the Four Chiefs, that Armstrong shares within her dissertation. The story tells of a time when, before humans, all *tmix<sup>w</sup>* gathered together to consult each other over the problem of the “people-to-be,” the humans that were coming, but who would require eating other *tmix<sup>w</sup>* in order to survive, and who would not be bound to

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, 149-150.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, 160.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, 233.

other tmix<sup>w</sup> because no one would require eating humans for their survival. All of the tmix<sup>w</sup> had existed together through consultation and reciprocal relations for “a long, long time” before humans became another tmix<sup>w</sup>; all of the tmix<sup>w</sup> also met together and consulted for “a long, long time” over the problem of the humans, and how to show humans the necessity of living in balance and harmony with all other tmix<sup>w</sup>. In the Four Chiefs story – or captik<sup>wł</sup>, which means story – knowledge must be shared with the people-to-be in order for all tmix<sup>w</sup> to continue to exist in balance with one another within tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>. The knowledge is shared in the form of stories, or captik<sup>wł</sup>, which “transfers the nature world of the tmix<sup>w</sup>-life-force into Syilx human language as the ‘world before humans’.”<sup>309</sup> In Syilx epistemology, all lifeforces are tmix<sup>w</sup>; in a way, then, it can be said all lifeforces are people, with *humans* a certain kind of person. Further, in the Four Chiefs captik<sup>wł</sup>, all of the tmix<sup>w</sup> meet together to consult before humans have been created; humans are thus referred to as “people-to-be.” Armstrong notes that “people-to-be” carries in it meanings on two levels:

the ‘people-to-be’ on one level refers to the humans of each generation yet to be born, who will be receiving the captik<sup>wł</sup> to guide their behavior. The humans not yet born, through each generation of relaying the stories, are who the captik<sup>wł</sup> is being passed on to, so they will always have the ability to become ‘persons’ themselves within that place or that ‘world’. They will be able to survive and the other ‘persons’ will always be able to ‘revive’ as ‘persons’ even though they lay their lives down for each other, if the human can continuously achieve becoming ‘a person’ within that ‘world.’ Without the ability for the human in each generation to be fully sustained, their future well-being and continuance would be compromised. Without the knowledge of the tmix<sup>w</sup> as a way to become ‘a person’ among the animal ‘persons’ as humans in each new generation, the human could become a serious problem to the other ‘persons’.

On another level, in the Four Chiefs narrative, the overriding theme is that a new ‘person’ will be joining the ‘community’. The community has been ‘meeting’ for a very long time over the coming ‘changes’ to their ‘world’. Quite clearly, from the Four Chiefs narrative, Syilx view the existence of the tmix<sup>w</sup> as a long history, prior to humans joining their physical community. This view is confirmed in the commonly held notion prevalent throughout historical and contemporary Syilx thought that the physical tmix<sup>w</sup> is our xaʔxʔit [:] *those-who-came-ahead* in a long line, unbroken,

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid.

finally to us. We have been a part of them for a long, long time, even before we became st'lsqilx<sup>w</sup> [:] *torn-away-people*.<sup>310</sup>

Humans are thus “people-to-be” in two ways; according to the Four Chiefs captik<sup>wł</sup>, humans have not yet become tmix<sup>w</sup> – they do not yet exist within tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>. In addition, humans are “people-to-be” because they are *always becoming* tmix<sup>w</sup>. That is, as “torn-away-people,” separated from tmix<sup>w</sup>, humans must constantly *learn how to be people* – learning how to live through responsible and reciprocal relations – guided by captik<sup>wł</sup>.

Returning to the quoted passage above from *whispering in shadows*, in which Penny hears and feels the tree breathing as she sits beside it, the section takes on deeper meaning in the context of Armstrong’s Syilx environmental ethics. Penny carries captik<sup>wł</sup> with her; she is tmix<sup>w</sup> because she is attuned to other tmix<sup>w</sup> around her, and sees the interrelatedness of all life. In addition, Penny’s artistic inspiration gains more significance, as well, since light and colour are the tools that Penny uses to try to translate what she sees in her Syilx epistemology.

But Penny struggles to maintain her artwork in a world that does not see tmix<sup>w</sup>, and cannot value life according to Syilx principles of reciprocity. Indeed, the contrast between Syilx worldview and mainstream Canadian ways of living take a toll on Penny. What she experiences is living across different value systems, systems deeply at odds with each other. Armstrong writes that, “the Syilx Okanagan view of economy [...] does not construct value based on human utility as the defining line in the decision-making as to which life forms will be conserved and therefore which are to be devalued and displaced.”<sup>311</sup> Instead, Syilx Okanagan economy is one that considers the ability of all tmix<sup>w</sup> to regenerate, and evaluates the actions of humans based on the interrelated affects that these actions would have on all other tmix<sup>w</sup>. And, from a Syilx perspective, losing a sense of the interrelatedness of life-forms is a deeply damaging prospect:

‘Through Syilx-story eyes, losing an intimate, long-term, natural relationship with the land results in an effect that silences the internal voice of the land in the particular ways nature claims and embraces its human inhabitants in its vast scheme of reciprocity and interdependence. The traditional Okanagan storyteller understands captik<sup>wł</sup> to be a powerful

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<sup>310</sup> Ibid, 235-236.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

voice, calling those within its hearing to knowledge and thereby transforming them.<sup>312</sup>

Penny is someone who hears the captik<sup>wł</sup> and continues to carry their messages with her. But walking with this knowledge in a world that is built on the privatization of land – or, the commodification of life-force – creates doubt and stress for Penny. In the middle of her life, she stops painting, after an explosive meeting with a gallery agent who tries to impress upon Penny the necessity of “marketing” her artwork. At the meeting, she is so filled with rage that she kicks in the canvases of her paintings, while the gallery agent stands behind her yelling to stop, until finally her partner David pulls her away into an embrace.<sup>313</sup> Walking with the knowledge of alternative worlds is not, then, a purely inspirational experience. Penny actually has a breakdown during the novel that goes noticeably un-narrated, with just a brief description:

They were points of madness—pointed—or pointing, she never could differentiate. Not like the petals of the wild sunflower pointed outward in every direction surrounding the brown centre with bright yellow. But the same green bough being turned to point toward her again and again.<sup>314</sup>

Penny is in touch with a spiritual world when she works on her art, and in this way she is like a Syilx storyteller, only her form of storytelling is through painting. Her dedication to social justice over the course of her lifetime is also inspired by the different world that she not just knows is possible, but knows to *exist*, right here and now. But the stress of living within mainstream Canadian society is, in my reading, the cause for Penny’s abrupt refusal to paint, and the cause of her breakdown. That is, she stops translating the captik<sup>wł</sup> that have been gifted to her, and this causes her stress and depression.

Penny is faced with more mortal threats towards the end of *whispering in shadows* than depression; she is diagnosed with a rare form of cancer, likely caused by her years of picking apples and exposure to pesticides in the Okanagan during her youth. After a few years of struggling against it, cancer becomes the cause of her death. The metaphorical functions of Penny’s cancer are multiple; on the one hand, Penny contextualizes her diagnosis in terms of the sickness of the earth, immediately

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>313</sup> Armstrong, *whispering in shadows*, 202-206.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, 207.

communalizing her illness, rather than individualizing it. Speaking both in terms of her recovery, and in terms of what is necessary for principles of reciprocal land stewardship to be instituted globally, Penny says,

‘But it would take some kind of total revolution to stop it. People don’t do that kind of thing unless they’re pushed against the wall. Unless they’re forced to. Unless they feel and know their very survival is at stake. It’s still not clear to people that it’s almost at that point, right now. How many people do you know that have died of cancer? That have it?’<sup>315</sup>

Penny relates her illness to the destructive ideology that dominates the globe, in which private property relations and exploitative labour practices dispossess Indigenous peoples from lands and displace non-Indigenous communities from networks of care and support. And yet, Penny’s contraction of cancer can also be read as related to her abrupt refusal to paint. Penny’s painting is her own connection with *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>*, her own way of maintaining and passing on *captik<sup>w</sup>ł*, weaving in social justice themes into her painting alongside environmental elements in order to communicate the relationships she sees between a community of the natural world, and a community of humans. When Penny stops painting, she disrupts her connection to *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>*. At this point in her life, she has moved home to the Okanagan, and prioritizes working with her community and being with family over her own artwork. Penny seems conflicted by the seemingly individual drive of painting, and the communal life that she leads on the reserve. But Penny’s conflict is largely due to her struggles to live in a colonized world outside of Syilx epistemology; that is, the pressures of marketing and publicizing her artwork are the primary reasons for her outrage, eventual breakdown, and subsequent depression. Seen in this way, living within a world that commodifies story, and lifeforce, places such a deep strain on Penny that she stops connecting with *tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>* through her painting.

As Penny confronts her death, she also confronts her decision to stop painting. In a letter to her friend Gard, she writes:

‘I should have painted what I saw. I should have let the images come out which shouted at me. [...] I knew that putting images out there changes the world, yet I feared the shadows. I know now that one should not fear them.

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<sup>315</sup> Ibid, 245.



The story must be told to be understood and changed. One should leap into the void and let the wind carry you. And then new things come.<sup>316</sup>

Penny is in touch with this “shadow” world that “whispers” to her through colour and light; her painting is her access to this world, in which, as I argue, she is also accessing and communing with tmx<sup>w</sup>ulax<sup>w</sup>. *Whispering in shadows* presents a perspective of what it means to be Indigenous in the twenty-first century that is at once deeply social, political, psychological, and spiritual. It defines Indigeneity as a relationship to land that spans historical time, and that opens up the ability to commune with the natural world and realize the interconnectedness of life. In her dissertation, Armstrong defines Indigeneity as a “social paradigm,”<sup>317</sup> “rather than a cultural or political differentiation.”<sup>318</sup> Indigeneity is instead “an attainment of knowledge and wisdom as a part of the scheme of perfect self-perpetuation that nature is” and, in the Syilx Okanagan context, “Indigeneity reflects an epistemology that optimum human self-perpetuation is not human centered but must be consistent with the optimum ability for the environment to regenerate itself.”<sup>319</sup> In Armstrong’s perspective, Indigeneity is a set of knowledges that must be practiced in order to be lived. For characters like Penny and Slash, recovering their Indigeneity by returning to their communities in the Okanagan and reviving relationships to the land become political motivations. These political motivations are connected to historical consciousness that learns to understand history as a web of connections permeating into the present. Both Penny and Slash illustrate Indigenous historical consciousness, while Penny more fully embodies Armstrong’s Indigenous feminist ecology and Syilx epistemology. Read together, *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* are two texts that offer complex portrayals of what it means to live as Indigenous people in the twenty and twenty-first century, and both texts offer visions of how cultural revitalization, coupled with Indigenous political resurgence, may move forward into the future.

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid, 292-293.

<sup>317</sup> Armstrong, “Constructing Indigeneity,” 36.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>319</sup> Ibid, 1.

## Conclusion

This chapter has sought to bring Armstrong's Indigenous feminist ecology forward as a way to show connections between the forces of globalization and global capital that Penny, the main character in *whispering in shadows*, witnesses in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. In addition, I contextualized *whispering in shadows* in terms of Syilx epistemology and notions of time, and in doing so, gave a reading of the novel placed beside Armstrong's doctoral dissertation. While I considered *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* in two separate chapters with distinct critical frameworks, I hold that the notion of Indigenous historical consciousness, developed in chapter three, is directly related to Indigenous feminist ecology, a practice introduced in chapter four. Together, *Slash* and *whispering in shadows* act as companion texts that trace Indigenous consciousness from the early 1970s into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Conclusion:

### Theorizing ontological displacement and dispossession

This dissertation articulates how I have come to consciousness as an Indigenous woman. Implicitly, and at times explicitly, it makes the argument for the necessity of Indigenous storytelling for our own sense of self and our abilities to reclaim our own knowledges that have been torn from us through the forces of colonialism in our lives. I have read many Indigenous writers tell, in their own words, how Indigenous storytelling and literature has changed the course of their lives, how it has contributed to their wellness as Indigenous people, how it has helped to form their senses of the world.<sup>320</sup> There are indeed important ways that Indigenous literatures can teach settlers new perspectives, and I certainly think that finding ethical ways to share Indigenous stories and to read Indigenous literatures with and by settlers is another important aspect to consider for anyone involved in writing or teaching our literature.<sup>321</sup> But this important contribution of Indigenous literatures has not been the focus of my dissertation, not because I don't see and value these potentials for Indigenous literatures, but instead because I have needed to ground myself in our own stories as much as possible, and not worry about justifying the value of our articulations to others.

The perspectives and analyses that I offer in the previous chapters are rooted in my partial knowledges of each Indigenous culture, worldview, and nation in which the texts that I consider are situated. Chapter one considered how capitalism and colonialism are intimately intertwined by reading Edward Ahenakew's circa 1918 novel *Black Hawk*. Chapter two proposed that Indigenous societies have unique forms of recognition that do not fall into the oppressive traps that the colonial politics of recognition produce, and I

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<sup>320</sup> It would be a nearly never-ending list to document those Indigenous authors in Canada and the United States who have articulated the importance of stories and storytelling. For a recent articulation on this topic, see Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018.

<sup>321</sup> The use of the term "settler" can and does flatten those people who are relative newcomers to Turtle Island, especially ignoring the varied positions that these newcomers hold in relation to the Canadian and U.S. states in terms of race. For a discussion on the use of the term settler, see the introduction to Daniel Heath Justice's *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*.

ground this chapter in a close reading of Nuu-chah-nulth author George Clutesi's 1969 text *Potlatch*. Chapter three attended to Okanagan author, activist, and knowledge holder Jeannette Armstrong's 1985 novel *Slash* to develop an argument about the necessity of building an Indigenous historical consciousness. Finally, chapter four blends two themes I identify in Armstrong's 2002 novel *whispering in shadows*, globalization and Indigenous feminist ecology, to show how Indigenous peoples living in a globalized world can indeed practice relationships to land. These four chapters reflect major questions that I held as I was developing my own historical consciousness as an Indigenous woman, and as such, I hope that they may provide other dispossessed Indigenous people with insight into some aspects of Indigeneity.

My perspectives and analyses are, I have attempted to highlight all along, deeply influenced by my own position as a dispossessed Indigenous person. This is a specific subjectivity, and one that I believe has yet to be thoroughly articulated or theorized. Within Indigenous communities and Indigenous politics in Canada and the United States, there are so many truly pressing, urgent concerns. Our communities face severe poverty, ongoing disappearances and murdering of our women and two-spirit people, high (at points the highest) rates of incarceration in both Canada and the United States, heavy criminalization and racial profiling, ongoing apprehensions of our children through child welfare and foster care, environmental degradation in our communities and traditional territories due to resource extraction; these are just some of the issues that we face in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century and that we have faced for decades, sometimes for hundreds of years. In this context, it is no wonder that Indigenous people who are the most dispossessed of our families, communities, nations, and territories would also need attention, care, support, and validation. There is so much work on all of our shoulders.

As I wrote in the fourth interlude, I believe that dispossessed Indigenous people in Canada and the United States have great insight for contemporary anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements. We hold a unique, if uncomfortable, position within our own communities, broader Indigenous communities, and society at large. As I've said earlier, I think of dispossessed Indigenous people as being people who lack both a state and a nation. To my knowledge, there are few other historical or contemporary examples of this political position. Our situation elicits questions regarding what exactly our political

agency is, lacking a state and a nation. Under colonialism, being aligned with a colonial state or nation is decisively not a transformative position, but being aligned with Indigenous nations decisively is. While I can articulate – and believe in the necessity in doing so – my national affiliations, I cannot at this time practice membership in my communities or nations, and this is both necessary to admit in terms of accountably reflecting my own position, but also in terms of undoing the shame that I have experienced as an Indigenous person with severely limited ways of knowing my cultures, histories, and languages. And, as I’ve also said in the previous pages, while this is certainly a highly personal positioning, there are also a great number of Indigenous people who share my position in terms of lacking a state and a nation. I believe that my personal interrogations in this dissertation have the potential to reflect wide-ranging implications for many Indigenous people living in Canada and the United States today.

The root of the problem, it should be clear by now, is that we lack the ability to practice culturally-informed relationships to land, and therein we lack access to the root of our own Indigeneity. I have explored many of the psychological and spiritual aspects of this conundrum in the previous pages, sometimes directly, and sometimes through parallel explorations of characters in novels whose particular subjectivities reveal something insightful about my own. For many years, I have also deeply appreciated the work of Frantz Fanon. Perhaps the most enduring aspect of his work for me, something I find myself returning to his work for reminders of, is the importance of politicizing the psychological, of revealing the psycho-social experiences of colonized people and doing so in a way that takes into account, as much as possible, the political ramifications of such experiences. I have always had a bent towards understanding things psychologically, wanting to grasp things in a certain form of personal knowledge that would allow me to empathize with positions radically different than my own. I am continually struck, as I return to Fanon’s work again and again, by his ability to empathize, interpret, and finally analyze psychological information for its political implications. Because colonialism itself is a “total institution,”<sup>322</sup> in that it intends to

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<sup>322</sup> Erving Goffman developed the concept of “total institutions” in the paper “On the Characteristics of Total Institutions” first presented at the Walter Reed Institute’s Symposium on Preventive and Social Psychiatry in 1957. The paper was later collected into Goffman’s book *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental*

transform us colonized people internally as well as externally, I am convinced that the psychological experiences of colonized peoples are uniquely laden with political information. This helps to explain why I state clearly in the introduction that I am deeply concerned with how to understand the subjectivity of dispossessed Indigenous people; it is not just a personal project of understanding myself.

One psychological aspect that I have struggled with, a struggle I will suggest here is a fundamental characteristic of colonized people, is rage. As I untangled my complex ties to a core of shame in my being, it produced an incredible amount of intense anger, such that the only appropriate term for it must be rage. Rage and shame – there must be a complex relationship between these two emotional states. I think this dynamic was one that Fanon knew quite intimately as well, in his personal life, in his political life as a revolutionary, and in his psychiatric work with colonized people. Rage can be, in my experience, a powerful, combustive tool; it can fuel and propel difficult action that may otherwise seem impossible or unrealistic. It can be politicizing, in the very way that shame can't, since shame seems to be a deep internalization and personalization of structural forces of oppression, whereas rage recognizes that you have been wronged, deeply wronged, and often means that you have at the very least begun to recognize that the injustice and inadequacy you have felt doesn't originate within your own being. Perhaps rage is the Janus-faced contronym to shame.

Yet, rage is very hard. It is emotionally exhausting and it is so explosive that what it can compel us to do may not be what we would *choose* to do. Rage consumes our emotional beings in such a way that other emotional states collapse; I don't think I've ever experienced rage at the same time as I've experienced joy, for instance, or sorrow, or humility, or grace. Rage is unilateral, and that can also make it dangerous, if not to those who may get caught in our sights, then certainly to ourselves. I have learned in the past half decade a very important lesson about limits. I have learned that there are indeed limits to my emotional capacity to withstand intense stressors, and I have learned that the

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*Patients and Other Inmates*. New York: Anchor Books: 1961. Also see Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience*. Penticton: Theytus Books, 2006. 68-77. Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun adopt Erving Goffman's concept of total institutions in their analysis of residential schools.

consequences for pushing past these limits are quite severe and very mortal. While I absolutely admit that rage has been a key emotional motivation through my own development of historical consciousness, and while I absolutely think that rage will return to me throughout my life, I have learned to be wary. I am wary of rage's enticing completeness, the way it obliterates anything else that tries to stand beside it. My deepest experiences of shame have also paralleled this aspect of rage; at the core of shame is an obliteration of one's ability to empathize with oneself. I wonder, then, if at the core of rage is the obliteration of one's ability to empathize with others. Regardless, I think that anything that annihilates complexity and multiplicity is highly suspect, and so I tread cautiously around rage, even as I recognize its value, its power, and the many ways it did, at times, save me from shame.

In the previous pages, I have sought to not write out of shame; I have also tried as much as possible to not write out of rage, either. I think the world is ultimately more complex than either of these emotional states points towards, and while they are both experiences of being human that cannot and should not be exiled from our emotional literacies, I have desired in these pages to try to practice a way of walking through the world that seeks justice as much as it seeks, and *because* it seeks, love. If I ground myself in the practice of consciousness that these pages actually reflect, then my motivations need to be rooted in a responsible sense of kinship that recognizes that banishing individual, human expressions of wrongdoing will not secure the future for all of us; instead, we must all learn, relearn, and remember ways of being that ethically and accountably attend to the vast complexity of the human and extra-human world around us.

From my own position as a dispossessed Indigenous person, I will continue to learn the stories of Indigenous peoples and continue to critically follow the lead of Indigenous knowledge holders in an effort to continue to politicize my own position in responsible ways. And as an Indigenous person living in the city, this also means continuing my commitments to the land that I find myself on, the land of the city. Cities are perplexing places from an Indigenous perspective that is committed to practicing a relationship to the land. In one view, the city is a massive site of destruction, a deep gash in the skin of an ecological being. In another view, the city is a tremendously vibrant,

human space that affords so much learning and sharing, so much production of new ways of being. I don't think that the city can be abandoned, physically or in our conceptions and practices of land relationships. There are many reasons for this, which I begin to express below.

The following pages present an attempt to begin to theorize aspects of dispossessed Indigenous consciousness, particularly in Canada, where I have lived for the past six years (though I believe these reflections will have implications for a U.S. context as well). I must say that these reflections are informed to a great extent by my experiences that I share in the fourth interlude, namely my involvement since 2013 as an organizer with Alliance Against Displacement. In particular, the following pages, while developing an understanding of aspects of dispossessed Indigenous consciousness, also draw connections between this consciousness and the consciousness of homeless settler Canadians. At first glance, these two groups of people may appear to share little in common. However, I hold that the ontological positions of dispossessed Indigenous people and homeless settlers run parallel, a perspective that I further elaborate below. Overall, the argument that follows acts as a distillation of the major themes that have been discussed so far, themes that I draw out of the literary texts of the previous four chapters, that are revealed through my personal reflections in the interludes, as well as themes that emerged from my engagement in social justice work at the same time I was writing this dissertation. My hope with the concluding words of this dissertation is that certain alliances may begin to appear, and certain connections between the experiences of displacement under capitalism and dispossession under colonialism may emerge.

## **Ontological dispossession**

Ontology as a branch of philosophy deals with existence; how we know we exist, how we know other beings exist. In the Western tradition it is a metaphysical interrogation in order to understand existence. At the core of this Western tradition is the concept of the self. Though ontology as a field of thought existed long before René Descartes, his famous “I think, therefore I am” – and the implications inherent in such a statement – both deeply influenced Western debates about ontology, and expressed the



philosophy of his time in an easily quotable quip. And while Descartes' ideas inevitably came under scrutiny, particularly in the 20th century, those who are acculturated in Western thought have inherited many assumptions about what it means to exist, and how we know we exist.<sup>323</sup> Important for the argument that follows is the construction and the centring of the self. The self for Descartes is a thinking being, that knows it exists because it is able to think. Descartes devalued the senses (and therefore the body) as an unreliable form of information about existence. "I think, therefore I am" implies two assumptions of note for the conversation that develops below: 1) that thought itself creates existence; and 2) that the self is a unit of existence by which all other aspects of existence are perceived, judged, and otherwise known to exist. Descartes' philosophy ranked the mind far above the body; it also split mind and body into a clear dualism. Thus it is possible to exist in human form but lack full humanity if one's capacity for intellectual endeavours are deemed by Western judges as inferior; Cartesian ideas of the self informed beliefs of racialized people's inferiority that justified both slavery and European colonization.

Cartesian ontology differs from Indigenous understandings of beingness in distinct ways. For Indigenous peoples, one exists in a complex web of relationships to the land and to layers of community that include but are not limited to family, clan, and nation. One also exists in relation to animals and plants who are living beings within their own family groups. At the core of Indigenous ontology is a relationship to land; we know we exist because we engage in land-based practices that construct our existence. For Indigenous peoples, existence is not anthropocentric. Humans are just another form of being, alongside other animals, plants, and the spirit world. For Indigenous peoples, "I think, therefore I am" is a very incomplete way of understanding one's existence. Thinking and intellectual capacity are one aspect of human beingness, not the defining aspect of being human. And crucially, many Indigenous knowledge holders, Elders, and those who are less dispossessed from their cultures express being human as a *practice* of stewardship of the material world, the land, around us; being human is not a given, it is

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<sup>323</sup> One major critique of Cartesian ontology is Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. 1927. Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper, 1962.

something to be practiced.<sup>324</sup> It is possible, then, to exist in human form but lack full humanity if one isn't practicing stewardship of the land and living in balance with other beings.

In both Cartesian and Indigenous ontologies, there are requirements for being human – being born in human form isn't actually enough. For Indigenous ontologies, being human is a practice founded in intimate relationships with the land. For Cartesian ontology, being human is situated in the anthropocentric locus of the self, defined by the capacity for thought. To be denied the status of a full human being in Cartesian ontology is largely through not demonstrating a rational mind. The following section extends this situation to homeless people to argue that Canadian society denies full humanity to homeless people, producing a profound “ontological insecurity.” And in contrast, to be denied the status of a full human being in Indigenous ontologies is largely through being dispossessed of one's relationship to land. This article thus develops the idea of “ontological dispossession” for those Indigenous people who have been severely dispossessed of our relationships to land and our familial, communal, and national ties.

## **Ontological insecurity of homelessness**

Currently, Canadian society thinks of homelessness as lacking a stable housing situation. While lacking stable housing affects all aspects of life, we can at the same time acknowledge that providing people with simply a roof over their heads isn't enough. What we fight for when we fight against homelessness is the abolition of the marginalization and stigmatization of poor people. We fight for the complex humanity of homeless people, and their ability to self-determine their lives. We fight against the criminalization of survival; the hatred for homeless people that dominant society expresses through excluding their survival from public or private land through the displacement of tent cities; and the social control and containment of homeless and low-income people enacted by a complex web of police, paramedics, bylaw officers, social

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<sup>324</sup> There are many examples of this kind of thought in Indigenous writing. Here I specifically recall Jeannette Armstrong's articulations of Syilx beingness in her dissertation “Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmix<sup>w</sup>centrism” (2009). For more on being human as a practice, see chapter four.

workers, and housing providers. Taken together, the message sent to homeless people through the myriad forces that attack their existence is that *they shouldn't be here*, whether *here* is a park, a private business's entryway, or in all public spaces more generally.<sup>325</sup> Homeless people are viewed by Canadian society as refuse, unproductive and socially deviant remainders that will not or cannot conform to the expectations of the capitalist market and liberal civil society.

The denial of full humanity to homeless people recalls the discussion of Cartesian ontology above. The dominant view is that there is something individually wrong with homeless people, not that the structures of society produce homelessness. In the dominant view, homeless people lack a trait that housed people possess, and their unfortunate circumstances are ultimately a product of this lack. Society questions homeless people's ability to rationally manage their lives. This deeply held belief that homeless people lack the ability to deal with life rationally – in other words, to think rationally – couples with the disdain for those who do not or cannot participate in capitalist markets and do not conform to civil society's values.

In a sense, homeless people are not full citizens, and at times they are seen (legally and morally) as being less than full human beings. Constantly shuffling between the street, a shelter, perhaps a friends' living room; being harassed by police, bylaw, and poor-hating strangers; having belongings seized or stolen; living with the uncertainty of a next meal; and being infantilized by social workers enacts a form of psychological warfare. Homelessness produces a profound experience of *ontological insecurity*, or dehumanization, in which individuals doubt their own worth – even their status – as human beings. In this context, it is crucial to reframe the experience of homelessness.

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<sup>325</sup> The sentiment and phrase *they (or we) shouldn't be here* is also expressed by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson in her 2013 talk [“Restoring Nationhood: Addressing Land Dispossession in Canadian Reconciliation Discourse.” SFU Woodward, 13 Nov 2013.](#) Though Simpson's context is being surveilled and criminalized as an Anishnaabe person accessing traditional and sacred territory for ceremony, to my mind the similarities between the dehumanization of homeless people trying to simply survive and Indigenous people *also* trying to survive *as* Indigenous people are worth noting. However, this is not to say that there are immediate felt affinities between Indigenous people and homeless people. At the end of January 2018, [homeless people were evicted from reserve land](#) by a private security company hired by the Kwaw-kwaw-apilt First Nation band council. See Paul Henderson, “Homeless evicted from First Nation reserve land say they have nowhere to go.” *The Abbotsford News*. 23 Jan 2018.

Lacking stable housing affects all aspects of life, most seriously one's ability to *feel* fully human.

### **A note on Canadian “solutions:” supportive housing & temporary modular housing**

The “solutions” that the Canadian state currently proposes for homelessness are far from adequate and do not address the ontological insecurity that defines homelessness; they may actually perpetuate conditions that produce ontological security even with the provision of shelter. These solutions include “supportive housing” and, increasingly, temporary modular housing. The state is divesting from social housing, at one time the main form of housing for low-income people, and instead substituting dignified social housing with these two forms of shelter.

The problems with temporary modular housing should be obvious: it's temporary, and does nothing to address the ongoing housing crisis marked by a tremendous shortage of low-income housing in the lower Mainland, throughout British Columbia, and across Canada more widely. Some proposed units of temporary modular housing also lack kitchens, therein lacking the material conditions for residents to reproduce themselves. Some proposed temporary modular housing is organized as a walled off camp that can be easily policed. Some residents of temporary modular housing are contained, easily surveilled, and geographically segregated from the rest of society.

The problems with supportive housing are often less clear. Contrary to the perceptions of many housed people, supportive housing does not offer social supports that “rehabilitate” homeless people into becoming active contributors to capitalist markets, either as producers or consumers, recovered from the marks of addiction and mental health. Instead, supportive housing contains, surveils, and polices the most marginalized groups within our society. Residents of supportive housing often draw similarities between their experience and the experience of incarceration in jails, prisons, and psyche wards.<sup>326</sup> Supportive housing often includes cameras in entryways and

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<sup>326</sup> See Karen Lane, “Inside the jail of supportive housing.” *The Volcano*. 26 Oct 2016. Web. 28 Mar 2018.

hallways with 24/7 staff who monitor residents' comings and goings.<sup>327</sup> Residents have been barred from holding organizing meetings in their own common rooms.<sup>328</sup> Limitations exist for the number of guests they are allowed, what time these guests can visit, and certain guests can be banned from the supportive housing building entirely. Formerly homeless residents of Victoria's Super InTent City, who were moved into the Johnson Street supportive housing building, have spoken out about the policies that seriously curtail their abilities to lead self-determining lives. Increasingly, supportive housing fills a gap within a "pipeline" that funnels the most disenfranchised of our society through various forms of social containment and control. And the institution of supportive housing as the current form of long-term housing for low-income people takes away some of the basic civil liberties that many housed people take for granted.

Canadian society's treatment of homeless people, and increasingly supportive housing residents, denies these groups self-determination. In addition, the ontological insecurity of homelessness renders homeless people unable to feel fully human. For all homeless people, then, one defining point is the experience of losing a sense of belonging, "citizenship," participation in larger society, or recognition from others as a full human being.

## **Indigenous difference: Non-capitalist economies and worldviews**

While this loss of recognition of full humanity hits every individual experiencing homelessness, it is compounded for Indigenous people who are homeless. Colonialism attempts to sever the complex economic, social and cultural ties that Indigenous people fight to maintain. These ties include material relations with the land, social structures and kinship systems, and cultural knowledges and practices developed in relation to particular land bases. For homeless Indigenous people, the effects of colonialism coupled with

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<sup>327</sup> For an articulation by formerly homeless residents of Victoria, B.C.'s Super InTent City who were moved into the Johnson Street supportive housing building run by Portland Hotel Society, see "S.O.S. at PHS." *The Volcano*. 26 Oct 2016. Web. 28 Mar 2018.

<sup>328</sup> It is hard not to think of the banning of Indigenous peoples' political organizing under Section 141 of the Indian Act, put into place in 1927, as a parallel example of the paternalistic limiting of self-determination between Indigenous people and homeless people.

homelessness create individuals who experience the ontological insecurity they share with non-Native homeless people, and also an *ontological dispossession* that is a dynamic experience of colonialism. In order to understand why this is the case, it is necessary to understand Indigenous difference.

In Canada today, there are a large number of Indigenous people who have been displaced from our Indigenous communities. We may live on others' territory; we may not even know where our own territory is. For some of us, the legacy of colonialism is such that the severing of our ties to land, economy, nationhood, and Indigenous worldviews may be nearly complete. Many of us or our families are the product of residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, foster care and adoption. There is a growing awareness that the Sixties Scoop was not limited to that particular decade; increasingly, there is also the acknowledgement that there is a greater number of Indigenous children in foster care than ever went through residential schools.<sup>329</sup> The techniques of colonialism have adjusted themselves from the use of the "total institution" of residential schools, to less overt forms of assimilation.<sup>330</sup>

But Canada's forces of colonial assimilation are still strong. They continue to attack four major areas of Indigenous identity, meaning-making, and social structures: land, economy, nationhood & kinship, and worldviews.

## **Land**

One's Indigeneity is defined by practicing a relationship to land. This relationship is at once material (economic), political, and ontological. In a material sense, having

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<sup>329</sup> The decades of work by Cindy Blackstock has been foundational to understanding the effects of the child welfare system on Indigenous children and their families. In addition, see the news articles: [Suffering from residential schools crosses generations](#) and [Canada discriminates against children on reserves, tribunal finds](#). Also see: "[Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness, and Reunification - From Root Causes to Root Solutions: A Report on Indigenous Child Welfare in British Columbia](#)" (2015) authored by Grand Chief Ed John; "[The Structure of Aboriginal Child Welfare in Canada](#)" (2013) by Vandna Sinha and Anna Kozlowski; "[Aboriginal Children and Child Welfare Policies](#)" (2014) by Stephanie Jansen.

<sup>330</sup> See Roland Chrisjohn, Sherri Young, and Michael Maraun, *The Circle Game: Shadows and Substance in the Indian Residential School Experience*, pages 68-77. Chrisjohn, Young, and Maraun adopt Erving Goffman's concept of total institutions in their analysis of residential schools.

knowledge about a particular territory and practicing Indigenous land knowledges<sup>331</sup> on that territory (for example, knowing what food sources exist, what can be harvested when, how to sustainably harvest in ways that don't deplete resources for future harvests) influences an Indigenous person's material and cultural identity.<sup>332</sup> Politically, understanding one's family, clan, or nation's relationship to a territory, and the political relationships with other families, clans, or nations that share that territory, influences Indigenous social structures and organization.<sup>333</sup> Ontologically, being able to practice Indigenous protocols, stories, and ceremonies reflect particular place-based, *land-based*, relationships of Indigenous communities.

Taken together, an Indigenous sense of identity is formed through these material, political, and ontological elements of land relationships. Indigenous practices of material, political, and ontological survival and meaning-making are unique to the land that these practices are developed upon. Indigenous identities are diverse because Indigenous land bases are diverse.

## Economies

Indigenous economies continue to exist alongside, outside, and beneath Canadian capitalist society. Capitalism is a system of economic organization founded in the belief in private property, where land is owned privately and communal forms of land

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<sup>331</sup> Discussing Indigenous land knowledges is incomplete without acknowledging the academic field of TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge). There are many critiques of TEK, a field curiously dominated by non-Indigenous people, as a way of capitalizing on Indigenous knowledges while also forcing Western scientific paradigms onto Indigenous practices. One article that brings forward a critical perspective of TEK is Deborah McGregor's "Traditional Ecological Knowledge: An Anishnabe Woman's Perspective" (2005).

<sup>332</sup> Many Indigenous writers emphasize the importance of land for the material and cultural identities of Indigenous peoples, and as such the following texts are in no way exhaustive of the contributions of Indigenous writers to articulating the place of land in Indigenous lives and worldviews. It is also important to note that what gets written by Indigenous authors is only a very small reflection of the lived experience of Indigenous peoples; that is to say that the written word should not be taken as the definitive word of lived experience. Some texts that express the centrality of land for Indigenous material and cultural identities include: *Living on the Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place* (2016) edited by Nathalie Kermaol and Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez; *The Land Within: Indigenous Territory and the Perception of the Environment* (2005) edited by Alexandre Surrallés & Pedro García Hierro; Jeannette Armstrong's dissertation "Constructing Indigeneity: Syilx Okanagan Oraliture and tmix<sup>w</sup>centrism" (2009); Winona LaDuke's *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (2008); Leanne Simpson's *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (2017).

<sup>333</sup> Although it is not often read in this context, aspects of Glen Coulthard's *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (2014) attests to the political importance of Indigenous relations.

tenureship or stewardship are violently suppressed. Under capitalism, the production of workers is alienated from us, and sold in capitalist marketplaces, allowing for surplus value to accumulate in the hands of the owners of the means of production. For Indigenous societies in particular, who may participate in capitalist marketplaces as alienated workers in full or partial ways, the related process of accumulation by dispossession has most egregiously disrupted Indigenous economies and communities. Accumulation by dispossession is the ongoing process of dispossessing communities from land bases in order to render that land and its resources useable by capitalist production.

Indigenous economies are outside of capitalism; they are totalizing systems of economic and social organization that have not been terminated or subsumed by capitalist markets. At times and in places, Indigenous economies have been and continue to be deeply affected, perhaps eroded, by capitalism. At other times and places, Indigenous economies revive themselves.

### **Nationhood & kinship**

Indigenous understandings and practices of nationhood are not aligned with the Western term “nation.” The liberal nation is the imaginative, ideological arm of the state. Members of a nation are knitted together by beliefs and values held in common; in liberal democracies, these beliefs and values include liberty and democracy. For capitalist societies, national membership is also intimately tied to participation in capitalist markets, as either a producer or consumer. Importantly, members of a nation are defined against others who are outside that nation, and others who are *within* that nation, but don’t participate in society in acceptable ways, or don’t share the founding beliefs that constitute the nation.

For Indigenous societies, nationhood is an organizational and imaginative projection of kinship relations. Indigenous nationhood expresses an awareness of complex interrelationships on the community level but also the material and spiritual levels. Indigenous nationhood is not just a political imagination; it is also an expression



of particular understandings of land relationships, land stewardship, and relations with animal and plant families.

Kinship, like nationhood, forms an essential part of Indigenous social structures. Kinship is a way of understanding relations that is not bound by the defining role that the nuclear family plays in bourgeois society. Bourgeois society actually attacks kinship relations, reifying the nuclear family as *the* site for family, relegating the elderly to old-age homes and supportive living that often removes them from participating in kinship structures within and beyond their families. Bourgeois society also attacks kinship relations by gendering the roles of family members, limiting expansive and extra-biological relations, and breaking down the network of responsibilities and care that kinship provides.<sup>334</sup>

For Indigenous peoples, kinship expresses our relations with all other beings, including non-human forms. As such, it is distinctively non-anthropocentric and fundamentally outside of the bourgeois nuclear family form.

## **Worldviews**

Economic systems produce worldviews that ground individuals' concepts and experiences of reality. Canadian society, under a capitalist mode of production, reproduces a liberal worldview; Indigenous societies, under non-capitalist Indigenous modes of production, reproduce specific, unique, and non-capitalist worldviews. Therefore, an important aspect of a person's Indigeneity is their specific knowledge and ways and potentials of being that differ from non-Indigenous people in Canadian society. Indigeneity is, then, partially defined by possessing different ways of being – and different perceptions of what constitutes reality – compared with dominant Canadian society.

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<sup>334</sup> Daniel Heath Justice's chapter "Go Away Water!: Kinship Criticism and the Decolonization Imperative" in the book *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, edited by Craig Womack, Daniel Heath Justice, and Christopher Teuton, explores Indigenous kinship practices in the context of Indigenous literary nationalisms.

## **Ontological dispossession of Indigenous people**

Indigenous people who experience dispossession from their material (land) base, and from the communal structures that this material-land base produces, struggle in specific social and psychological ways. A defining aspect of dispossessed Indigenous people is the navigation of a constant ontological dispossession, whether or not this is consciously articulated within the individual. This ontological dispossession is reinforced by settler notions of Nativeness that refer to an entirely imagined and idealized Indigeneity that has never existed. But this ontological dispossession is also reinforced to a profound degree within Indigenous communities.

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Canada has seen an inspiring wave of Indigenous self-determination, sovereigntist, and revitalization efforts. These efforts span initiatives to reclaim land and traditional territory to revitalizing Indigenous languages. It is exciting to watch and learn from Indigenous leaders who reoccupy territory, block resource developments, and form Indigenous language-learning communities.

Within Indigenous politics, these activities inspire me the most. Yet, these movements are not accessible to Indigenous people who are dispossessed of our Indigeneity. Many of us cannot return to our territories (if we even know where these territories are) because, if we are adopted, who will claim us? If we are the product of gender violence, who will claim an uncomfortable reminder of a rape? If we are street-involved, struggling, managing addiction or mental health issues, who will claim us? We are not exactly the long-lost relatives that anyone wants to discover. We may also not feel safe returning to our families, as they may be sites where colonial oppression expressed itself through violence.

We Indigenous wards of the state, adoptees, residential school survivors and their descendants, may lack Indigenous relations to land, economy, nationhood, and worldview. For us, our Indigeneity is, to various degrees, constructed. Many of us live in urban centres, and may find a sense of identity at Friendship Centres. We often develop affinities and intimacies with other Indigenous people who are dispossessed of major aspects of their identities. We also often develop affinities and intimacies with non-

Native people who experience exclusion from Canadian society, whether that be because of status, class, gender expression or sexuality, race, or ability. For Indigenous people who must consciously construct our Indigeneity, there is plenty of joy. But there is, simultaneously, a constant awareness of what you don't know, and what you aren't.

To be an Indigenous person without access to the material, political, and ontological elements of one's Indigeneity thoroughly affects that person's ability to make sense of themselves and the world. To a degree, you are an Indigenous person who lacks your Indigeneity. This is the experience of a large number of Indigenous people in Canada. Statistics Canada [reports](#) that more than half of people identified as Aboriginal live in metropolitan areas. While certainly not all urban Indigenous people experience dispossession from their Indigeneity, many of us do. And it is also likely that the statistics reported by the government under-represent urban Indigenous populations, since a disproportionate number of homeless people are Indigenous in metropolitan areas, and these homeless people are not considered in census data.

Indigenous people who are severed from their communities must constantly navigate their lack of material, political, and ontological knowledges and practices. For many of us, there is no going home. We will not be reunited with our land in our lifetimes. We stand outside looking in on many Indigenous efforts to reclaim territory, culture, and language. Standing outside, we experience a negation from other Indigenous people who are less dispossessed, and we are reminded of what we don't know, and what we aren't. We may often be in doubt about our worth and status as full human beings in the eyes of other Indigenous people.

In Indigenous worldviews that I have learned from Elders, knowledge holders, and writers, to be human means to constantly practice interrelationships with all living things; to be fully human is a *practice*, not a given. For dispossessed Indigenous people who do not have access to learning our communities' ways of practicing being a human, it is not surprising that we may feel dehumanized.

## **Double bind of Indigenous homelessness**

Dispossessed Indigenous people are at a greater risk for homelessness. We have broken or entirely severed ties with our families and nations. Thus we lack the social structures and kinship relations that could prevent us from ending up homeless. In addition, the psychological experience of dispossession from our lands, economies, nationhoods, and worldviews is an extremely taxing one. We may cope by any means accessible to us, and this may include addiction. We may develop and wrestle with mental health issues, the root causes of which are most likely entirely misunderstood by healthcare professionals. Many of us may end up excluded from Indigenous communities *because of* our attempts to deal with our initial exclusion from our families and nations - because of our ontological dispossession.

Dispossessed Indigenous people are those who, through unfortunate circumstances, bear the heaviest weight of colonialism. We come from families who are wrecked by residential schools and torn apart by foster care and adoption. We come from families who are not Indigenous elite, do not hold band council or hereditary positions, and were otherwise unable to resist the most egregious forces of colonialism.

Indigenous homeless people are most often also the most concerted dispossessed. And in addition to experiencing exclusion from aspects of their Indigeneity, Indigenous homeless people also experience the generalized ontological insecurity of homelessness described above. This coupling, of the ontological insecurity of generalized homelessness with the ontological dispossession of one's Indigeneity, produces a double bind, an intensified denial of full humanity, for the homeless Indigenous person.

For Indigenous homeless people, the chances of feeling "at home" are even further out of reach of other homeless people. To understand Indigenous homelessness is to understand the double bind that Indigenous homeless people experience. It is worth noting that in some, perhaps many, instances, the feeling of exclusion that Indigenous homeless people receive from their own Indigenous communities is greater than the exclusion that they feel as homeless people in Canadian society. That is, for Indigenous homeless people, the main source of psychological anguish may not actually be from the

experience of homelessness itself, but rather from the experience of othering by Indigenous people.

Within Indigenous politics, a vast, tumultuous and contradictory space, there is no significant place for Indigenous people who either lack a sense of home through exclusion or displacement from their nations, or for Indigenous people who are doubly marginalized through physical homelessness. Those of us who stand outside looking in on the inspiring Indigenous movements of today are essentially politically silenced. Without an ability to reclaim ourselves through our nations, our very status as Indigenous human beings feels at best jeopardized, and at worst negated.

## **Indigenous home within land relationships**

The argument brought forth in this conclusion, as well as the perspectives I share in the whole of this dissertation, show the importance of understanding, articulating, and politicizing the subjectivities of dispossessed Indigenous people. At the root of our subjectivity is a need, and a seemingly irreconcilable barrier, to practicing relationships with the land. How I can account for our existence *as* Indigenous people, if the very core of our Indigeneity has been taken from us?

I think that the answer to this difficult question begins to appear if we recognize that dispossessed Indigenous people can reconstruct relations to the land, just as we can reconstruct our Indigenous identities. We have it within our power to do this whether or not we can access our cultures, communities, nations, and territories for guidance. In fact, I believe that all people, not just Indigenous people, can practice relationships to the land, and that colonialism and capitalism are precisely the historical processes that have torn this land relationship knowledge from *all* people in the world, not just people who identify as Indigenous today.

As I have asserted all along, Indigenous storytelling and literatures are significant sites of knowledge for us as Indigenous peoples. Our stories carry within them irrepressible accounts of other realities, other modes of being, other economic and political structures, than those we find in 21<sup>st</sup> century Canada and the U.S. Our ancestors

are alive with us through our stories, and our cultural knowledges live on in our stories as well. Just as I have shown that a reconstruction of Indigenous beingness can begin with exposure and openness to Indigenous stories, I believe that a reconstruction of Indigenous land stewardship practices can also be found in our stories as well. While I may live in an urban area, I have a bookshelf chock full of Indigenous authors from so many nations. I may revisit and relearn alongside these writers and knowledge holders at any time. This is a great gift, and it carries with it great potential.

For European-descended settlers, the challenges will be different than for dispossessed Indigenous people. In my view, the epistemological foundations of European scientific knowledge, itself a great gift if used accountably, hold quite troubling implications. For settlers, I imagine there will be much to untangle, sorting through what knowledges and economic and political practices aid in forming land relationships, and what knowledges and economic and political practices make these relationships impossible. Ultimately, I think this work is crucial for the continued existence of all living beings on our planet. Yet, this work – of untangling the complicated implications of European knowledges – is not mine to do; it is for others whose subjective and political positions are such that they, to live responsibly and accountably, must do this work for the sake of future generations. My contributions, and those of other dispossessed Indigenous people, may instead be to find ways of ethically grounding ourselves through reconstructing land relationships of our own.

I think it's common to assume that the appropriate action, if you are desiring practicing relationships to land, is to locate yourself in a rural area. And if you are Indigenous, locating yourself on your specific ancestral territories. But there are immediate, and in some cases insurmountable, challenges to this. For instance, barring significant changes to my life, and gaining a significant amount of social mobility, removing myself from the city in order to develop more intimate relationships with the land is not possible. And as I've detailed in my introduction, my relationships to my nations who are the stewards of my ancestral territories are anything but straightforward or completely activated. It remains to be seen how I will find ways to activate these relationships, and this is likely a lifelong process. If I wait to practice land relationships, wait for community relationships to develop, I could be waiting a very long time. For

others who are in a similar position to me, but have not been afforded the opportunity of reconnecting to family or are decisively not able to return to their families or communities for a host of reasons, it is exclusive, in my view, to assert that we must form land relationships with our ancestral territories in order to practice land relationships at all.

This view, which unfortunately I have found to be common among some Indigenous people who possess positions of community membership, has negative implications for the great many of us who are not lucky enough (under colonialism) to retain these positions. I also see it as not only an abandonment of the city as itself a site of potential land relationships, but an abandonment of those whose positions – the most extreme example is homeless urban Indigenous people – completely rule out the possibility of reconnecting with the land outside of the city. Cities still provide community, survival support, and in some cases resources, albeit limited, for homeless Indigenous people that are not commonly found in more rural areas. Cities might be here to stay, even as they begin to erode, or gentrify, around us; many of us are certainly wedded to cities, whether or not we choose to be.

What if we were to consider the city as a site of Indigenous land stewardship? How would we treat and care for the city, and all its dwellings, from an Indigenous grounding? I mentioned earlier that, in Canada, more than half of people identifying as Aboriginal live in urban areas. That is a great potential resource, a great and diverse knowledge base of cultural and national practices of land stewardship. What if Indigenous resurgence was, parallel to the significant efforts of land defenders and sovereigntists who act on and with their ancestral territories, extended to the city, and urban Indigenous people began to view themselves as stewards of *this* land? What principles would we assert in protecting and caring for the city, principles that would draw from what we might retain from our diverse Indigenous knowledges of land stewardship, and what we might relearn as we reground ourselves in Indigenous ways of being?

I think that these are the questions that dispossessed Indigenous subjectivities are best suited to grapple with. Rather than succumb to feelings of inferiority because of our

structural positions under colonialism, we can turn these positions into sites of strength that push us towards politicization and action. Ultimately, this is how I view my position in the city, and the work that I can dedicate myself to. It is an ethical, accountable way of responding to the world around me. It also honours the very networks of urban Indigenous and non-Indigenous kinship that have supported me as I developed my consciousness as an Indigenous woman. It seems fitting, then, that I would respond in kind; I have received a gift of recognition – one might say a canoe – from this place, and now I can gift in return.



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